

ENGL 305: Technical Writing | Spring 2020

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Office: 339 Colson Hall
Office Hours: Wednesdays 10:00-11:30am
and by appointment

/ Introduction

This course introduces you to strategies for translating between discipline-specific knowledge and interested outsiders. While this may include topics traditionally understood as *technical*, such as those in engineering, architecture, and computer science, *technical writing* encompasses any topic that must be explained to an involved, but not expert, audience.

In this course, you will explore the forms of technical writing that are common in the professions, including memos, instructions, and descriptions. Drawing on the expertise you developed in your major, you will explore technical writing through topics and issues important to the work you plan to do. Because a primary assumption of this course is that all writing emerges from and responds to a particular problem, audience, and purpose, the course focuses on helping you develop multiple strategies for accomplishing your communication goals.

/ Required Texts

- Graves, H., & Graves, R. (2012). *A Strategic Guide to Technical Communication* (2nd ed.). Ontario/Buffalo: Broadview Press.
- Additional readings (PDF or web links) are available on eCampus.

/ Course Goals

Students who have completed English 305 should be able to:

1. Specify and adapt to the constraints of the rhetorical situation, especially an audience's knowledge of a topic and its desired uses for a document.
2. Conduct research to gain command of a technical subject and to invent the contents of communication.
3. Convey clearly and precisely the technical aspects of a topic to a non-specialist audience.
4. Develop a functional vocabulary for discussing, analyzing, and planning professional, technical documents.
5. Apply technology to organize and design documents that support reader comprehension.
6. Evaluate and modify a document to ensure its usability and accessibility for an audience by emphasizing planning, audience analysis, persuasion, clear and effective writing style, organization, graphics, and information design.
7. Demonstrate the ability to speak persuasively in a professional setting, including the ability to select and design effective presentation graphics.

/ Communications

I check my email regularly and typically respond within 24 hours (maybe 48 hours on the weekend).

You, too, should check your Mix account email regularly (at least daily). At times, I will send out important information about the course. Please follow professional standards when emailing me.

/ Attendance & Professional Conduct

Missing class

You may miss **four (4) days of class** without penalty. If you are absent five or more (5+) times—for any reason—you will receive a zero (0) for your participation grade. Starting with your sixth absence, you may lose 5% from your final course grade (e.g., 85% becomes an 80%, 80% becomes 75%, etc.) in addition to not earning participation points. If you miss more than 7 days of class, you will fail the course.

Arriving late, leaving early, or being unprepared may count as an absence. Working on assignments for other courses during class time will count as an absence and you will be asked to leave.

University policy on excused absences

Excused absences are absences in which the instructor agrees to provide an opportunity to make up missed class work or activities (e.g., assignments, exams). Events that justify an excused absence include religious observances, mandatory military obligation, mandatory court appearances, and participation in university activities at the request of university authorities. Other events may justify an excused absence at the discretion of the instructor or program.

For the full statement, see the Undergraduate Catalog:

<http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/enrollmentandregistration/#enrollmenttext>

Extended absences

If you know that you'll need to miss more than three (3) consecutive class meetings, you should take the course in another term, when your schedule allows you to be present to do your best work. If you are a military service person with possible drill events or deployments please speak to me about a plan for successfully completing all required coursework.

A note on absences, participation, and make-up work:

I do not accept late work, except for under extreme circumstances. If you know you will miss class, arrange with me beforehand to submit your assignments.

That said, I know that things happen that may cause you to miss class. Please reserve your absences for those extreme circumstances. You don't get to miss four days of class, then take another four days for a religious holiday, travel with band, and something else that would be "excused."

Because this is a discussion-based, workshop style class, you can't participate (fully) if you're not here, regardless of the reason.

Timeliness and preparation

I expect you to treat this class and your classmates professionally; to arrive on time and prepared, having completed all readings, homework, and project drafts; to bring all relevant materials with you every day; to complete all major assignments; to actively contribute to class discussions, workshops, and peer review sessions with thoughtful questions and comments; to seek help early and immediately when you need it; and to generally contribute to a positive learning environment.

/ Submitting Assignments

Major assignments

Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due at or before the start of class on the day they are listed in the course schedule. Check the schedule or assignment sheet for submission guidelines.

