ENGL 305: Technical Writing
Fall 2016

MWF 10:30-11:20 a.m. (Sec. W01/CRN 80420), 11:30-12:20 p.m. (sec. W02/CRN 81657)
Colson Hall G18

Instructor Information

Professor Doug Phillips
Office: Colson Hall 339
Office hours: Tuesdays 9:00 a.m.-11:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m.-3:00 p.m., and by appointment
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Course Description

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

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

Required Texts

- Reynolds, Nedra, and Elizabeth Davis. *Portfolio Keeping: A Guide for Students.* 3rd ed. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2014.
- Tebeaux, Elizabeth, and Sam Dragga. *The Essentials of Technical Communication*. 3rd ed. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Readings (.pdfs) available on eCampus.

Course Objectives

- That you master the practices and principles of technical communication with particular emphasis on planning, audience analysis, persuasion, clear and effective writing style, organization, graphics, and information design.
- That you refine a writing process that will enable you to communicate well, meet deadlines, and work as part of a team.
- That you attend and participate in classroom discussions and peer-review sessions. Class participation will be a significant portion of your grade.
- That you design and execute several forms of technical communication including a memo, résumé,

instruction set, and technical description.
- That you produce a significant (20+ pages), professional report related to your field of study, which has been revised and refined for clarity and effectiveness.
- That you demonstrate the ability to speak persuasively in a professional setting, including the ability to select and design effective presentation graphics.

Communications

Email is the best way to contact me. I check it regularly and will do my best to respond in a timely manner. Typically, you should receive a response from me within 24 hours during the work week and 48 hours on the weekend. Please also understand that emails are perhaps the most common genre of professional communication; treat them as such.

You, too, should check your Mix account email regularly (at least daily). At times I will send out important information about the course.

Course Requirements & Assignments

You will be evaluated on written documents, oral presentations, class participation, and your final writing project. You will receive a detailed assignment sheet for each task. Assignments that will be graded on content, technique, and style will pass through a drafting stage before you turn in your "final" version.

The major assignments for this course include:
- Job Application Materials – 15%
- Technical Description – 15%
- Instruction Set – 20%
- Usability Report – 20%
- Portfolio & Reflection – 20%
- Participation – 10%

The more writers write, reflect, and revise, the better their writing becomes. As such, in this course, you will complete many in-class or short homework "minor" writing assignments, which will count toward your participation (also see Professional Expectations and Conduct, below). More important, you will receive extensive comments (from me and your peers) that will help you in the revision process for the major assignments.

As you turn in your assignments, I will hold you to professional standards. For example, your employer will take for granted qualities such as promptness, neat appearance, and correct mechanics (grammar, spelling, and punctuation).

If at any time course requirements, assignments and expectations are unclear, please do not hesitate to ask!

USB Drive and Drafts

Please obtain a USB drive that you will dedicate to collecting the writing, designing, editing, and revising done in this course. Bring this drive to each class. As you work on your assignments both in and out of

class, keep (within reason) progressive versions of all your notes, drafts, outlines, peer reviews, and research materials (both hard copy and electronic). Organize and label the documents as you go because you will regularly review these materials in order to learn how your discovery, drafting, and research processes evolve throughout the course.

> *Tip for naming digital documents:* Use a consistent naming format for your documents since you will be writing multiple drafts and will want to see your progress (as well as not lose original work that you may need to come back to later). For instance, I might name my drafts something like (Assignment-MyInitials-DraftStage.doc):
>
> *First draft* – BadNewsLetterDP1.doc
> *Second draft* – BadNewsLetterDP2.doc
> *Peer-reviewed draft* – BadNewsLetterDP2edits.doc
> *Final draft* – BadNewsLetterDPfinal.doc

Also, regularly back up your files in a second location (another USB drive, an external hard drive, the cloud etc.). USB drives have been known to get lost or corrupted!

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and bring your USB drive and reading materials. You may miss up to **three** classes without penalty. Starting with your fourth absence, your grade for the course may be lowered **one** full letter grade per absence. Students with six or more absences will receive a failing grade.

It's particularly important for you to attend—and be prepared for—in-class peer reviews 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," 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 without its peer-reviewed rough draft.

> *Note*: An absence on the day a draft is due counts as two absences. 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.

