

## English 305: Technical Writing

Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:00–2:15 p.m. | Colson G18



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**Instructor Details:** Dr. Erin Brock Carlson, [erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:erin.carlson@mail.wvu.edu)

**Office Hours:** Tuesdays, 11:15 a.m.–12:45 p.m. in my office (Colson 337) or by appointment—just send me an email and we'll find a time that works!

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

### 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. Further, an additional lens for us will be the role of technology in communicating complex information, so be prepared to interrogate the platforms we use in our everyday lives and careers.

**Note:** For our final unit, we will be working with the West Virginia and Regional History Center in order to conduct user testing on some of their digital repositories. This client-based project will be a great way to hone the skills we're working on, and you will be expected to document your work in various ways and to develop a range of materials for the WVRHC.

### Course goals

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 be required to consider how writing might shape particular situations, and how you might adapt information to the constraints of a situation, including audience, purpose, and genre.

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- **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:** Since this is an online course, 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.

### Required texts

There is no assigned textbook for this class. All of your readings will be posted to Classroom.

### Course tools

This course is technologically-focused, so we will be using devices and online platforms frequently. We will meet in a Mac computer lab with new Mac mini computers (so they should work fairly well). 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](#) or enter this code to join: `ccb44hf`).

### 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: Workplace genres and technical communication principles (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: Job application materials (15%)**

Our first major project is dedicated to developing 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, 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.

#### **3: Wikis, collaborative writing, and instruction/documentation notes (20%)**

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In any technical career, you will undoubtedly encounter unfamiliar platforms, participate in collaborative writing (including across distances), and document your work in a variety of ways. In this unit, we'll talk about the role of wikis in communicating complex information, and develop strategies for editing public pages on Wikipedia. At the end of the unit, you will participate in WVU's annual Wikipedia edit-a-thon, using your technical writing skills to contribute to pages related to issues relevant to the region and our state.

### **4: Usability testing and documentation report (30%)**

For the final project, we will practice your writing and project management skills in a client project! We will conduct usability testing for the West Virginia and Regional History Center to assist them in assessing the effectiveness of their public-facing web materials, research benchmark sites, and write a recommendation report with clear, concise suggestions for improving their website navigation. This will be a team-based project.

### **Reading responses & in-class activities (15%)**

You will be responsible for keeping up with the readings in the class. I will regularly assign reading responses to direct your attention to a particular aspect of these readings. I expect you to write 300-500 words in response to the reading, but you may focus on any aspect or idea within the reading that interests you. When there are no reading responses assigned, we will engage with the reading in other ways: short, in-class writing, activities, etc.—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, be well-informed and thoughtful, be respectful of audience, be grammatically and stylistically sound, and be rhetorically effective for its intended purpose.

If you are unsatisfied with your grade on a major assignment, you may revise it for a higher grade; but, you must correspond with me about those revisions and write a brief rationale that explains your changes. (After all, this is what would happen in a professional environment.)

In compliance with relevant privacy laws (FERPA), I must discuss grades with you in confidence. This means I cannot email grades to you; please set up a meeting where we can discuss virtually. I post grades on Classroom regularly, so you can keep track of them there.

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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

#### 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 complete any missed assignments that were due during the class period. (However, you will not be able to make up activities missed in class unless you and I have made alternate arrangements beforehand.)

This classroom will be run like a work environment, meaning that you will have a fair amount of freedom. With that freedom comes the expectation that you will be not only physically present, but mentally present, and ready to work in class. I also expect you to use technology (computers, phones, etc.) with care and consideration for others.

#### Community health

Sicknesses abound these days, so please...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. Since, as you see above, I do not have a particular number of absences you are allowed, take that as a sign that I will work with you—but please don't take advantage of that.

#### Late work and technological difficulties

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. That being said, in professional environments, you may ask for an extension. An approved extension will not affect your grade, but do not over use this professional courtesy. Additionally, if you submit an assignment late, you will not get detailed written feedback as per usual. And finally, if you do not ask for an extension **before** the due date, your late work will not be accepted, and you will receive a zero.

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### 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

I take seriously the need to provide a respectful and supportive environment in our classroom, and outside of it as we work with our community partner. 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. According to a [2019 survey conducted by the American College Health Association](#), 66.4% of college students felt "overwhelming" anxiety, while 46.2% experienced depression so severe they had difficulty functioning. With the increased stress and isolation of living in a COVID-19 environment, these difficulties have been amplified: [60% of college students surveyed](#) stated that the pandemic has made it more difficult to access mental healthcare.

If you (or a friend) are struggling, I strongly encourage you to seek support. I take your mental health seriously and can help you navigate the resources available to you as a WVU student. Supportive resources are available on campus, and most are 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 services are available. You can text "WVU" to 741741 for support 24/7 from a trained Crisis Counselor or call 304-293-4431. If you're experiencing mental distress, need immediate attention, and would prefer to use a non-university support service, you can call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255.

