

COM 221: Technical Report Writing

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University
Department of Humanities &
Communication
COM 221 | Section 03 | Fall 2021
Building P76 Rm. 106 | T/TH: 12:00--1:15
PM

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University Course Description

This course introduces students to the preparation of formal and informal technical reports, abstracts, proposals, instructions, professional correspondence and other forms of technical communication. Major emphasis is placed on the long technical report and the acquisition of advanced writing skills.

To enroll in COM 221, students must have previously earned a C or higher in COM 122 or the equivalent.

Course Overview

COM 221 equips students to become skilled technical communicators in the professional workplace. Students learn genre conventions to compose and design professional written and digital “texts” in the form of reports, memos, portfolios, proposals, and reflections. Across all assignment sequences, students will engage all stages of the writing process—inventing, prewriting, drafting, revising, editing—to compose original technical documents that are responsive to instructor feedback and peer review feedback. Students are also invited to hone their oral communication skills by delivering formal classroom presentations that are attuned to audience expectations. Additionally, students will be introduced to various technological tools to compose and design technical documents for diverse audiences and rhetorical purposes. The classroom lectures, discussions, and assignments are informed by current theoretical conversations in writing studies that engage the role of the professional communicator in ethical and professional contexts.

Learning Outcomes

At the conclusion of COM 221, students will achieve the following learning objectives:

- Explain the importance of audience analysis in technical communication and apply it in practical contexts.
- Apply the particular conventions of definitions, descriptions, instructions, processes, and other types of professional communications, including electronic correspondence, to all technical documents.
- Recognize and discuss ethical implications of decisions in technical communications.
- Correctly compose and use headings, legends, abstracts, graphs and tables.
- Communicate in writing with minimal errors in grammar, usage, mechanics, and sentence structure.
- Prepare a formal technical proposal in an individual or collaborative team structure.
- Prepare a formal presentation developed from the technical proposal or report in an individual or collaborative team structure, using visual aids.

- Employ appropriate documentation in a lengthy, thoroughly researched, summative project or evaluative technical report.

GOALS

This is a required course in every degree program. It is designed to help students learn to think critically, research ethically, and write clearly and effectively to achieve a variety of purposes.

CONFERENCES

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, to resolve differences about grades, or to suggest ways to improve the course.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

To fully participate in this class, students will be required to have access to the following:

- *Technical Communication: 13th Edition* by Markel and Selber. (ISBN: 9781319245085.) Available via Amazon or the Campus Bookstore. Both print and ebook editions are acceptable.
- Canvas Login to access course readings and documents
- ERAU student email

ASSIGNMENTS

Instructions for each assignment will be explained in a detailed handout. Below are general descriptions.

Assignment 1: Basic Technical Communication 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 evaluate the usability of a piece of technical communication—that is, you will analyze whether the document effectively communicates the necessary information to its audience and where it fails to do so. In this way, the assignment will introduce you to basic elements of technical communication.

Assignment 2: 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 in your field. You will also discuss your writing and communication decisions in a reflective memo.

Assignment 3: 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. For example, an engineering firm might write a proposal to bid on a contract to develop a helicopter for the Defense Department; one section of the proposal would be a detailed description of the product the company proposes to develop. 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.

Assignment 4: 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 oftentimes serve as instruction sets. Customers read instructions for using a product. You will develop a set of instructions advising users to perform a specific task.

Assignment 5: Researched Recommendation Report

For our final project, your team will prepare a researched-based recommendation report proposing specific solutions to a campus services website.

GRADING

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:

GRADED WORK	PERCENTAGE
Assignment 1: Basic Tech. Comm. Analysis	10%
Assignment 2: Job Application Package	20%
Assignment 3: Technical Definition and Description	20%
Assignment 4: Instruction Set	10%
Assignment 5: Researched Recommendation Report	30%
Reading Quizzes	10%

The lowest passing grade in COM 122 is a C. I grade on a 10-point scale (A 90-100; B 80-89; C 70-79; D 60-69; F 0-59). I am not obligated to round up grades. This means students who earn a 89.99% in the course will earn a B. In accordance with FERPA regulations, I am not allowed to discuss your grades via email or in public settings.

Similarly, I cannot discuss final grades via email once the semester concludes. These policies are in place to protect your privacy. If you have questions about your grade, please reach out to me to set up an in-person meeting in my office to discuss my evaluation of your performance in the class.

FINAL EXAM

Students will submit their researched recommendation report on Canvas as the final exam for the class. There will not be an in-person final exam. Final drafts are due by the end of our scheduled final exam period at 12:15 PM on Monday, December 13th.

COURSE POLICIES

Punctual submissions in the required format are expected for all assignments.

