English 305: Technical Writing

Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:30-3:45 p.m. | Colson G18

Image courtesy of Aleks Dorohovich via Unsplash

Professor: Dr. Erin Brock Carlson, erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu
Course Links: Schedule and Classroom
Office Hours: Mondays 3-4 p.m., Thursdays 4-5 p.m., and by appointment
Office Location: Colson Hall 227

Overview

This course will introduce you to strategies for translating between discipline-specific knowledge and audiences previously unfamiliar with that information. We will explore the forms of technical writing that are common in the professions, including memos, job documents, short reports, instruction sets, and more. Drawing on the expertise developed in your major, you will develop technical writing skills through your engagement with topics important to the work you plan to do. The skills you develop in this course will support you in your journey to become more effective and ethical communicators.

Outcomes

By the end of the semester, students who earn a passing grade in the course (C- or above) will have demonstrated their ability to:

- **Analyze and understand complex communication scenarios:** Throughout the course, you will consider how writing might shape particular situations, and how you might adapt information to the constraints of a situation, including audience, purpose, and genre.
- **Write in multiple genres and contexts:** You will be introduced to a range of genres that you might encounter in technical spaces, so that you are prepared to respond to them and create your own in the future.
- **Prepare and translate complex information effectively:** Taking into account audience needs and communicative goals, you will hone your research, drafting, revision, and polishing skills in order to communicate complex information to a layperson audience.
- **Design inviting, effective, and accessible documents:** Document design is just as important as the content in the document, so you will have the opportunity to consider the role that design plays in engaging with audiences, including headings, typography, visuals, and the like.
- **Utilize current workplace technologies:** You will be responsible for navigating online platforms to engage in class, much as you would in a professional workplace, as well as to create textual and visual materials.

English 305: Technical Writing

Required texts and course tools
There is no assigned textbook for this class. All of your readings will be posted to Classroom. We will meet in a Mac computer lab with Mac mini computers. You are welcome to bring your own devices, as well. We will be using Google Classroom as a headquarters for our class (click this link to join).

Assignment overviews
Each unit is made up of several components, including shorter writing assignments and the final product, so missing major components does lower your overall unit grade. English 305 does not have a final examination.

1: Learning technical and professional genres (10%)
We will start the semester with a short unit that focuses on the proper content and format of common professional documents such as letters, memos, and emails. You will also be asked to identify a genre that you think you will encounter in your intended profession, and to write up a short "cheat sheet" about that genre to be shared with your peers in a collaborative guidebook.

2: Crafting job application materials (25%)
Our first major project is to develop job materials. The focus of this unit will be on developing a portfolio of employment documents. After exploring different positions you would be interested in applying for in the future, you will develop all of the necessary materials for one particular position. This includes an application or cover letter, two types of resumes (skills-based and chronological), and participation in a short interview sequence. We will also do some preparation for job fairs.

3: Documenting and designing for users (25%)
In any career, you will find that the ability to accurately describe things, places, or processes is essential, especially to audiences that do not possess the same subject knowledge that you do. You will craft a variety of documents, including an instruction set, to practice this important skill. We will also learn about user experience design and practice usability testing to further enhance your audience awareness.

4: Researching and writing about scientific/technical controversies (20%)
One of the problems facing open public conversation about complicated issues is a lack of public understanding about the nature of the problem or problems that underlie the issue and potential responses to it. For our final project, you will take what you've learned this semester and combine it with your own specialized knowledge and interests in order to write a brief report about a scientifically or technically complex topic, explaining the issue at hand and reflecting on the ethical implications of the topic at hand.

Class preparation & in-class activities (10%)
You will be responsible for keeping up with the readings in the class. I will regularly assign traditional reading responses (300 words) or other guided activities to direct your attention to a particular

English 305: Technical Writing

aspect of these readings. When there are no reading responses assigned, we will engage with the reading in other ways: short, in-class writing, activities, and potentially reading quizzes.

