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English 305: Technical Writing

English 305, Technical Writing, serves students who are studying and preparing for careers in the sciences and applied sciences, including engineering. This advanced course in writing will give you the opportunity to explore and identify the discourse practices prized in your disciplinary and institutional communities—and help you to manage those practices effectively in your own written work. In this way you will learn and practice those writing strategies and tactics that scientists, engineers, and others all need in order to write successfully on the job. You will produce many different types of technical writing in this course, but the centerpiece will be your web portfolio. The portfolio will be the end product in the course, containing your best works and marking the culmination of your efforts to produce rhetorically savvy and precisely executed documents. This course makes use of web portfolios first and foremost because portfolios place emphasis where it should be in any composition course—on giving you the opportunity to develop as a writer. Developing as a writer comes as you reflect on your own writing habits and processes, so you will be given plenty of opportunity to cultivate this habit of reflection as you progress through the course. For subsequent writing assignments, you will apply these insights as you continue practicing and sharpening your craft as a writer. Equally as important, the web portfolio assignment encourages you to develop and demonstrate your skills in writing and designing multimedia texts, skills that have become increasingly important in today's information economy. With three weeks to go in the semester, then, your attention will shift from the process of writing and designing documents to the final product. At the end of the semester, you will publish your web portfolio—revised, edited, and polished to meet your rhetorical purposes as well as your audience's demands—and I will evaluate it.

With these various elements in mind, this course has been designed to give you the following learning and writing opportunities:

• Develop a habit of reflection that allows you to engage with your own writing before you ask others to engage it.

• Discover and understand the discourse features that distinguish your disciplinary and institutional communities from others.

• Discover and specify the purposes of your writing.

• Develop a range of writing processes appropriate to various writing tasks in technical and scientific communities.

• Identify your readers and describe the characteristics of your readers in a way that forms a sound basis for deciding how to write to them.

• Invent the contents of your communications through research and reflection.

• Arrange material to raise and satisfy your readers' expectations, using rhetorical patterns of organization.

• Reveal the organization of your communications by using forecasting and transitional statements, headings, and effective page/document design.

• Observe appropriate generic conventions and formats for technical documents.

• Design and use tables, graphs, and technical illustrations.

• Compose rhetorically effective sentences.

• Evaluate your documents to be sure that the documents fulfill your purpose and to ensure that you revise them if necessary.

• Collaborate effectively with your peers in a community of writers who provide feedback on each others' work and occasionally write together.

• Develop and demonstrate functional literacies in webpage design.

• Connect your technical writing and designing (via the web portfolio) to other work in your field as well as to the wider world.

• Communicate in an ethically responsible manner.

Required Texts and Tools

Technical Communication by Lay et al. Chicago: Irwin, 2000. ISBN 0256119856.

The Web Portfolio Guide: Creating Electronic Portfolios for the Web by Miles A. Kimball. New York: Longman, 2003. ISBN 0321093453. Companion website: You will need to have access to, at minimum, a non-HTML-based web page editor such as Netscape Composer, Microsoft FrontPage, or Macromedia Dreamweaver. While The Web Portfolio Guide refers to a graphics-based web page editor, you certainly may use HTML (HyperText Markup Language, the basic language of web pages) in order to create a more sophisticated web portfolio. See the book's companion website for links to tutorials about using HTML. NOTE: The companion website for Kimball's Web Portfolio Guide provides links to sites where you can download freeware and shareware web development tools. Meanwhile, WVU makes FrontPage available to all students as part of the Microsoft Office installation CD ($10).

You may also need to secure personal web space where you can display your portfolio. You can sign up for space via "Community," WVU's free web-hosting service, at .

Conferences

Meet with me when you have questions about an assignment, when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due, when you have questions about a comment, when you want to know where you stand in the course, and when you want to discuss your revision strategies for your web portfolio. You should also see me to get help with particular writing or web-portfolio related problems or to resolve differences about grades. Finally, I am extremely open to your suggestions for improving the course, so please feel welcome to discuss with me your ideas about how the course is going. If you cannot make my scheduled office hours and would like to meet with me, we can work together to find a convenient time for conferencing.

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and to have your textbook and all of your work with you. An occasional absence is perhaps understandable, but habitual absence is inexcusable. If you amass more than three unexcused absences, your grade for the course will be lowered one full letter grade. For each unexcused absence after three, I reserve the right to lower your final grade by an additional letter grade.

It is particularly important for you to attend—and be prepared to participate in—in-class workshops on drafts of your documents. The more you have written before peer review sessions,

the more you will benefit from them. Although your drafts need not be "polished," in general they should be complete enough for you to receive substantial help from your peers. Under no circumstances will I accept a "final" version of a document unless I have seen a rough draft. Note that an absence on the day a draft is due counts as two absences. Also note that if you show up to class on the day a draft is due without your draft work (or with draft work that is incomplete), you will be given two absences for the day.

I will follow the WVU Faculty Senate's policy on "excused absences" such that legitimate reasons for missing a class include regularly scheduled, University-approved curricular and extracurricular activities (such as field trips, debate trips, and athletic contests); medical illness; and religious observances.

Assignments

In this course, I will try to hold you to the professional standards that prevail in your field. For example, of the requirements listed below, your employer will take some completely for granted, such as promptness, neat appearance, and correct mechanics.

Promptness. In this course, as in the working world, you must turn in your work on time. All projects are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Assignments turned in late will be penalized one letter grade for each day late unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance.

Appearance. All work should be neatly prepared on a computer, using margins and spacing and design techniques that are conventional for the genre. Whether it is a resume, set of instructions, or report, your communication should exhibit complete and appropriate format. All writing for the course should be printed clearly, including draft work.

Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading. At work, even a single error in spelling, grammar, or proofreading can jeopardize the effectiveness of some communications (depending on the rhetorical situation). Grading will reflect the great seriousness with which these matters are frequently viewed in the working world. If you would like special assistance with any of these skills, I can recommend sources for extra help.