If you have extenuating circumstances (e.g., illness, traveling for competitions) that may cause you to miss more than the allotted number of classes, please speak to me early. I may require a letter from your advisor, coach, etc. to excuse any absences but will not apply that retroactively.

Professional Expectations and Conduct

In addition to the requirements in this syllabus, you are expected to bring all materials (e.g., readings, drafts, etc.) to class; to participate in class activities and discussions; to work until the class period has ended; to complete all readings and 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; and to be courteous and considerate.

Please turn off all cell phones (no ringing, vibrating or text messaging) during class. Our classroom computers are for class use only – no Facebook, email, etc., please. All are very detrimental to your class

participation grade. Finally, please respect the request for no food or drink in the lab.

Plagiarism

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. Students *are* expected to be familiar with the sections on Academic Honesty in the *University Student Conduct Code, Policy Bulletin 31*, which is online at http://www.arc.wvu.edu/rightsa.html.

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, which can include failure of an assignment, failure of the course and a permanent blemish on your University transcript.

Non-Discrimination and Disabilities Policy

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, veteran 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 Accessibility Services (293-6700).

Undergraduate Writing Center

The Writing Studio strives to help all members of the university community learn more about effective communication practices. Professional and friendly consultants work one-to-one on all stages of the writing (or speaking) process, from note-taking and pre-writing to revision strategies, proofreading techniques, and presentation practice. Because the Writing Studio works to teach students ways to improve their own work, consultants will not proofread, edit content, or discuss grades. It is helpful to bring your assignment prompt with you on your visit. To make an appointment, call 304.293.5788 or visit the Writing Studio website <http://speakwrite.wvu.edu/writing-studio>.

Grading

Because this is a portfolio-graded course, you will receive feedback—but not grades—on individual assignments. You may then revise these assignments for your final portfolio. At midterm, you will collect your work so far, write a mid-term letter explaining your writing progress, and enclose it all in a portfolio (more detailed instructions to follow). I, then, write a letter in return discussing your progress in the course and assigning a provisional midterm grade. This grade does not calculate in to the final grade; it merely gives you a sense of how your writing measures up to the grading standards below. At the end of the semester, you will again gather your (revised) work and a letter into a portfolio.

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

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

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

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

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

Superior ~ A (100-90)	**Strong ~ B** (89-80)	**Satisfactory ~ C** (79-70)	**Poor ~ D** (69-60)	**Failing ~ F** (<60)

Course Calendar

Like all writing, this course calendar is subject to revision. In other words, readings, due dates, or daily course topics may change. When this happens, I will let you know as soon as possible.

Abbreviations: *ETC* = *Essentials of Technical Communication*
PK = *Portfolio Keeping*
eC = eCampus (.pdfs)

Day/Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments Due
Week 1		
W 8/17	Course introduction. Defining characteristics of technical communication. Fundamentals of professional communication: email.	
F 8/19	Introduce Assignment #1: Job Application Package. Locating and interpreting job ads. Keeping a portfolio.	Read: *ETC* Ch. 1 & 2 (pp. 3-34) and *PK* Introduction (pp. 1-8)
Week 2		
M 8/22	Planning the resume and cover letter: audience analysis.	Bring to class: 2 job ads Read: *ETC* Ch. 12 (pp. 344-368)
W 8/24	Rhetorical elements of the resume: action verbs, visual design, headings.	Read: Markel, "Preparing Job Application Materials" (pp. 395-415) and Gurak & Lannon, "Page Layout and Document Design" (pp. 123-148) (eC)
F 8/26	Rhetorical elements of the cover letter: select and develop, ethos, pathos, and logos appeals.	Read: Markel, "Preparing Job Application Materials" (pp. 415-422) (eC)
Week 3		
M 8/29	**In-class peer review of Job Application Package.**	Draft of Job Application Package
W 8/31	Building a portfolio.	Read: *PK* Ch. 1-3 (pp. 11-25)
F 9/2	In-class write: Assignment #1 reflection. Introduce Assignment #2: Technical Description.	Read: *PK* Ch. 4 (pp. 26-33) **Assignment #1: Job Application Package**
Week 4		
M 9/5	**No Class: Labor Day**	
W 9/7	Rhetorical elements of a technical description: picking a topic and analyzing the writing situation.	Bring: 2 description topics (1 process, 1 product) Read: Markel, "Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions" (pp. 533-575)

Day/Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments Due
F 9/9	Analyzing technical descriptions: adaptation strategies. In-class planning and drafting: introductions.	Read: Penrose & Katz, "Communicating with Public Audiences" (pp. 176-202).

