

English 202 C: Technical Writing

Spring 2020

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 write 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 and document design.
- Observe appropriate generic conventions and formats for technical documents.
- Design and use tables, graphs, and technical illustrations.
- 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 and Stuart A. Selber. Bedford/St. Martin's, 2018. 12th edition. E-book.

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.

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. Two or three absences will probably not affect your performance too much (unless you miss a rough draft session—a major problem); but try to limit it to that. Indeed, why not attend every meeting? Excused absences are appropriate, of course, but beyond that, let me repeat English department policy: A student whose absences are excessive “may run the risk of receiving a lower grade or a failing grade,” whether some of those absences are considered “excused” or not. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get assignments, complete any work, and submit any due assignments.

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 rough drafts. In addition, 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.

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. All writing for the course should be printed clearly, including draft work, unless otherwise noted.

Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading. At work, even a single error in spelling, grammar, or proofreading can jeopardize the effectiveness of some communications. 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 back-up your electronic files. And 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. You should try to apply the comments to improve not only the particular assignment you are working on at the time but also your strategies for writing in general.

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 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:

- Basic Rhetorical Analysis, 15%
- Job Application Package, 15%
- Technical Definition and Description, 15%
- Instruction Set, 15%
- E-Portfolio, 20%
- Reading Quizzes, 10%
- Class Participation, 10%

Instructions for each assignment will be explained in a detailed handout. 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 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.

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.

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.

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.

E-Portfolio

Electronic portfolios are an increasingly common vehicle for developing a professional online identity. 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 the Penn State WordPress environment. The portfolio will include work from this course and 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.

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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 |
|------|---|---|----------------------|
| 1/13 | M | Course introduction. | In-class activities. |
| 1/15 | W | Defining technical communication. | Read Chapter 1. |
| 1/17 | F | Assignment #1: Basic Rhetorical Analysis. | In-class activities. |

Week 2

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1/20 | M | MLK Day. No Class. | |
| 1/22 | W | The rhetorical situation. | Read Chapter 5. |
| 1/24 | F | Looking at drafts. | Draft of Basic Rhetorical Analysis. |

Week 3

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1/27 | M | The rhetorical situation. | In-class activities. |
| 1/29 | W | Understanding the writing process. | Read Chapter 3. |
| 1/31 | F | Understanding the writing process. | Basic Rhetorical Analysis due. |

Week 4

| | | Topic | Due |
|-----|---|---|-----------------------------|
| 2/3 | M | Assignment #2: Job Application Package. | In-class activities. |
| 2/5 | W | Researching jobs. | Read Chapter 15. |
| 2/7 | F | Writing resumes. | Bring job ads for approval. |

Week 5

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| 2/10 | M | Looking at drafts. | Drafts of both resumes. |
| 2/12 | W | Communicating persuasively. | Read Chapter 8. |
| 2/14 | F | Writing cover letters. | Read Chapter 7. |

Week 6

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 2/17 | M | Looking at drafts. | Drafts of both cover letters. |
| 2/19 | W | Writing effective sentences. | Read chapter 10. |
| 2/21 | F | Looking at drafts. | Draft of cover memo. |

Week 7

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|--|-------------------------------------|
| 2/24 | M | Assignment #3: Technical Definition/Description. | Job Application Package due. |
| 2/26 | W | Writing definitions and descriptions. | Read Chapter 20 (through page 551). |
| 2/28 | F | Writing definitions and descriptions. | In-class activities. |

Week 8

| | | Topic | Due |
|-----|---|-----------------------------|--|
| 3/2 | M | Emphasizing Important Info. | Read Chapter 9. |
| 3/4 | W | Emphasizing Important Info. | In-class activities. |
| 3/6 | F | Looking at drafts. | Draft of Technical Definition/Description. |

Week 9

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|------------------------|------------|
| 3/9 | M | Spring Break. No Class | |
| 3/11 | W | Spring Break. No Class | |
| 3/13 | F | Spring Break. No Class | |

Week 10

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|---------------------------------|--|
| 3/16 | M | Catch-up Day | |
| 3/18 | W | Assignment #4: Instruction Set. | Read Chapter 20 (page 551 to end). |
| 3/20 | F | Writing instructions. | Technical Definition/Description due. |

Week 11

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|----------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 3/23 | M | Designing documents. | Read Chapter 11 (through page 280). |
| 3/25 | W | Designing documents. | In-class activities. |

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|------|---|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 3/27 | F | Designing and using graphics. | Read Chapter 12. |
|------|---|-------------------------------|------------------|

Week 12

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|------------------------|---------------------------|
| 3/30 | M | Looking at drafts. | Draft of Instruction Set. |
| 4/1 | W | Usability evaluations. | In-class activities. |
| 4/3 | F | Usability evaluations. | In-class activities. |

Week 13

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 4/6 | M | Assignment #5: E-Portfolio. | Instruction Set due. |
| 4/8 | W | Using Sites at Penn State. | Read Chapter 11 (page 281 to end). |
| 4/10 | F | Using Sites at Penn State. | In-class activities. |

Week 14

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 4/13 | M | Designing and Evaluating Web sites. | Read Chapter 13. |
| 4/15 | W | Designing and Evaluating Web sites. | In-class activities. |
| 4/17 | F | Designing and Evaluating Web sites. | In-class activities. |

Week 15

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|---------------------------|-----------------------|
| 4/20 | M | Looking at drafts. | Draft of E-Portfolio. |
| 4/22 | W | Writing ethically. | Read Chapter 2. |
| 4/24 | F | Writing reflective memos. | In-class activities. |

Week 16

| | | Topic | Due |
|------|---|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 4/27 | M | Looking at drafts. | Draft of reflective memo. |
| 4/29 | W | Final editing. | In-class activities. |
| 5/1 | F | Course wrap-up. | E-Portfolio due. |