Back-up Copies. Always prepare two legible copies of each major assignment. I will grade one copy and hand it back; the other copy will be for your own safe keeping and permanent records. Sometimes I will request a copy of one of your documents so that I can use it as a sample, to

illustrate effective and problematic responses to assignments. Unless I completely obliterate any marks that might identify it as yours, I will never use your work in class without your permission.

Revisions. You will receive feedback on your writing at various stages of the writing process, from your peers as well as me. Since you will be revising three of the five major assignments for your web portfolio, you should try to apply the comments to improve not only the particular assignment you are working on, but also your strategies for writing in general.

Writing Folders

A successful portfolio for this course will reflect three major principles: choice, reflection, and variety (we will discuss these principles more fully as the semester progresses). In order to meet these criteria, you will collect in a folder everything that relates to the individual projects and the course as a whole. For example, as you work on each major writing assignment, keep—within reason—hard copies of all your notes, drafts, outlines, peer reviews, and photocopied articles; keep the documents organized and labeled, both for my benefit and your own. The contents of your folder will demonstrate to me, your peers, and yourself how much collecting, drafting, and revising that you have done. Moreover, as you prepare your final portfolio, you will review these materials in order to learn how your discovery, drafting, and research processes have evolved throughout the course. Bring this writing folder to each class.

Expectations

In addition to the requirements outlined above, you are expected to work until the class period has ended; to complete all reading assignments on time; to help your classmates learn by your responses to their writing; to choose projects that require significant research and analysis; to spend at least six hours per week out of class for writing and class preparation; to be courteous and considerate.

Grades

When grading each of your assignments, I will ask one overriding question: "Does this document do its job successfully?" That is, would your communication have the intended effect on the reader you are addressing. I will, of course, recognize the difference between a competent performance (a "C") and good and excellent performances ("B" and "A"). A competent performance is one that stands a chance of succeeding; an excellent performance is one that seems assured not only of success but also of winning praise:

- A superior; the work is of near professional quality. The document meets or exceeds all the objectives of the assignment. The content is mature, thorough, and well-suited for the audience; the style is clear, accurate, and forceful; the information is well-organized and designed so that it is accessible and attractive; the mechanics and grammar are correct.

- B good; the document meets the objectives of the assignment, but it needs improvement in style, or it contains easily correctable errors in grammar, format, or content, or its content is superficial.

- C competent; the document needs significant improvement in concept, details, development, organization, grammar, or format. It may be formally correct but superficial in content.

- D marginally acceptable; the document meets some of the objectives but ignores others; the content is inadequately developed; or it contains numerous or major errors.

- F unacceptable; the document does not have enough information, does something other than the assignment required, or it contains major errors or excessive errors.

Your final grade will be determined by the grades you receive on written and in-class assignments, according to the following weighting:

• Job Application Package 10%
• Instruction Set 10%
• Report for Decision Making 25%
• Progress Report 5%
• Usability Memo 10%
• Web Portfolio 35%
• Class Participation 5%

Instructions for each assignment are explained in detail elsewhere in this packet. As a class, we will develop grading criteria for the web portfolio assignment.

Undergraduate Writing Center

Please consider taking your ideas and your written work to the WVU Writing Center, where trained peer tutors will consult with writers about any piece of writing at any stage of the writing process. The Writing Center is located in 44 Stansbury Hall, and its Fall 2007 tutoring hours are Monday – Thursday, 10 a.m. – 5 p.m., and Friday, 10 am – 3 pm. To schedule appointments or

to ask questions, call 293-3107 ext. 3340. For more information about Writing Center programs as well as for materials to help you negotiate various stages of the writing process, visit .

Plagiarism (Cheating)

West Virginia University defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights and property; and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts. Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. For procedures regarding the procedure for handling academic dishonesty cases, please consult the current Student Code of Conduct at .

Talking over your ideas and getting comments on your writing from friends are NOT acts of plagiarism. Taking someone else's published or unpublished words and calling them your own IS plagiarism: a synonym is academic dishonesty. When plagiarism amounts to an attempt to deceive, it has dire consequences, as spelled out in the university's regulations (WVU Academic Integrity/Dishonesty Policy, available online at).

Please note: West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veterans status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Assignment #1: Job Application Package

Most people obtain jobs through a multi-stage process. First you research the types of jobs you are qualified for and the types of employers you would like to work for. Then you try to convince specific employers to consider you for a job. These days, most employers have too many applicants per job to interview each personally. These employers sort through job application packages (resumes and cover letters) to decide which applicants to consider further.

Consequently, your first communication with your future employer is likely to be in writing and must persuade him or her to continue the conversation.

For this assignment, you will write:

Two cover letters addressed to different prospective employers and that apply for two different types of jobs. The letters should highlight different aspects of your experience relevant to the different jobs.

Two resumes that may well differ significantly in content or in layout or both. The choices of content and layout should emphasize appropriate experience for each job.

A cover memo addressed to me that overviews the two jobs, reviews what you know about these particular employers, and describes the strategies and tactics you have used to adapt your letter and resume to each situation. I expect you to make good use of the information in this memo in the arguments you present in your cover letters to the employers.

Memo

Write a brief memo (no more than two pages) addressed to me that will help me read, understand, evaluate, and "coach" your resumes and cover letters. For each of the two jobs, the memo must contain a separate job description and audience analysis, as well as a commentary highlighting how you adapted your resumes and cover letters to the different jobs. Since the memo will be of use to you in designing the rest of your job application package, you probably should think about it early—even begin drafting it early. But you should look over it carefully at the very end of the project to make sure that it tells me "how to read" your resumes and cover letters.

Job Description. Describe the specific or unique aspects of the jobs for which you are applying. Be sure to provide details that help you and me to visualize the types of work you would be doing as well as the types of skills and knowledge you would be applying were you to work in this position. You may base your job description on job listings that you find in a professional or trade journal, on the Internet, or in other resources on campus at Career Services . The jobs should be different enough that you will have to emphasize different parts of your experience to qualify for the positions. You may also (with my permission) write for a summer job, an internship, or for a scholarship or other award. Note that you must hand in copies of the job ads you use.

