

Technical Writing Course Overview

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For more specific information and specific course policies, see the [Course Policy Manual](#).

Course Details

English 3764: Technical Writing
CRNs #85298, #85300, #85304, & #85305
Fall 2025 (Aug 25–Dec 17)

Course Texts

All readings are free, from

- open online textbooks.
- pages & files in Canvas.
- external PDFs & websites.

Teacher



Traci Gardner
tengrrl@vt.edu
she, her, hers

Straight, cisgender, white.
Disabled. Night owl. List
maker. Planner addict.

Sticker hoarder. Lifetime Girl Scout. Hokie alum.
Steelers fan. Poodle lover.

Accessibility

Everyone needs special accommodation at some point. I am happy to work with the [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\) staff](#) or directly with you to make sure that you have the support you need.



Need extra time on assignments?

No problem. If you need more time, use the course's grace period. Check the details on [the Late Policy & Grace Period](#) for details.

Need a less-distracting environment?

Do your work any place that works for you. All work is done online and independently, so you have complete control over where you work.

Ready to tell me what you need to do well in the course?

Official testing can be expensive and time-consuming, so I don't require it. Just tell me what you need, and I'll try to help. Send me a message with Canvas Inbox or email message that tells me what you need as soon as you can. Attach info from the SSD office if you have it. I'll do what I can to help, but can only apply changes to the future. I cannot apply accommodations retroactively.

Contacting Traci & Getting Help

Questions about the Course & Assignments

Discussion Board

Post your questions in the [General Q&A Discussion Board](#) in Canvas so anyone who knows the answer can help you. You can also check the General Q&A Discussion Board for questions that have already been answered.

If no one else answers your question, I usually respond **within 24 to 48 hours on class days. I take holidays and weekends off** and reply on the next class day.

Help from the Writing Center

Visit the [Writing Center](#) on the second floor of Newman Library. You can talk to a tutor if you have a draft, an outline, or just ideas. Bring your assignment description with you. Make appointments online by setting up an account with [WOnline](#) or call the Writing Center director at 540-231-9270.

Questions about Grades, Your Work, and Accommodations

Canvas Inbox or VT.EDU Email

Send your message to tengrrl@vt.edu using your VT.EDU email or the Inbox tool in Canvas. I will respond as quickly as possible, **usually within 24 to 48 hours on class days. I take holidays and weekends off** and reply on the next class day.

Private Online Meetings

Schedule online meetings in Google Meet. Visit my [Booking page](#) to sign up (at least 24 hours in advance). Think of these meetings as like office hours.

Video is not required for the meeting.

Traci's Schedule During the Term

Usually Online Monday to Thursday

- 3 PM to 7:30 PM
- 11 PM to 12 AM

I'm a night owl, so I may reply to your message after midnight.

Offline Weekends & Holidays

Offline after 5 PM on Fridays and all day Saturday and Sunday. I'll send replies on Monday (or the next class day in the case of holidays and university days off).

Course Structure



Course Modules

This course has five modules:

Module 1: Foundations & Project Initiation

Module 2: Proposing a Project

Module 3: Writing to Instruct

Module 4: Writing for Decision-Makers

Module 5: Writing for the General Public

What's in a Module?

Each Module includes everything you need for a unit. Think of it like a backpack that has just the right materials for a task.

You'll find the following materials:

- A Module introduction page
- Links to readings
- Links to all assignments

To access each module, click on Modules in the left menu in Canvas.



Module Starting Point

Begin with the Module introduction page, which provides:

- A brief intro to the subject(s) covered in that Module
- A set of Module objectives
- Links to readings and assignments

Module & Project Overview

Tentative schedule with more specific dates and information is available in Canvas.

Semester-Long Project Overview

Over the course of this term, you'll research, write, and design a series of interconnected documents about a socially-relevant subject connected to your major. Each assignment builds toward your ability to explain a complex topic clearly and accessibly to different real-world audiences—always with the goal of informing, guiding, or supporting action that contributes to equity, access, or social justice in communities.

