

English 202C: Technical Writing (Section 023)

Spring 2014

Instructor: Mr. Paul Zajac

Contact Information: pjz113@psu.edu

Mailbox: Zajac, 136 Ritenour

Office: Allenway Building, Ground Floor, Suite 3, Desk F

Office Hours: Tuesday 10 AM – 11:30 AM & Wednesday 11 AM – 12:30 PM

Office Phone: N/A

Class Time and Location: T/Th 8 AM – 9:15 AM, 001 Sparks Building

ENGL 202C: Technical Writing serves students who are studying and preparing for careers in the sciences and applied sciences, including engineering. This advanced course in writing familiarizes students with the discourse practices prized in their disciplinary and institutional communities—and helps them to manage those practices effectively in their own written work. In this way the course teaches those writing strategies and tactics that scientists, engineers, and others will need in order to communicate successfully on the job.

Accordingly, students in the course can expect to:

- Discover and understand the discourse features that distinguish their disciplinary and institutional communities from others.
- Discover and specify the purpose(s) of their writing.
- Develop a range of writing processes appropriate to various writing tasks.
- Identify their readers and describe the characteristics of their readers in a way that forms a sound basis for deciding how to write to them.
- Invent the contents of their communications through research and reflection.
- Arrange material to raise and satisfy readers' expectations, using both conventional and rhetorical patterns of organization.
- Reveal the organization of their communications by using forecasting and transitional statements, headings, and effective page/document design.
- Observe appropriate generic conventions and formats for technical documents.
- Compose effective sentences.
- Evaluate their documents to be sure that the documents fulfill their purpose and to ensure that they can be revised if necessary.
- Collaborate effectively with their peers in a community of writers who provide feedback on each others' work and occasionally write together.
- Write several specific kinds of documents that recur in technical, scientific, and other communities.
- Employ computer technology effectively in the solution of communication problems.
- Communicate in an ethically responsible manner.

Required Texts

Technical Communication by Mike Markel. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. Tenth edition.

Office Hours

See me when you have questions about an assignment, when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due, or when you have questions about a comment. You should also see me to get help with particular writing problems or similar concerns. I hold office hours for your benefit, and I am also more than happy to schedule additional appointment times if you cannot meet during my regular hours. I want to answer any and all questions you have about the expectations of this course, but I cannot answer questions that you never ask.

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and to have your work with you. Regular attendance is required because course instruction depends on your active participation. Your involvement in class discussions, in-class exercises, and peer review sessions is a crucial component of the education process both for you as an individual student and for your fellow classmates. Excused absences are permitted for illnesses and family emergencies, but you must be in contact with me and are fully accountable for missed work. **After 2 unexcused absences, your participation grade will suffer. I will not allow a student to make up a missed quiz. If you miss more than 10 classes for ANY reason, you will not be able to pass the course.** Let me repeat English department policy: A student whose absences are excessive will “run the risk of receiving a lower grade or a failing grade.”

It is particularly important for you to attend—and be prepared to participate in—in-class workshops on drafts of your documents. You must produce a completed draft of the assignment before peer review in order to receive maximum benefit from these sessions. If you are unable to attend a peer review session, you **must** either meet with me about a completed draft of the assignment or take your work to a writing tutor at the Boucke Writing Center. **I will not accept a final draft that has not undergone the proper peer review or its equivalent.** In addition, you should always have your draft ready to work on, especially on days that I specifically set aside for your own writing time. Finally, you **must** hand in all assignments in order to pass the course.

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. As I mentioned above, you must hand in all assignments in order to pass the course.

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, memo, or report, your communication should exhibit complete and appropriate format. When relevant, writing for the course should be printed clearly, including draft work. I will always tell you the proper way to turn in a final draft (ANGEL, email, printed copy, etc.).

Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading. At work, even a single error in spelling, grammar, or proofreading can jeopardize the effectiveness of some. Grammatical correctness and spelling accuracy are not merely taken seriously in the context of English classes; employers in all fields frequently (and rightly) look at errors of this kind as signs of inattention, carelessness, and a lack of professionalism. Grading will reflect the great seriousness with which these matters are typically 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 back-up your electronic files. Make sure you hold onto graded copies with my comments until at least the end of the semester.