Audience Analysis. Investigate the particular companies you are applying to. You may obtain information on many companies from the library, on the Internet, or from Career Services. You may also contact the personnel office of the company directly. Then write one or two paragraphs that specify any special qualities or experience that this company may be looking for in its employees. For example, suppose you are applying for a job as a chemical engineer. A small company may be looking for an engineer who can work on a variety of projects, while another may be looking specifically for someone with experience with polymers. You also should highlight any unique aspects of the company culture that might shape your crafting of the resume or cover letter. This is also the place to describe anything you know about the particular person you are writing to. Note: I expect you to make extensive use of this information as your draft and revise cover letter. This information also should influence how your organization and choose details for your resume. Strategies for Textual and Visual Design. Describe how you adapted each resume and cover letter for its particular type of job, company, and reader and explain why you made those changes. Normally, your reasons will be closely related to the information in the job description and audience analysis.

Resume

The purpose of the resume is to describe your qualifications for a type of job. Since this assignment requires you to apply for two somewhat different jobs, you may well decide to create two somewhat different resumes. Content. Your resume should include contact information and relevant details of your educational training, professional training, special accomplishments, and skills. A resume is not a life history. The goal is to argue that you are qualified for a particular type of job and that you would be a capable, responsible, and personable employee who communicates effectively.

Format. Your format may be traditional or innovative as long as it is appropriate and as long as the information is highly accessible and is organized in a way that highlights the most important items (from the employer's perspective).

Style. Your style should be fairly formal. You need not use complete sentences, but you should use a concise, active style and show consistency in expression from section to section.

Cover Letter

While your resume is addressed to any employer with a certain type of job opening, the cover letter is most effective when tailored to a particular employer. The purpose of the cover letter is to persuade that specific employer to grant you an interview. Just as you appreciate being

treated as an individual rather than as a statistic, so does an employer. Are you applying hit-or-miss to every company in the country? Or have you invested some effort into finding a company that you are well suited for?

Content and Organization. The opening of your letter should establish why you are writing to your reader. Be explicit about the fact that you are looking for a particular kind of job and explain why you would like to work at that particular company. Preview the body of the letter by stating your major qualifications for the job. The body of the letter develops each qualification with specific evidence. The goal is to show the reader both that you know what that specific company needs and that you have what it takes. You may organize this section in various ways: around your training and experience, around what the job or the company requires, or some other way. The letter should close by inviting a response.

Style. Cover letters are difficult to write because they aim at somewhat conflicting goals. On the one hand, you want to make a good first impression. So you want to sound polite and fairly formal. On the other hand, you want to stand out from the crowd—otherwise, why should the employer hire you rather than any of the other applicants? The best policy is probably to talk to your reader as directly and naturally as possible. Avoid hype. Format. Use a conventional business letter format. Be brief: if possible, stick to one page.

Standard for Correctness

Employers impose a strict standard of correctness on application materials: An error is the equivalent of a bad spot on your shirt. Accordingly, I will mark this assignment on a somewhat stricter scale than usual. If any letter or resume contains more than two typographical or grammatical errors, I reserve the right to deduct the entire package one letter grade. I will lower the grade for the package even more if there are numerous typographical or grammatical errors.

Assignment #2 – Instruction Set

Instruction sets are common technical documents for many disciplines and occupations. Employees read instructions to learn how to assemble a product or complete a procedure. Supervisors write out company policies that often serve as instruction sets. Customers read instructions for using a product. For this assignment, you will develop a set of instructions advising users to perform a specific task.

Before deciding on a task, consider the following guidelines:

• Choose something you are very familiar with. It can be something related to your field of study (i.e. how to use a particular piece of laboratory equipment) or something related to a more general audience (i.e. how to learn to juggle).

• Your audience should be someone who has never performed this task before.

• Your audience should have a general understanding of the topic area.

• Choose a task with an appropriate level of difficulty—neither too easy nor too hard to explain in the space allotted.

• The task may involve a device: assembling it, operating it, or fixing it. Or it may involve some process (e.g., registering for classes using WVU's on-line system). You may choose the task from a course, a hobby, a previous job, or some skill you've acquired in school.

• The device or process should have discrete parts or steps that are fairly easy to name and refer to.

• Your task should be explained in approximately 3 pages of written instructions, including visuals.

Topics

Your instructions should help users to perform any kind of task that requires several steps or stages. Here are some topic ideas:

• how to change the oil in your car
• how to iron a shirt
• how to add another component (CD-ROM, hard drive, sound card, etc.) to your computer
• how to reformat your hard drive
• how to fully use your ATM card (include many options, not just how to withdraw and deposit)
• how to cook a turkey
• how to operate a Rotovap

Rhetorical Situation

Before you begin to write, consider the rhetorical situation for your instructions. Use the rhetorical analysis worksheet to help you determine the purpose, audience, and context for your instructions. Next, use the instructions planning worksheet to help you develop the contents for your instructions (see below).

Contents:

Depending on the nature of your task, you may wish to include some or all of the following contents.

• Introduction or background information. Here you'll provide your reader with the following information, if applicable:

o an overview of the steps needed to complete the task

o definitions of terms or concepts they need to know before they proceed

o cautions or warnings that apply to the task as a whole

o a sense of how long the task will take

o where they should perform the task (i.e. in a well ventilated area, outside, on a flat surface, etc.)

• List of materials or ingredients needed.

• Diagrams, drawings, photographs, figures, or tables. (Pencil sketch or description of the diagram is fine).

o Include captions for each illustration or figure.

o Label charts and diagrams clearly.

o Make sure to give a sense of scale and orientation.

• List of steps, in chronological order.

o Make sure you use active verb commands.

o Phrase each step clearly and concisely.

o Provide "feedback" that informs the reader what will happen after they complete each step.

o Include warnings or cautions before readers will encounter problems.

o Break long lists into sections with appropriate sub-headings.

o Make sure sub-headings and steps are phrased in parallel form.