Module 1 (Weeks 1–2): Foundations & Project Initiation

Explore how rhetoric, ethics, and audience awareness shape technical communication. You'll choose your semester-long topic and write a **Subject Selection Memo** that justifies its importance and identifies key audiences. This memo sets the foundation for all your major projects, so thoughtful topic selection and audience analysis are essential.



Module 2 (Weeks 3–5) Proposing a Project

Develop a **Research Proposal** that outlines how you'll approach your topic. You'll learn to write clearly using plain language, support your ideas with research, and plan a project that meets real-world needs. This assignment also introduces techniques for evaluating sources and documenting your research professionally.



Module 3 (Weeks 6–8): Writing to Instruct

Create a **User Document** that explains a process or task for a non-expert audience. You'll apply principles of document design and usability to make the information clear, helpful, and actionable. This module emphasizes accessibility and usability testing.



Module 4 (Weeks 9–12): Writing for Decision-Makers

Research and write an **Informational Report** on your topic. You'll focus on clarity, evidence, and purpose, targeting non-expert decision-makers. You'll also complete a **progress report** and a **letter of transmittal** as part of the project.



Module 5 (Weeks 13–15): Writing for the General Public

Convert your report into a **fact sheet** for a general audience. Your task is to simplify complex information, highlight key takeaways, and use visuals to communicate clearly with the public—like community members or constituents. You'll learn to distill content for readability while maintaining accuracy and impact.



Work Categories and Weights

Assignment Basics

This course includes three weighted categories of work, described below.

All work is open book.

Your work is your individual responsibility. There are some group discussions, but you are graded individually, based on your participation in these activities.



Kinds of Work in the Course

Major Projects

60%

These are written documents ranging from 1–15 pages.

They ask you to compose memos, instructions, proposals, long and short reports, and fact sheets. All major projects have visual design elements.

Each project has a rubric that explains how it will be graded. There are five Major Projects in the course.

Weekly Activities

25%

These are short exercises, discussions, and assignments, similar to in-class work or homework in a campus-based class.

They may ask you to write something, fill out a form, or complete a quiz. They also include Discussions with others in the course.

You usually have two Weekly Activities each week.

Check-In Surveys

15%

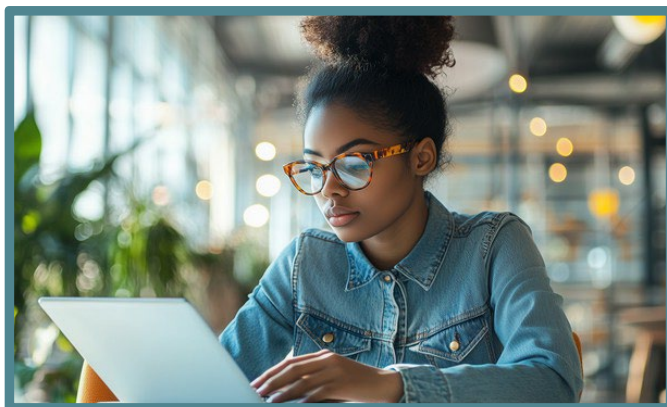
These are brief, anonymous polls that ask you how you are doing in the course. Surveys are primarily multiple-choice or true-false. There are no right or wrong answers.

I use your responses to customize the course and write a class newsletter.

There is a Check-In Survey for each week of classes.

Course Grading Process

Like a Performance Review on a Job



In the workplace, no one gives you a 92% on a report or a B+ on a proposal. You're expected to do the job fully and meet the expected standards. If something's off, your manager asks you to revise it by the final deadline.

That's what we do in this class too. If your work meets the standard, you're done. If not, you can revise it by the final deadline.

What "Complete" Means

Criteria	Complete	Incomplete
Matches the assignment	✓	X
Follows VT's Honor Code & Principles of Community	✓	X
Meets every rubric item	✓	X
Includes everything required	✓	X

Incomplete Isn't a Failure—It's a Draft

If your work is marked Incomplete, don't panic—it's just a sign that something needs more work.

