

English 421: Technical Writing

Instructor Information

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Course Information

Summer 2016
MTWRF 11 am – 12 pm in HEAV 227
Course Site: Blackboard
English Department: 765.494.3740

Course Description

English 421 helps students become better technical communicators, whose work is characterized by the presentation of technical material in written and visual formats that are user-centered and aware of audience and context. The course and its principles are grounded in rhetorical theory and informed by current research in technical communication.

Communication across multiple audiences and for multiple purposes continues to be a desired skill set in technical and professional fields. Beyond field-specific knowledge and experience, successful and ethical communication drives the professional world. This class, in content and form, models these successful communication practices. Working individually and in groups, students learn effective strategies for communicating about and with technology, particularly in networked workplaces and through usability testing. To achieve success in this course, students must display the ability to succeed in their future workplaces by developing a variety of informative and visually effective print and electronic documents.

Required Texts

Johnson-Sheehan (2014), *Technical Communication Today*, 5th Edition. ISBN: 978-0321907981.

Additional readings will be available for download on Blackboard.

Course Goals

Writing in Context

- Analyze the invention, manufacture, and distribution of technologies in context and use writing to communicate these attributes in a variety of media and genres.
- Write to the different levels of technical expertise of a range of audiences and stakeholders to foster technical understanding.
- Understand the ethical implications of working within the nexus of technology and culture.

Project Management

- Understand, develop and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively.
- Select and use appropriate technologies that effectively and ethically address professional situations and audiences.
- Build professional ethos through documentation and accountability.

Document Design

Make rhetorical design decisions about technical documents including

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and expectations of a range of audiences including both technical and non-technical audiences
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, revising visual design and information architecture
- ensuring the technical accuracy of visual content

Teamwork

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork, such as

- working online with colleagues to determine roles and responsibilities
- managing team conflicts constructively
- responding constructively to peers' work
- soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- achieving team goals

Research

Understand and use the research methods and strategies necessary to the production of professional documents, including

- working ethically with research participants, subject matter experts, and technical experts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence
- selecting appropriate primary research methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys to collect data
- applying concepts of usability research, such as user-centered design

Technology

Use and evaluate the writing technologies frequently used in the workplace, such as emailing, instant messaging, image editing, video editing, presentation design and delivery, HTML editing, Web browsing, content management, and desktop publishing technologies.

Accessibility

Purdue University is committed to ensuring all students can fully participate in its programs. If you have a disability that requires accommodations, please see me privately within the first week of class to make arrangements. If a student has a disability and chooses to work with the Disability Resource Center (DRC), I will receive written notification early in the semester. The student should also contact me about any recommended academic adjustments. For more information, see the site, www.purdue.edu/odos/drc/welcome.php. Beyond official accommodations, I assume that everyone learns differently, and I encourage you to discuss your learning needs with me as early as possible so that we can work together to meet them.

Course Assignments

Unit 1: Employment Project

The first unit asks you to choose a job opening or other opportunity and tailor application documents to that opportunity. These documents include a print resume, a cover letter, and a web resume. In addition, you will orally deliver a brief professional self-introduction. This unit helps you prepare professionally useful documents while laying a foundation for rhetoric, document design, and concision on which subsequent assignments will build.

Unit 2: Instructions

The second unit has you develop step-by-step technical instructions on a topic of your choosing. You will design two sets of instructions – one primarily textual, the other primarily visual – on the same topic. This unit allows you to practice writing documentation in an area of your interest and understand documentation as essential to operations, while implementing user-centered strategies in multiple media.

Unit 3: Usability Report

The third and final unit is the most substantial. You will work collaboratively with a team of other students to conduct usability testing on a digital artifact (e.g. website, mobile app, etc.) in order to evaluate its effectiveness. You will then share your findings and develop recommendations in a written report and present key points orally at the end of the semester. This unit has you enact qualitative methods in an authentic context, develop critical awareness about user-centered design, and analyze technology's rhetorical situations with an eye toward action.

Reading Responses

Throughout the semester, you will respond to discussion prompts posted on Blackboard about assigned readings. These reading responses are **due at class time** and should be approximately 200-300 words long. In addition to responding to the prompt, you are required to ask a question about the reading, point to something about it that confused you, or respond to a classmate's post. Reading responses should help all of us engage with the material, prepare for class discussion, and connect readings to course projects. They will not be accepted late.

Professional Ethos

For this class, *ethos* is defined as your persona, your reputation, and your attitude. This means that your ethos will be affected by 1) your behavior in class, 2) your interactions with your classmates, 3) your interactions with your instructor, 4) your work, and 5) your behavior outside of class. Developing a good *ethos* means coming to class prepared, being active and engaged in both small and large group discussions and activities, and being proactive about your writing development as well as seeking help from me for course assignments. More qualifications about a solid *ethos* are listed under the Professional Ethos rubric on Blackboard.

