Technical Writing

ENGL 341.04 • Fall 2010 • MWF 10-10:50 • Cramer 101

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Course Overview

Welcome to English 341: Technical Writing. In this course, you will learn to produce documents that communicate technical information effectively and efficiently. Further, you will be introduced to specific writing contexts within your own fields of study and will gain experience communicating technical information to non-technical audiences. This course emphasizes the importance of audience, document design and visual rhetoric, as well as the use of technology in designing, developing and delivering documents.

Learning Goals

By the end of the semester, you should be able to:

Communicate effectively

- Identify, analyze, and target readers/listeners.
- Articulate your communication purpose and employ appropriate rhetorical strategies in the service of that purpose.
- Demonstrate facility with ideas and language.
- Analyze and synthesize information in sophisticated and complex rhetorical/logical structures.
- Devise and employ effective document design.
- Know and be able to modify conventional formats such as manuals, technical reports, and other standard professional documents.

Conduct relevant, professional, and innovative research, both primary and secondary

- Understand and implement appropriate strategies for gathering information.
- Integrate the ideas and language of various sources.
- Document sources and research professionally.

Work collaboratively

- Demonstrate flexibility to lead, listen, facilitate, negotiate, and participate as needed to build and sustain group productivity.
- Demonstrate knowledge of and respect for various perspectives and approaches.

Engage in peer review

- Ask readers/listeners specific questions about the content and delivery of your documents and presentations.
- Evaluate and revise your ideas and expression as appropriate in response to reader/listener feedback.
- Provide specific, respectful, and useful feedback to your peers based on attentive close reading and listening.

Required Text

Markel, M. (2010). *Technical Communication (9th ed.)*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martins.

Note: Earlier editions of this textbook will not work for this course. Please make certain to purchase the 9th edition.

Blackboard

Our class has a Blackboard site set up. I will use Blackboard to disseminate important course documents. You will also submit some assignments via Blackboard instead of submitting paper copies.

To access our Blackboard page, go to http://nmt.blackboard.com/ and type in your TCC username and password. For instructions on using Blackboard, go to the following site: http://infohost.nmt.edu/tcc/help/pubs/Bb/Bb8student/index.html.

Course Projects

Over the course of the semester, you will complete the following major projects:

1. **Technical Writing in Your Field—Short Report and Presentation (Individual Project).** The first major project allows you to explore further the technical writing activities in your field of study and future profession and to identify a variety of audiences, genres, and rhetorical contexts you may encounter. In preparation for your report, you must interview a professional in your field or a professor in your department, interview a more advanced student in your program (or a recent graduate), collect and analyze three examples of technical documents in your field, and identify three writing guidebooks or articles on technical writing that might help other students in your program. You will deliver your findings in a 3-4 page short report addressed to the course instructor and your classmates. You will also prepare a short 5-minute presentation with a descriptive 1-page handout. (See assignment sheet for more on this assignment).
2. **Technical Manual and Usability Testing (Collaborative Project).** This project allows you to gain experience with an important technical writing genre (instructions) and research method (usability testing). In groups of 3, you will identify a process, task, or piece of equipment for which you would like to create a manual. Each group will start by writing a 1-2 page technical description of its topic. Groups will then create a manual for completing this task or using this equipment. Each group must include descriptive

images and visuals and must choose an appropriate medium for their manual (e.g., a booklet, an online tutorial, a hyperlinked PDF, a series of posters, etc.). Further, each group must perform usability testing on members of their target audience and revise their manual based on feedback they receive. (See assignment sheet for more on this assignment).

