

ENGL 605: Professional Writing Theory

Wednesdays 4:00-6:50 p.m. | Colson Hall G18

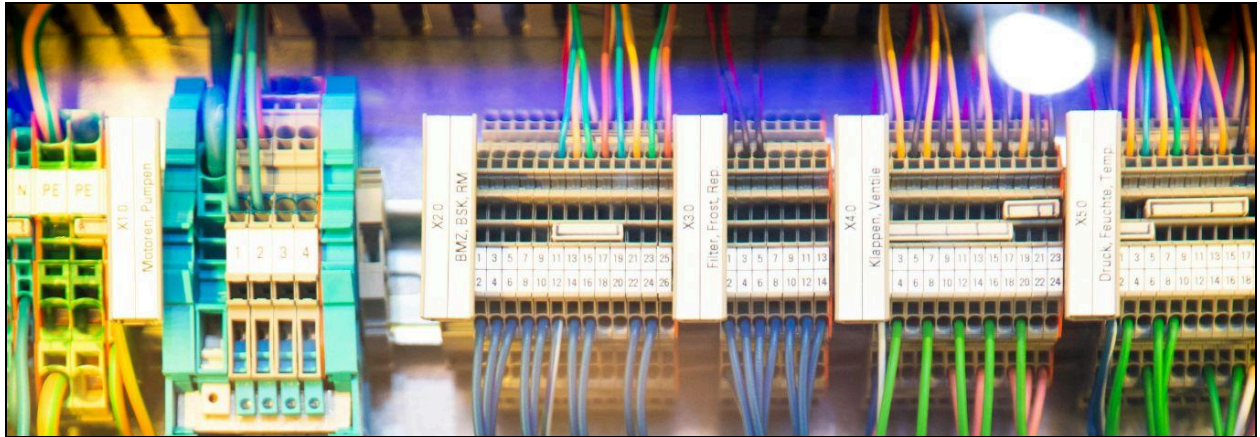


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Instructor: Dr. Erin Brock Carlson, erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu

Course Links: [Schedule](#) and [Classroom](#)

Office Hours: Mondays and Wednesdays 11:30-12:30 p.m. or by appointment

Office Location: Colson Hall 337 (for now); at some point will be Colson 227

Overview

This course will introduce you to the history of, development of, and current issues in Professional and Technical Writing theory and research. Beginning with foundational histories and theories of the field, we will go on to survey various current concerns and issues in the field, such as usability and user experience (UX) design, risk communication, and the teaching of technical and professional writing. We will examine the intersection of the field with different areas of interest, keeping in mind the sociopolitical, cultural, economic, and rhetorical implications of technical and professional communication research.

Key to an understanding of the field (in my opinion) are our perceptions of *work*¹, *community*, and *expertise*, which will be centered in our discussions. In order to put what we're learning into practice and to develop your professional and technical writing portfolios, we will collaborate with the West Virginia Alliance for the Arts (formerly Tamarack Foundation for the Arts), a nonprofit organization that serves artists and creatives in the state of West Virginia, throughout the semester. We will support their efforts to develop a new web platform that will both serve as a public-facing space for the organization and a hub for artist and creative resources. We will engage in resource development, usability testing, and writing a range of technical documents to support their work.

¹I approach TPC through work because of the professional writing theory seminar I took with Patricia Sullivan in 2014 (10 years ago??? no), who wrote that, "*work* is a key *lingua franca* concept that links the various disciplines and interests, and thinking of PW as work...helps us integrate technology in a bounded way...it allows us flexibility and is more naturally dynamic than genre." Pat is an incredible mentor, scholar, and teacher, and I hope that this frame can inspire you as it has me.

At the end of this course, you will:

- Know the nuances of major debates and ongoing conversations in the overarching field of TPC;
- Comprehend the similarities, differences, and disputes regarding definitions of professional, technical and business writing;
- Evaluate of the role of ethics and the law in professional writing classrooms and workplaces;
- Analyze critical approaches to the use of technology and the utilization of research methods in professional and technical writing settings;
- Apply theories of TPC to classroom activities, materials, and curriculum; and
- Demonstrate mastery of technical and professional writing skills through the creation of materials for a community partner.

Required Texts

In addition to articles and excerpts from books that I provide via Classroom, you will need to have access to the following texts (each available through the library):

- Walton, Rebecca, Moore, Kristen R., & Jones, Natasha N. (2019). [*Technical Communication After the Social Justice Turn: Building Coalitions for Action*](#). Routledge.
- Haas, Angela M., & Eble, Michelle F. (Eds.). (2018). [*Key Theoretical Frameworks: Teaching Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century*](#). University Press of Colorado.
- Walton, Rebecca, & Agboka, Godwin. (2020). [*Equipping Technical Communicators for Social Justice Work: Theories, Methodologies, and Pedagogies*](#). Utah State University Press.

Course Tools

We will work with a range of tools, but we will use Google Classroom each week to share resources and complete assignments. You can access the classroom space through [this link](#) or via this code: `xvpvlsf`. You will need to have access to a computer during many of our class meetings, so bring your own or be prepared to use a lab machine.

Assignment Overviews

Below are overviews of each major assignment. I will provide in-depth instructions in class.

TPC journal profile (5%)

To help map out the landscape of TPC, you will pick a journal within the field and provide a brief overview of its mission, scope, and ongoing discussions. We will collect all of the profiles in one shared Google Doc so that we have a shared resource moving forward.

