Course Syllabus—Fall 2013

Dorian Harvey, Instructor

English Dept.

Minnesota State University Moorhead

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# Course Description

This 4-credit course focuses on expository writing dealing with subjects in student's major and planned for a specialized audience. Students practice 1) analyzing the needs of general and specialized audiences, 2) using standard technical report formats, and 3) researching topics related to their majors. In researching and creating these documents, students focus on writing persuasively for specific audiences and contexts.

*Note: Upper-level writing courses assume that students are familiar with issues and topics in their major fields or areas of interest. Students who are new to their majors may need to contact instructors in their programs to discuss topic ideas for this course.*

This course is delivered completely online using D2L. Students who are new to D2L can find tutorials and other guidance at <http://web.mnstate.edu/instrtech/D2LNew/Students/index.html>

Instructor Information

Instructor: Dorian Harvey, English Department

Classroom: Online, Desire2Learn course management system

Email: [harvey@mnstate.edu](mailto:harvey@mnstate.edu)

Phone: Office: 651-490-7715 or 1-800-862-5322

Engl. Dept.: 218-477-2905

Video: [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com), username dorian-harvey

Availability: • I’ll reply to e-mail messages within 24 hours, between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m., Monday through Friday.

• I’m usually in my office each weekday, except for occasional travel. I’m not available for face-to-face meetings because I live just north of the Twin Cities, but I’m happy to meet with you over Skype.

Required Reading

* Gurak, L., Lannon, J. (2012). *Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace, 10th ed*. Boston, MA: Longman. ISBN 978-0-205-24552-9. Available at book store.
* D2L file: *Course Handbook* (D2L > Content)
* An authoritative dictionary:
* Merriam-Webster Dictionary, in print or online at [www.merriam-webster.com](http://www.merriam-webster.com))
* American Heritage Dictionary, in print or online at <http://ahdictionary.com/>

Learning Outcomes

• Display professionalism in your written communications.

• Use a concise, direct, fact-based, and grammatically correct technical writing style.

• Use audience analysis to create useful and effective technical documents.

• Locate and evaluate information and standards used by professionals in your major field.

• Use information from outside sources professionally:

* Summarize, paraphrase, and quote the information correctly, and work it into your own writing effectively.
* Use statistical and graphical information effectively and correctly.
* Cite your sources correctly.

• Present technical information in conventional and customary formats as needed.

• Collaborate effectively in groups, and critique the work of others judiciously.

Instructional Strategies

This class makes use of the following components to help students achieve the above-listed objectives:

• Highly regarded, comprehensive textbook in its seventh edition

• Additional instructor materials based on 20-plus years as a professional technical writer

• Four lengthy written projects that reproduce the types of technical writing graduates will perform in the workplace

• Additional shorter assignments that cover other elements of technical writing in the workplace

• Individual Skype conferences once or twice a semester for instructor-to-student interaction

• Discussion Board assignments that promote student-to-student interaction

The final grade is weighted toward demonstrated writing ability:

• Approximately two-thirds of earned points come from the larger assignments that receive letter grades (Projects 1, 2, 3, and 4). These high-point-value projects demonstrate students’ understanding of the following:

* Textbook content
* Instructor’s materials on D2L
* Assignment instructions
* Instructor’s individual guidance (e.g., Skype conferences, e-mails, phone conversations as needed)

• Approximately one-third of earned points come from smaller assignments:

* Discussion Board posts—Allow students to share their understanding of aspects of writing that are unique to their fields of study: the analysis of likely workplace audiences, and an exploration of their disciplines’ codes of ethics.
* Chapter quizzes—Ensure that students stay up-to-date with assigned reading so that they can apply it to the assignments.

Assignments

• Chapter quizzes

• Discussion assignments

• Writing assignments

* Progress Report
* Inspection Report
* Technical Procedure
* Feasibility Report

# Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who believe they may need an accommodation in this class are encouraged to contact Greg Toutges, Director of Disability Services at [477-2131](callto:+1477-2131) (Voice) or [1-800-627-3529](callto:+11-800-627-3529) (MRS/TTY), CMU 114 as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion.

For more information, visit <http://www.mnstate.edu/disability/>.

*A web-based course requires organizational skills that may be difficult for students who have learning disabilities. If you have not yet notified Disability Services, please do so right away so that we can work together to ensure your success in this course.*

# Late Work Policy

Overview

Assignments are due by midnight (11:60 p.m.) on the day of the week stated on the Semester Schedule.