Performance evaluations (10%)
This class requires you to act as you would in a workplace environment, which means that you should be present, ready to engage with the material, and willing to work with others. This behavior takes many different forms, and you will be encouraged to reflect on your own practices throughout the semester in different forms to prepare you for workplace evaluations.

Grading

Specific criteria and rubrics for each major assignment will be provided; however, all of the writing you produce in this course should meet the requirements of the specific project. Additionally, each assignment should be well-researched, respectful of the intended audience, grammatically and stylistically sound, and be rhetorically effective for its intended purpose.

Each major assignment will have **two** deadlines: a **feedback** deadline and a **grade-only** deadline. If you turn in your assignment by the first deadline, you will receive personalized feedback as well as a letter grade. If you turn in your assignment by the second deadline, you will receive only a letter grade and summative feedback that reflects trends I saw across the class. In compliance with relevant privacy laws (FERPA), I must discuss grades with you in confidence. I post grades on Classroom regularly, so you can keep track of them there.

letter grade	range	letter grade	range	letter grade	range
A+	100-99%	B-	82-80%	D	67-63%
A	98-93%	C+	79-78%	D-	62-60%
A-	92-90%	C	77-73%	F	59-0%
B+	89-88%	C-	72-70%		
B	87-83%	D+	69-68%		

Course policies

I follow all of WVU's standard policies, but there are a few that I'd call your attention to.

Attendance and engagement

WVU's full attendance policy covers a wide range of circumstances (extended illness, military deployment, official university events, etc.). Just as you would if you were going to miss a shift at work, it is good practice to notify your instructor that you won't be in class. If you must be absent from class for any reason, I expect you to take full responsibility for your academic work and to review material you might have missed; however, you will not be able to make up activities missed in

English 305: Technical Writing

class for credit. **If you miss more than six classes, I will advise you to drop the course.** Once you miss four classes, you will need to meet with me to discuss a plan of action to avoid further disruption in your learning.

This class depends on your engagement and participation, meaning that you must be not only physically present, but mentally present, and ready to work in class. Additionally, I expect you to use technology (computers, phones, etc.) with care and consideration for others. If you are working on assignments for other classes, you will not earn points for in-class activities.

Communication

I will use Google Classroom for class-wide communication. I will post any important announcements, updates, or changes on the Stream for our class. The best way to contact me is through email at erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu or ebc00001@mix.wvu.edu (they go to the same account). I check my email regularly between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Monday through Friday.

I am always happy to meet with you to talk about your work, your life, and your plans for the future. My office hours are noted at the top of the syllabus, and I do my best to be available and present during those times in my office; however, I sometimes have to schedule meetings during that period, so if you'd like to speak with me, it is always best to set up an appointment.

Community health

Sicknesses abound these days, so please...If you are sick, do not come to class. (Part of my generous absence policy is to try and keep us all healthy.) If you don't feel well or have been around other folks you know are ill and attend class, please wear a mask and respect others' personal space. There are folks in class (including me!) that are high-risk or live with high-risk individuals.

Late work

I set deadlines for a reason – to help you be better students and to help me be a better teacher. This class is modeled after real work environments, where deadlines matter. Writers at all levels improve by writing, by receiving timely feedback, and by writing some more. Late work interrupts that process. As a way to mitigate the possibility of late work, every assignment has two possible deadlines (see above). Barring extenuating circumstances that must be discussed with me in advance, **I do not accept late work.** Finally, please remember that the end of the semester imposes a final deadline on all of us. I do not give incompletes except in extraordinary circumstances.

Intellectual property, academic integrity, and generative AI

Intellectual property is an increasingly relevant concern in both academic and professional spaces. I expect that the work you submit in this course will be your **original intellectual contribution**. Any academic dishonesty (including, according to WVU's standards, plagiarism, cheating, and fabrication/falsification) will result in a failing grade of 10% for the assignment.

