WR 327: Technical Report Writing

Course Outline

Winter 2017

Portland State University

**Week 1**

**Reading:** Chapter 1: Definition of Technical Communication; Chapter 2: Profiling Audiences

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Overview of technical communication**  What is technical communication? Who creates technical communication and why is it important? What is the purpose of technical communication?  **Class Schedule:**   * Class introductions * Syllabus review * Assign chapter presentation groups (6-8 groups depending on total class size) * Discuss chapter presentations: Each group will be assigned a chapter from the book. The group will be responsible for creating a 20-minute PowerPoint presentation (20-25 slides) that covers the major points of that chapter. * PowerPoint presentation of Chapter 1 * Activity: Defining Technical Communication   **Activity details:**  Students will first write their personal definition of technical communication and will share their definitions with the class. Next, students will split off into small groups and scan Chapter 1 with the purpose to derive one definition of technical communication (2-4 sentences). Lastly, groups will share their collective definitions with the class. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Understanding your audience**  Students should read Chapter 2 prior to class. The goal of Chapter 2 is to identify ways for technical writers to relate to their audience in order to effectively influence their acceptance, with the objectives of identifying audience characteristic and the factors that impact effective communication.  **Class Schedule:**   * Open class discussion on the major takeaways of Chapter 2 (10-15 minutes) * Introduce Assignment #1: Interview & Technical Brief * In-class writing exercise/online discussion   **Week 1 Discussion (all discussions will take place on the course D2L page): compose a written response to the following and post on the D2L page.**  **Part 1:** Please introduce yourself to the class. Describe your major and any areas of special focus or study. Include any work experience and what you are interested in pursuing as a profession. Read all the other posts.  **Part 2:** In your particular field of study, list some examples of technical writing produced by professionals. Feel free to research this question online. Read other posts.  **Part 3: Post a response to the following:** Why is effective communication in the workplace so important? When writing a technical document or an email, why is it important to understand your audience? Read and respond/comment to other posts. Engage in discussions with your classmates. |

**Week 2**

**Reading:** Chapter 3: The Technical Communication Process; Chapter 4: Technical Communication Style; Essay: “Outlines Help You Write Better, Faster” (posted in the Week 2 Module)

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Developing a framework for the technical communication process**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 3 PowerPoint presentation * Presentation: Using outlines * Class discussion: The value of using outlines * Activity: Email exercise   Students will split into groups of three. Each group will be given a write up—an email from a close-working colleague to another describing the results of a project. The tone of the email will be informal. The groups will then rewrite the email as if it will be sent to a group of clients who are not intimately aware of the project. Each group will present their write-ups to the class and explain their strategy behind the rewrite. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Technical communication style and utilizing outlines**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 4 PowerPoint presentation (Group A) * Introduce Assignment #2: Technical Writing Analysis * In-class writing exercise/online discussion   **Week 2 Writing Exercise/Discussion:**  In Chapter 4, Riordan discusses sentence strategies including the effectiveness of writing in the active voice and using parallelism. Please read through these sections carefully, it will go a long way towards helping you to write clean, concise and well-structured sentences. For this week, please post a response on the Week 2 D2L Discussion forum to the below:  **First exercise:**  Locate three passive sentences (or write them yourself) that correspond or relate to your field in some way. Then, rewrite the sentences to make them active. For example:  Passive sentence: *The process schematic of the anaerobic digester was designed by the project engineer.*  Made active: *The project engineer designed the anaerobic digester process schematic.*  **Second exercise:**  Locate a sentence (or write it yourself) that uses coordinate elements that are not treated in the same way (see page 91 for more details). Then, rewrite and correct the sentence using parallel structure.  **Third exercise:**  Having read the article “Outlines Help You Write Better, Faster,” and consulted the opening pages of Chapter 3 (including Figure 3.1), propose a process that you plan to use in this course for producing technical reports.  Read and respond/comment to other posts. Engage in discussions with your classmates. |

**Week 3**

**Reading:** Chapter 5: Researching; Essay: Editing: A Critical Process

**Due on Friday of Week 3: Assignment #1**

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| **Tuesday (bring laptops to class)**  **Theme:** **Research**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 5 PowerPoint presentation (Group B) * Class activity: online research   Students will divide into groups of 3 or 4. First, we will hold a 10-15 minute class discussion on strategies that can be used to find and collect quality information/data. We will discuss this question: When you locate something online that may be useful, how can you determine if the information is sound?  Next, each group will be assigned a topic that could be the focus of technical report. Each group will conduct online research and find as many sources as possible that could be used in developing and writing the report. Groups will then present their topic and the sources they found, discussing how information from each source could be specifically used in the report. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Editing & proofreading**  **Class Schedule:**   * In-class online discussion/editing exercise   **Week 3 Writing Exercise/Discussion:**  **Part 1:** Read “Editing: A Critical Process” which is posted in the Week 3 Module.  **Part 2:** **post a response to the following:**   * With important documents that you have written in the past, what kinds of steps have you taken to edit and proofread? * What is your impression of the “Editing: A Critical Process” essay? Do you believe this process can help? Why or why not?   **Part 3:** Using Microsoft Word,students will edit a brief report (paying attention to the tools available in Word). Then, students will edit another document as a hardcopy. Afterwards, the class will discuss any differences in the two processes. |