With the exception of extreme emergencies, if you fail to turn in an assignment, the assignment will be considered late. Major assignments will lose 10% from the final assignment grade for each calendar day that a rough or final draft is late. If you don't hand in a rough draft, I won't grade a final draft.

Minor assignments, homework, and in-class work

In this course, you will complete many in-class or short homework "minor" writing assignments. Some I may collect for a homework grade, others I may check in class and count as a quiz or toward your participation grade. I do not accept late homework.

Professional Standards

As you turn in your assignments, I will hold you to professional standards. Your employer will take for granted qualities such as promptness, neat appearance, and correct mechanics (grammar, spelling, and punctuation). Toward that end, please spell check your work and plan ahead when switching between computer programs—documents created in MS Word might look different when saved as a PDF—and don't expect spell check to catch all errors.

Anything longer than one sheet of paper **must** be stapled (larger documents may require a binder clip). I will not accept unbound or dog-eared papers.

A note on problems with technology:

In general, problems with technology are not acceptable excuses for late or incomplete work. Computer problems? Internet out? Printer not working? Try going to a computer lab on campus. You should create multiple backups of your work (flash drive, Google Drive, etc.) in case you accidentally erase, overwrite, or otherwise lose your files.

I do not accept assignments via email.

/ Assignments & Drafts

Assignments are graded on content, technique, and style. Before you submit your final drafts, you will receive a detailed assignment sheet and grading rubric, as well as extensive comments (from me and your peers, written or oral) that will help you in the revision process.

The major assignments for this course include:

- **Job Application Materials (20%).** You will create application materials for an appropriate position for a person with your education, experience, and expertise.
- **Technical Description (20%).** You will describe in detail a complex mechanical object or natural process for a non-expert audience.
- **Presentation/Archival Notes & Handout (15%).** You will research and plan a talk about a specialized topic, design effective supporting slides, and deliver your talk to the class.
- **Instruction Set & Usability Test and Report (20%).** You will write a comprehensive step-by-step guide to help a user complete a complex task, then test it on real users.

A note rough drafts:

I may not collect and comment on your rough drafts before you submit your assignments for grading. I will, however, speak with you extensively in class about your work-in-progress, and you may come to my office hours for additional advice.

You must complete all major assignments to pass this course grade.

The remaining portion of your course grade breaks down as follows:

- **Homework & Quizzes (10%).** Again, if you are not in class, you cannot earn points for homework or quizzes.
- **Participation (10%).** Participation is not the same as attendance. Again, I expect you to be present and prepared, and to actively contribute to the class.
- **Reflection Letter (5%).** You will analyze your own growth and performance as a technical writer and reflect on areas in which you have performed well or still need to practice.

Weighted Grades

Grades for this course are *weighted*, which means that the point values don't correspond exactly to your overall course grade. In other words, Assignment A and Assignment B might count equally toward your final course grade (20% each), even though the possible points for each assignment may differ (e.g., 100 points vs. 150 points). eCampus will display both your point total and weighted grades.

For more on weighted grades, see this handy explanation from the University of Tampa (<http://edtech.ut.edu/all-cat/160-weighted-grades-explained>).

/ Grade Descriptions & Grade Weights

The major assignments for this course will be graded according to the following criteria:

A—Exemplary work that demonstrates originality and initiative. The content is mature, thorough, and well-suited for the audience; the style is clear, accurate, and forceful; the information is well-organized and formatted so that it is accessible and attractive; genre conventions are effectively used; mechanics and grammar are correct. A company or organization could use these documents without further revisions, and might even use them as examples when training new employees.

B—Good work. The documents generally succeed in meeting their goals in terms of audience, purpose, and genre without the need for further major revisions. They may need some *minor* improvements in content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics. In the workplace, a company or organization would be able to use the documents without major revisions of any sort.

C—Satisfactory work. Documents are adequate in all respects, but require some substantial revisions of content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics; they may require further work in more than one area. For instance, central ideas may generally be apparent, but may often lack adequate explanations or documentation necessary for different audiences and purposes. In the workplace, the documents would be functional for an immediate deadline, but would require further revisions before being distributed or made part of a permanent record.