• Troubleshooting tips.

• Glossary of key terms and definitions.

Organization

Obviously, instructions are normally organized in a chronological order. Beyond that, here are some other guidelines:

• The focus of instructions should be on tasks the user performs, not capabilities of a system or product. Headings and sub-headings should reflect this focus. For instance, "Compiling your program" puts the focus on the audience's task, while "Program compilation" puts the focus on the system.

• If there is no necessary chronological order for your instructions, then choose another rationale for the organization. For example, you could move from more to least important tasks, from general to specialized tasks, from most to least common, and so on.

Format

Your instructions should be designed to accommodate multiple reading styles and user needs. Accordingly, your design should include:

• A clear hierarchy of headings and subheadings.

• Well-chosen fonts. For print documents, sans-serif fonts are usually best for headings; serif fonts are best for body text. (For online documents, the reverse is true.)

• Numbered lists and bulleted lists, where appropriate. Know the difference. Make sure bullets and numbering are consistently formatted. Do not number of bullet lists with fewer than two items.

• An appropriate amount of white space—neither too much nor too little.

• Effective use of alignment. Centered alignment may make it harder for users to skim headings and sub-headings; left alignment or indentations can be more effective for this.

• Effective use of contrast. Too much contrast means that nothing stands out; too little makes it hard for users to find what they need. Consider emphasizing elements like headings, key words, and warnings.

• Effective and consistent design features, including fonts, font sizes, and forms of emphasis. Length should be 3-5 pages.

What to hand in: • Your instruction set
• Your planning worksheet
• Your rough drafts and draft worksheets
• Your postwrites

Evaluation

Audience Accommodation: The instructions are appropriate for the intended audience. They're written from a user-centered, rather than system-centered, perspective. They anticipate the user's questions, difficulties, and needs. Content: The instructions include all of the information needed to complete the task at hand. Background information, warnings, and definitions are included where appropriate.

Organization: The instructions are organized logically. Items within numbered lists are organized chronologically. Sub-sections are clearly marked with headings.

Format: The instructions use the format features listed above (fonts, white space, contrast, alignment, headings and sub-headings) appropriately and consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.

Style: The instructions effectively create a professional ethos. The tone is effective for the audience. Instructions are written as active voice commands. Headings and numbered and bulleted items are in parallel form. The document is free from typographical or grammatical errors.

Assignment #3: Report for Decision Making

Assignment #4:

You will write a report for decision making (or what is sometimes called a recommendation report). Your report will aid a reader in solving a problem by presenting the results of research and your evaluation of the significance of the findings. The recommendations will suggest specific actions to solve the problem. Your research methods will probably include library (or secondary) research, but since the problem is particular to a time and place, you will also conduct research by "primary" means of information gathering. The report will highlight criteria for decision making in its structure.

Your report will answer one of the following questions: • Will X work for a specific purpose? (feasibility study)
• Is X or Y better for a specific purpose? (comparative analysis)
• Why does X happen, and what can be done about it? (cause-effect analysis)
• How can we use X to best advantage?

The Problem

Look for a project with practical application; that is, be able to define how a specific reader will use your report. The best projects are real and "local" rather than theoretical. (Don't ask huge questions, such as whether universal health care is feasible in the United States.) Practical topics relate to your work, organizations, or field of specialization. The recommendation must require the investigation of at least two criteria for decision making in at least two of the three categories: technical, managerial, and social (see pp. 506-510).

Research

You must use at least two types of research, such as letter of inquiry, questionnaire, interview, site inspection, Internet research, and library research. (If your project is an analysis of uses of the Internet in your discipline, one type may suffice.)

Format

Your report will include the following elements:

• letter of transmittal

• title page with descriptive abstract

• table of contents

• list of visuals (if you have more than two)

• glossary (if necessary)

• executive summary

• introduction

• discussion section organized according to criteria for decision making

• conclusions, recommendations

• appropriate documentation, according to the style used in your field

• appropriate supplements (e.g., copies of research instruments, such as survey forms)

• visuals (tables, graphs, drawings, photos); at least one visual is required

The body of the report, including introduction and conclusions, will probably run about 10 double-spaced pages in 12-point type. The preliminary and supplemental pages will be additional. Number pages, use a running header, and use headings in the report text. Note that the report is worth 25% of your grade for the course. Please manage your time well.

Sample Topics

Is it feasible to install speed bumps on University Avenue?

Which type of marketing would be better for the Meals-on-Wheels new promotional campaign: flyers and brochures, or a public relations video?

Which law school is better for a career in intellectual property, Dickinson or Pitt?

Why do the necks of subjects ache when our lab does tests for zero-gravity muscular motion, and how can we fix the problem?

Why are the Internet connections so slow in Arnold Hall, and how can we make them faster?

Are more bicycle paths feasible for the WVU campus?

Is a Diver Propulsion Vehicle a feasible project for the senior design project in mechanical engineering?

What resources are available on the Internet to support research in my discipline? (Categorize by type, recommend particular ways to use the net for specific inquiries.)

Evaluation criteria

I will evaluate the reports according to these expectations:

The executive summary reflects the entire report concisely. Introduction, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are covered. Significant factual information is present. Sentences are efficient, and the summary does not exceed one page.

The introduction states a problem (with who-what-when-where-why-so what information), identifies a research question, explains methods, and forecasts the rest of the report.

The body sections reflect criteria for decision-making. Headings are parallel. Each body section is a mini report, with an introduction, findings, and conclusion. The introduction defines the issue and explains its significance. The findings report what you have discovered through research. The "conclusion" (just on that issue) tries to define the significance of the findings for the research question and to reconcile any conflicts.

The conclusion section for the entire report weighs the results from all the criteria and answers the research question. All the criteria should be accounted for. The conclusion does not introduce any new criteria. The section includes interpretive (not just factual) statements: words like "more important because…" or "a more immediate need" or "long term benefits outweigh short-term costs." You put the findings for each criteria in relation to one another. You justify and

explain your answer to the research question. The conclusion answers the research question: An explicit statement will say something like "A is the better choice" or "X is not feasible at this time."

