Technical Writing Essentials

Fall 2020 Writing 355:202, Section 2

Dave Howland

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OFFICE HOURS:

Tuesday: 11 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Thursday: 2 p.m. - 3 p.m.

(with CESEP recitation)

COURSE MEETS:

5 p.m. – 6:20 p.m.

Monday & Wednesday

Welcome

This course is designed to teach you how to effectively communicate using various kinds of documents common to the workplace, including memos, business letters, proposals, research reports, and instructions. Central to this task is learning how to be sensitive to the needs of the audiences you are trying to reach. We will work on how to identify and meet those needs and how to get your message across with cogent prose and effective document design. Specifically, this class meets the university’s Revision-Based Writing and Communication Learning Goal [WCr] to: “Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience, and respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, &/or supervisors through successive drafts & revision.”

You will develop your writing skills here by engaging in several large projects that build upon one another – starting with a research report and moving up to a multi-stage collaborative effort to help a non-profit university or community organization with a research and analysis task. This seven-week group project (Project IV) will put you and your classmates to the test. You will not only need to learn how to write well but how to get along and cooperate as a team to help a real-life client. Making this happen – that is, making the most of everyone’s best ideas and efforts – is harder than it may sound. I’ll be there to help you problem solve. You will find, as many of my former students have, that this experience will help prepare you to better handle similar challenges thrown your way in the professional world.

Finally, our section of Writing 202 features a real bonus that will enrich your learning: a one-credit recitation with my colleagues at the [Collaborative Center for Community-Based Research and Service](http://www.engage.rutgers.edu/). Along with our regular class attendance and homework, you will meet online once a month with faculty at the Center to learn about the work and role of nonprofit organizations in our community. The recitation – which will require some written work and a final presentation of its own – will provide invaluable context and support for your teamwork on Project IV. I will explain more about this terrific program as our class gets underway. Below is a description of what’s ahead of us this semester and the rules of the road for our Writing 202 class.

A Word on Working Remotely

As one who has enjoyed teaching in person for nearly 30 years, I am as bummed out as most of you that we cannot be together on campus this semester! But as I noted in the [short video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVEuLw9ft08&feature=youtu.be) I sent you in early August, my students last Spring taught me that a remote class can work pretty well – and in some ways even better than a traditional class. Much of what we’ll be doing will be the same: We’ll meet at the same time each week and I will greet you and take attendance (more on that below) every class. You will be busy reading and writing and providing constructive feedback to one another. I will grade your major papers and hold office hours at a regular time to help you with questions and go over your work in more detail. Before the pandemic, I assigned and collected most of my students’ work electronically over Canvas. That will also remain the same. And I will be every bit as excited to see you and to learn together.

While we have a variety of tools for collaboration and interaction at our disposal, I plan to keep it simple: We’ll meet for class via Conferences on Canvas. When needed, we’ll break into pairs or small groups using the breakout room function so you can talk about and go over your work. I will leave it up to you how to swap papers, but I recommend using Google Docs. You could also e-mail each other your files. *Whatever method you use, be prepared if I ask you to send me or upload to Canvas a copy of your peer-reviewed work with your name, your reviewer’s name, and the date you worked together.* For class presentations, I will have you upload your slides to Canvas in pdf and we’ll take turns presenting and asking questions.

For office hours, just visit Chat on our Canvas site during either of our regular windows – Tuesday: 11 a.m. - 1 p.m. & Thursday: 2 p.m. - 3 p.m. – and let me know you’d like to talk. That’s just like knocking on my office door. I’ll let you know if I’m already busy with other students and will get to you as soon as I can. I’ll have a Conference set up so we can work together. We can talk individually, or if it’s helpful, as a group with other classmates I’m already working with. As with any semester, it will take a little while for us to get to know one another, but I know we’ll build a good learning community and get a lot accomplished.

Class Projects

What follows are descriptions of our course’s four major assignments and a brief summary of skills that are exercised in each. Each subsequent assignment uses and builds on skills in previous assignments. The specifics of each will be provided in separate, detailed assignment sheets posted on our class Canvas site.

**I. Research Paper**

This opening assignment has you research the role of technical communication in two separate fields of your choosing. You will need to track down a professional in each of these fields and ask them about the documents they produce on the job and their writing process. You will compile the results of library and Internet research and your interviews into a clearly-written, well-organized research report. This project is intended to exercise and solidify basic research and writing skills that are fundamental to the workplace. It is designed to help you:

* Develop an understanding of the scope and importance of written communication in the workplace.
* Conduct basic library and Internet research.
* Write a letter requesting an interview.
* Develop interviewing skills.
* Practice writing and editing for clarity, organizing a report, and properly citing sources within it.