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; and to be courteous, considerate, and attentive.

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. In addition, each assignment sheet will conclude with an explicit list of my grading criteria for the document in question. 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 ideally 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 throughout. The grade of an A is reserved for excellent technical documents that demonstrate mastery of the relevant skills with near-flawless presentation.
- B** Good: the document generally meets the objectives of the assignment, but it needs improvement in style, or it contains a number of 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. Documents that receive this grade often exhibit an utter disregard for the supplied instructions.

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:

- Basic Rhetorical Analysis 05%
- Job Application Package 20%
- Technical Definition and Description 15%
- Collaborative Project 15%
- Revision Assignment 10%
- E-Portfolio 15%
- Reading Quizzes 10%
- Class Participation 10%

Instructions for each assignment will be explained in detail in individual assignment sheets. Below are general descriptions.

Basic Rhetorical Analysis

Technical communication is meant to be used and not just read. Good technical communication communicates information to an audience who will act on that information in a variety of ways: in making hiring decisions, in following technical procedures, in developing research plans, and more. In this assignment, you will select, examine, and evaluate a job advertisement. The job offering can be for a position in your field or for a local job for which you might actually apply (in State College or your hometown). You may use an appropriate internship position that you identify, but you cannot use a graduate school application. You will briefly describe any relevant aspects of the technical communication and analyze whether the document effectively communicates the necessary information to its audience and where it fails to do so. Your analysis will take the form of a memo addressed to me. In this way, the assignment will introduce you to basic elements of technical communication while also preparing you for the next assignment.

Job Application Package

The process of applying for a job is an extremely important scenario for technical communication. As a job applicant, you have a vested interest in communicating your suitability for the position with the specific audience making employment decisions. This assignment will ask you to create resumes and application documents attuned to the rhetorical situations of two actual job offerings. You will also discuss your writing and communication decisions in a reflective memo. The reflective memo will be worth 10% of your final grade in the course, and the two resumes and cover letters will make up another 10%.

Technical Definition and Description

Engineers and scientists are often required to describe a technical object, concept, or process to someone who has little knowledge or experience with the subject at hand. Technical descriptions are used before products and processes are developed (as part of proposals and planning

documents), during development (in progress reports, for instance), and afterwards (as part of marketing and promotional literature and technical support documents). You will write a technical definition for an object, concept, or process in your field.

Collaborative Project

In this project, you will be paired with several of your classmates to produce a collaborative technical document. You will need to make decisions about organization, format, and style as a means of creating a usable document for readers. The document must contain a table of contents and meta-discourse describing the decisions made in the document. You will also write a formal email to me, thinking critically about the process of writing collaboratively. Unexcused absences during this unit of the course may drastically affect an individual student's grade, as that student will be hindering the work of his or her fellow classmates.

Revision Assignment

In this assignment, you will revise one of your earlier assignments according to the feedback that you received from me. You will obviously be refining your revision skills throughout the entire semester due to the peer review sessions built into every unit. This assignment will allow me to formally evaluate your progress at revising earlier documents to improve them according to specific comments. In some cases, I will tell you which assignment you must revise, and I may make additional qualifications, such as a change in audience or purpose. In addition to turning in the revised assignment, you will also hand in a reflection memo addressed to me that explains in detail the changes that you made.

E-Portfolio

Electronic portfolios are an increasingly common vehicle for developing a professional online identity, even in fields that long resisted such forms of individual self-marketing. Professionals are beginning to create them and employers are beginning to expect them. Employers are interested in e-portfolios for a variety of reasons: they provide multiple writing samples, display skills with computers and new media, and require reflection and meta-knowledge. Professionals like e-portfolios because they help them keep track of their projects and accomplishments. As a final course assignment, you will design an e-portfolio using Sites at Penn State, which will serve as an exercise for future online endeavors. The portfolio will include work from this course and perhaps from others. You will create your e-portfolio for an audience of potential employers.

Plagiarism (Cheating)

Penn State 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 (Faculty Senate Policy 49-20).