The recommendations direct specific action (without explanation or justification). The recommendations may (but do not have to be) in list form. If there is a list, the verbs may be "command" verbs (imperative mood). Items in the list are in parallel form.

All the report parts are present (title, table of contents, executive summary, report, illustrations, references etc.). Illustrations support the argument (they highlight important information that would be harder to understand with words alone) and they are constructed and labeled according to conventions. Format reveals the structure. Headings show main divisions. A running head and page numbers help readers find their place. Preliminary pages are numbered with roman numerals. Sentence style emphasizes strong verbs. Grammar and mechanics are correct. References are complete and accurate. The citation style is the one used by the writer's discipline (e.g., APA for social science and business, reference notes for engineering, MLA for literature, Chicago-author/date for technical writing).

AND, finally: The problem is significant, research is good, reasoning is sound. The report is convincing and important.

Assignment #4: Progress Report

Definition, purpose, and resulting action

A progress report updates a project supervisor on work accomplished and work remaining on a long-term project. The report helps an organization coordinate related projects. The report should persuade the supervisor that you will achieve the intended goals by the specified deadline. The report also offers an opportunity to propose a slight change in focus or methods or to request additional support. If the progress is satisfactory, the supervisor will continue support of the project (and of the investigator). If progress is not satisfactory, a project may be canceled or assignments redefined.

Your assignment

Prepare a progress report on your Report for Decision Making. The progress report should:

• summarize the project,
• describe accomplishments (e.g., research, writing, construction of graphics—be specific),

- identify work remaining,
- evaluate the progress overall.

You may describe problems encountered (especially if the problems will shape the final outcome, such as a shift in purpose), but don't belabor the point. If possible, explain how the problems have or will be resolved. The report should be positive in tone without being inflated in its assessment. The best way to accomplish this goal is to be specific about accomplishments. The best way to be specific about accomplishments is to have some! Plan your research and writing so that you will be able to describe your progress in a way that attracts the approval of a supervisor. In other words, work on the most important tasks first, and budget your time wisely.

Report format, structure, and style

Present your report in memo format. You can address the report either to me or to a client for whom you are preparing your recommendation report. (Note that contents will differ somewhat depending on your main audience. Your client is less interested in writing tasks than I am, but we are both interested in the results of your research.)

Layout and Design:

Use headings to show where the subdivisions begin and end. Consider using visuals (i.e. tables, Gantt charts) to display spatial information. Number pages. The report will probably be 2–3 typed pages (depending on type style and spacing mostly).

Structure:

1. Begin the report with a brief overview of the project's purpose and scope.

2. For the body of the memo, describe the work you have accomplished so far, any problems you have encountered, and what remains to be done. There are two essential ways to structure the progress report: chronologically (work completed-work in progress-work remaining) or by task (interview, library research, writing). Either way, you need to be very specific! For instance, rather than saying "conducted interview," say "interviewed G. Smith and P. Jones regarding feasibility of computer-based instruction to teach productivity skills".

3. Optional: Within the body of the memo, or at the end of the report, writers sometimes include a table to summarize tasks and completion dates. You may also wish to include a separate section describing any complications you've encountered and how you plan to address them.

4.   For the conclusion, indicate whether the project is on schedule according to the management plan. If it is not, provide your course of action to resolve this problem.

Style:

Use active voice verbs and concrete nouns to suggest achievement. Save evaluative terms ("good") for the overall assessment in the conclusion.

Evaluation criteria

1.   The document meets the objectives of a progress report in content and organization.

2.   A brief project description orients the reader to the project. The content is specific, and achievements and problems are easy to identify. Achievements are reasonable for this point in the project.

3.   Organization and format make it easy to find the relevant information.

4.   Style is businesslike: the writer neither whines about problems and looks for excuses nor inflates the accomplishments unreasonably. Action verbs suggest accomplishment.

5.   Format, grammar, and mechanics conform to conventions for memo reports.

Assignment #5: Usability Memo

This third assignment serves as a kind of mid-semester examination in that it tests how well you are learning the concepts in this course, especially the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose, organization, style, and visual design. Moreover, this assignment will prepare you for the commissioned assignment, in which you will create documents that will need to help readers more effectively complete their assessment of agricultural extension programs. As you have learned in this course, technical communication happens all around us; it is indeed a central part of our professional and personal lives. You consult a cookbook to figure out how to make mashed potatoes. You access the help menu to find out how to put footnotes into a Word document. You check the ITS FAQ to determine how to upload files to your Website. Yet, more often than not, these activities lead to feelings of frustration and powerlessness. How come technical writing so often doesn't work? Why doesn't anyone know how to program a VCR? How come 80 percent of child safety seats are improperly installed? And why is filing taxes such a painful process?

In this assignment, you'll write a usability memo that helps to answer this question. You'll apply the basic principles of technical communication to determine what makes a document effective

or ineffective. People in the field of usability would call this kind of investigation a heuristic evaluation. In such an evaluation, researchers apply the "best practices" of technical communication in the research literature to a document in development, in order to assess its usability for readers (although one of your other goals is to convince me that you are learning the basic principles of technical communication).

For this assignment, you will: (1) choose a piece of technical communication, a document, to analyze (this is a very important part of the assignment, for some documents will be easier to analyze than others, and some documents will give you a wider variety of material to analyze than others); (2) evaluate the document for usability; (3) write a usability report that organizes your analysis in both a logical and convincing way.

1) Choose a Document

Locate a piece of technical communication that you might use in your everyday life. In other words, you should be a part of the target audience for the instructions.

Here are some ideas (don't be limited by them):

• A set of instructions you might use to perform a task. For instance, you could evaluate the instructions that come with your VCR or microwave.
• Online help that accompanies a software program you use.
• A technical report you can download from an organization's Website.
• A resume and/or cover letter you find on the Internet.
• A technical definition or description from a textbook.
• A section of a Web site that serves technical communication purposes.