**Week 4**

**Reading:** Chapter 6: Designing Pages; Chapter 7: Using Visual Aids

**Due on Friday of Week 4: Assignment #2**

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| **Tuesday (bring laptops to class)**  **Theme:** **Developing a Design Strategy**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 6 PowerPoint presentation (Group C) * Assign groups and introduce the group project assignment * Activity: Group strategy session   Each group will take some time to huddle together, exchange information, and collectively decide on a topic from a list. Then, the group will have some time to discuss the topic, perform some initial research and construct a strategy for writing a 350-word abstract and a 20-25 minute PowerPoint presentation covering the topic. Each group will discuss their strategy to the class including the major points they plan on investigating. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Developing a Design Strategy (cont.)**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 7 PowerPoint presentation (Group D) * In-class writing exercise/online discussion   **Week 4 Discussion/Writing Exercise:**  **Part 1: post a response to the following:** In technical report writing, describe the significance of design. What can visual features such as headings, chunks, and highlighting help achieve? What’s important to know when integrating a design strategy into a technical report?  Read other posts and comment.  **Part 2:** Students will be given a block of text. Using Word, students will incorporate a design strategy to the text. Students will upload their completed document to D2L. Look at the documents to observe how other students applied design strategies to the same text. |

**Week 5**

**Reading:** Chapter 8: Describing; Chapter 10: Informal Reports

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Describing**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 8 PowerPoint presentation (Group E) * Hold a 10-15 minute discussion on mechanism and process descriptions. What are the main differences of each? What are the most important aspects of each? * Chapter 10 PowerPoint presentation (Group F) * In-class workshop: Huddle into your groups (for the group project). The second part of the class is an opportunity to work on your abstracts and presentations. | **Thursday (writing lab or work from home option)**  **Theme:** **Informal Reports**  **Class Schedule:**   * “Mid-term” Informal Report (worth 5% of your grade)   **Details:**  Students will have the entirety of Thursday’s class to complete a brief (one-page or longer) informal report based on the principles outlined in Chapter 10. The report will be due (post in the assigned D2l dropbox) at the end of class. |

**Week 6**

**Reading:** Chapter 12: Formal Reports; Appendix B: Documenting Sources

**Due on Friday of Week 6: Group project abstracts**

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Understanding formal reports**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 12 PowerPoint presentation (Group G) * Introduce formal technical report assignment (students should read Appendix B in detail and understand how to incorporate citations and utilize references). * Activity: Formal technical report analysis   Split into groups. Each group will be give 3 complete technical reports. After evaluating each report, groups will present what they liked or didn’t like about each report and whether they felt that the reports were effective. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Developing a formal report strategy**  **Class Schedule:**   * In-class discussion/writing exercise   **Week 6 Discussion/Writing Exercise:**  **Part 1: Formulate a response to the following:**   * What does it mean to provide context to a report? * What is the difference between an IMRD report and a conceptual/background report? Read other posts and engage in discussions.   **Part 2:** Create an outline and a 1-2 paragraph synopsis of the report you plan to write. Please specify whether the report will be an IMRD or a conceptual/background report. |

**Week 7**

**Due: Group project PowerPoint presentations**

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| **Tuesday**  **Group presentations all class** | **Thursday**  **Group presentations all class** |

**Week 8**

**Reading:** Chapter 11: Websites; Essay: Structural-level revisions

**Due: Formal Technical Report**

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Peer editing**  Students should come to class having read the essay, “Structural-level revisions”  **Class Schedule:**   * Hold a quick class discussion on the importance of organization in a report. How do reports that are not well organized suffer? * Peer editing workshop   Students should come to class with a rough draft of their formal technical reports. Pair up with another student and exchange hard copies. Conduct an edit of the report focusing on:   * Grammar * Sentence structure * Punctuation * Report flow * Report organization * Overall effectiveness at presenting research or conveying a topic   Exchange the reports back and examine the edits. Discuss the edits with one another. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Websites**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 11 PowerPoint presentation. * Workshop: website evaluation.   Students will split into groups and be given 2-3 websites to choose from. Each group will perform an analysis of their chosen website. Afterwards, each group will present their findings to the class.  **Questions to drive the website analysis:** Is the site easy to navigate? Does the site clearly present information? In what directions do your eyes follow to scan the page? Does the content of the site address the global community? |

**Week 9**

**Reading:** Chapter 13: Recommendation and Feasibility Reports

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Understanding feasibility reports**  **Class Schedule:**   * Chapter 13 PowerPoint presentation. * Introduce final feasibility report project. * Class activity   **Activity details:** The class will split into groups of 3 or 4. Groups will be given a feasibility analysis, similar to that which appears on page 404 of the book. Each group will analyze the organization, persuasiveness, and effectiveness of the write-up and present their findings to the class. | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Developing a framework for feasibility reports**  **Class Schedule:**   * In-class writing exercise/online discussion   **Week 9 Discussion/Writing Exercise:**  **Part 1: Formulate a response to the following:** After reading Chapter 13, describe what you feel is important in creating an effective feasibility report. Please include at least three points. Read other posts and engage in discussions.  **Part 2:** Create an outline of the feasibility report you intend to write. Post to D2L and examine other posts. |

**Week 10**

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| **Tuesday**  **Theme:** **Work on final projects**  **Class Schedule:**   * Final project workshop | **Thursday (writing lab)**  **Theme:** **Work on final projects**  **Class Schedule:**   * Course evaluations * Rest of class will be an opportunity for students to work on their final projects |

**Due on Tuesday of Week 11: Feasibility Report**