

Week 1

Comm 1234 Technical Writing Fundamentals

Winter 2016

David Laing

Instructor

- Name: David Laing
- Part-time faculty
 - Comm1234 (2 sections) & Comm1133 (3 sections)
- Part-time writing skills drop-in facilitator
- Part-time writer

Contacting me

- Email is best: dlaing@niagaracollege.ca
- Please allow 24-48 hours for a response, and consider me available during workday hours (9am-5pm)
- IMPORTANT:
 - Email me from your Niagara College email address, **not** your personal email
 - Include your **name** and your **section**

Finding me

- Feel free to drop by my office, M206L. I can't guarantee that I'll be there, but here are some promising times:
 - Monday 2:30pm-5:20pm
 - Wednesday: 11:30am-2:20pm
- Come to one of my drop-in sessions at the library:
 - Monday 10:30am-11:20am & 12:30-2:20pm
 - Tuesday 5:30pm-6:20pm
 - Friday: 10:30am-11:20am & 12:30pm-1:20pm

Who's here?

- Writing Strategies was:
 - Fun or torture?
- As a writer, I know exactly what my weaknesses are:
 - Agree or disagree?

Plan for today

- Course info
 - Course description
 - Readings
 - Evaluation
 - Timeline
 - Class policies
- Intro to technical communication
 - Characteristics of technical documents
 - The need for communication skills
 - Tools for developing technical communication skills
- Response questions

Course description

“The world of business and industry is a world of communication. Technical and business writing requires competence in writing skills.

This course will focus on:

- organizational structures
- style via effective sentences, paragraphs, and punctuation
- memos and business letters including the job application”

Readings

- Technical Style Guide (free resource, available on Blackboard)
- Web links (included on TLP & Blackboard)

Evaluation structure

- Business/workplace communication: 25%
 - Business memo (10%)
 - Business letter (15%)
- Summary writing: 25%
 - Summary activity (5%)
 - Summary memo report (20%)
- Job Application package: 25%
- Tests, Exercises, and/or quizzes: 25%
 - 2 tests (10% each)
 - 1 exercise (5%)

Themes of course

1. Technical Writing Basics (Jan. 13th-Feb. 6th)

1. Test Feb. 6th

2. Business Communication (Feb. 10th-Feb. 24th)

READING WEEK (Mar. 2nd)

3. Summary Writing (Mar. 9th-Mar. 23rd)

4. Job Application Package (Mar. 30th-Apr. 20th)

3. Test Apr. 20th

Attendance & Lateness

- If you miss a test or an in-class exercise, a grade of zero will be recorded. Exceptions *may* be made *if*:
 - You contact me within 24 hours of the class
 - You provide acceptable documentation
- Assignments are due at the *beginning* of class, unless otherwise specified.
- Late assignments will be deducted 10% per day.
- No late assignments will be accepted after the other students' assignments have been graded and returned.

Students with disabilities

- If this applies to you, please identify your needs to the Centre for Student Disabilities.
- They will send me a letter of accommodation (LOA), and I'll be happy to help in any way I can.
- It is your responsibility to approach me regarding your specific needs for this course.
- Make sure your LOA is current for Winter 2016.

Academic misconduct

- Includes:
 - Submitting any work that is not your own, or not properly cited
 - Submitting any work that is inauthentic (e.g. students submitting the same work)
 - Submitting any work that is not original (e.g. previously completed work, or work for other classes)

Class policies

- Technology
- Food
- Professionalism

Intro to technical communication

- Characteristics of technical documents
 - Table 1.1 (p. 5 of Technical Style Guide)
- The need for communication skills
 - General Electric survey
 - Reasons to communicate well
- Tools for developing technical communication skills
 - Critical thinking
 - Organizational skills
 - Ethical/moral/philosophical mindset
 - Writing/composition skills
 - Technical knowledge

Characteristics of technical documents

- Subjects:
 - Scientific
 - Technological
 - Administrative
 - Business-oriented
 - Managerial

Characteristics of technical documents

- Formal elements:
 - Technical vocabulary
 - Graphic aids
 - Report forms

Characteristics of technical documents

- Attitude:
 - Committed to satisfying needs of audience
 - Direct (usually)
 - Objective and factual
 - Appropriate use of emotion

Characteristics of technical documents

- Style:
 - Clear
 - Concise
 - Accurate
 - Well-organized
 - Skim-able

Characteristics of technical documents

- Writing techniques:
 - Persuasion
 - Definition
 - Classification
 - Interpretation
 - Compare/contrast
 - Descriptions of mechanisms/processes

Characteristics of technical documents

- Products:
 - Proposals
 - Recommendation reports
 - Manuals & brochures
 - Lab reports
 - Progress reports
 - Technical reports
 - **Summary reports**
 - **Memos**
 - **Emails**
 - **Letters**

General Electric Survey

- Ranking of courses reported most valuable to career:
 1. Mathematics
 2. English
 3. Engineering
 4. Physics
 5. Economics
 6. Chemistry

General Electric Survey

- Ranking of courses reported most recommended for management responsibility:
 1. English
 2. Engineering
 3. Economics
 4. General business
 5. Mathematics

General Electric Survey

- Work done by junior employees in a large corporation (% of time spent):
 - Calculations: 34%
 - Collection and correlation of data: 26%
 - Writing reports and letters: 20%
 - Selling results of their work: 12%
 - Other: literature reviews, attendance at meetings, consultations, etc: 8%

Reasons to communicate well

- Critical to obtaining job in the first place
- Reports/proposals will be used for consideration for promotions
- Reports are permanent and possibly public records
- Good writing enhances your profile

Tools for technical communication

- Critical thinking:
 - Problem-solving:
 - Identifying problems on the job
 - Providing solutions, not just symptoms
 - Researching carefully to present causes and effects
 - Logic:
 - Avoiding sweeping generalizations and hasty conclusions
 - Investigating scientifically, with an open mind
 - Creative thinking:
 - Considering an array of solutions
 - Gathering and considering the ideas of others

Tools for technical communication

- Organizational skills:
 - Planning ahead
 - Meeting/beating deadlines to earn respect and display accountability
 - Separating distinct periods of time for planning, data collection, drafting, etc.

Tools for technical communication

- Ethical, moral, and philosophical mindset
 - Delivering positive and negative information in appropriate ways
 - Putting others first
 - Considering safety
 - Upholding the law and company policies

Tools for technical communication

- Writing/compositional skills
 - Writing to express, not impress
 - Producing grammatical sentences to ensure clarity and readability
 - Expressing ideas clearly, concisely, and accurately
 - Using a credible, mature voice

Tools for technical communication

- Technical Knowledge
 - Knowing about methods, theory, equipment, trends, and research in the field
 - Using audience-appropriate examples, details, explanations, etc
 - Understanding technical diagrams and graphics
 - Knowing where to go to find more information

Readings for next week

- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/600/01/>
- <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/566/1/>

Response questions:

1. Do you enjoy writing? Why or why not?
2. What sort of feedback on your writing have you received in the past?
3. What do you hope to get out of this course?
4. What do you expect from me as a teacher?
Please touch on the following:
 - a. Use of class time
 - b. Use of Blackboard
 - c. Grading