As a first step, try to gather at least three or four possible documents. Do not just choose the first one you find. Then, consider the length and complexity of the document. If your document is very long, you won't be able to analyze it in enough detail. If your document is too short, you might have trouble coming up with enough elements to discuss. Next, take some time to look through the documents briefly and consider them from a rhetorical perspective. If the document is already perfect, you won't have much to say in your memo. Try to find a document that has at least some rhetorical problems that are immediately obvious (you'll find more as you work through the worksheets for this assignment). That way, you'll definitely have some factors to discuss in the body section and some recommendations to make at the end of the memo.

2) Evaluate the Document for Usability

First, fill out the planning worksheet for this assignment. This will help you to get a better sense of the audience and purpose for your document.

Next, use the usability worksheet to evaluate the instructions. As you work through the checklist, try to put yourself in the place of a user who is actually reading the document. In other words, it's not just a matter of whether a certain element is in the document, but whether or not the user would reasonably be able to find and understand that element. For example, an instruction manual might include a 1-800 number for customer service, but the number might be buried in fine print at the end of the document where no one will see it. An online help section might provide instructions on how to do "Mail Merge," but it might not explain to the user what "Mail Merge" is or why one might want to use it. Make sure to note any place in the document where a user might have trouble performing a task or understanding content, places where users might have questions, places where terms need to be defined, and so on.

3) Write the Usability Memo

Your report should take the form of a memo, and your memo should be addressed to the person or group in charge of the document you're reporting on. For instance, if you are analyzing the effectiveness of some instructions from the SLIC Website, you would address whoever is in charge of writing documentation for that site. Call or e-mail SLIC to find out. If you can't, make up a name and position, but remember that you are addressing the person who wrote (or managed the writing of) the document you are reporting on. As you write, provide specific details and examples to support your usability claims. Since your audience may not be familiar with the principles we've discussed in class, you should explain why a certain feature makes the document ineffective or why a certain suggestion would improve the document.

Contents

• Introduction. Briefly describe the purpose of your memo and give an overview of what it will cover. You should give the reader a sense of why this memo will be important for them (i.e. how it will benefit their organization or company, why usable documents are important).
• Rhetorical analysis. Who is the audience for the document you are analyzing? What is the purpose of the document? What are the different needs, tasks, or questions the audience has? In what context will the audience be reading the document?
• Usability analysis. See the usability worksheet for questions to address here:
o Content,
o Organization,

o Style,

o Design,

o Ethical, legal, and cultural considerations.

• Conclusions. Summarize your analysis.

• Recommendations. Make specific recommendations to improve the document.

Format

See pages 592-595 in your textbook for sample memos and their conventions. You can change certain design features for the memo (e.g., type face and size), but you should include the following:

• The word Memo or Memorandum at the top • The Date, To, From, and Subject lines, including your initial news to the Subject line • Topic headings (this memo won't be short) • Proper paragraph spacing (single space within paragraphs, double-space between paragraphs) • Headers on pages after page 1 • Copy, distribution, and enclosure notations if applicable

The length should be at least three (3) single-spaced pages.

Grading & Evaluation

Content. The memo includes each of the sections listed above. Within each section, the usability claims are supported by concrete examples and evidence. The section goes beyond reporting answers to the usability questions: it explains why a given item is effective or ineffective. That is, the memo moves well beyond description and into analysis. Organization. The memo is organized in a logical manner overall and within each section. Headers mark each section.

Format: The memo includes each of the format features listed above. The overall design is clear and consistent. The memo uses fonts, white space, headings and sub-headings appropriately and effectively.

Style: The memo creates a professional ethos, one that demonstrates a solid understanding of the basic principles of technical communication. The tone is effective for the audience. The document is free from typographical and grammatical errors.

What to hand in: • A copy of the document you are working with • Your planning worksheet • Your usability testing worksheet • Your usability report, including rough drafts and the final copy • Your postwrites

Assignment #6: Web Portfolio

Throughout the course, you have continually recorded and reflected on the strategies which you use to work through writing and research projects. Your tasks as a portfolio keeper have included tending to your developing ideas about individual writing projects in particular and technical writing more generally; keeping watch over your learning patterns; and collaborating with your peers. Now, your responsibility shifts to putting together and polishing a final product. The final web portfolio marks the culmination of your efforts in this course, as you display to me your ability to be a reflective technical writer and to analyze and respond to rhetorical situations effectively.

On the final day of class, then, you will submit your web portfolio to me in one of two ways. (1) If you are uncomfortable with the public nature of a website, hand me a burned CD (or floppy disk) containing a copy of your web portfolio; or (2) If you choose to publish your portfolio to the web, send me an email containing the URL where I can view it. Your portfolio should be revised, edited, and polished to presentation quality, and I will evaluate the argument it makes about your ability to make rhetorically informed choices. In effect, the purpose of your final portfolio is to convince me that your portfolio represents your best work, that you have become a reflective learner, and that you have developed abilities in writing and designing documents that match the high evaluative standards set for the course.

There are three major principles that should guide your choices as you begin to build this argument: choice, reflection, and variety.

Choice: You will need to make many conscious decisions as you choose what to include and how to arrange and present—through both textual and visual rhetoric—your entries. Good decisions will reflect your understanding of the rhetorical situation of the portfolio and shape the reader's impression of you as a composer.

Reflection: This final portfolio assignment asks you to examine carefully your own patterns, strengths, and preferences for negotiating writing tasks and for learning new skills. To compose an effective web portfolio, you must do more than merely put the materials together. You also must articulate why you made the choices that you did and what these choices are meant to convey to your reader. In a sense, the portfolio project assesses your ability to think about your own habits of thinking and writing.

