

English 301: Technical Writing, Summer 2008 Texas A&M University

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Office telephone: 458-1898 (I cannot return long distance calls.)
Office hours: 9:00 a.m. – 10:00 p.m. MTW (and by appointment)
I will also be available via email and occasionally on Yahoo IM. If we cannot arrange for a mutually agreed-upon office appointment, I will make other arrangements (such as a conference via phone or IM).
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Course Description, Prerequisite, and Texts

Processes of developing field-specific technical information related to the major, including researching, drafting, editing, revising, and designing technical reports, proposals, manuals, resumes and professional correspondence for specific audiences.

The prerequisites for this class are English 104 or its equivalent *and* junior classification. You should have experience developing research papers, including the use of documentation and citation standards.

This class requires excellent English writing skills. Errors in tone, grammar, usage, punctuation, spelling, diction, sentence structure, etc., are expensive. If you have particular difficulties with English, please come by during my office hours or schedule an appointment.

Required Text:

Johnson-Sheehan, Robert. *Technical Communication Today*, 2nd edition. New York: Pearson Education, Inc., 2007.

Course Objectives

To provide guidance and interactive experiences that will

- Introduce students to the kinds of writing that they will be doing on the job;
- Engage students in developing technical documents from conception to camera-ready copy.

To fulfill these objectives, students will

- Effectively analyze rhetorical, contextual, and ethical factors inherent in technical communication situations;
- Research technical documents using multiple approaches;
- Plan and deliver, using visual aids, an oral briefing on a technical subject
- Draft, edit, illustrate, and revise professional documents effectively;
- Recognize and apply appropriate style techniques to technical documents;
- Work individually and collaboratively to edit and improve technical documents developed by classmates;

- Prepare a technical document suitable for publication.

General Policies and Information

Please attend class, arrive on time, and be considerate of others during class discussion. I encourage you to use portable digital devices for relevant, in-class work; however, I will ask you to stop using them if your usage becomes distracting.

I take attendance at the beginning of class. If you are there when I take attendance, you will be marked “present.” If not, you will be marked “absent.” I do not record tardiness.

With the exception of university-approved absences, I reserve the right to refuse an excuse. Do not submit documentation unless you have missed a graded assignment.

If you email me, make sure ENGL 301 and your section number appear in the subject of the message.

Missing class means missing the discussion. I want you to do well in this class; however, I won’t be repeating myself.

Assignments must be submitted on time and in the required format. I do not accept late assignments except in the case of a documented, university-excused absence. I also do not accept assignments improperly formatted. For instance, I will not accept an Office 2007 document when Office 2003 has been requested.

All electronic files submitted to me should follow this naming convention: LastName_Document. For instance, if a student whose last name is Rosales submits a memo, then the file containing that memo should be named Rosales_Memo. This naming convention helps ensure the correct, timely grading and return of your work.

I’ll return assignments to class as soon as possible and then file them in my office. Wait 24 hours before discussing graded work with me. There will be no extra credit.

Technology

This class requires that you be able to use a computer to create, modify, and save documents in various formats. You will also be required to find information online and then save it (or “bookmark” it) for later use. You are required to use a word processor to create and modify text, and in some cases you will be required to insert and modify graphics.

You are responsible for backing up your work. Our computer classroom is equipped with CD burners and USB drives. I strongly recommend saving your work before, during, and after class. You are responsible for not losing your own work.

Save a tree and a dollar, folks. Only print when necessary to complete work for this class.

Accommodations for Disability

“The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal antidiscrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you believe you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact the Department of Student Life, Services for Students with Disabilities in Room B118 of Cain Hall, or call 845-1637” (A&M Student Rules).

University Writing Center

I encourage you to make an appointment and visit the University Writing Center (second floor of Evans Library, writingcenter.tamu.edu). They have trained, professional writing consultants who can help you with any question at any stage in the writing process.

Texas A&M and Writing Programs Office Writing Programs Policies are available on the Web at <http://www-english.tamu.edu/wprograms/WPOstudentpolicies.html>.

Texas A&M Student Rules are available at <http://student-rules.tamu.edu/>.