Week 5

M 9/12	Technical descriptions: achieving a readable style for parts or stages, summaries.	Read: *ETC* Ch. 4 (pp. 57-84)
W 9/14	Visual display in technical descriptions.	Read: *ETC* Ch. 6 (pp. 112-146) and Hagan & Golombisky, Ch. 4 (pp. 31-42) (WVU library eBook)
F 9/16	In-class work on Assignment #2.	Read: *PK* Ch. 6 (pp.38-42)

Week 6

M 9/19	**In-class peer review of Technical Description.**	Draft of Technical Description Read: *PK:* Ch. 5 (pp. 34-37)
W 9/21	Revise Technical Descriptions.	
F 9/23	In-class write: Assignment #2 reflection. Mid-term portfolios: selection, arrangement, and the reflection letter.	Read: *PK* Ch. 4 (pp. 26-33) **Assignment #2: Technical Description**

Week 7

M 9/26	Introduce Assignment #3: Instruction Set. Working in groups: establishing norms. Choose a topic.	Read: *ETC* Ch. 10 (pp. 274-308)
W 9/28	Rhetorical elements of instruction sets: usable steps, numbers v bullets, actions, tips, conditions.	Read: Graves & Graves, "Writing how-to documents" (pp. 223-246)
F 9/30	Creating user-centered instruction sets (cont'd).	

Week 8

M 10/3	**No class** – work on Assignment #3 and your portfolios.	
W 10/5	**No class** – work on Assignment #3 and your portfolios.	
F 10/7	Creating a functional design for instruction sets: TOC, headings, columns, and typography.	Read: *ETC* Ch. 5 (pp. 85-111) and Markel, "Designing Documents" (pp. 256-285) (eC) **Mid-term portfolio**

Day/Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments Due

Week 9

M 10/10	Creating a functional design for instruction sets: proximity, alignment, contrast, repetition.	
W 10/12	In-class work on instructions.	
F 10/14	**In-class peer review of Instruction Set.**	Draft of Instruction Set

Week 10

M 10/17	In-class write: Assignment #3 reflection. Introduce Assignment #4: Usability Report.	**Assignment #3: Instruction Set**
W 10/19	Rhetorical elements of a usability report: overview, methodology, user profiles, findings and recommendations.	Read: Dumas & Redish, excerpts from *A Practical Guide to Usability Testing* (eC)
F 10/21	Usability tests: methods selection, user and tester roles	

Week 11

M 10/24	How to conduct a usability test (cont'd): usability handout	
W 10/26	Interpreting data and writing recommendations	Draft usability handout Read: *ETC* Ch. 8 (pp. 181-232)
F 10/28	Interpreting data and writing recommendations (cont'd)	

Week 12

M 10/31	**No class** – Conduct usability tests	
W 11/2	In-class: compiling data, writing recommendations.	Data from usability tests.
F 11/4	Designing an effective report: audience needs	Working draft: user profiles, data-driven recommendations

Week 13

M 11/7	In-class write: Assignment #4 reflection. Introduce Assignment #5: Portfolio	Read: *PK* Ch. 7 (pp. 45-54) **Assignment #4: Usability Report**
W 11/9	Usability report presentations.	
F 11/11	Usability report presentations.	

Week 14

M 11/14	Planning your Reflective Essay.	Read: *PK* Ch. 9 (pp. 63- 69)
W 11/16	Planning your portfolio: selecting and arranging artifacts.	Read: *PK* Ch. 8 (pp. 55-62)

Day/Date	Topic	Reading/Assignments Due
F 11/18	Revising assignments for the portfolio.	Read: *PK* Chs. 10-11 (pp. 70-79)

Week 15

M 11/21	**Fall Recess**	
W 11/23	**Fall Recess**	
F 11/25	**Fall Recess**	

Week 16

M 11/28	In-class work on portfolio.	
W 11/30	**In-class peer review of Reflection Essay.**	Draft Reflection Essay.
F 12/2	**In-class peer review of Portfolio.**	Draft Portfolio.

Week 17

M 12/5	Last day of class. Course wrap-up.	
T 12/6		**Assignment #5: Final Portfolio**