D—Documents are unprofessional. They generally require extensive revisions of content, presentation, writing style, and/or mechanics before the documents could be used by a company. The writer has encountered significant problems meeting goals of audience, purpose, and genre. In the workplace, a company or organization would most probably have to reassign the project to another writer for successful completion.

F—Documents do not have enough information, do something other than is appropriate for a given situation, or contain major and pervasive problems in terms of content, presentation, or writing style/mechanics that interfere with meaning. A company or organization would most probably dismiss the writer from current projects.

Grading Scale

A+: 97 or above

A: 93-96

A-: 90-92

B+: 87-89

B: 83-86

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 63-66

D-: 60-62

F: 59 and below

/ Inclusivity Statement

WVU is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this course, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700 or <https://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu/>). For more information on WVU's Division of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, please visit <https://diversity.wvu.edu/> as well.

/ Department of English Affirmation of Values

We, the members of WVU's Department of English, believe that critical and creative reading and writing constitute acts of radical love. We ally ourselves with a multitude of departments, student bodies, and dedicated individuals across the country and the world who refuse to remain silent within a climate of hatred and violence: be it from sexism, racism, classism, ableism, nativism, anti-Semitism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, or Islamophobia. We are committed to building communities, not dividing them.

Colson Hall and our classrooms campus-wide are spaces where students, faculty, and staff may safely voice their concerns and where we may, together, foster futures more just. We aim to raise the status of those suppressed by the status quo; in assembly with human and nonhuman beings, we protest all types of environmental degradation, especially those prescribed at the expense of inhabitants' health.

Our research and syllabi affirm the core values of compassion, inclusivity, and care that a diverse humanities program holds for everyone. By telling stories of those who suffer under oppression in any form, past and present, we honor the ability of language and other means of communication—in each area of study we offer—to redress these wrongs, urge unity, and pursue peace. To those who seek shelter or wish to expand its scope, we welcome you; we thank you; we are with you.

/ Statement on Sexual Misconduct and Resources

WVU does not tolerate sexual misconduct, including harassment, stalking, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, or relationship violence [BOG Policy 44]. It is important for you to know that there are resources available if you or someone you know needs assistance. You may speak to a member of university administration, faculty, or staff; keep in mind that they have an obligation to report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator (<https://titleix.wvu.edu/staff>).

If you want to speak to someone who is permitted to keep your disclosure **confidential**, please seek assistance from the Carruth Center, 304-293-9355 or 304-293-4431 (24-hour hotline), and

locally within the community at the Rape and Domestic Violence Information Center (RDVIC), 304-292-5100 or 304-292-4431 (24-hour hotline).

/ SpeakWrite Certification

This course will emphasize effective communication, provide opportunities for feedback and revision, and base a significant portion of the final grade on written and spoken communication. The Eberly Writing Studio will work one-on-one with students on everything from note-taking and pre-writing to revision strategies, editing, and effective presentation techniques.



Purpose: What exactly do I want to happen?

Audience: Who is reading, listening, or viewing?

Conventions: What is expected in this context?

Trouble Spots: What could get in the way of my goals?

/ Academic Integrity

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Standards Policy (<http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification>). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me before the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

/ Helpful Resources

Office of Accessibility Services

B20 Stewart Hall
304-293-6700
access2@mail.wvu.edu
<http://accessibilityservices.wvu.edu>

Carruth Center

Health and Education Building, 390 Birch St.
304-293-4431
wvuccps@mail.wvu.edu
<https://carruth.wvu.edu/>

WellWVU (The Students' Center for Health)

Health and Education Building, 390 Birch St.
304-293-5054
wellwvu@mail.wvu.edu
<https://well.wvu.edu/about>

Eberly Writing Studio

G02 Colson Hall
304-293-5788
<https://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>

ENGL 305 | Course Calendar | Spring 2020

I reserve the right to make changes to the course calendar as necessary and will communicate those changes to you as soon as possible.

Pay attention to page numbers for readings listed in the course calendar. Sometimes, you're only expected to read selections from longer articles, chapters, or books. The entire texts have been provided in case you would like to learn more about a given topic.

