

## English 421—Technical Writing

Time: 9:50 – 12:00 p.m. MWF

Location: WTHR 212

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Office Hours: 12:30-1:30 T (and by appointment)

### overview

Technical Writing is a course designed for students training for professions that require conciseness, clarity, and brevity in workplace communication. In many technical fields, such as those in the sciences and engineering, language is positioned as an obstacle to objectivity and usability for its ability to influence and alter a study, apparatus, or even the operability of a device. At the same time, it is this social nature of the human experience that makes these professions and their discoveries possible. Technical writing is in many ways a negotiation of language that works to form language into a more predictable form by through an emphasis on conciseness, clarity, and brevity. The technical writer is constantly placed in this challenging position between the inherent messiness of language and the objective ideals of scientific professions.

### required texts:

- Johnson-Sheehan, Richard, *Technical Communication Today*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (ISBN 0205171192)

### course website: <http://www.itap.purdue.edu/learning/tools/blackboard/>

We'll be using Blackboard for some aspects of the course, but we'll also use Dropbox, Google Docs, and some other collaboration resources.

### course goals

#### writing in context

Analyze specific instances of technical communication, how they are informed rhetorically, and how a range of audiences for texts we produce necessitates a delicate understanding of context

- writing for a range of defined audiences and stakeholders
- negotiating the ethical dimensions of technical communication

#### project management

Understand, develop, and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively, including

- selecting and using appropriate technologies that effectively and ethically address tech comm situations and audiences
- building professional *ethos* through documentation and accountability

#### document design

Make rhetorical design decisions about workplace documents, including

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and audience expectations
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, and revising visual designs and information architecture

#### teamwork

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork and collaboration, such as

- working online with colleagues
- determining 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 various research methods to produce professional documents, including

- analyzing professional contexts
- 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
- working ethically with research participants

### 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.

## course projects and activities

### unit 1: job docs and other genres

Employment materials are documents that help communicate how an applicant fits into an employment environment. Documents such as cover letters, resumes, and portfolio sites are important constructions in bridging the divide between an applicant's abilities and an employer's perception of those abilities. You will use this assignment to draft employment materials and begin considering the ways that professionalization can occur prior to graduation.

### unit 2: technical description and instructions (the a/v project)

In any technical career, you will find that the ability to accurately describe things, places, or processes is essential. This project will involve writing instructions for specific a/v tech and writing an app to house them. First, we'll become familiar with the technology, performing both primary and secondary research to gain the technical expertise required to write a set of instructions. During the second phase of the project, we'll write instructions, test the instructions, revise the instructions, then place the final drafts in an Android and iOS app.

## grading

### breakdown

job docs	25%
a/v project	50%
ethos, weblogs, reading responses, , peer review, etc.	25%

The two major projects in the course will be comprised of several components, each of which will be worth a percentage of your final grade.

All major assignments will be graded on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale: A=100-94, A-=93-90, B+=89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D+=69-67, D=66-64, D-=63-60, F=59 or below.

Students must participate in all of the three major projects and complete a majority of the required weblog posting 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](http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html).

### class participation, reading responses, peer reviews

This portion of your grade will be based on

- How well you implement the guidelines and best practices for posting comments and creating reading responses, as presented on our course site and discussed in the textbook.
- The degree to which your peer reviews and responses offer insightful feedback and suggestions on your classmates' drafts.
- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts demonstrate learning of the course content.

- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts engage with and contribute to the learning of others in the course.

### late work

The majority of missed class assignments cannot be made up. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me in writing prior to the deadline to determine whether or not an extension for the work will or will not be granted.

## technology

### system requirements

In order to participate fully in the course, you should already be able to use the technology platform and applications listed below.

- Mac OS X or Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7
- Microsoft Office for the PC or Mac (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) or Apple counterparts (Pages, Keynote, Numbers)
- Web Browser (e.g., Firefox, Safari, or Internet Explorer 8)
- Email Program (e.g., Purdue Webmail, Thunderbird, Gmail, etc.)
- Adobe Acrobat and Reader (for PDF documents, collaborative review)

### technology responsibilities

Familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for participation and success in the course. If you need any assistance now or at any point during the semester, please do not hesitate to ask.