English 305: Technical Writing

In regard to generative AI: AI is here to stay and there are beneficial uses for it; however, outsourcing all of your writing is not an effective practice and will not yield the results that this course is designed to deliver. There are also a plethora of ethical issues tied up in AI (low-paying content moderation jobs; environmental impacts; data privacy; etc.) that I would prefer to not contribute to during our time together. For those reasons, I ask that you **do not use** generative AI platforms to complete assignments in this class, unless specifically instructed otherwise (e.g. experimenting with a platform with intention). Not acknowledging AI-generated work will be treated as academic dishonesty (see above).

Accessibility

I strive to make my courses as accessible and accommodating to all persons as I can. If you require any specific accommodations, please send me an email within the first week of the term in order to discuss any necessary adjustments. I want you to succeed and I will work with you to ensure that you do! For more information, consult the Office of Accessibility Services.

Community

Our classroom will be a respectful and supportive environment for everyone. You are expected to behave professionally in class and out of class (this includes while corresponding through email), and to treat everyone in our community with kindness and respect. I have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment in all forms.

Student success, basic needs, and mental health

WVU has a number of resources and offices dedicated to student success. Of special note, when it comes to writing, is the Eberly Writing Studio where you can receive personalized help for your projects at any stage: brainstorming, drafting, revising, or editing.

I understand that student success involves more than just succeeding in classes. Any student who faces challenges securing their food, housing, mental health, or other elements of wellbeing, and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Student Advocacy Center for support. Also, please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide any resources that I may possess and to try and connect you to others who can help, too.

I know that college students face many stressful issues that affect one's ability to remember, learn, and perform, and interact socially in and out of the classroom. I take your mental health seriously and can help you navigate the resources available to you as a WVU student. The Carruth Center for Psychological and Psychiatric Services (CCPPS) offers consultations, short-term individual therapy, group therapy, and various mental health-related workshops. Virtual and in-person services are available. You can text "WVU" to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained Crisis Counselor or call 304-293-4431. Part of college is learning how to manage stress and difficult situations, so I want to encourage you to be cognizant of your own wellness and to advocate for yourself in every space, including this class. I look forward to learning with you this semester!

English 305: Technical Writing

Week 1 (Starts 1/13): Definitions of technical writing

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading		1. 305 job packet materials 2. Browse r/technicalwriting
Writing		Come to class prepared to share something you learned about technical writing from the subreddit linked above
Notes	Class cancelled 1/16 due to weather/travel concerns	

Week 2 (Starts 1/20): Principles and genres of technical writing

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	1. Conventions of TC 2. Intro to TC 3. Browse r/technicalwriting	Professional correspondence
Writing	1. Complete survey 2. Reading activity #1	1. Email acceptance by EOB (5 p.m.) 2. Performance eval #1
Notes	Sign up for genre guidebook entry **no later than** Friday 1/24, 5 p.m.	

Week 3 (Starts 1/27): Reading advertisements and preparing to apply for jobs

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading		Building careers, writing resumes PDF
Writing	1. Start browsing job ads 2. Genre guidebook entry	1. Bring **two** job ads to class 2. Reading activity #2
Notes	Scenario memo feedback deadline: Thursday, 1/30 11:59 p.m. **Extra credit opportunity:** Job Seeking Prep Workshop–Wednesday, January 29, 1–2 PM in Colson 130	

Week 4 (Starts 2/3): Resumes

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	Resume PDF	1. AI black hole 2. Resume gaps 3. Review resume examples
Writing	Submit job ad analysis memo	1. **Printed** draft of chronological resume (2 copies) 2. Reading activity #3

English 305: Technical Writing

Notes	Scenario memo grade-only deadline: Monday, February 3, 11:59 p.m. **Extra credit opportunity:** Career Fair Prep Workshop–Wednesday, February 5, 1–2 PM in Colson 130

Week 5 (Starts 2/10): Cover letters

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	1. Cover letter PDF 2. Do we really need cover letters?	1. Real-life example of revision 2. Review cover letter examples
Writing		Reading activity #4 (Very early) draft of cover letter
Notes	🚨🚨🚨**CLASS CANCELLED TUESDAY 2/11**🚨🚨🚨 **Wednesday, 2/12 from 11–3: Business Career Fair** **Thursday, 2/13 from 11–3: Social Sciences Career Fair**	