Note that “I had to work a lot this week,” “I didn’t have computer access,” and similar situations are *not* valid reasons for being late with an assignment. Illness requires a physician’s note and phone number.

Traveling and being on vacation are not valid reasons for late work, either. Assignments are due before your trip or during the time you are on the trip.

NOTE: In order to receive credit for any course, you must meet all of the learning objectives. This means that you need to turn in every assignment, even if it’s late.

Rationale

* Over the semesters, I've seen many students fall victim to the temptation to delay work for this class because it's online. Too often, they continue to fall further behind until they finally have to drop the class because they can no longer keep up at all.
* This course prepares you for writing in your profession after you graduate. Just as deadlines must be observed in the workplace or others’ work will suffer, so must you *plan your time so you can complete your assignments no later than the due dates* described in the Semester Schedule.
* This course involves staged assignments with instructor feedback in some cases. Such feedback will be of little value to a student when the related assignment has not been turned in.

# Attendance Policy

In compliance with MSUM’s Student Absence Policy (<http://web.mnstate.edu/sthandbook/policiesprocedures/studentabsence.cfm>), “Students are expected to attend all class meetings [in our case, communicate at the required intervals, e.g., twice a week, with instructor and/or classmates] unless they are ill or officially excused as the result of participation in a university function. However, faculty members may or may not take roll in their classes [in our case, note your involvement], and they may or may not lower the marks of students for the sole reason of unexcused absences.”

For an online course, “attending class meetings” translates into your being present through participation in the Discussion Board forums, any chat room sessions, and assignment due dates.

# Other Guidelines

Software compatibility

*Microsoft® Word*

Most of the files on D2L are created in Microsoft Word. If you’re experiencing compatibility problems with an older version of Microsoft Word, you can obtain a patch from Microsoft (free in most cases) that will help your older version open the files:

<http://www.microsoft.com/downloads/details.aspx?FamilyID=941b3470-3ae9-4aee-8f43-c6bb74cd1466&displaylang=en>

I must be able to open your assignment files with Microsoft Word, because I use Word’s comment feature to insert comments, suggestions, and corrections into your assignments.

If you use another program to create your assignment files, be sure to save your files in a Word-compatible format, and test that the file can be opened in Word before you turn it in to me. Computer lab staff on campus, at public libraries, or at commercial centers (e.g., FedEx-Kinko’s) can help you accomplish this step.

*Adobe Reader*

Student samples are Adobe® Acrobat files, and require Adobe Reader to open and view. Most computers come with this software pre-installed, but if you experience a compatibility problem, download a free update:

<http://get.adobe.com/reader/>

Technology back-up plan

Students who enroll in a web-based course make a commitment to meet course requirements with a computer. Save your files often, back them up to a USB drive, and, early in the semester, *find an alternate computer to use if your own computer fails.*

Time commitment

This four-credit course is designed to involve a weekly commitment of four hours of class time and 12 hours outside of class, or 16 hours per week.

During the compressed, eight-week summer schedule, the time commitment doubles to eight hours of class time and 24 hours outside of class, or 32 hours per week.

# Grading

Table 1 lists the semester’s anticipated assignments and the points they earn. Table 2 describes the meanings of letter grades. Tables 3 through 5 show how individual assignments are evaluated, how the evaluations become letter grades, and how final grades are calculated.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Table 1: Assignments and associated points.** | |
| **Assignments** | **Points** |
| Open-book reading quizzes | 120 |
| D2L discussions | 45 |
| Two scheduled videoconferences with instructor and one written summary | 40 |
| Planning documents for each of the larger assignments below | 50 |
| **Larger assignments that earn letter grades** | |
| Progress Report | 100 |
| Inspection Report | 120 |
| Technical Procedure for Translation | 150 |
| Researched Feasibility Report | 150 |
| Total points: | 775 |

The assignments that earn letter grades require more planning than the smaller assignments, and involve two stages:

• Planning Document: You’ll fill out and turn in a planning document (e.g., an Objectives Worksheet) at least a week before your final, polished assignment is due. The planning document helps you explore your topic, audience, and general approach well ahead of project’s actual due date.