As long as you submit your work by the end of the grace period, you can revise and resubmit as many times as you need, up until you earn a Complete or reach the final deadline at 11:59 PM, whichever comes first.



Why This Grading System?

It helps you focus on learning, not just grades. This approach:

- Encourages revision and growth through feedback.
- Reduces pressure by treating Incompletes as part of the process.
- Rewards persistence, not perfection.
- Gives you a chance to revise as long as you submit your work before the end of the grace period.

Tracking Your Work in Canvas



You'll see these marks in Canvas Grades:

✓ or 1 = Complete

X or 0 = Incomplete

Canvas chooses symbols or numbers based on the kind of assignment. I can't change it.

These aren't grades. They're status updates that tell you when your work is finished.

Where Your Course Grade Comes From

Canvas calculates your course grade by tallying all the work that is Complete in each category of work and assigning a score based on the weight of the category. The math is straightforward:

$$\frac{\text{\# of Complete Tasks}}{\text{Total \# of Tasks Available}} \times \text{Weight for the Category}$$

Add up the calculations for all the categories, and compare the number to the VT Grade Scale with +/- (below). Canvas does the math for you, so your current course grade is always visible on the Grades page.

Keep in mind: Canvas calculates based only on work that has been assigned and is due—your grade may change as more work is added and as I add feedback.

Example Grade Calculation

Here's how Example Student would calculate their grade using the information in Canvas:

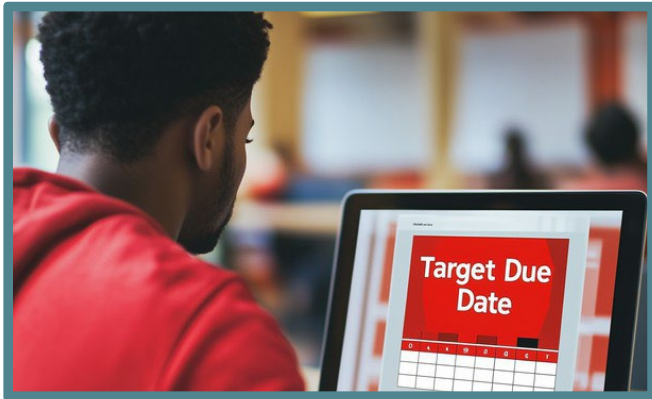
Category of Work	\# of Complete Tasks	Category Weight	Category Calculation
Major Tasks	4/5	60%	48.0
Weekly Activities	25/28	25%	22.25
Check-In Surveys	23/25	10%	13.8
Total (Course Grade)			84.05 (B)

Virginia Tech Grade Scale with +/-

	B+ 87–89.99	C+ 77–79.99	D+ 67–69.99	
A 93–100	B 83–86.99	C 73–76.99	D 63–66.99	F 59.99 &
A- 90–92.99	B- 80–82.99	C- 70–72.99	D- 60–62.99	below

Late Policy & Grace Period

The Basics



I accept late work for most assignments in this course. Just use the Grace Period.

You don't need to ask in advance or explain why your work is late.

The Grace Period lets you take more time when you need it, as often as you need it, and then turn your work in before the grace period ends.

Target Due Dates

Every assignment in the course has a **Target Due Date**. That's the date the assignment is due. Aim for the Target Due Date so you do not fall behind in the course.

- Applies to all work in the course.
- Ends at 11:59 PM on **Fridays**.

Grace Periods

There are **two different grace period systems**: one for weekly activities and check-in surveys, and another for major projects. For both systems, once the grace period passes, you can no longer submit the assignment and, therefore, it earns an Incomplete.

Weekly Activities & Check-In Surveys

- Lasts **3 weekdays**.
- Requires that work is submitted to the relevant assignment in Canvas.
- Ends at 11:59 PM on Wednesdays.

Major Projects & Self-Checks

- Lasts **6 weekdays**.
- Requires that work is submitted to the relevant assignment in Canvas.
- Ends at 11:59 PM on Mondays.