- Please come to class prepared to discuss the required reading for the day. Minor assignments (i.e. journals and individual portfolio components) will be due by the start of class that day. Major assignments will be due by 11:59 PM on the designated date.
- All work completed outside of class should be in APA format, typed and double spaced using 12-point typeface (e.g., Garamond or Times New Roman) with 1” margins all around. Students must include a title page and page header/running head, as well as appropriate page numbers. Students will learn to follow the APA guidelines to appropriately cite and reference.
- If you notify me at least 48 hours in advance of the final deadline that you need an extension, I will consider it. Things happen; however, communicating with me is key. You must let me know in advance in writing in order for me to consider offering an extension. The extension is only applicable for Major Assignments 1, 2, and 3.

- Your assignments must be uploaded to Canvas (unless otherwise stated); students must ensure that your paper is posted by the time of the required due date.

Contacting Me

I will primarily communicate with students individually via ERAU email. Some announcements and updates will also be posted on Canvas. Please check our classroom spaces and your email regularly so you don't miss any important updates or adjustments to our schedule. Please post any questions about the class or assignments in the appropriate forum in Canvas.

I will answer messages and emails during regular business hours (roughly 8am–5pm local time).

Keep these hours in mind when sending messages that may require a quick response.

I expect you to use a professional approach when communicating with your peers and with me. If you do not know what this means, please ask.

File Naming Conventions

When uploading and submitting any assignment, draft, memo, or other project, pay close attention to the name and format of the file. To make it easier for me to keep things organized, name all of your projects in this format:

FirstnameLastname_Com221_Assignment#_ProjectTitleorInformativeDescription.pdf

If your submissions arrive in a format other than the one specified, or without a file name that conforms to the pattern above, I may decline to accept your submission or count it automatically late.

Attendance

In this course, attendance is considered a valuable mechanism for pushing forward class discussion. Please keep in mind that when you do miss class, you miss the chance to participate in class activities.

- Missing **three** classes will be cause for a 10% reduction of the final course grade.
- Missing **four** classes will be cause for a 20% reduction of the final course grade.
- Missing **five or more** classes will result in failing the course entirely.

You will sign up for a brief individual conference during the proposal stage for unit 1 (to be held in person or over Microsoft teams). Missing an individual conference will be counted as **two absences**.

Technology Use

Since the course meets in a computer lab, students are expected to use technology for class purposes.

Accessibility Accommodations

ERAU is committed to access for all students. It is University policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities who qualify for services. Students with a documented (dis)ability should meet with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss possible accommodations through the Disability Support Services (DSS) office. However, if a student receives documentation of a (dis)ability later in the semester, I would still like to meet to discuss accommodations. Please feel free to speak with me privately, as I am happy to speak with you about

making arrangements that will help you get the most out of this class. If you would like to discuss and/or request accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services. DSS is located on the first floor of Hazy Library, at the end of the hall. You may stop by, call 928.777.6750, or email the director at marcee.keller@erau.edu.

Classroom Civility

Students at ERAU are expected to exhibit professional and ethical behavior in the classroom.

Respect for other students and instructors is required to contribute to a productive learning experience both in and out of the classroom. Students who do not cultivate a professional ethos in the classroom will receive either a warning or dismissal if the behavior is not corrected.

Please be respectful of the different experiences, beliefs, and values expressed by everyone in this course. This class should be a safe space where everyone feels comfortable sharing perspectives, asking questions, and taking productive risks. Behaviors that threaten, harass, or discriminate against anyone will be addressed with disciplinary action, which may include being referred to the Office of the Dean of Students. Unacceptable, inappropriate behaviors include:

- making rude comments regarding students, me as the instructor, or the course material
- inhibiting the participation of other students or posting distracting remarks
- physically or verbally disrupting class spaces or activities
- abusing other students' contact information
- refusing to engage in scheduled learning activities.

Be a generous and kind colleague. Engage with each other respectfully at all times. This doesn't mean we have to always agree, but we should strive to interact with kindness and understanding. If you at any time feel uncomfortable in our class spaces or are upset with any aspect of our course, please let me know privately in a mature, respectful way.

Academic Integrity

Embry-Riddle is committed to maintaining and upholding intellectual integrity. All students, faculty, and staff have obligations to prevent violations of academic integrity and take corrective action when they occur. The adjudication process will include the sanction imposed on students who commit the following academic violations, which may include a failing grade on the assignment, a failing grade for the course, suspension, or dismissal from the University.

