Technical Writing: Spring 2018

TH – 9:30-10:50, Biddle 210

Instructor: Wil Fine
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Required Texts

- Pearsall, Thomas E. *The Elements of Technical Writing*. Boston: Longman, 2010. (9780205583812)
- Wolfe, Joanna. *Team Writing*. Boston: Bedford, 2010. (9780312565824)

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Course Description

ENGWRT 1192, Technical Writing, serves students who are preparing for careers in the sciences and applied sciences, and business. This advanced course in writing familiarizes students with the discourse practices prized in their fields and helps them to manage those practices effectively in their written work.

Course Objectives

Students in the course can expect to –

- Discover and understand the discourse features that distinguish their disciplinary and institutional communities from others.
- Discover and specify the purpose(s) of their writing.
- Develop a range of writing processes appropriate to various writing tasks.
- Identify their readers and describe the characteristics of their readers in a way that forms a sound basis for deciding how to write to them.
- Invent the contents of their communications through research and reflection.
- Arrange material to raise and satisfy readers' expectations, using both conventional and rhetorical patterns of organization.
- Reveal the organization of their communications by using forecasting and transitional statements, headings, and other document design strategies.
- Observe appropriate generic conventions and formats for technical documents.
- Design and use tables, graphs, and technical illustrations.
- Compose effective sentences.
- Evaluate their documents to be sure that the documents fulfill their purpose and to ensure that they can be revised if necessary.
- Collaborate effectively with their peers.
- Write several specific kinds of documents that recur in technical, scientific, and other communities.
- Employ computer technology effectively in the solution of communication problems.
- Communicate in an ethically responsible manner.

Course Structure and Major Assignments

It is most useful to conceive of the course as having an introduction and four distinct units. The introduction and each of the units are listed below; assignment descriptions are included under each:

Introduction:

The course opens with a quadrad of foundational topics:

- the history of technical communication
- rhetorical situation, analysis, and moves
- ethical communication
- effective technical style

Unit 1: Persuasion/Professional Correspondence

Communicating effectively, both within and outside of an organization, is essential to productivity and profitability, so we will discuss common modes of professional communication to include email, text messages, memos, and letters. As a means of practicing communicative skills, students will compose several types of common business correspondence, to include a set of application materials for an entry-level position in their field. As you will see, the majority of such correspondence is persuasive in nature, so developing these documents will help you to develop your professional argumentative skills, as well.

> *Assignment 1, Part 1: Professional Correspondence* – a 2016 study (Global Strategies Group*)* of nearly 500 senior managers and C-suite executives (a corporation's most important senior leaders) revealed that most applicants right out of college are only "somewhat" prepared to solve problems, think critically, and communicate their ideas "clearly and persuasively in writing." In light of such industry insight, this first segment of the assignment focuses on your ability to think critically and rhetorically, and to compose effective day-to-day professional correspondence.
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> For this segment of the assignment, you will write three pieces of correspondence that respond to provided prompts. The first is an inquiry memo, the second is a claim letter, and the third is an adjustment email.
>
> Final length: rhetorically-informed
>
> *Assignment 1, Part 2: Application Package* – Quite obviously, the process of applying for various professional positions (to jobs, to internships, to graduate programs, and the like) is an extremely important communicative task. As an applicant, students have a vested interest in communicating their suitability for a given position to a specific audience with particular needs; persuading said audience to seriously consider one's candidacy is the objective.
>
> For this segment of the assignment, you will compose a letter and résumé to apply for a professional position in your field.
>
> Final Length: rhetorically-informed

Unit 2: Collaborative Writing

In preparation for the group projects outlined in Units 3 and 4 below, we will devote time to discussing strategies for effective collaboration and project management, and the various documents that support the enterprise.

The culminating activity for this unit *(Group Project 1)* is a series of documents in-support of *Group Project 2*, to include a Team Charter, Project Proposal, Task Schedule(s), Meeting Minutes, and a Progress Report.

Note: each group is *required* to apply the project management strategies and create the supporting documents covered in this unit across the first major group project (*Group Project 2: Design Analysis and Redesign*). Continued use of these strategies and the supporting documentation is at each group's discretion – think strategically and use whatever methods will help your group to best accomplish its goals.

Final lengths: rhetorically-determined

Unit 3: Design

Professional communication in the 21st C. is far more complex than simply composing cogent text. It requires that writers are visually savvy with their communication, so we will devote considerable time to visual rhetorical concerns, page layout and design, creating and incorporating various types of visuals, and some of the software that makes such visualizations possible.

> *Group Project 2: Design Analysis and Redesign* – To develop and demonstrate such skills, students are required to apply their newfound visual acumen via an analysis and redesign of a technical document of their choosing.

> Length: Design Analysis – rhetorically-determined; Redesign – loosely determined by the length of the original document

Unit 4: Exposition

Expository writing is the mainstay of technical communication, so this unit contains two foci and two complimentary assignments: 1) definition and description and 2) instruction.