Variety: All writers have different strengths and different interests, so your web portfolio gives you a space in which to display your writing ability across a range of assignments, for different

audiences, or with different amounts of time for each piece of writing. You may be tempted to think of "variety" only in terms of different types of documents, but the portfolio assignment also encourages you consider pieces of different lengths, for different purposes, or even at different points in your experiences as a writer. When thinking about "variety," consider the full picture of your writing ability that you want me to see.

As we've discussed this semester, the visual design of your web portfolio also plays an important part in readers' assessment both of its content and of you, its composer. I certainly expect students to come to this portfolio project with a wide range of abilities in publishing documents for the web. Our readings and in-class demonstrations (plus on-line tutorials at The Web Portfolio Guide's companion website) should help everyone to develop basic web-authoring skills that they can use to build effective web portfolios. Ultimately, my concern while evaluating your portfolio will be not on whether your portfolio reflects highly advanced web-authoring skills but instead on whether every element of the portfolio—from its textual contents to its visual design—supports your purposes and goals for the project.

(Loose) Guidelines

The only firm guideline for the contents of your final portfolio is that it include three of your five major assignments (you choose which three to include), revised and polished for final presentation, along with five additional pages of any writing that you wish to include. These five pages could come from your five postwrites, peer response forms, impromptu pieces composed in class, email correspondence, or the two remaining major assignments.

Questions to Get You Thinking about Your Selections

To begin making your selections for the final portfolio, sit at a large table and spread out the contents of your working folder, with ever piece already dated, labeled, and organized in the fashion that you have chosen. You now need to make decisions about the type of argument that you want your portfolio to make about yourself as a writer. Here are some questions to help you get started, but also realize that these are not the only possibilities for shaping your portfolio:

• Do you want to show progress—that is, how much your writing and thinking has improved?
• Do you want to show steadfastness, your ability to stick with a project for a long period of time?
• Do you want to show your flexibility, that you can write in different styles or voices?
• Do you want to show creativity, or how you have made the assignments your own?

• Do you want to show independence, that you have revised well beyond the suggestions, or made considerably more changes than were recommended?

You naturally will want to select those documents that your readers (me and your peers) thought were your best, or that you most enjoyed writing. But, you do have other options. For example, you might choose a document that you think has considerable potential. You might need to work with it a bit more to prepare it for the final portfolio, but you could talk about these revisions in your reflective introduction. As compositionist Nedra Reynolds suggests, "Being able to demonstrate an understanding of revision through a smartly revised paper could be just as satisfying as including one already considered 'the best.'"

The Reflective Introduction

This essay will explain the analysis that guided your decision-making about what to include in your portfolio. You will use these other contents of the portfolio as evidence to support the claim that you want to make about yourself as a writer. For example, you might discuss how the extensive revisions you made to your instruction set illustrate your greater sensitivity to audience's informational needs. Or, you might explain how the email correspondence among your partners shows you working through the difficulties of blending different writing styles. So, after you have selected your materials and built a cohesive argument, you will explain to me what cohesive argument they make and how they do so. Your goal with this essay is to show me what you have learned about the qualities of good writing, anticipating readers' needs, and the importance of careful presentation. Therefore, as you make your decisions about the portfolio and begin to draft your reflective introduction, consider how you have already responded to the various "tasks" in Chapter 2 of Kimball's Web Portfolio Guide; they are meant to sharpen your focus on the rhetorical nature of this assignment.

The Reflective Introduction

You have maintained a working folder during the course of this semester in which you have saved, labeled, and arranged all of your paperwork for this class. You have also written postwrites in order to keep track of your writing processes for each assignment, to reflect on how, where, and why you struggled and succeeded in various aspects of the assignment, and to plan strategies for addressing your concerns as you progressed through the course. Now you will return to all of these materials as you write a reflective introduction for your portfolio. As you put together your portfolio and compose the reflective introduction, you will want to think about the different type of assessment that will now take place. I will no longer be reading your texts to make revision suggestions or respond to your specific concerns; instead, I will be reading your

portfolio to evaluate your work throughout the semester and to determine how it compares to the goals and grading criteria I established at the beginning of the course. This new rhetorical situation should undoubtedly influence your decisions about what documents to include in your portfolio and what to say about them in your reflective introduction.

Suggestions for Focusing Your Reflective Essay

Nedra Reynolds offers the following suggestions for focusing your reflective essay. During the first week of this portfolio unit, you should spend several minutes freewriting about each of these options to find which one best fits your vision of the technical writing you have done this semester.

• Discuss your best entry and why it is your best.
• Detail the revisions you've made and the improvement and changes that you want readers to notice.
• Discuss each piece of writing included, touching on the strengths of each.
• Outline the process that one or more of your entries went through.
• Demonstrate what this portfolio illustrates about you as a writer, student, researcher, or critical thinker.
• Acknowledge your weaknesses but show how you've worked to overcome them.
• Acknowledge the reader-respondents who have influenced your portfolio pieces and how.
• Reflect on what you've learned about writing, reading, or other topics of the course.
• Prepare your reader for a positive evaluation of your work. (45

As this list suggests, you have a wide range of options for composing an effective introduction to your portfolio. This text could be a series of entries that preface each of your individual portfolio documents, a traditional reflective essay that either formally introduces or concludes your portfolio, or a cover letter that establishes a slightly different relationship with me, your reader and evaluator. No matter how you decide to craft this piece, however, you will need to demonstrate that you have developed the ability to assess your own work this semester, understanding both what you do well in composing technical documents and what you still need to improve. Finally, you will be making claims about your writing throughout the reflective introduction, so you will need to continue practicing one of the key skills you developed throughout the semester—providing evidence and examples to support your assertions. Of course, I have read much of your writing throughout the semester. I haven't participated in your peer review groups, though, or been sitting alongside you as you softened the tone of your critique in your usability memo or improved the consistency of your instruction set's visual

design. Therefore, you should use evidence and examples throughout your reflective introduction to help me see how your writing process has evolved this semester.

Schedule

WEEK 1

8/22 T Course introduction.