1. Plagiarism: Presenting as one's own ideas, words, or products of another. Plagiarism includes use of any source to complete academic assignments without proper acknowledgment of the source.
2. Cheating: A broad term that includes the following:
 - a. Giving or receiving help from unauthorized persons or materials during examinations.
 - b. The unauthorized communication of examination questions prior to, during, or following administration of the examination.
 - c. Collaboration on examinations or assignments expected to be individual work.
 - d. Fraud and deceit, which include knowingly furnishing false or misleading information or failing to furnish appropriate information when requested, such as when applying for admission to the University.

My assumption will always be that your writing and other creative work is original and generated purposefully for this course during the Fall semester of 2021. There are many types of plagiarism—some more obvious than others, but there are subtle forms you may not be aware of. A good rule of

thumb to live by: if you're not sure whether you're violating these rules, talk to me about it before turning in the work in question. We are here to learn, after all.

Privacy of Student Records

The University respects the rights and privacy of students in accordance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The University may disclose certain items of directory information without the consent of the student, unless the student submits a written non-disclosure request. Students are required to file requests for non-disclosure with the Office of the Registrar. Non-disclosure forms remain in place permanently, unless the office is notified otherwise.

Nondiscrimination Statement/Title IX

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University continually strives to recognize, respect, and celebrate the differences and cultural identities among individuals as we recruit, support, and embrace our diverse community. We work to provide a safe environment where self-expression is welcome. We strive to create a campus climate that is free of discrimination so that networks, partnerships, and cultural competency can be fostered through leadership, integrity, and respect.

In so doing, Embry-Riddle does not permit discrimination or harassment in its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability, veteran status, predisposing genetic characteristic, age, religion, pregnancy status, or any other characteristic protected by University policy or state, local or federal law.

This policy covers nondiscrimination in employment and in access to educational opportunities. Therefore, any member of the campus community, guest or visitor who acts to deny, deprive, or limit the educational, employment, and/or social access, benefits, and/or opportunities of any member of the campus community on the basis of their actual or perceived membership in the protected classes listed above is in violation of the University policy on nondiscrimination. When brought to the attention of the University, any such discrimination will be appropriately remedied by the University.

If you have questions or need guidance regarding your Title IX rights, please contact the Title IX Coordinator at 928-777-3747.

Other Student Responsibilities

All Embry-Riddle students are responsible for knowing all academic regulations and procedures required for continued attendance at the University. These regulations and procedures are presented in University publications such as the catalog, the Student Handbook, the Flight Operations Manual, and the Academic Policies and Procedures Manual. These documents are available for reference either online or at the Office of the Registrar, student government offices, and academic departments throughout the University. A student who requires clarification of any policy or regulation should seek help from their academic advisor, program/department chair, or the Office of the Registrar. University regulations will not be waived because a student pleads ignorance of established policies and procedures. The University reserves the right to change curricula and academic regulations and procedures without notice or obligation.

COVID-19 Policies

Barring unforeseen circumstances, all classes will be held in-person unless otherwise noted on the syllabus. In order to keep us all safe and healthy together, I encourage you to take advantage of

ERAU's vaccination clinics and wear a face covering while in class. Per current university policy, vaccinated and masked students will not have to quarantine if exposed to COVID. In order to support community contact tracing, I am required to keep a seating chart for our class this fall. Finally, while I'm available to meet in person upon request, office hours and individual assignment conferences will primarily be held over Microsoft Teams (see the scheduling links in Canvas).

Syllabus Change Policy

Except for changes that substantially affect implementation of the evaluation (grading) statement, this syllabus is a guide for the course and is subject to change with advance notice.

CAMPUS RESOURCES

Please feel free to drop by during my office hours, as this can be a productive opportunity to discuss questions, concerns, or to simply work through potential ideas for a project. If you are not available to meet during my scheduled office hours, I am happy to meet with you if you make other arrangements with me ahead of time. If you can't drop by, I make it a point to check my email regularly during the weekdays from 9:00 AM – 5:00 PM, so don't hesitate to send me a message if you have questions or concerns about the class. Of course, please remember that FERPA forbids the discussion of student grades over email.

Hazy Library and Learning Center

The Hazy Library and Learning Center is actively involved in promoting your academic success and enriching your learning experience and research. Ask a Librarian about any of our many services we offer for students, staff, and faculty, including:

- Course Reserves: course support materials
- Information Resources: Research and Course Guides (LibGuides), and Databases
- Materials: Borrowing, My Library Account, Interlibrary Loan (ILL), and Purchase Requests
- Research Assistance: ASK Desk, Faculty Research Support, and online reference assistance
- Space: Computers, Study areas, and Online Room Reservation
- Technology: Computers and other technology, Computer Commons, and Technology Lending Services

University Tutoring

The Tutoring Program at the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Prescott campus provides free tutoring for all students. Our experienced peer tutors have already taken the courses for which they tutor, provide specific and knowledgeable guidance, suggest effective study strategies, and encourage independence in learning. For more information, email prtutor@erau.edu.