> *Group Project 3: Technical Description* – Technical professionals are often required to define or describe a technical object, concept, or process to someone who has little knowledge or experience with the subject at hand. For example, an engineering firm might write a proposal to bid on a contract to develop a helicopter for the Defense Department; one section of the proposal would be a detailed description of the product the company proposes to develop. Technical descriptions are used before products and processes are developed (as part of proposals and planning documents), during development (in progress reports, for instance), and afterwards (as part of marketing and promotional literature and technical support documents).

> This assignment asks you to select a discipline-specific product or process and write a description of it. It's a good idea to select something with which you are already familiar, so you can focus on learning how to write the description rather than focusing on both learning how to write the description and learning about the product or process.

> Students will compose a discipline-specific technical description of a concept, device, product, or process of their choosing.

> Final Length: approximately 1500 words.

> *Group Project 4: Instructional Set* – Much of what is written by technical writers is instructional in nature, hence the impetus for this assignment. While it might seem simple to prepare instructions, most readers know far less about the subject matter than we do as SMEs (Subject Matter Experts);

so, not only must we provide the means to complete some task, but we must also provide readers with adequate background (definitions and descriptions) to complete said task.

Students will compose a discipline-specific set of instructions for a procedure of their choosing.

Final Length: approximately 1200 words.

Professional Obligations

In addition to the major assignments described above, students will be expected to demonstrate the following professional standards, which are commonplace in virtually every field:

- *Participation* – While it might sound rather cliché, candidates/employees who are "team players" are aggressively recruited/highly-valued in business and industry. Because this course makes a concerted effort to mimic "real-world" expectations, students are required to be adequately prepared and actively engaged in class. It is important to note that a variety of measures will be employed to gauge student performance, to include discussions, group work, short in-class assignments, quizzes, and impromptu presentations (all of which are counted as part of your participation grade).

- *Promptness* – In this course, as in the real world, you must complete tasks on time. All projects are due on the days demarcated in the Course Schedule. Assignments will NOT be accepted after the due date; excuses will not be entertained.

- *Attendance* – You are expected to attend regularly; naturally, any employer would have similar expectations. Missing more than two classes, then, will put your grade in jeopardy. *The weight of the penalty will be proportionate to the percentage of class time missed.* (Imagine that you missed a total of six classes out of thirty; your final grade would be lowered by twenty percent.)

  Note: Students who arrive *after* I have taken attendance are considered *absent*.

  Excused absences are, of course, permissible; however, it is your responsibility to get me the proper documentation and catch up on any work you might have missed. An excused absence does not in any way excuse you from your responsibilities in the course.

- *Mechanical and Grammatical Correctness* – In the workplace, your final product is only as strong as its most egregious error. ALL of your communiqués for this course should be error-free. Even your e-mail correspondences with me should be mechanically and grammatically correct. If you anticipate struggling in this respect, I can recommend some helpful resources.

Assessment

When grading your projects, I will be asking myself one overriding question: "Does this document do its job successfully?" In other words, does the document have the intended effect on the reader? I will, of course, recognize the difference between a competent job ('C') and strong or excellent performance ('B' or 'A').

A – Superior. The work is of professional quality. The document meets or exceeds the requirements of the assignment; the content is fully-developed, cogently-written and arranged; the document effectively addresses concerns of purpose and audience; the information is well organized, as is the layout; the mechanics, formatting, and grammar are correct.

B – Good. The document meets the objectives of the assignment, but it needs minor improvement in content, style, organization, and/or mechanics.

C – Competent. The document needs some improvement in the areas of content, style, organization, and/or mechanics; however, all the major elements are "in play."

D – Marginal. The document meets some of the objectives but fails in others, and the content is significantly underdeveloped or it contains many egregious errors in mechanics/formatting.

F – Unacceptable. The document is severely lacking in content, does something other than what the assignment requires, or contains major or excessive errors that seriously detract from its readability.

Assignments and their respective weights are listed below:

- Assignment 1: Application Package 15%
- Group Project 1: Collaborative Documents 15%
- Group Project 2: Design Analysis and Redesign . . . 20%
- Group Project 3: Technical Description 20%
- Group Project 4: Instructional Set 20%
- Class Participation 10%

Final grades will be computed based on the following percentages:

94 – 100	A
90 – 93	A-
87 – 89	B+
84 – 86	B
80 – 83	B-
76 – 79	C+
70 – 75	C
60 – 69	D
59 & below	F

Plagiarism

Because of dishonesty, indifference, insecurity, or expedience, students sometimes have others do their work for them or copy material from published or cyber-sources. Whatever the reasons for doing it, the consequence of getting caught cheating or plagiarizing is the same: failure of the course and pending action by the university as outlined by the Academic Integrity Guidelines. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity; I recommend you investigate it thoroughly.

Disability Accommodation

If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you are encouraged to contact both your instructor and the Office of Disability Services (ODS), G-10 Student Union Building, (814) 269-7119 as early as possible in the term. ODS will verify your disability and determine reasonable accommodations for this course.