• Final draft of assignment for grading: Your final draft should show a clear grasp of the following:

* Readings assigned to-date
* “Achieving a Technical Writing Style” section of the *Course Handbook*
* Assignment instructions
* Standard written English (correct word choice and spelling, and correct sentence mechanics as described in “Style and Mechanics Reviews” area of the *Course Handbook)*

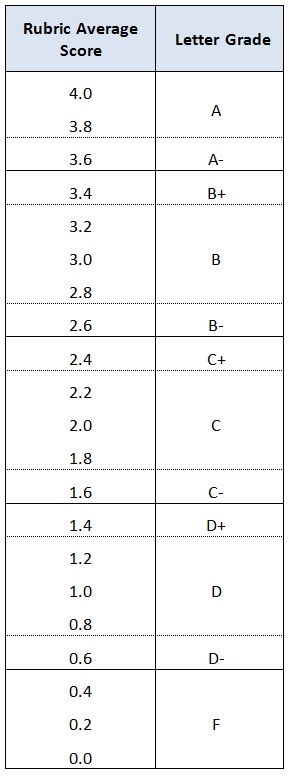
**Table 2. Meanings of letter grades.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Letter** | **Meaning** |
| A | Outstanding—Shows mastery of language and necessary writing style; demonstrates creative problem solving to meet the assignment’s goals. Exceeds the assignment’s requirements in most areas. |
| B | Good—Shows strong control of language and necessary writing style; demonstrates good problem solving to meet the assignment’s goals. Exceeds the assignment’s requirements in several areas. |
| C | Average, or Developing—Shows developing use of language and necessary writing style. Meets the assignment’s requirements. |
| D | Poor, or Minimal—Shows weak control of language and difficulty with necessary writing style. Falls short of the assignment’s requirements in several areas. |
| F | No credit for assignment—Shows little control of language and writing style, or falls short of the assignment’s requirements in most areas, or a combination of the two. |

**Table 3: Sample assignment rubric.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Grading Criteria** | **Ratings** | | | | |
| Absent (0) | Minimal  (1) | Develop-ing  (2) | Good  (3) | Outstanding  (4) |
| Introductory components identify the subject as expected; document includes a purpose statement. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Overall structure and organization are appropriate for the genre and audience. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Uses effective professional and/or technical writing style. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Uses outside sources effectively and cites them correctly. |  |  |  |  |  |
| Uses the conventions of written English (grammar, mechanics, spelling). See Style and Mechanics Reviews on course website. |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Rubric calculation:** |  |  |  |  |  |
| Rubric average score, used in Table 4. | | | | Total: \_\_  ÷5 criteria =  \_\_\_ |

**Table 4: Conversion of rubric average score to assignment letter grade.**



**Table 5: Final grade calculation.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Percentage of Total Points** | **Final Grade** |
| 93% to 100%  90% to 92.9% | A  A- |
| 87% to 89.9%  83% to 86.9%  80% to 82.9% | B+  B  B- |
| 77% to 79.9%  73% to 76.9%  70% to 72.9% | C+  C  C- |
| 67% to 69.9%  63% to 66.9%  60% to 62.9% | D+  D  D- |
| <60 | F |

# Semester Schedule

The readings and assignments for this class are appropriate for a junior-level writing course. If you need to review general elements of writing, read through our textbook’s Appendix B: A Brief Handbook.

Be sure to observe the due dates shown in the far-right column of the table below. Assignments are due by midnight (11:59 p.m.) on the day of the week stated.