**II. Internship/Job Application**

For those of you who plan to apply for a job, this is an important assignment. In this project, you will seek out and analyze advertisements for work in your field (in most cases, an internship) and create a resume and cover letter geared to the requirements of an opening that interests you most. It is designed to help you:

* Explore the type of work available in your field of study/ interest and consider whether it’s a “good fit”.
* Gain experience writing resumes and letters.
* Practice tailoring your job application materials to meet the demands of specific openings.
* Begin applying your improved understanding of audience and purpose.
* Practice writing clearly and concisely.
* Learn key principles of document design.

**III. Instructions**

By challenging you to create a set of written instructions and then test them on real people, this project aims to create an awareness of audience and the need to adapt writing content, format and visual layout to the task at hand. It will help you:

* Develop an understanding of the importance of audience and format.
* Learn about best practices for visual and text layout.
* Experience the process we call document usability testing.
* Present your work to peers in a short individual PowerPoint presentation.

**IV. Collaborative Project**

In this large, multi-stage project – which will run to the end of the course – you will collaborate with a small group of classmates to work with a non-profit client on a writing project. This involves the challenging tasks of pooling your strengths, managing and heading off potential intra-group conflicts, deciding on a strategy and tasks, dividing labor, taking minutes, and issuing progress memos to the company president (your professor). It concludes with a formal group presentation before the class and the client. More specifically, you will work to:

* Collaborate with a team to organize and effectively complete a research project for a client.
* Practice problem solving and communicating effectively with your team, a client, and supervisor during a big project.
* Create, for multiple audiences, a variety of important professional documents. These include: reader-oriented meeting minutes, progress reports, a team organizational memo, a needs analysis and proposal, a set of products for your client, and a compendium of your work with a reflection.
* Produce a team PowerPoint presentation for the class and your client.

Note on grading: In this project, which accounts for 25 percent of your overall course grade, each team member will receive *the same final grade*. Separately, 10 percent of your final course grade is set aside for class participation. If everyone pitches in on this project, you should score well in this category, too. But scofflaws be warned: your instructor can award less in the class participation category to team members who are not pulling their weight. Exceptional cases of laziness (these are very rare but have happened in the past) can lead to an exception to the uniform 20 percent project grade rule. If needed, this can be determined in part by peer reviews at the end of the project.

Texts

While I have always listed and expected students to buy a textbook, this semester I’m going to make that optional. For years, we have used a good textbook for reference and you can’t go wrong by purchasing a copy:

Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. *Technical Communication Strategies for Today*. 3rd ed., Pearson; 2017

ISBN: 978-0134433035

That said, there are some good free alternatives online. In this class, a writing textbook is a *supplement* to what we’re covering in class on a wide range of topics; from advice on attributing sources and working in teams, to understanding specific document formats and designs. Here are some additional and alternative sources available for free (for example. the Suzan Last book is available through the Creative Commons) at the links just below.

FOR OVERALL REFERECE:

Last, Suzan *Technical Writing Essentials*. University of Victoria.

<https://pressbooks.bccampus.ca/technicalwriting/>. Accessed 5 June 2020.

FINDING & USING SOURCES:

Teaching & Learning, University Libraries. *Choosing & Using Sources, A Guide to Academic Research*. The Ohio State University. <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/choosingsources/>. Accessed 5 June 2020.

JOB APPLICATION WRITING:

Hall, Lynn & Wahlin, Leah. “Preparing Job Application Materials”. *A Guide to Technical Communications: Strategies & Applications*. The Ohio State University. <https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/engrtechcomm/chapter/preparing-job-application-materials/>. Accessed 5 June 2020.

USING MLA STYLE (Website Guides):

Purdue Online Writing Lab. *MLA Formatting and Style Guide*, Purdue University, 2020. <https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/mla_style/mla_formatting_and_style_guide/mla_formatting_and_style_guide.html>. Accessed 17 June 2020.

Class Schedule

The following is a daily schedule for our class, listing the focus of lectures, reminders (*in italics*) of material to bring for discussion/workshopping or to submit/receive on that class day, and deadlines for submitting your four major projects. I will explain in class or in your specific assignment documents how to submit your work (whether online via Canvas or in person) on a given day. Depending on our class progress, deadlines may be moved back (later, but not earlier) at the discretion of the instructor.

