

FOCUS	READING ASSIGNMENTS	WRITING ASSIGNMENTS
<p><b>August 17 - 23</b></p> <p><b>Introduction to Technical Writing</b></p>	<p><b>In D2L:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Getting Started (all documents within, which are listed and linked to below)</li> </ul> <p><b>In Textbooks:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gurak and Lannon, chpt. 1 "Technical Communication: Global, Collaborative and Digital"</li> <li>Gurak and Lannon, chpt.3, Providing Audiences with Usable Information"</li> <li>Skim/familiarize yourself with yourself with the entire text, including appendices.</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Class Discussion #1.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Follow prompt and post introduction <i>by midnight Wednesday, Aug. 19.</i></li> <li>Respond to a peer's introduction <i>by midnight Sunday, Aug. 23. Worth up to 5 points.</i></li> </ul> </li> <li><b>Class Discussion #2.</b> Find and post an example of an ineffective piece of technical writing and explain why you find it ineffective and what could improve it. <i>Keep in mind <a href="#">the Discussion Board Expectations &amp; Rubrics</a> while you compose and respond to foster a productive and thorough discussion. Due by midnight Sunday, Aug. 23.</i></li> </ol>

**Welcome to WRIT 221!** During this first week of class we will focus on meeting others in the course, getting a sense of how the course is structured, and familiarizing ourselves with some of the basic characteristics and constraints of technical writing. As with all weeks, **first** complete the required reading; **second**, complete any writing; **third**, head over to the discussion board to share work and discuss writing with peers.

**My intention with Getting Started is to ensure a smooth, informed start to the term, which is why you must read the following:**

- [Course Overview & Learning Outcomes](#)
- [Course Structure](#)
- [Course Syllabus](#), noting in particular required texts, assignments, grading and course policies
- [Weekly Assignment Calendar](#)
- [Instructor Bio & Contact Policy](#)
- [Online Course Commitment](#)
- [Discussion Board Expectations & Rubric](#)

Because this is a course in technical writing, most of the course material you encounter this term will be written: the textbook, supplementary readings, sample documents, course discussions, fellow students' drafts, and weekly notes from me like this. I will post mid-week short videos to emphasize and clarify certain information, but for the most part we'll be working with written language.

Once you've read the required textbook chapters thoroughly this week, please consider the highlights below as away to enhance your understanding of the material covered.

**Key Points from Week #1 Reading:**

As you read, pay particular attention to the ideas and passages bulleted below, and take the time to read the comments in the margins alongside each sample document (especially Figures 1.3 – 1.5, as these are all document types you will write this terms).

If you are coming into the course with considerable experience writing in professional settings, I'll be interested to hear how well this week's reading applies or doesn't apply to the types of writing you have done on the job or anticipate doing in the future. For those of you without much prior experience in professional writing, I'll be interested in the extent to which this material confirms and/or challenges your expectations about the kinds of writing you will be asked to do in professional settings in the future. This is all information to include in your Class Discussion #1 and #2 posts.

*Please note: The page numbers below are from the 3rd edition of the book. If you have an earlier or later version, page numbers may vary but essential content will be the same.*

**Gurak and Lannon, Chapter 1, “Technical Communication: Global, Collaborative, and Digital”**

- Understand Gurak and Lannon's definition of technical communication (3); is this type of writing different than writing you've completed in the past? Does it overlap with other academic writing you've done?
- Take note of common characteristics of technical documents (and what sets them apart from typical college essays) (4). For many of you, this is a departure from school-based writing.
- Understand that user-centered communication isn't about the writer, but the reader. How do the textbook authors explain these concepts via examples? (4) Pay attention to the fact that learning new skills is much easier with the support of well-crafted examples.
- What are the three primary purposes of technical communication? Can you see how these objectives are articulated in the examples provided (6 - 9)?
- Note the common types of technical documents (9 - 12).
- Technical writing carries with it global, collaborative and digital considerations (12 – 21) that must be considered to make your writing effective.

**Gurak and Lannon, Chapter 3, “Providing Audiences with Usable Information”**

- The difference between primary and secondary audiences (45-46) is important to understand. Writing for readers is about rhetoric—the art of shaping one’s message to best suit specific audiences with specific language constraints, education, biases and expectations.
- Consider the issues Gurak and Lannon name when analyzing audiences for technical and professional documents (46-50)—and why they are so important.
- “The larger the audience the more you must consider the various levels of expertise and language differences” (47). Why? What’s an example, and why is this important to keep in mind?
- Gurak and Lannon’s description of the “general reader” (50) is important to note. In your experience of “general readers,” how accurate or useful is this description? Why?
- Likewise, understand the difference between primary and secondary purposes (50-51).
- What do Gurak and Lannon mean when they say “most technical communication is task-oriented” (51)? Again, noting examples is the best way to understand this tenet of technical writing.
- What is a task analysis, and why might it be a useful planning or pre-writing tool (56-57)?
- Other usability issues to consider include setting, potential problems, length, format, timing, and budget (57-59).
- What is an information plan, and why might it be a useful planning or prewriting tool (59-61) ?
- As with all chapters, please spend some time understanding the Checklist for Usability (63-64).

**A GENERAL NOTE TO CONSIDER WHEN READING:** This textbook is a technical document, as are my Instructor’s Notes and Assignment Sheets. So too, of course, is the Syllabus. Pay attention to how we structure our writing to boost readability; note how color, bold and other emphatic features are used to support the reading process—and, by extension, your understanding of these concepts. Likewise, start looking around you at doctors’ offices, school buildings, and at work. How do writers structure information to make their content stand out? Does it work? If so, why? If not, why? **Reading this way (like a writer), will ensure your writing improves as you start to think and write rhetorically—i.e. to best reach your reader.**

#### **Gurak and Lannon, Appendix B, “A Brief Handbook”**

- **As you skim this handbook, note any sentence-level issues you are unfamiliar with and/or struggle with in your own work, and develop a plan to focus on at least one each week, using the explanations and sample exercises in the book as well as supplementary material online.** If you have questions about any of these editing issues, feel free to post them to “Ask Brooke” in Discussions, or make arrangements to work with a tutor through the MSU Writing Center online.