| **Week No. (Monday’s date)** | **Reading Due** | **Assignments Due** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1  (Week of Aug. 26) | □ *Course Handbook* file at D2L > Materials > Content. Note especially . . .  □ “Getting Started” section of the above  □ “Prepare for our videoconference” section of the above  □ Ch. 1, Introduction to Technical Communication  □ “Progress Report Assignment” file at D2L > Content > Assignments | *By Sunday, 9/1:*  □ Discussion Board DB-1: Introduce Yourself (“Discussion” tab)  □ Ch. 1 Review/Quiz (D2L “Quizzes” tab). We don’t review chapters in the sense of chapter overviews or summaries. Instead, we use D2L's Quiz function to review what you’ve learned.  □ Sign up for our Week 3 videoconference to discuss the Progress Report assignment at <http://doodle.com/5e6qvn6wfvhyaxvq>. If this link doesn’t open, copy it into your browser.  NOTES:   * Reserve a time when you’ll be seated and able to take notes. You’ll be writing a two-page summary of what you learn about technical writing during this conference. * Please don’t reschedule your time after you’ve reserved it. * Record your time on your calendar so you don’t have to ask me to look it up for you. |
| 2  (Week of Tues., 9/3) | □ Ch. 4, Providing Audiences with Useful Information | *By Thursday, 9/5:*  □ Ch. 4 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 9/8:*  □ Progress Report Communication Objectives worksheet (upload to folder in Dropbox). *Name your file with your last name as the first word in the filename.*  □ Make sure that you've added me as a Skype contact for next week’s videoconference. You won’t be able to connect with me on Skype if I’m not already a contact. |
| 3  (Week of 9/9) | □ Ch. 7, Writing with a Readable Style  □ *Course Handbook* > “Achieving a Technical Writing Style” section | *According to reserved time:*  □ Videoconference to discuss your Progress Report Objectives worksheet. You’ll initiate our conference by selecting me from among your contacts and clicking “Video call.”  *By Sunday, 9/15:*  □ Ch. 7 Review/Quiz  □ Two-page (double-spaced) report on what you learned about technical writing during our videoconference. |
| 4  (Week of 9/16) | □ Ch. 6, Structuring Information for Your Readers | *By Wednesday, 6/18:*  □ Ch. 6 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 9/22:*  □ Progress Report (upload to folder in Dropbox) |
| 5  (Week of 9/23) | □ Ch. 9, Designing User-Friendly Documents | *By Wednesday, 9/25:*  □ DB-2: Tell Us About Your Future Audience (related to Ch. 4)  *By Sunday, 9/29:*  □ Ch. 9 Review/Quiz |
| 6  (Week of 9/30) | □ Ch. 5, Recognizing Ethical Issues in Technical Communication  □ “Inspection Report Assignment” file at D2L > Content > Assignments | *By Wednesday, 10/23:*  □ Ch. 5 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 10/27:*  □ DB-3: Ethics in Your Field (related to Ch. 5) |
| 7  (Week of 10/7) | □ Ch. 2, Teamwork and Global Issues in Technical Communication | *By Sunday, 11/3:*  □ Inspection Report Communication Objectives worksheet |
| 8  (Week of 10/14) | □ “Technical Procedure for Translation Assignment” file at D2L > Content > Assignments | *By Wednesday, 10/16:*  □ Sign up for our Week 10 videoconference to discuss the Technical Procedure for Translation assignment at <http://doodle.com/dierw7y47qts248d>. See Week 1’s NOTES.  *By Sunday, 11/10:*  □ Inspection Report |
| 9  (Week of 10/21) | □ Ch. 8, Using Audience-Centered Visuals  □ Ch. 14, Instructions and Procedures | *By Wednesday, 10/2:*  □ Ch. 8 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 10/6:*  □ Technical Procedure for Translation Communication Objectives worksheet |
| 10  (Week of 10/28) | □ Ch. 16, Informal Reports | *According to reserved time:*  □ Videoconference to discuss your Technical Procedure for Translation Communication Objectives worksheet. You’ll initiate our conference by selecting me from among your contacts and clicking “Video call.”  *By Wednesday, 10/9:*  □ Ch. 14 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 10/13:*  □ Ch. 16 Review/Quiz |
| 11  (Week of 11/4) | □ Ch. 11, Memos and Letters | *By Wednesday, 10/16:*  □ Ch. 11 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 10/20:*  □ Technical Procedure for Translation  □ Translation Brief |
| 12  (Week of 11/11) | □ Ch. 3, The Research Process in Technical Communication  □ “Researched Feasibility Report Assignment” file at D2L > Content > Assignments | *By Sunday, 11/17:*  □ Ch. 3 Review/Quiz |
| 13  (Week of 11/18) | □ Ch. 17, Formal Reports  □ MSUM Library’s online resources (<http://www.mnstate.edu/library/>). | *By Wednesday, 11/20:*  □ Ch. 17 Review/Quiz  *By Sunday, 11/24:*  □ Researched Feasibility Report Objectives worksheet |
| 14  (Week of 11/25-27; short week for Thanksgiving holiday | □ Ch. 19, Email and Text Messages | □ OPTIONAL videoconferences to discuss Researched Feasibility Report Objectives worksheets. |
| 15  (Week of 12/2) | □ Additional reading TBD according to students’ questions about Researched Feasibility Report. | *By Sunday, 12/8:*  □ Researched Feasibility Report  □ Fill out four-question survey on D2L. “Survey” tab is at the end of the course’s horizontal menu bar. |
| 16  (Week of 12/9) | *Finals Week* | |