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, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive

academic sanctions and will be reported to the University's Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

Talking over your ideas and getting comments on your writing from friends are NOT 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 English department regulations.

Disability Policy

The Pennsylvania State University encourages qualified people with disabilities to participate in its programs and activities and is committed to the policy that all people shall have equal access to programs, facilities, and admissions without regard to personal characteristics not related to ability, performance, or qualifications as determined by University policy or by state or federal authorities. If you anticipate needing any type of accommodation in this course or have questions about physical access, please tell me as soon as possible.

Course Schedule

Week 1

		Topic	Due
1/14	Tu	Course introduction.	In-class activities.
1/16	Th	Defining technical communication. Introduction to Assignment #1: Basic Rhetorical Analysis.	Read Chapter 1.

Week 2

		Topic	Due
1/21	Tu	Planning the Job Search. Working on Assignment One.	Bring 3 job ads for discussion and approval. Read Chapter 15 up through "Understanding the Risks..." (p. 405).
1/23	Th	Writing Technical Documents.	Read Chapter 3. Read Chapter 14 on Memos (p. 385-87).

Week 3

		Topic	Due
1/28	Tu	Peer Review.	Draft of Basic Rhetorical Analysis.
1/30	Th	Introduction to Assignment #2: Job Application Package.	Finish Chapter 15.

Week 4

		Topic	Due
2/4	Tu	Writing Job Application Materials.	Basic Rhetorical Analysis due.
2/6	Th	Audience and Purpose. Grammar Day.	Read Chapter 5.

Week 5

		Topic	Due
2/11	Tu	Peer Review of 1 Resume and Cover Letter. Communicating Persuasively.	Draft of 1 Resume and Cover Letter. Read Chapter 8.
2/13	Th	Peer Review of Complete Job Application Package.	Draft of the Cover Memo, 2 Cover Letters, and 2 Resumes.

Week 6

		Topic	Due
2/18	Tu	Introduction to Assignment #3: Technical Definition and Description.	Job Application Package due.
2/20	Th	Writing Definitions & Descriptions.	Read Chapter 20 up to p. 581.

Week 7

		Topic	Due
2/25	Tu	Designing Documents.	Read Chapter 11 up to p. 292.
2/27	Th	Researching Your Subject. Graphics in Technical Communication.	Read Chapter 5. Skim Chapter 12

Week 8

		Topic	Due
3/4	Tu	Peer Review. Writing Effective Sentences.	Draft of Technical Description. Read Chapter 10.
3/6	Th	Writing Instructions.	Technical Definition and Description due.

--- Spring Break ---

Week 9

		Topic	Due
3/18	Tu	Introduction to Assignment 4: Collaborative Project.	Read Chapter 4.
3/20	Th	Writing abstracts.	In-class activities.

Week 10

		Topic	Due
3/25	Tu	Reviewing and Evaluating.	Read Chapter 13 up to p. 357.
3/27	Th	Writing Correspondence.	Read Chapter 14 (pages 370-76 and 387-92).

Week 11

		Topic	Due
4/1	Tu	Writing Coherent Documents.	Read Chapter 9.
4/3	Th	Peer Reviewing Abstracts.	Draft of 3 abstracts each. E-mail Reflection due Sunday , 4/7 by 8 PM.

Week 12

		Topic	Due
4/8	Tu	Workshop.	Draft of All Materials for the Collaborative Project.
4/10	Th	Final Day of Collaborative Writing.	Collaborative Project due Sunday, 4/14 by 8 PM.

Week 13

		Topic	Due
4/15	Tu	*Website Training.	In-class Activities.
4/17	Th	Introduction to Assignment 6: E-Portfolio.	Finish Chapter 11.

Week 14

		Topic	Due
4/22	Tu	Writing ethically.	Read Chapter 2.
4/24	Th	Writing day.	Revision Assignment due.

Week 15

		Topic	Due
4/29	Tu	Peer Review.	Draft of completed E-Portfolio (including Reflective Memo).
5/1	Th	Course wrap-up.	In-class activities.

---E-Portfolio due Sunday, 5/4 by 5 PM---