Invisible work research memo (10%)

After situating ourselves in the theory and practice of TPC, you will identify a site of invisible work and write a researched reflection (lol) on that site and its related labor. You will incorporate your own observations (evidence in the form of photographs, artifacts, and even

excerpts from conversations/interviews, etc. are welcome) and secondary sources to orient your analysis in the larger field of TPC.

Engagement project with WVAA (40%)

In order to put our skills into practice in a meaningful way, we will work with WVAA throughout the semester on a range of tasks that are related to supporting their current project: creating a webspace that holds resources and networking opportunities for artists and also can serve as a hub for artists to showcase and sell their work. Our tasks may include data analysis and reflective memo writing; benchmarking research and resource management; and (definitely) usability and user experience testing of the webspace. We will also engage with WVAA and present our work to them.

“My TPC”: Portfolio of work, disciplinary snapshot, and reflective memo (20%)

To conclude our work this semester, you will assemble an archive of your work in this class and contextualize that work within the field. You will 1) provide at least 5 examples of TPC work done in this class or in other contexts with brief annotations—note that these can and should include things we do to practice research methods in TPC; 2) choose one subfield of technical communication, and present a snapshot of that area of the discipline; and 3) write a brief reflection on the connections you’ve noticed in our time together.

Class preparation and in-class activities (15%)

This class will require a lot of engagement during our meetings, as we’ll do a range of activities. You can earn up to 5 points each week for class preparation work; I also sometimes assign points to in-class activities. If you miss activities in class that are worth points, you cannot make those points up. Most weeks, our class preparation will be in the form of the dialectic notebook, but every so often I might ask for a more formal reading response.

- Dialectic notebook: You will contribute no fewer than **7 entries** to our dialectic notebook about the readings before you come to class. An entry might be a quote/paraphrase of a text (left side of notebook), a response to a quote/paraphrase (right side of notebook), or a response to a peer’s response (a comment in the margin). Please don’t hesitate to include ideas from other classes, your life, or things we’ve discussed in previous class sessions. Here is [an example from a previous semester](#).
- Reading response: You will write a response of roughly 500 words in which you critically engage one of the texts read for that day as well as at least one additional text of your own choice (from the current week, from a previous week, or from your own research). [Casey Boyle’s piece on reading ethics](#) offers strategies for effective reader response.

Discussion leading and pedagogical activity (10%)

Once during the semester, you will be asked to lead class discussion. In leading the discussion, I will ask you to:

- 1) Provide a brief summary of the readings and the important concepts in the readings;
- 2) Design a pedagogical activity to help us delve into the readings that could be used or revised for use in an undergraduate classroom;

- 3) Formulate discussion questions that will lead the class to a better understanding of the reading and its applications (these can be embedded in your activity if you like);
- 4) Supplement your work with an aid of some sort: I recommend a handout (since that would be useful for your classmates to have and refer back to later), but some sort of slidedeck is acceptable, as well.

When you're doing this, think about what class sessions you enjoy the most, what activities you find most helpful, what helps you digest complex ideas the best. Feel free to be creative and to think outside of the box with your activities, but be sure that they ask us to work through the material in the reading. The day you lead a discussion you will not have to complete the class prep work (dialectic notebook or reading response, depending on week). Also, you may decide to complete this assignment with another person, if you wish.

Course policies

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

Community

I believe that graduate courses can be a generative and transformative space in an institution that is steeped in bureaucracy and power inequities; however, to make it such a space requires our full engagement. This means that I expect you to come to class having done the readings and ready to discuss them, question them, and build with them.

Our course will be a respectful and supportive environment—a space that I hope can be simultaneously safe and brave for all of us. You are expected to treat everyone in our community with kindness and respect. I have a zero-tolerance policy for discrimination and harassment in all forms, and you will be asked to leave class if you engage in this sort of behavior and the Office of Student Conduct will be notified.

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, or as needed throughout the course. For more information, consult the [Office of Accessibility Services](#).

Intellectual property and academic honesty

Intellectual property is an increasingly relevant concern in both academic and professional spaces given the impact of digital technology. 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 1% for the assignment. In regards to AI-generated content: AI platforms may be used in assignments, but you must disclose any use of an AI tool and proper citations must be given. You must clearly identify writing, text, or media generated by AI and explain how AI tools were

used in the process of creating a final product. Not acknowledging AI-generated work will be treated as academic dishonesty.

Community health

If you are sick, do not come to class. 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.

If you miss more than three classes, that will present a significant barrier in your contribution to the course and you will need to meet with me after that third absence to make arrangements for moving forward. If you miss four or more classes, I will advise you to drop the course.

Student success, mental health, and basic needs

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](#), located here in Colson Hall. (On a personal note: I was a writing center consultant during my BA and MA, and wouldn't have been able to write my dissertation without visiting the writing center each week, from prospectus to final edits. It's a wonderful space and I encourage you to take advantage of it.)

Being a student is really hard, and it's often a big adjustment from whatever you were doing in your previous life. WVU does have resources available on campus, and most are available at no-charge. [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 (outside of pandemic situations) services are available. Crisis services are also available 24/7/365: you can text "WVU" to 741741 for support from a trained Crisis Counselor.

However, I do want to acknowledge that the stressors of being a graduate student, instructor, and scholar are different from the pressures that most undergraduate students face. The mental health of graduate students is [deeply overlooked](#), 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 am a resource to help you work through the difficulties of balancing these different roles; however, those different roles include being an active and committed participant in our course. If you do not feel like you can fulfill that role, I will encourage you to drop the course.

Any student who faces challenges securing their food, housing, 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. Please notify me if you are comfortable in doing so. This will enable me to provide or connect you with any resources.