Week 1

Tuesday, January 14

In class: - Course introduction: common (mis)conceptions about technical writing
- Discuss rhetorical situation audience, purpose, genre

For next class: - Review: *SGTC*, Ch. 1, "Thinking about Audience, Purpose, and Genre," pp. 29-50
- Read: *STC*, "Defining Technical Communication" (eCampus link)
- **Before midnight on Wed.:** Complete professional email homework

Thursday, January 16

Due: - Professional email

In class: - Introduce Job Application Package Assignment and review grading rubric
- What is a genre set?
- Create Handshake account: Interpreting job ads → audience analysis

For next class: - Complete: Audience analysis and attach job ad (print & save as a PDF)
- Read: Markel, "Writing Job Application Materials," pp. 405-417 (skim pp. 417-425)
- Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 8, "What is persuasion?," pp. 174-182

Week 2

Tuesday, January 21

Due: - Audience analysis worksheet (print)

In class: - Rhetorical elements of the resume: categories and organization (logos)
- Bullet point formula, action verbs, and memorable details (ethos and pathos)

For next class: - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 5, "Designing Documents and Page Layout," pp. 117-130

Thursday, January 23

- In class:
- Review sample resumes
 - Visual design in resume: CRAP and using tables to create alignments
- For next class:
- Read: Markel, "Writing Job Application Materials," pp. 425-431
 - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 4, "Writing Technical Prose," pp. 95-105

Week 3

Tuesday, January 28

- In class:
- Rhetorical elements of the cover letter: making the resume come alive
 - Review sample cover letters
 - Write an effective introduction
- For next class:
- Complete: Job Application package. Bring two (2) printed copies each of resume, cover letter, and job ad to next class

Thursday, January 30

- Due:
- Job Application rough draft (two print copies of resume, cover letter, job ad)
- In class:
- In-class peer review
 - Discuss memo for final draft and thank-you letter/email
 - How to sign a cover letter
- For next class:
- Complete: Peer reviews (print & eCampus)
 - Review: *SGTC*, Ch. 4, "Writing Technical Prose," pp. 95-105

Week 4

Tuesday, February 4

- Due:
- Peer reviews (print & eCampus)
- In class:
- Review: Writing technical prose
 - Review grading rubric
- For next class:
- Complete: Job Application Package (print & eCampus)
 - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 4, "Writing Technical Prose," pp. 108-116

Thursday, February 6

- Due:
- Job Application Package final draft (print & eCampus)
- In class:
- Introduce Technical Description

- Review samples: why write a technical description?

For next class: - Complete: Technical Description proposal (print)
 - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 3, "Researching Technical Subjects," p. 73 and pp. 88-94

Week 5

Tuesday, February 11

Due: - Technical Description proposal (print)

In class: - Workshop proposals: refining your topic by analyzing audience knowledge
 - Conducting research/locating useful sources; citing sources

For next class: - Complete: Technical Description source summary (print)
 - Read: Markel, "Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions," pp. 543-551

Thursday, February 13

Due: - Technical Description source summary (print)

In class: - Discuss organizational principles and strategies for providing enough detail
 - Effective introductions: Wonder appeals and application appeals
 - Adaptation Strategies (Penrose & Katz) and extended definitions

For next class: - Complete: Adaptation strategies analysis (print)
 - Review: *SGTC*, Ch. 5, "Designing Documents and Page Layout," pp. 117-130

Week 6

Tuesday, February 18

Due: - Adaptation strategies analysis (print)

In class: - Compare adaptation strategy analyses
 - Review organizational principles and strategies for providing enough detail
 - Image search: Google images, Creative Commons, picture attribution
 - Page layout considerations: balance, white space, justification

For next class: - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 2, "Leading and misleading the reader," pp. 59-72

Thursday, February 20

In class: - In-class work day
 - Discuss assignment memo and review grading rubric

For next class: - Complete: Rough draft of Technical Description (two print copies & eCampus)

Week 7

Tuesday, February 25

Due: - Technical Description rough draft (two print copies & eCampus)

In class: - Peer reviews

For next class: - Complete peer reviews (print & eCampus)

Thursday, February 27

Due: - Peer reviews (print & eCampus)

In class: - In-class work day: Meet with peer review partners before beginning revisions

For next class: - Complete final draft of Technical Description (print & eCampus)
- Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 13, "Presenting Technical Information Orally," pp. 301-314

Week 8

Tuesday, March 3

Due: - Technical Description final draft (print & eCampus)