3. **Technical Research Proposal (Individual Project).** For the final course project, you will write a formal technical report on a topic of your choice (see description of Technical Research Report below). Before starting your report, you will write a proposal addressed to the instructor and classmates that outlines your topic, lays out a development schedule for the report, provides a tentative bibliography of at least five articles and books to research the topic, and identifies the documentation style you will be using and any report formatting conventions appropriate to your discipline. (Note: You might use the Technical Writing in Your Field project to identify report-writing conventions in your field). See assignment sheet for more on this assignment.
4. **Technical Research Report and Oral Presentation.** You will write and deliver a formal technical report on the topic approved in your proposal. The report should be substantial in depth and include any necessary definitions, descriptions, graphics, and instructions. The report should be logically organized and professional (i.e., your report should have a title page, table of contents, abstract, etc.) At several points throughout the assignment, you will submit progress reports to me that convince me that you are making progress in both the research and drafting stages of the project. During the last two weeks of class, you will give a 10-minute presentation of your research topic to the class. Your presentation should include a PowerPoint and any necessary visuals. 1. (See assignment sheet for more on this assignment).

Reading Reports (RR)

Throughout the semester, I will ask you to write short informal Reading Reports on the assigned readings. Reading Reports should be attached in Word or Rich Text Format to a post in the appropriate Blackboard discussion board forum *by class time* on the day they are due. You are responsible for reading reports assigned on days you are absent, so make sure to check Blackboard if you need to miss class. See schedule for Reading Report due dates. Note: You are responsible for completing assigned readings regardless of whether I assign an accompanying Reading Report.

Grading Policy

I will use the following grading scale to assess your work: A (94-100), A- (90-93), B+ (87-89), B (83-86), B- (80-82), C+ (77-79), C (73-76), C- (70-72), D (60-69), D, F (59 and below). In order to pass you *must* complete all the major assignments. The breakdown of grades will be as follows:

- 10% Class Participation (includes RR, class discussions, in-class projects and peer review, and team work)
- 20% Technical Writing in Your Field—Short Report and Presentation
- 20% Technical Manual and Usability Testing

- 10% Technical Research Proposal
- 40% Technical Research Report and Oral Presentation

Revision. This course emphasizes revision during the writing stages rather than revising final products. Therefore, it is very important that you work hard on drafts and provide useful feedback when responding to classmates' drafts during peer review. If you have additional questions about drafts, I am available for conferences outside of class.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy. Because much of the course material will be delivered through in-class collaborative exercises, your attendance at each session is critical. If you are ill or must miss class for another valid reason, please speak to me about excusing your absence. Students with more than 3 unexcused absences will have their final grade lowered by one full letter. Note: unexcused absences on presentation days count as 2 absences! Also, a missed conference counts as an absence.

It is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate if you miss a class. It is also your responsibility to keep track of and complete the missing work. In-class work cannot be made up. If you miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements to send it with a classmate, or submit it electronically.

Participation. You are expected to participate actively, constructively and cooperatively in all in-class and online activities—including whole-class and group discussions, individual/group presentations, peer workshops, individual/group conferences, and online discussion.

Ethical Conduct. The administration, faculty, and your fellow students at New Mexico Tech expect you to act ethically. This includes not cheating, falsifying information, or plagiarizing, actions which may result in you receiving a failing grade for the class, or sending you before the Disciplinary Board for more severe treatment. Other non-ethical acts may also be cause for disciplinary action. See the *New Mexico Tech Student Handbook* for more information and a more complete description.(http://www.nmt.edu/nmt-student-handbook)

Late Submissions. You are expected to complete all assigned work in a timely manner. Late or incomplete work will not be accepted, responded to, or evaluated. Requests for "incomplete" will not be considered.

Technology. Students are encouraged to bring laptops to class for note-taking and in-class activities. Please limit all computer use during class-time to class-related activities. (No e-mail, IMing, or Facebooking!) Also, please put your cell phones away. (No texting!)

Syllabus and Schedule. I will amend the syllabus frequently throughout the semester. Therefore it is *extremely* important to check with me or with a classmate about assignments if you miss a class. *You are responsible for what goes on in class when you are absent!*

Tentative Course Schedule—ENGL 341

(Note: Dates and assignments are subject to change)

Technical Writing in Your Field Report & Presentation

Week 1

Wed 8/25

In class: Introductions; read through syllabus.

Fri 8/27

In class: What is technical writing? Introduce Technical Writing in Your Field Report and Presentation.

Due: Markel chs. 1 & 2

Week 2

Mon 8/30

In class: Analyzing Audience

Due: Markel chs. 5 & 14; Reading Report 1.