During the semester, you'll need regular access to the Internet and email. Because the course home page is the main locus of the class community, you are responsible for reading and keeping current with all content posted there, including what has been submitted by both the instructor and your fellow students. You'll be responsible for configuring your system to access course materials, to read course email and participate in online discussions, and to submit your work. Very early in the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate that you can meet these responsibilities:

- Register for the course website and complete your profile information.
- Post a message about yourself and your interests
- Read the course description and calendar, then ask questions when you are uncertain about requirements or activities.
- Set up your @purdue.edu email or an alternative that you can access regularly and reliably
- Become proficient sending and receiving email attachments, resolving file compatibility issues, and following email decorum.
- Check the course calendar before each class meeting.
- Become proficient participating in the class Drupal space.
- Become more proficient with unfamiliar computer technologies and applications, including
- Web editing software, document cycling systems, desktop publishing applications, and graphics programs.
- Maintain back-up copies of all assignments via your home directory, disks, USB drives, or CDs.

If at any time you have problems accessing the Internet from home, you'll need to find a public lab or connection point. Problems with computers will not be an excuse for falling behind or failing to complete required assignments. If your Internet service goes down, find another connection point. If your computer breaks, use another one. In other words, find a way to complete the assignments on time. Because computer problems are a fact of life, always work to complete your assignments early and make frequent backups to multiple media.

## policies

### 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.

### behavior

This course relies heavily on discussion. We'll be doing a lot of reading, and discussing most of the reading in class. While it can be intimidating to make comments in front of your peers, you're expected to make a good effort to do so. Being nervous about class discussion is completely understandable. It's also appropriate to react and respond to the comments people are making in class. Learning to think quick and respond coherently in face-to-face interaction is an important rhetorical skill. But the class must always be considered a safe zone—a place where you can comment without fear of being mocked or belittled. Inflammatory remarks, personal attacks on me or other class members, racism (serious or humorous), or other hurtful comments will not be tolerated. If you make these types of comments I'll first call it to your attention. If, after you've been warned, you continue, I will ask you to leave class. If you consistently violate the [Purdue University Student Conduct Code](#), (the above incidents are covered under sections 3, 4, 7, and 11), I'll call campus security and have you escorted to the Dean's office.

### attendance

If you have three (or less than three) absences, your grade won't be adversely affected by attendance, and you'll be well on track to receiving full credit for participation. For each absence you accrue over the allowed limit (3), you will lose 1/3 of a full letter grade from your final grade. That means, if you have earned an A, but have missed class five times, you will receive a B+. However, if you miss more than 11 class periods, you will fail the course, even if you've completed and submitted all major assignments.

Attention to personal life while in class (Facebook, email, texting, etc) will result in you being marked absent for the day. If you're texting or sleeping regularly during class, I'll notify you out of class. If you don't stop, you'll be marked absent. If you are consistently late, you stand to forfeit a portion of your attendance/participation grade, depending on the frequency and severity of your lateness. Generally speaking, if you're late three times, it counts as a full absence.

If my attendance policy is unclear, please drop by my office and we'll talk about it (HEAV 308A).

### grief absence policy

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.

### plagiarism

This is the copying, deliberate or not, of another person's work and/or ideas without the proper citation. This can result in failure of the project, the failure of the course, dismissal from Purdue University, and other disciplinary action. We will discuss it further in class, but you also need to be aware of what it is and how to avoid it. When in doubt, you can always check with me.

### disability

If you have an ongoing condition that interferes with your ability to complete assigned work in the class, you should contact the Disability Resource Center to inquire about accommodation. If you have a documented disability that requires special accommodations (you already have an accommodation letter), please see me privately within the first week of class to make arrangements.

### pandemic and catastrophe

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 beyond the instructor's control. Information about possible changes will be communicated by me through email. If you have questions, please email me, and for more information, see ITAP's Campus Emergency website: <http://www.itap.purdue.edu/tlt/faculty/>