8/24 Th Definitions and special characteristics of technical communication. Introduce Assignment #1: Job Application Package. Develop strategies for finding jobs. Reflective writing due. TC: Read Chapter 1, "Technical Communication in Today's Workplace" (pp. 3-35).

WEEK 2

8/29 T Rhetorical elements of the resume. TC: Read Chapter 16, "Professional Communication" (pp. 603-623). Locate four possible jobs for Assignment #1.

8/31 Th Analyzing Audiences for Technical Communication. Rhetorical elements of the cover letter. TC: Read Chapter 3, "Audience and Technical Communication" (pp. 72-101).

WEEK 3

9/5 T What does Persuasion have to do with Technical Communication? TC: Read Chapter 4, "The Persuasive Nature of Technical Communication" (pp. 102-136). Conduct audience analysis of two employers.

9/7 Th In-class peer review session. Defining the Rhetorical Nature of Web Portfolios. Drafts of Cover Letters and Resumes due. WPG: Read Chapter 1, "Understanding Web Portfolios" (pp. 5-40).

WEEK 4

9/12 T In-class peer review session. Drafts of Cover Memo due. Revised drafts of Cover Letters and Resumes due.

9/14 Th Introduce Assignment #2: Instruction Set. Inventing topics and identifying audiences for the instruction set. Assignment #1 due: Job Application Package. TC: Read Chapter 12, "Instruction, Specifications, and Procedures" (pp. 436-468)

WEEK 5

Reminder: The Employment Expo is Thurs., Sept. 21, 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. in the WVU Coliseum. For more details, see the WVU Career Services webpage: . Good luck with your job or internship search!

9/19 T Rhetorical elements of an instruction set. Usability issues concerning instruction sets. Conduct task analysis for instruction set (bulleted items on TC, pp. 444-445). Read James Paradis, "Text and Action: The Operator's Manual in Context and in Court" (electronic reserve).

9/21 Th Designing your instruction set. TC: Read Chapter 9, "Document Design and Packaging" (pp. 297-341).

WEEK 6

9/26 T Developing a structure for your web portfolio. WPG: Read Chapter 2, "Planning Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 41-61). Complete Tasks 2-4 in Chapter 2 of WPG (pp. 44-48).

9/28 Th In-class peer review session. Maintaining a working portfolio. Developing the habit of reflection. Draft of Instruction Set due. Read Reynolds and Rice, "Keeping Watch to Become a Reflective Learner" (electronic reserve).

WEEK 7

10/3 T Introduce Assignment #3: Report for Decision Making. Understanding the rhetorical situation of decision-making reports. Assignment #2 due: Instruction Set.

10/5 Th Understanding the rhetorical elements of decision-making reports. TC: Read Chapter 14, "Reports for Decision Making" (pp. 501-538).

WEEK 8

10/10 T Planning and conducting primary research. Shaping primary research into ethos and logos appeals. Introduce Assignment #4: Progress Report. Sketch a site map and create a web page design for web portfolio (See WPG, pp. 56-59). TC: Read Chapter 7, "Primary Sources of Information: Surveys, Interviews, Observations" (pp. 259-296).

10/12 Th Rhetorical elements of progress reports. Technical elements of web portfolio construction. TC: Read first half of Chapter 13, "Reports and Studies" (pp. 469-484). WPG: Read Chapter 3, "Creating Your Web Portfolio" (63-85).

WEEK 9

10/17 T Aims and methods of secondary research. In-class peer review of Progress Report. Draft of Progress Report due. TC: Read Chapter 6, "Secondary Sources of Information" (pp. 177-220).

10/19 Th The Rhetoric of Visual Display and Presentation. Assignment #4 due: Progress Report. TC: Read Chapter 10, "Visual Display and Presentation" (pp. 342-396).

WEEK 10

10/24 T Strategies for revising and editing Decision-Making Reports. Incorporating visual rhetoric into web portfolios. WPG: Read Chapter 4, "Graphics and Multimedia in Web Portfolios" (pp. 87-127).

10/26 Th Peer review of Report for Decision Making. Draft Decision-Making Report due.

WEEK 11

10/31 T Introduce Assignment #5: Usability Memo. Assignment #3 due: Report for Decision Making.

11/2 Th The Ethics of Usability: User-Centered vs. Object-Centered Documents. Writing in the Workplace: Balancing the Writer's Responsibility to Users with the Writer's Responsibility to Her Organization. TC: Read Chapter 2, "The Writer and the Writing Process in the Workplace" (pp. 36-71). Read Robert R. Johnson, "Audience Involved" (electronic reserve). Select three possible documents for usability testing.

WEEK 12

11/7 T NO CLASS—ELECTION DAY

11/9 Th Editing with an orientation toward audience needs and concerns. The social and political dimensions of usability. TC: Read Chapter 8, "Editing and Style" (pp. 259-296). Read Cynthia Selfe and Richard Selfe Jr., "The Politics of the Interface" (electronic reserve).

WEEK 13

11/14 T In-class peer review of Usability Memo. Draft of Usability Memo due.

11/16 Th Discuss the "Time to Decide" period. Introduce reflective essay assignment. Assignment #5 due: Usability Memo. WPG: Read Chapter 5, "Revising and Editing Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 129-139).

Thanksgiving Break: November 18—November 26.

WEEK 14

11/28 T Planning your reflective essay. Matching revision strategies to reflective essay theme. Publishing your web portfolio. Plan revisions for web portfolio. WPG: Read Chapter 6, "Publishing Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 141-149). Read Nedra Reynolds and Rich Rice, "Preparing to Write the Reflective Components" (electronic reserve).

11/30 Th In-class peer review of reflective essay. In-class User Test of web portfolio. Draft of Reflective Component due. Design survey for User Test of web portfolio. Create a Revision Action List.

WEEK 15

12/5 T In-class workshop on Web Portfolio: questions & concerns, suggestions & strategies. Continue making final revisions to web portfolio. Bring questions, concerns, and helpful strategies to class.

12/7 Th Course wrap-up. Assignment #6 due: Web Portfolio.