**Day One**

Day 1 (Wed, Sept. 2) – Welcome, Syllabus & Core Concepts of Audience & Purpose

Class Date & Day Goes Here

Class Focus

**Project I** *RESEARCH PAPER*

NOTE: MONDAY’S CLASS MOVED TO TUEDAY

Day 2 (Tuesday, Sept. 8) – Introducing Project I Research Report: Writing in Careers

*Receive Project I Assignment*

Homework/ classwork/ assignments to change hands that day

*Submit “Course Driver’s License”*

Day 3 (Wed, Sept. 9) – Library Visit

Day 4 (Mon, Sept. 14) – Finding & Interviewing Sources

Day 5 (Wed, Sept. 16) – Editing for Clarity & Conciseness/ Introducing Project II

*Bring a draft of Project I for peer review*

*Receive Project II Assignment*

**Project II** *JOB APPLICATION*

Day 6 (Mon, Sept. 21) – Job Descriptions & Resumes

*Bring job advertisements and resume to class*

Day 7 (Wed, Sept. 23) – Job Letters

*Bring ads, draft letter, and resume to class*

Day 8 (Mon, Sept. 28) – Networking & Job References **PROJECT I DUE**

*Bring ads, revised letter, and resume to class*

Day 9 (Wed, Sept. 30) – Job Interviews/ Introducing Project III

*Bring ads, revised letter, and resume to class*

*Receive Project III Assignment*

**Project III** *INSTRUCTIONS*

Day 10 (Mon, Oct. 5) – Creating a Design Plan

*Work on Design Plan Memo*

Day 11 (Wed, Oct. 7) – Draft Instructions

*Work on Design Plan Memo & Draft Instructions*

**Project IV***GROUP COLLABORATION*

Day 12 (Mon, Oct. 12) – Group Collaborative Process **PROJECT II DUE**

*Introduce Project IV and discuss group collaborative process*

Day 13 (Wed, Oct. 14) – Establish Project IV Teams

*Create Project IV Teams and discuss Team Organizational Memo*

Day 14 (Mon, Oct. 19) – Needs Analysis/Proposal, Progress Report and Minutes *Submit Team Organization Memo by class time.*

*Send E-mail with Introduction Letter to your client (minimum 400 words, copied to me at* [*dave.howland@rutgers.edu*](mailto:dave.howland@rutgers.edu)*).*

*Week 1 Minutes and Progress Report due by end of week.*

Day 15 (Wed, Oct. 21) – Usability Testing

*Usability Test/Workshop Draft Instructions*

Day 16 (Mon, Oct 26) – Elevator Pitches Round One

*Individual “elevator” presentations*

Day 17 (Wed, Oct. 28) – Elevator Pitches Round Two

*Individual “elevator” presentations*

Day 18 (Mon, Nov 2) – Draft Needs Analysis/Proposal **PROJECT III DUE**

Day 19 (Wed, Nov. 4) – Research & Draft Products

*Submit Needs Analysis/Proposal to Canvas & E-mail to client by class time.*

*Week 2 Minutes and Progress Report due by end of week.*

Day 20 (Mon, Nov. 9) – Research & Draft Products

*Round One of (6-minute) team presentations in class on client and project progress.*

*Work on products*

Day 21 (Wed, Nov. 11) – Research & Draft Products/ Prep Usability Forms

*Round Two of (6-minute) team presentations in class on client and project progress.*

*Work on products and usability forms*

*Week 3 Minutes and Progress Report due by end of week.*

Day 22 (Mon, Nov. 16) – Usability Testing Round One

Day 23 (Wed, Nov. 18) – Usability Testing Round Two

*Week 4 Minutes and Progress Report due by end of week.*

Day 24 (Mon, Nov. 23) – Revise Products & Assemble Portfolio

*Submit draft of client products to Canvas by class time.*

*Finalize proposals, assemble portfolios, prepare final talks.*

(Wed, Nov. 25) – FRIDAY SCHEDULE/NO CLASS

Day 25 (Mon, Nov. 30) – Professor Check-In & Assemble Portfolio

*Finalize proposals, assemble portfolios, prepare final talks.*

Day 26 (Wed, Dec. 2) – Final Team Presentations Round 1

*Upload presentation slides to Canvas ahead of class.*

*Week 4 Minutes and Progress Report due by end of week.*

Day 27 (Mon, Dec. 7) – Final Team Presentations Round 2

*Upload presentation slides to Canvas ahead of class.*

Day 28 (Wed, Dec. 9) – Final Class **PROJECT IV DUE**

*Class farewell and course evaluations. Upload final project portfolios to Canvas.*