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### Week 1 (Starts 1/9): Principles of technical communication

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read		<a href="#">305 job packet materials</a> <a href="#">Unit 1 overview</a> <a href="#">Tilly, "Technical Writing"</a>
Do		Review <a href="#">syllabus</a> and schedule, if you haven't
Notes	Please complete <a href="#">intro survey</a> by end of week.	

### Week 2 (Starts 1/16): Workplace genres

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	<a href="#">"Conventions, characteristics of TC"</a> <a href="#">"Professional correspondence"</a>	<a href="#">Memo reminders</a>
Do	Reading activity #1 Complete performance evaluation #1	Email acceptance notice <a href="#">Sign up</a> for genre guidebook entry
Notes		

### Week 3 (Starts 1/23): Cataloging your skills and preparing job materials

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	<a href="#">Unit 2 overview</a>	Building careers, writing resumes PDF
Do	Start looking for job ads Submit scenario memo Complete genre guidebook entry	Bring three job ads to class Reading activity #2
Notes		

### Week 4 (Starts 1/30): Resumes and cover letters

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Resume PDF <a href="#">Resumes and bots</a> <a href="#">Resume gaps</a>	Cover letter PDF <a href="#">This is why you need a good cover letter</a> <a href="#">Real-life example of revision</a>
Do	Review <a href="#">resume examples</a> (if time) Submit job ad analysis memo	Review <a href="#">cover letter examples</a> (if time)

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Notes	Requested: If you have drafts of your resume or cover letters (no matter how out of date!) please bring it to class this week.  Optional: If you would like feedback on drafts of your job application materials from me, please submit to me by Friday by 5 p.m.
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### Week 5 (Starts 2/6): Packaging and interviewing

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	<a href="#">How Typography Shapes Perceptions</a> <a href="#">Clean Design</a>	<a href="#">Appearance in Interviews</a> <a href="#">Perfect Interview Outfit</a>
Do	Bring updated drafts (digital versions) of skills-based resume, cover letter	
Notes	Peer review of job materials in class on Tuesday, 2/7 Wednesday, 2/8 in Writing Studio from 8.15-10.15: Coffee and donuts	

### Week 6 (Starts 2/13): Wikis and collaborative platforms

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Unit 3 Overview	Wikipedia readings TBD
Do	Submit final job portfolio Complete performance evaluation #2	Reading activity #3 Work through the following modules: <a href="#">Wikipedia essentials</a> <a href="#">Editing basics</a>
Notes	EBC @ CCCC conference in Chicago, no in-class meeting this week	

### Week 7 (Starts 2/20): Evaluating platforms and pages

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read		<a href="#">Rating news sources</a>
Do	Work through the following modules: <a href="#">Sandboxes and mainspace</a> <a href="#">Evaluating articles and sources</a>	Work through the following modules: <a href="#">Sources and citations</a> <a href="#">Plagiarism and copyright violation</a>
Notes		

### Week 8 (Starts 2/27): Instructions and documentation notes

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
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Read	Instructions and Documentation PDF	van Wicklen, Know Your Subject PDF H4W, Conciseness PDF
Do	Work through the following module: <a href="#">Contributing images and media files</a>	Review example documentation notes Reading activity #4
Notes		

### Week 9 (Starts 3/6): Creating an editing plan

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	TBD	
Do	Bring idea of page(s) you want to work with	Submit projected edits memo Complete performance evaluation #3
Notes		

### Week 10 (Starts 3/13): SPRING BREAK, BABY

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read		
Do		
Notes		

### Week 11 (Starts 3/20): Usability and information design standards

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Unit 4 Overview <a href="#">"What is information design?"</a>	
Do		Peruse WVRHC online presence, specifically <a href="#">Visit Us</a> and <a href="#">Research</a> and its subpages, but look at more Reading activity #5
Notes	Thursday, 3/23: Visit to WVRHC in downtown library	

### Week 12 (Starts 3/27): Planning projects and writing for public audiences

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Writing for Public & Doc Design PDF	



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Do		
Notes	Thursday, 3/31: Participate in edit-a-thon on 2nd floor of Downtown Library!	

### Week 13 (Starts 4/3): Planning user testing

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	TBD	TBD
Do	Submit documentation notes Reading activity #6	Submit proposal memo Complete performance evaluation #4
Notes		

### Week 14 (Starts 4/10): Conducting user testing

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	TBD	TBD
Do		Reading activity #7
Notes		

### Week 15 (Starts 4/17): Drafting recommendation reports and designing presentations

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Formal reports PDF	Presenting and pitching your ideas PDF
Do		Reading activity #8
Notes		

### Week 16 (Starts 4/24): Polishing projects and setting future goals

	By Tuesday, 1:00 p.m.	By Thursday, 1:00 p.m.
Read	Revising, editing for usability PDF	
Do		
Notes	Tuesday, 4/25: In-class presentations to Miriam Cady, WVRHC	

### Finals Week (Starts 5/1)

	By Tuesday, 12:00 p.m.	
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Do	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Complete performance-assessment #5</li><li>• Turn in written recommendation report for WVRHC</li><li>• Fill out SEI</li></ul>
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