Academic Integrity Statement

AGGIE HONOR CODE

“An Aggie does not lie, cheat, or steal or tolerate those who do.”

Upon accepting admission to Texas A&M University, a student immediately assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor System. Students will be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the TAMU community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor System.

Just for the sake of full disclosure, you should know that I’ve adapted this syllabus from the English Department’s standard syllabus.

Personal Ethics: Guidelines for Incorporating Ethical Issues into Topic Selection, Discussions, and Assignments (Source: A&M Standard Syllabus)

Purpose

To ensure that student learning of technical communication/editing concepts and skills is not unnecessarily complicated by individual differences in beliefs

Guidelines

- Religious evidence should not be used to refute or support scientific positions and vice versa.
- Personal beliefs (yours or those of others), while valid, should not be used as evidence to support or refute a position.
- Proselytizing is not appropriate in technical documents of any kind.

Assignments/Grade Distribution

Major assignments (20% each):

- Job application portfolio
- Proposal on report topic
- Final report
- Group Presentation

Daily assignments (20% total):

- Rough drafts for various assignments
- Memoranda
- Other documents or quizzes as assigned
- Final exam

Grading Criteria

A – The point of technical writing is to make clear that which is complex, unclear, or otherwise inaccessible. When reading an A paper, the audience is immediately closer to solving the indicated problem or performing a particular task. The hallmark of the A paper is lack of effort when reading. An A paper never leaves any doubt or misunderstanding.

B – A B paper is good work and accomplishes its intended goal. The meaning, audience, and purpose are all clear, but there are times when the reader has to re-read or put in an unexpected effort in order to understand. This extra effort might be due to some mechanical errors, sentences or phrases which don't contribute to the reader's understanding, or irrelevant information (no matter how well written).

C – A C paper can be useful to the audience, but only because the audience persists in understanding it or already knows something about the subject. Errors in tone, usage, spelling, or any other mechanical element might hinder the reader's understanding or call for increased effort in understanding the material. A grade of C on a technical writing assignment might be equated to a cell phone manual which requires you to learn a whole new set of words and definitions in order to understand it ("convenience dialing" rather than "speed dialing," for instance).

D – A D paper is often missing some critical element or deficient in more than one major area. For instance, if your report is missing a Results section, or a References page, the best grade you can hope to receive is a D. A D paper can also be the result of critical mistakes in audience analysis, formatting, citation, grammar, usage, design, purpose, or medium. In short, a D paper has presented the audience with only a portion of what was expected.

F – The F paper fails to meet the criteria for the assignment. A paper might receive an F if it lacks more than one required section, or is simply difficult to understand. Most commonly, an F paper lacks required material *and* is difficult to understand. In technical writing, an F means the audience has not learned anything.

ENGL 301 Calendar – Spring 2008

Work is learning. Learning is change. Change is inevitable in a good class; therefore, consider this schedule volatile and subject to change. I will not change policies; however, deadlines and readings might change. I will notify you in advance of any such changes.

Tuesday, July 1

Class introduction. Introduction to technical writing.

For later in the week, come to class ready to discuss the various documents you are required to produce for your major.

Discussion:

- What is technical writing?
- Why does A&M require technical writing?

The larger world of TC:

- Read “Poll shows 1 in 4 Americans don’t read books. . .” at <http://webtools.uiuc.edu/blog/view?blogId=25>
- The role of technical writing in everyday reading.

Wednesday, July 2

Homework:

- Bring a sample of technical writing to show the class (you will *not* turn it in). Find a definition of technical writing, *not* from the textbook, which you think describes your example.
- Read “The Death of E-Mail,” by Chad Lorenz, at http://www.slate.com/id/2177969/pagenum/all/#page_start
- Read Chapters 1, 2, 3 and 15

Discussion:

- Audience analysis: Speaker, audience, medium, message.
- What are the requirements for someone in my field looking for an entry-level position?
- Document Design for resumes and cover letters. Why should you care about CRAP?
- What is an application letter?