Class Rules/ Expectations

Our class will combine lecture, class discussion of “real world” examples and applications, and in-class individual and team exercises. You are expected to attend all classes, complete assignments on time, and actively participate in class discussions and peer review. There will be plenty of time to work in class on projects, especially in groups. You will also work on projects that allow you to apply concepts that you’ve learned or are learning in your major. Whenever possible, you will have the option to compose documents that suit your major and your future career. We will incorporate workplace issues and situations into the class.

**Attendance**

Attendance at all classes is expected. I will take attendance at the start of each class. Please turn on your computer camera when you arrive so I can see you. And when I call your name, please flip on your mic for a moment to let us hear your voice. This ritual will help confirm that our equipment is working and that we can all contribute to the class ahead as needed. After roll call, I’ll take a screenshot of the whole class as a record that we’re all present and up and running on that day. After that, if you need to – say, if you’re sharing space with siblings or family who would rather not be broadcast to the rest of us – you may turn off your camera. But be prepared to speak up and contribute at any moment as I may have a question for you. I may on occasion tack on a second roll call at the end of class to make sure we all made it through. The idea here is not to give you hard time, but to ensure that everyone was able to participate. I will follow up with students who disappear from a session (due to tech problems or otherwise) to make sure we keep you on track.

Come to every class. After four absences, you’ll risk failing the course. As a courtesy, if you expect to miss a class, please use the University’s Self-Reporting Absence Application: <https://sims.rutgers.edu/ssra/> to indicate the date and reason for your absence. An email is automatically sent to me. A late arrival to class, that is missing our roll call = ½ of an absence. If you are more than 40 minutes late, you will be marked fully absent. Rutgers has a policy for religious holidays, which reads in part: “Students are advised to provide timely notification to instructors about necessary absences for religious observances and are responsible for making up the work or exams according to an agreed-upon schedule.” You can find the full policy here: <https://scheduling.rutgers.edu/scheduling/religious-holiday-policy>

**Assignments and Work Deadlines**

I will post all assignments on Canvas. For each written assignment, I will specify a format and often a word/page count range. Most of our assignments will be due via Canvas. Unless I note otherwise, references must be included using MLA style. Late work will not be given credit but must nonetheless be completed to the standards spelled out in the assignment and submitted by the last day of class. In other words, one cannot simply opt out of submitting any of our major course projects and pass the course. Students who miss two or more course project deadlines will not pass the course. If you must miss class on the day a written assignment is due, make arrangements with me to turn it in ahead of time. Finally, if you miss class it is your responsibility to get the assignments, class notes, and course changes from a classmate. It is up to you to keep track of and complete missing work.

**Class Participation**

Your regular attendance and active participation in class exercises, discussion and group work directly constitutes 15% of your grade and will doubtless affect your learning and the outcome of your work in the rest of class. We will learn much from each other by sharing our ideas, opinions and experiences with the writing projects ahead. My expectation is that you will contribute to the discussion with reasoned and thoughtful comments during class discussion and peer review of our papers. Effective work collaboration often demands creativity, tact, patience, and some humor and humility. Debate and disagreement can be very constructive provided it is conducted in a courteous manner respectful of classmates. If you’re fired up about an issue and/or completely disagree with what someone’s saying, focus your response on the content of what they’re saying – not the person who is saying it. Be constructive: offer a solution to go along with that criticism.

**Office Hours**

Much class time will be spent discussing ongoing assignments and analyzing drafts of work in process. I encourage you to bring drafts of your work, before it is due, to discuss with me during office hours. I always say that one-on-one work in office hours – where we can focus on your writing alone – is an excellent use of your tuition dollars, and I am more than happy to help you.

Grading

Here is the breakdown of your final course grade:

25% Research Report on Technical Writing

15% Job Application

20% Instructions

25% Group Collaborative Project

15% Class participation

I grade and provide feedback to you based on the lessons we cover in class, the requirements of our assignments, and the rules in our syllabus. What follows are general descriptions of work that falls under the grading categories A to F. In the Writing Program, the lowest passing grade is a C. Thanks for these goes to Lee Seidel at the University of New Hampshire Center for Teaching Excellence.