Counseling Services

The mission of Counseling Services is to enhance the emotional well-being of ERAU students. We believe that good mental health is a key part of overall health, and good health is essential to academic success! We support students' academic experience by providing brief mental health counseling and consultation services that help them identify barriers, improve coping, and achieve personal and academic goals. For more information, call 928.777.3312 or email prcounsel@erau.edu.

COURSE SCHEDULE**Key:** *TC*—*Technical Communication* (our textbook)**Mode of Delivery:** In person classroom instruction (unless otherwise noted)**Week 1**

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
8/31	T	Why write? Syllabus Overview; Class Introductions		
9/2	R	Defining Technical Communication; Introduction to Assignment 1	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 1; Jones + Williams, “The Social Justice Impact of Plain Language” (Canvas)	Introduction Letter (Prompt in Canvas) Reading Quiz 1

Week 2

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/7	T	Responding to the Rhetorical Situation	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 5	Reading Quiz 2
9/9	R	Understanding the Writing Process; Peer Review Workshop	Read “Responding, Really Responding to Student Writing” (Canvas)	Assignment 1 Draft

Week 3

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/14	T	Writing Ethically	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 2	Reading Quiz 3
9/16	R	Introduction to Assignment 2; Researching jobs and writing resumes	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 3	Assignment 1 Final Draft Sign up for individual conference (Canvas)

Week 4

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
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9/21	T	Resumes and Professional Genres	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 15	Reading Quiz 4
9/23	R	Class canceled for individual conferences (sign up on Canvas).		Bring job ads for approval

Week 5

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/28	T	Peer Review Workshop; Communicating Persuasively	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 8	Drafts of both resumes Reading Quiz 5
9/30	R	Writing Cover Letters	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 7	

Week 6

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/5	T	Peer Review Workshop; Writing Effective Sentences	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 10	Drafts of both cover letters Reading Quiz 6
10/7	R	Introduction to Assignment 3; Writing Definitions and Descriptions	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 20 (through page 551)	Assignment 2 Final Draft

Week 7

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
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10/12	T	Emphasizing Important Info	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 9	Reading Quiz 7
10/14	R	Fall Break! No Class Today.		

Week 8

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/19	T	Audience analysis, inclusion, and gatekeeping; Peer Review Workshop	Read Johnson, "A Microcosm of	Assignment 3 Rough Draft
10/21	R	Introduction to Assignment 4; The ethical implications of instructional documents	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 20 (page 551 to end) Listen <i>Tech Comm</i> : "Making TC more inclusive"	Reading Quiz 8

Week 9

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/26	T	Writing Instructions; Designing Documents	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 11 (through page 280)	Assignment 3 Final Draft
10/28	R	Designing and using graphics	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 12	Reading Quiz 9

Week 10

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
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11/2	T	Peer Review Workshop	Read Quesenbery, "Using the 5Es to understand users" (Canvas)	Assignment 4 Draft
11/4	R	Usability Evaluations	Duhigg, "What Google Learned.." (Canvas)	

Week 11

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/9	T	Introduction to Assignment 5; Team project horror stories & what makes a good team member?	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 11 (page 281 to end)	Assignment 4 Final Draft
11/11	R	Veteran's Day. No Class.		

Week 12

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/16	T	Assignment 5 brainstorming & tools for effective project management	Read <i>TC</i> Chapter 13	Reading Quiz 10
11/18	R	Technical Reports	Listen <i>Tech Comm</i> : "Kirk St. Amant on International User Experience" (Canvas)	

Week 13

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/23	T	Example proposals; Evaluating Websites	Norman, "Affordances and Design" (Canvas)	

11/25	R	Thanksgiving Break. No Class.		
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Week 14

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/30	T	Accessibility in Web Design; Peer Review Workshop	Usability.gov “Accessibility Basics,” “Interaction Design Basics,” and “User Experience Basics”	Assignment 5 Draft
12/2	R	Team workshop time		

Week 15

Date	Day	Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
12/7	T	Recommendation Report Presentations		Assignment 5 Presentations
12/9	R	Recommendation Report Presentations; Course Wrap-Up		Assignment 5 Presentations

Finals Week

Date	Day		Writing Due
12/13	T	<i>There are no in-person class meetings during Finals Week. Instead, your final draft of your recommendation report is due on Canvas by the end of our exam period.</i>	Final Draft of Assignment 5 due by 12:15 PM on Monday, December 13 th