Week 6 (Starts 2/17): Preparing for interviews and packaging your materials

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	1. How to use LinkedIn… 2. Attractive people have a big advantage…	
Writing		
Notes	Thursday, **in class**: Mock group interviews → Group assignments here	

Week 7 (Starts 2/24): Preparing for ~the grind~

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	How leaders create and use networks	
Writing	Updated drafts of all materials	
Notes	Job materials feedback deadline: Thursday, 2/27 11:59 p.m. Thursday: No class meeting **Wednesday, 2/26 & Thursday, 2/27, from 10–3: STEM Career Fair**	

Week 8 (Starts 3/3): Descriptions and documentation

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	Descriptions, specifications PDF	One reading from this folder

English 305: Technical Writing

Writing	Performance evaluation #2	Reading activity #5
Notes	Job materials grade-only deadline: Monday, 3/3 11:59 p.m. **Note**: Friday, March 7 at 7 p.m., screening of _Small Town Universe_ featuring EBC as a panelist for discussion following the film; Oglebay/Ming Hsieh Hall G20	

Week 9 (Starts 3/10): Instruction sets and usability

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	1. Instructions, documentation PDF 2. H4W, Conciseness PDF	1. What does usability mean 2. Usability testing 101
Writing	Reading activity #6	Instruction set proposal memo (11:59 p.m.)
Notes		

Week 10 (Starts 3/17): SPRING BREAK, BABY

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading		
Writing		
Notes		

Week 11 (Starts 3/24): Project management and designing usability tests

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	1. What is project management 2. Alston, PM Software can't save…	1. Planning a usability test 2. Running a usability test
Writing	Reading activity #7	Draft of instruction set
Notes	Special guest on Tuesday, March 25: Colleen Nagel, Project Manager at All4	

Week 12 (Starts 3/31): Conducting user testing

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading		
Writing		Draft of usability test protocol

English 305: Technical Writing

Notes	**No class** on Tuesday, April 1; use this time to develop your sets and testing protocols

Week 13 (Starts 4/7): Interpreting and implementing user feedback

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	Reporting usability test results Example usability report (PDF)	
Writing	Reading activity #8	Performance eval #3 (11:59 p.m.)
Notes	**No class** on Thursday, April 10; EBC at conference	

Week 14 (Starts 4/14): Identifying and researching complex and controversial issues

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading		Managing ethical dilemmas PDF
Writing		1. Reading activity #9 2. Short report proposal memo (11:59 p.m.)
Notes	Don't forget about Week of Writing Activities, available on this schedule! You can earn 5 points of extra credit applied to any assignment you want for attending any of these events and sending me a short summary (100-150 words) of what you learned. Instruction set and postmortem feedback and grade deadline: Monday, 4/14 11:59 p.m. Instruction set and postmortem grade-only deadline: Thursday, 4/17 11:59 p.m.	

Week 15 (Starts 4/21): Drafting and designing short reports

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	Short report PDF	
Writing	Bring 1 reputable source you'd like to work with in your report	
Notes	**No class** on Thursday, 4/24; EBC will be in her office (Colson 223) if you want to chat with her	

Week 16 (Starts 4/28): Polishing reports and setting future goals

	By Tuesday, 2:30 p.m.	By Thursday, 2:30 p.m.
Reading	Writing for public audiences PDF	
Writing	One page, printed, from your short	Full draft of short report

English 305: Technical Writing

	report	
Notes	Thursday: Peer review of short report	

Finals Week (Starts 5/5): Reflecting on the work of technical writing

	By Monday 5/5, 11:59 p.m.
Submit	- Final short report - Performance eval #4 - And fill out your SPOT survey if you would like to let me know what was effective about the class and what you think could make it better in the future