The larger world of TC:

- Discuss the role of document design, both print and electronic. Discussion of design as a cultural construct. Contrast, Repetition, Alignment, and Proximity.
- In class: View Metlife and CSS Zen Garden examples, Gutenberg Bible, math article, and *NY Times*.

Thursday, July 3

Rough draft: Job Application Portfolio:

- You must bring an electronic copy of your Application Portfolio. In order to receive credit, your proposal must meet the requirements discussed during class time.

Friday, July 4

Independence Day—no class

Monday, July 7

Job Application Portfolio due at beginning of class. Must be printed and stapled.

Tuesday, July 8

Homework:

- Virtual Library Tour
- Research video: http://www-english.tamu.edu/pers/fac/england/files/library_intro2.wmv
- Read Chapters 7 and 21.
- Choosing a topic and beginning your research.
- What's the difference between a topic and an issue ("issue" as a noun, not a verb)? Use the Oxford English Dictionary via the TAMU library page to find out, and come to class ready to discuss. What are some topics in the world of technology? What are some issues?

Discussion:

- What are some topics in your field? What are some issues?
- What is a proposal? Audience, purpose, format
- What is a credible source?
- Use OED to look up "ethics" and "credibility." What is the relationship between those words?
- What is the writing process? What is *your* writing process? What is free writing?
- What is a research question and where on Earth can I find one? (skim over Chapter 7)
- What role does research play in the writing process?
- Class time for research.

Wednesday, July 9

Homework:

- What are the issues in your field? Come with a typed memo listing three issues—they can be social, professional, technical, legal—and *turn them in for a daily grade.*
- Proposals (Chapter 21)
- Summary/Purpose Statements
- Memos: skim Chapter 17, but pay attention to the section on memos.

Discussion:

- What's the relationship between a proposal and a report?
- The following items forwarded from class discussion on 6/2/2008:

- What is a proposal? Audience, purpose, format
- What is a credible source?
- Use OED to look up “ethics” and “credibility.” What is the relationship between those words?
- What is the writing process? What is *your* writing process?
- What is free writing?
- What is a research question and where on Earth can I find one?
- What role does research play in the writing process?
- Class time for research.

Thursday, July 10

Homework:

- Read Chapter 5

Class time for writing and research for your proposal.

The larger world of TC:

- Ethics and technical communication. The Texas City Refinery explosion; Photoshop; purpose and context.

Friday, July 11

Rough Draft: Proposal

- You must bring an electronic copy of your proposal. In order to receive credit, your proposal must meet the requirements discussed during class time.

Monday, July 14

Proposal due at beginning of class. Must be formatted like a memo, printed, and stapled neatly.

Tuesday, July 15

Homework:

- Read Chapter 23
- The Formal Report
- What’s the purpose of a report? What part do *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos* play? Use the OED to look up those words.
- In-class revision exercise. Revising a passage into less than 200 words, less than 300 words, three paragraphs, two paragraphs, without removing any information at all, and other scenarios.

Wednesday, July 16

- **Revision exercise – in class**

Discussion:

- Styles, Headings, and the Table of Contents
- Workshop: inserting graphics into a Word document (text layout, resizing, when to use). How to label a table or figure within a technical document.

- In-class writing and research time.

Thursday, July 17

Work in class; I'll be here to answer questions.

Friday, July 18

Rough Draft: Final report

In order to receive credit, you must bring an electronic copy viewable upon a computer; additionally, your draft must conform to the standards discussed in class.

Monday, July 21

TBA

Tuesday, July 22

Bibliography and citation. Bring your sources to class and we'll go through citation styles and formatting.

Final Report due by end of class. Your report must be printed and stapled neatly. If necessary, put it into a folder or small binder.

Wednesday, July 23

TBA

Thursday, July 24

TBA

Friday, July 25

TBA

Monday, July 28

TBA

Tuesday, July 29

TBA

Wednesday, July 30

TBA

Thursday, July 31

Presentations

Friday, August 1

Presentations

Monday, August 4

Presentations

Wednesday, August 6

Final Exam

Section 209: 10:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.

Section 210: 1:00 – 3:00 p.m.