In class: - Introduce Presentation Assignment: archival notes, references, and a handout
- So, what? What's the point?
- Discuss sticky ideas (SUCCES[S])

For next class: - Complete: Presentation proposal (print)
- Read: Garr Reynolds, selection from *Presentation Zen*, pp. 121-152

Thursday, March 5

Due: - Presentation proposal (print)

In class: - Workshop presentation proposals
- Review design techniques: signal-to-noise ratio, picture superiority effect, and sentence headers
- Review TC ethics and image copyright

For next class: - Find at least two images you want to use for the in-class workshop; save to USB drive and bring to next class

Week 9

Tuesday, March 10

- Due: - Have with you two images to use for the workshop
- In class: - In-class workshop: Pictures, graphs, and charts, but maybe not bullets
- Background images, contrasting colors, text boxes, and useful animations
- For next class: - Work on presentation slides and narrative, notes, handout

Thursday, March 12

- In class: - How to begin and end presentations and avoiding bad habits
- Creating a quality handout
- Assign presentation dates
- For next class: - Complete: Presentation slides/narrative and handout, and practice!
(eCampus)
- Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 10, "Writing How-To Documents," pp. 233-256
- Important Reminder: - Presentations begin March 24 and will take ~40 minutes each day. In the remaining ~35 minutes, we'll work on the next major assignment, which we begin discussing next class.

***Everyone must submit the slides/narrative and handout to eCampus before class on March 24, regardless of your presentation day.**

Week 10

Tuesday, March 17 and Thursday, March 19

No class: Spring Break

Week 11

Tuesday, March 24

- Due: - Presentation slides with archival notes and audience handout (everyone, eCampus)
- Presentations (1-5)
- In class: - Introduce Instruction Set Assignment
- Identifying a manageable and interesting topic
- For next class: - Complete: Instruction Set proposal (print)

Thursday, March 26

- Due: - Presentations (6-10)
 - Instruction set proposal (print)
- In class: - Workshop proposals and review grading rubric
 - Rhetorical elements of instructions: overview/introduction, materials/tool, numbered steps
- For next class: - Complete: How do these recipes target audiences with varying levels of expertise (fried chicken handout, print)

Week 12

Tuesday, March 31

- Due: - Presentations (11-15)
 - Fried chicken analysis (print)
- In class: - Compare sample analyses
 - Practice writing usable steps: “messy” instructions
- For next class: - Online instructions genre analysis (print)

Thursday, April 2

- Due: - Presentations (16-20)
 - Online instructions genre analysis (print)
- In class: - Discuss rhetorical conventions of online instructions
- For next class: - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 12, “Taking Technical Communication Online,” pp. 286-300

Week 13

Tuesday, April 7

- In class: - Taking and editing screenshots
 - How to arrange text and images
- For next class: - Read: *SGTC*, Ch. 11, “Testing and Reporting Document Usability,” pp. 257-278

Thursday, April 9

- In class: - Discuss usability testing and usability memo
 - Conduct sample user tests

For next class: - Draft usability documents: test objectives, tasks, target user profiles, handouts, and questionnaires (print)

Week 14

Tuesday, April 14

Due: - Draft usability documents: test objectives, tasks, target user profiles, handouts, and questionnaires (print)

In class: - In-class workday: Review usability documents

For next class: - Complete: Instruction Set rough draft (print & eCampus)

Thursday, April 16

Due: - Rough draft of Instruction Set (print & eCampus)

In class: - Conduct usability tests with classmates

For next class: - Conduct usability tests with outside users
- Compile notes from usability test; bring all notes and handouts to next class

Week 15

Tuesday, April 21

No class: - Conduct Usability Tests

For next class: - Compile notes from usability test; bring all notes and handouts to next class

Thursday, April 23

Due: - In-class writing: revise instructions and prepare usability memo

In class: - Review Usability Memo assignment
- Introduce Reflection letter

For next class: - Complete: Instruction Set and Usability Memo (print & eCampus)

Week 16

Tuesday, April 28

Due: - Complete: Instruction Set and Usability Memo (print & eCampus)

In class: - In-class work day: Reflection Letter

For next class: - Complete final reflection letter (print)

Thursday, April 30

Due: - Reflection Letter (print)

In class: - Course wrap-up
- Complete SEIs