**A work** demonstrates a high level of understanding and the ability to use course materials (readings, lessons from lectures/class discussions) to create a well-reasoned and logical document. Evidence is used to support arguments and citations are used appropriately. The writing is well-organized, active, cogent and concise. The document must contain no flaws in spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting. All requirements of the assignment are followed.

**B work** demonstrates an awareness and command of the material covered in the course. The document addresses the basic requirements of the assignment but arguments may lack focus or some key evidence to back them up. Major points may be cluttered by less relevant points/information. A few mistakes are found in one or more of the categories of spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting.

**C work** partially addresses the assignment but typically fails to provide a comprehensive and organized document. Main points are difficult to identify and/or are poorly supported by evidence. There are several mistakes in spelling, grammar, punctuation or formatting.

**F work** is deficient and fails to demonstrate adequate understanding of the course materials. It is usually very poorly organized. It demonstrates no significant command of course materials. Incomplete work (i.e. documents that address only a portion of the assignment) or work with an abundance of mistakes in spelling, grammar or punctuation may fall in this category.

SAS Core Curriculum goals

All 300-level BTW courses satisfy Cognitive Skills and Processes: Writing and Communication [WCr], [WCd]

Students take three degree credit-bearing courses (at least 9 credits) including Expository Writing 01:355:101; one WCr; and one WCd and, in doing so, meet all five goals:

* Communicate complex ideas effectively, in standard written English, to a general audience.
* Evaluate and critically assess sources and use the conventions of attribution and citation correctly.
* Analyze and synthesize information and ideas from multiple sources to generate new insights.
* Respond effectively to editorial feedback from peers, instructors, and/or supervisors through successive drafts and revision. [WCr]
* Communicate effectively in modes appropriate to a discipline or area of inquiry. [WCd]

For more information see <http://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/academics/requirements/core>.

Academic Integrity

Students and instructors have a duty to each other and to our community to abide by norms of academic honesty and responsibility. To present something as your own original writing when it is not is plagiarism. Plagiarism and other forms of cheating are serious violations of trust, and all written assignments for this course will be submitted via Turnitin software. Academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, will have severe consequences, in accordance with the University Policy on Academic Integrity and the Code of Student Conduct. For details about the University’s academic integrity policies, please see <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/>.

Support Services

Rutgers has many excellent programs to help support its students and foster a constructive and productive environment for learning. Below, for your reference, are links to a number of important services.

**Writing Program Writing Centers**

<https://wp.rutgers.edu/writingcenters/writingcenters>

**Office of Disability Services**

If you need accommodation for a disability, you will need to obtain a Letter of Accommodation from the Office of Disability Services. The Office of Disability Services at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, provides student-centered and student-inclusive programming in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments of 2008, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1998, and the New Jersey Law Against Discrimination.  
<https://ods.rutgers.edu/>

**Dean of Students**

[http://deanofstudents.rutgers.edu](http://deanofstudents.rutgers.edu/)

**Academic Deans and the Office of Academic Services**

[http://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu](http://sasundergrad.rutgers.edu/)  
<https://sebs.rutgers.edu/academics/>  
<http://www.business.rutgers.edu/>  
<http://www.masongross.rutgers.edu/content/undergraduate-academic-advisors>   
<http://soe.rutgers.edu/oas/advising>

**Rutgers Health Services**

[http://health.rutgers.edu](http://health.rutgers.edu/) Can connect you to:

* Counseling, Alcohol & Other Drug Assistance Program & Psychiatric Services (CAPS) <http://health.rutgers.edu/medical-counseling-services/counseling/>
* Medical Service
* Pharmacy
* Health Outreach, Promotion & Education (H.O.P.E.)

**Office of Violence Prevention & Victim Assistance**

[http://vpva.rutgers.edu](http://vpva.rutgers.edu/)

**Center for Social Justice & LGBTQ Communities**

<http://socialjustice.rutgers.edu/>

**Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services**

If you are a military veteran or are on active military duty, you can obtain support through the Office of Veteran and Military Programs and Services. <http://veterans.rutgers.edu/>

**International Student & Scholar Services**

<https://global.rutgers.edu/international-scholars-students>

**Title IX Matters**

<http://compliance.rutgers.edu/>

**Bias Prevention**

<http://studentaffairs.rutgers.edu/services-and-support/bias/>

**Public Safety**

RUPD <http://publicsafety.rutgers.edu/rupd/>

**Department of Transportation Services**

<http://rudots.rutgers.edu/>

**Academic Integrity**

[http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu](http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/)