ENC 3250 Module A:

Backgrounder Report
Project Description

In any profession, one educates him/herself about a breaking issue in the field by doing some background research. This may be done formally or informally, in the library or at conference table by asking others what they’ve heard about X. In this project, you will practice your backgrounding skills, your report writing skills, and your document design skills. In developing these skills you will look closely at a company’s use of social media in advertising/product promotion.

Consider the following scenario: Mr. Layne is President of a regional tire company that sells and maintains truck tires. His company is the largest tire company in Minnesota. One day about a year ago he came back from a business meeting, called the marketing person into his office and said, “I’ve been hearing about social media. Should we be doing something with it?” That person responded, “It’s a fad.” Later, talking to his children he realized the company was now behind. But he still didn’t know what to do. A first step he might take is pulling aside a young person in the company and say, “Look into how we should be using social media.” He would be asking for a backgrounder. In this assignment you do the work to develop a backgrounder. No need to focus on the tire industry. Pick a workplace context that’s relevant to your career goals.

It is important that you realize your rhetorical positioning in this project. You need to imagine yourself as a new employee at the organization of your choice. As a new employee, you are expected to perform professional duties that are unfamiliar to you and that might even seem like busywork. In this project, you are conducting research on a topic (social media) for your boss (an audience who is familiar with the topic and unsure of what to do). Your boss wants to become more informed. Social media is a wide topic, so your research should focus on the use of social media in advertising/product promotion in the industry you have chosen. For example, if your local employer is Wells Fargo, then you research the banking industry; Gecko Restaurant, then you research the restaurant industry; a local grass-cutting small business, then the landscaping industry, etc. As such, your research will encompass anything from internet articles on the uses and trends of social media, to visiting many websites of companies within the industry, to finding academic sources arguing for specific uses of social media, to interviewing local people in the industry. Your goal is to accumulate these research sources into one coherent backgrounder report with the purpose of informing your boss about social media use in the industry so he/she can then make executive decisions about how to move the company forward in this respect. Do not argue in favor of one strategy or another or indicate in any way how you think the company should progress in terms of social media use (this would be overstepping your bounds); rather, merely inform your boss about the topic. This is crucial to successfully understanding the genre of the backgrounder report.
Deliverables: Overview

- Proposal
- Progress Report
- Backgrounder Report
- Reflection Memo

Deliverables: Specifications

Proposal

Using the material in *Professional Writing Online 3e* on memos, as well as our analysis of models and examples of memorandums, write a proposal for this project. Your proposal is persuasive if it can convince the reader:

I) that there is a significant problem or need within the company (and that you understand it)

II) that you have a method and a plan for addressing that problem or need (you have technical know-how [in this case, research capabilities] that will help address the problem or need)

III) that you have the ability to manage the project successfully (you can outline what the report as a whole will look like)

IV) that you are qualified to do the work (you have particular expertise or prior skill)

Length: 500 words.

Progress Report

Using the material in *Professional Writing Online 3e* on memos, as well as our analysis of models and examples of memorandums, report on your progress with this project. Often at work you will be judged on how well you keep your supervisor up-to-date on your progress toward the goals you have set, so crafting this memo is an important task. You need to be able to help your supervisor imagine the project as it is unfolding and keep them on-board with your emerging understanding of the work, particularly if your goals shift. In as much specificity as possible, explain to me:

- How you have progressed in your goals
- How your research or other circumstances have led you to modify these goals
- What goals you have for the rest of your research.

As before, frame the memo within the particular business/industry context of your backgrounder report and address both secondary and primary research.
Using the material in *Professional Writing Online 3e* on reports, as well as our analysis of models and examples of reports, compose a report that documents your research findings. The aim of this report is to articulate the main positions that professionals take in relation to social media in a particular industry. To that end, using your “pull” research techniques, library research techniques, primary research techniques, and your own industry knowledge, compose a report (content, images, appendices, graphs, etc.) that outlines these positions and gives decision makers relevant data for their work. At minimum, your report should contain:

1. **Executive summary.** Begin with an “executive summary” that briefly introduces and summarizes your research and establishes reader expectations for what is to follow. Make sure to state clearly here how social media is relevant or useful, both generally to businesses and specifically within your industry.

2. **Introduction.** This introduction should prepare the reader in more detail for the main issues of the paper. You may choose to begin by defining major terms in the report (social media, for instance), or by giving a specific anecdote of how social media has been used or policies have been formed concerning it by one of the companies you researched in your industry. Set up your audience’s expectations for the whole report and especially make its purpose and relevance clear.

3. **Data.** You need to use one primary source (i.e., interview) and as many secondary sources as you find you need to comprehensively inform your audience. Your job in the report is to both present and interpret the data on social media’s uses in business for your audience who should be assumed is not familiar with social media. Data or research does not speak for itself; it requires that you explain the relevance of this data clearly and directly to your audience in a way that is understandable to them.

4. **Infographics.** You must have at least two infographics in your report. One of them is to be of your own creation. The infographic that you create may be based on your primary data or on data found in a secondary source, which was not previously represented visually. It should be designed for easy interpretation of the data in a visual form so that visual learners may better access the information you are presenting.

5. **Source Citations.** I am encouraging you to use endnotes (footnotes at the end of the paper, not at the bottom of each page) in the text of the paper to tie sources to a bibliography of at the end of the report. Endnotes must be in APA style format. For in-text, you may use only endnotes in many cases, but you may want to introduce the author or other info about the source if it will add to the effectiveness of your report. Consider your audience: are they going to expect parenthetical citations in the report, or will they likely just ignore these? What is most important for your ethos.
and credibility as a researcher is that you make it clear in the report where data has come from (including infographics) and that you integrate it into the report by explaining how it is relevant to your report’s stated purpose.

Reflection Memo

At the end of the project, you will write an assessment in memo format. Address:

• How well did you manage your time and goals over the course of the project?
• How well do you feel your backgrounder fulfilled its objectives?
• If you were to work on a similar document again, what might you do differently?