Grading

The assignments in this course impact your grade in the following proportion:

Project 1: Employment Project	20%
Project 2: Instructions	25%
Project 3: Usability Report (collaborative)	35%
Reading Responses, Quizzes, Short Writing, & Semester Reflection	10%
Professional Ethos	10%
Total	100%

All major assignments will be graded on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale:

A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	F
95-100	90-94	87-89	83-86	80-82	77-79	73-76	70-72	67-69	63-66	60-62	0-59

Here's the meaning behind the numbers I assign to your paper (you can use these statements as clues about how you might work toward a higher grade):

90-100 (A)—You did what the assignment asked at a high quality level, *and your work shows originality and creativity*. Work in this range shows all the qualities listed for a B; but it also demonstrates that you took extra steps to be original or creative in developing content, solving a problem, or developing a unique verbal or visual style.

80-89 (B)—You did what the assignment asked of you at a high quality level. Work in this range needs little revision, is complete in content, is organized well, and shows special attention to style and visual design.

70-79 (C)—You did what the assignment asked of you and fulfilled the basic requirements of the assignment. Work in this range tends to need some revision, but it is complete in content and the organization is logical. The style, verbal and visual, is straightforward but unremarkable.

60-69 (D)—You did what the assignment asked at a low level of quality. Work in this range tends to need significant revision. The content is often incomplete and the organization is hard to discern. Verbal and visual style is often non-existent or chaotic.

Below 60 (F)—Don't go here. I usually reserve the F for people who don't show up or don't do the work. If you give an assignment an honest try, I doubt you would receive an F. If you feel you put in your best effort and still received an F, you might consider dropping the class.

Students **must** participate in all of the major projects and complete a majority of the shorter writing assignments in order to pass this class. Students with questions about final grades should review university policies regarding grade appeals, which are outlined by the Dean of Students here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/gradeappeal.pdf>. The University regulations are here: http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html. Additional grading information can be found on the assignment sheets for individual projects.

Technology

In order to participate fully in the course, you should be familiar with and have regular access to Microsoft Office (or equivalent), e-mail, web browsers, and Adobe Acrobat and Reader. You are responsible for checking your e-mail regularly and for reading and keeping current with all content posted to the course Blackboard site. You are also responsible for backing up all files and ensuring that technological difficulties (internet outage, lost files, etc.) do not keep you from submitting work on time. We will also use software with which you may not be familiar (such as Adobe InDesign. In such cases, I expect a willingness to work toward proficiency.

Collaborative Work

Teamwork is a required component of the course. You and your project team members are responsible for updating one another and me about assignment development and progress. In addition, you also are responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and scheduling of assignments. When a collaborative project is assigned, you will receive explicit guidelines for successful collaboration. Individual group members will complete Team Performance Reviews.

Attendance

Attendance is required at all scheduled electronic and face-to-face (F2F) meetings. Since you will be working in project teams much of the semester, you also will be required to attend any scheduled out-of-class meetings with your team to complete course assignments. **More than four absences may result in your final grade being lowered by a partial grade for each absence. More than seven absences can result in a failing grade for the course.** Excused absences may be granted for religious holidays or university-sponsored events, provided you make a written request to me no less than two weeks in advance and that you complete any required work before the due date. Being excessively or regularly late for class or team meetings, both electronic and F2F, can also be counted as an absence. Being unprepared for class or excessively off task during class can be counted as an absence, as well.

Academic Integrity

Purdue students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students," which students are encouraged to read here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php>.

The preamble of this guide states the following: "Purdue University values intellectual integrity and the highest standards of academic conduct. To be prepared to meet societal needs as leaders and role models, students must be educated in an ethical learning environment that promotes a high standard of honor in scholastic work. Academic dishonesty undermines institutional integrity and threatens the academic fabric of Purdue University. Dishonesty is not an acceptable avenue to success. It diminishes the quality of a Purdue education, which is valued because of Purdue's high academic standards."

Academic dishonesty is defined as follows: "Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [University Regulations, Part V, Section III, B, 2, a] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972]" If you have any questions about this policy, please ask.

In Case of a Campus Emergency

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. You can acquire updated information from the course website, by emailing me, or by contacting me through the English Department at 765-494-3740.

Late Work

Work needs to be turned in by its deadline. Without prior approval, late work will receive a penalty. If I do not receive a rough draft of your project on time, I will deduct **a full grade** from your final project grade. Similarly, I will deduct **a partial grade** from your final project grade every day a final draft is late. After three days, I will no longer accept late projects. **I do not accept late reading responses.** If a problem arises that you foresee preventing your ability to turn in your work on time, let me know as soon as possible so we can work something out. Project management is vital to ensure potential problems are resolved in a timely manner.

Writing Lab

The Purdue Writing Lab offers one-to-one assistance with all document types at any stage of development. To make an appointment, visit the Writing Lab's website at <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/writinglab>.