Wed 9/1

In class: Genre Analysis

Due: Markel chs. 16 & 17

Fri 9/3

In class: Genre Analysis (Part 2)

Due: Reading TBA; Reading Report 2

Week 3

Mon 9/6—Labor Day (No Class)

Wed 9/8

In class: Principles of Design and Graphic Representation

Due: Markel chs. 11 & 12

Fri 9/10

In class: Design, and Intro to Presenting

Due: Reading 9 & 21; **TWiYF Progress Report Memo**

Week 4

Mon 9/13

In class: Peer Review

Due: Draft of Report

Wed 9/15

In class: *Presentations!*

Due: TBA

Fri 9/17

In class: *Presentations!*

Due: Technical Writing in Your Field—Short Report and Presentation Materials

Technical Description, Instructions, & Usability

Week 5

Mon 9/20

In class: Presentations!

Due: TBA

Wed 9/22

In class: Manuals, Instructions and Usability (Part 1); introduce Manual and Usability assignment

Due: Markel chs. 4 & 20;

Fri 9/24

In class: Manuals, Instructions and Usability (Part 2)

Due: Reading Sample Instructions/manuals; Reading Report 3 (collaborative)

Week 6

Mon 9/27

In class: Definitions, Descriptions, and Concision

Due: None

Wed 9/29

In class: Advanced Design Principles

Due: Manual Idea Memo (collaborative—counts as "Reading Report 4")

Fri 10/1

In class: Design (part 2)

Due: Read Selber, "A Rhetoric of Electronic Instructions Sets." In "Additional Readings" folder under "Course Content"

Week 7

Mon 10/4

In class: Usability Testing

Due: Markel ch. 13 & 18

Wed 10/6

In class: TBA

Due: Group Technical Description (collaborative)

Fri 10/8

In class: TBA

Due: TBA

Week 8

Mon 10/11

In class: Conducting Primary and Secondary Research

Due: Read Markel ch. 6

Wed 10/13

In class: peer review

Due: Manual draft due

Technical Report and Presentation

Fri 10/15
In class: Proposals
Due: Read Markel ch. 16

Week 9

Mon 10/18
In class: Report Writing (Part 1)
Due: Markel ch. 19; scanned article in "Additional Readings" on Blackboard. ("Reports," from *MIT Guide to Science and Engineering Communication*).

Wed 10/20
In class: Report Writing (Part 2)
Due: Final Manual and Usability Report Due; TBA

Fri 10/22 **– Apparently, a school holiday. Grrr.**

Week 10

Mon 10/25
In class: Peer review
Due: TBA

Wed 10/27
In class: TBA
Due: TBA

Fri 10/29
In class: TBA
Due: Technical Report Proposal (Draft)

Week 11

Mon 11/1
In class: TBA
Due: TBA

Wed 11/3
In class: TBA
Due: TBA

Fri 11/5
In class: TBA
Due:

Week 12 (Conference Week)

Mon 11/8
In class: Sign up for Conferences
Due: TBA

Wed 11/10
In class: Sign up for Conferences
Due: TBA

Fri 11/12
In class: Sign up for Conferences

Due: Progress Report Memo 1 (Reading Report 7)

Week 13

Mon 11/15

In class: TBA

Due: TBA

Wed 11/17

In class: TBA

Due: TBA

Fri 11/19

In class: TBA

Due: Progress Report Memo 2 (Reading Report 8)

Week 14

Mon 11/22

In class: Presentations and PowerPoint (Part 1)

Due: TBA

Wed 11/24

In class: Peer Review

Due: Technical Report (Draft)

Fri 11/26—Thanksgiving Break (No Class!)

Week 15

Mon 11/29

In class: Presentations and PowerPoint (Part 2)

Due: TBA

Wed 12/1

In class: Peer Review

Due: TBA

Fri 12/3

In class: Peer Review

Due: TBA

Week 16

Mon 12/6

In class: *Presentations!*

Due: TBA

Wed 12/8

In class: *Presentations!*

Due: TBA

Fri 12/10

In class: *Presentations!*

Due: Final Technical Report and Presentation Materials