Title IX

Title IX makes it clear that violence and harassment based on sex and gender are Civil Rights offenses subject to the same kinds of accountability and the same kinds of support applied to offenses against other protected categories such as race, national origin, etc. If you or someone you know has been harassed or assaulted, you can find the appropriate resources here: http://www.purdue.edu/sexual_assault/titleix/overview/index.html

Grief Absence Policy for Students

Purdue University recognizes that a time of bereavement is very difficult for a student. The University therefore provides the following rights to students facing the loss of a family member through the Grief Absence Policy for Students (GAPS). GAPS Policy: Students will be excused for funeral leave and given the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments in the event of the death of a member of the student's family. A student should contact the ODOS to request that a notice of his or her leave be sent to instructors. The student will provide documentation of the death or funeral service attended to the ODOS. Given proper documentation, the instructor will excuse the student from class and provide the opportunity to earn equivalent credit and to demonstrate evidence of meeting the learning outcomes for missed assignments or assessments. If the student is not satisfied with the implementation of this policy by a faculty member, he or she is encouraged to contact the Department Head and if necessary, the ODOS, for further review of his or her case. In a case where grades are negatively affected, the student may follow the established grade appeals process.

Course Calendar

	Daily Activities	Readings and Assignments
Unit One: Employment Project		
Week 1 6/13- 6/17	M: Introduction to Course & Project	
	T: Correspondence: Memos & Professional E-mail	TCT, p. 19-24, 84-90, 96-111
	W: Document Design & Job Ads	Reynolds, "The Big Four" TCT, p. 294-297
	R: Resumes	TCT, p. 298-311 <i>Reading Response #1 Due</i>
	F: Cover Letters Self-Introductions	Deliver Self-Intro in Class TCT, p. 312-317, 343-360 Resume & Cover Letter Drafts Due
Week 2 6/20- 6/24	M: Peer Review	
	T: LinkedIn & Social Media CAR Model	Arruda, " How to Write the Perfect LinkedIn Summary "
	W: Interview Activity	TCT, p. 320-324
	R: Work Day	
	F: No Class (Instructor at conference)	Employment Project Final Due
Unit Two: Instructions		
Week 3 6/27- 7/1	M: What Is Technical Communication?	TCT, p. 9-15 Blakely and Savage, "What Do Technical Communicators Need to Know about Writing?" <i>Reading Response #2 Due Today or Wed.</i>
	T: Instructions Imperative Mood Document Design	TCT, Chapter 7 TCT, Chapter 17 " Cooking a Banana Cream Pie "
	W: Planning & Research Audience Analysis	TCT, Chapter 14 (skim), Chapter 2 (review) Van Ittersum, "Craft and Narrative in DIY Instructions" <i>Reading Response #2 Due Today or Mon.</i>
	R: Graphics, Visuals, Fair Use Hazards & Warnings	TCT, Chapter 18 Johnson, " Professional Looking Graphics " Proposal Memo due at Class Time
	F: InDesign	Watch InDesign Video Tutorials
Week 4 7/4- 7/8	M: No Class (Independence Day)	
	T: Peer Review	Instructions Draft Due Alexander, "The Usability of Print and Online Video Instructions" <i>Reading Response #3 Due</i>
	W: Typography & Color	Coffin, " Typography 101 " Groeger, " When Typography Is a Matter of Life or Death " Cho, " The Science Behind Fonts "
	R: Plain Style	TCT, Chapter 16
	F: Work Day	TCT, Chapter 19 InDesign Practice Document Due

Unit 3: Usability		
Week 5 7/11- 7/15	M: Introduction to Usability	Posner, " Bad Doors Are Everywhere " Ely, " The World Is Designed for Men " " Principles of Universal Design "
	T: Practice with Usability Methods	Quesenbery, " What Does Usability Mean " Krug, Chapters 2-3
	W: Developing User Profiles & Scenarios Planning Tests	Usability.gov, " Planning a Usability Test " Just Ask, " User Group Profiles " Pre-Proposal Memo Due
	R: Conducting Tests	Krug, Chapters 9-11 Usability.gov, " Running a Usability Test "
	F: Collaboration	<i>TCT</i> , Chapter 3 Instructions Final Due Group Contract/Work Plan Due Professional Ethos Self-Assessment Due
Week 6 7/18- 7/22	M: Accessibility	WebAIM, " Introduction to Web Accessibility " Pullin, Design for Disability (excerpt)
	T: IMRaD Overview	Hopkins, " IMRaD Research Paper Format "
	W: Introduction and Methods	<i>TCT</i> , Chapter 10 & p. 399-400
	R: Work Day	
	F: Data Analysis	Brizee, "An Introduction to Coding"
Week 7 7/25- 7/29	M: Into & Methods Peer Review	Introduction & Methods Due
	T: Reporting & Discussing Results Data Visualization	Usability.gov, " Reporting Usability Test Results " <i>TCT</i> , p. 402-411
	W: Cohesion & Paragraphing	<i>TCT</i> , p. 430-435
	R: Delivering Oral Presentations	<i>TCT</i> , Chapter 20
	F: Work Day	
Week 8 8/1- 8/5	M: Peer Review	Bring a full draft to class
	T: Presentations	
	W: Presentations	
	R: Group Meetings w/Instructor	
	F: No Class	Final Report due

This calendar is subject to change. Check Blackboard for a current version.