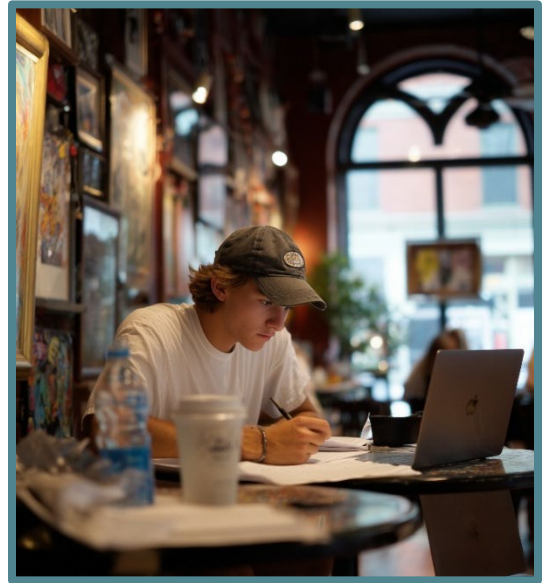
There is **no grace period for the Final Exam** (which is optional); however, you have the entirety of Exam Week to do your work. Your final exam is due by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 16, 2025.

Major Project Revision Deadlines

You can revise Major Projects as long as you meet these requirements:

- Your Major Project is **submitted by the end of the Grace Period**.
- Your submission meets the expectations for a **good-faith effort** (meaning it responds to the assignment and meets basic requirements like length and format).
- You earn an **Incomplete** on that Major Project.

You may revise as often as you'd like **until the revision deadline**, which is **two weeks after its Target Due Date**.



Late Labels and 0 or X Marks in Canvas

If you don't submit your work by the **Target Due Date**, Canvas will do two things:

- Label your work as **Late**.
- Mark it as **0** or **X** (Incomplete).

These are automatic labels Canvas applies. **There's no penalty** for being late as long as you submit by the end of the **grace period**.

Once you submit the work, I'll check it to see if it meets the assignment criteria. If it does, I'll update the mark to **✓ or 1** (Complete). The **0 or X** will go away. If it doesn't, I'll let you know if you can revise and resubmit. Allow time for me to review and add feedback. It's not always automatic.

Unfortunately, the **Late** label is permanent. Canvas won't let me remove it. I do hide it from my view though, so I never see it. Try not to stress about it. After all, it doesn't affect your grade.

Keys Tips

- You can revise and resubmit during the grace period.
- You're only locked out after the final deadline passes.
- Canvas doesn't reflect the whole story. Check the assignment or message me if you're unsure.

Key Terms at a Glance

✓ / X in Canvas: Canvas marks assignments as ✓ (or 1) for Complete and X (or 0) for Incomplete. These are *status updates*, not grades.

Check-In Surveys: Anonymous weekly polls used to reflect on how the course is going. There are no right or wrong answers. Worth 15% of your grade.

Complete: Your work meets *all* assignment expectations and rubric criteria. It's considered finished—no revisions needed.

Grace Period: Extra time to submit your work with no penalty.

Incomplete: Your work needs revision or is missing something. It's not a failure—it's just a draft. You can revise and resubmit it until the final deadline.

Late Label (in Canvas): If you turn in work after the Target Due Date, Canvas marks it "Late." This label is permanent, but it doesn't affect your grade.

Major Projects Grace Period: Applies to Major Projects and Self-Checks. Ends six weekdays after the Target Due Date (on Mondays at 11:59 PM).

Major Projects: Five longer assignments that involve research, writing, and design. Examples include memos, proposals, reports, and fact sheets. Worth 60% of your grade.

Modules: Course units organized in Canvas. Each includes a starting page, objectives, readings, and assignments. Begin every module at the introduction page.

Revision Deadline: The final date (two weeks after the Target Due Date) to revise and resubmit a major project that was marked Incomplete.

Target Due Date: The day an assignment is *due* in order to stay on schedule. You won't be penalized for turning work in after this date, as long as it's within the grace period. Most Target Due Dates fall on Fridays at 11:59 PM.

Weekly Activities Grace Period: Applies to Weekly Activities and Check-In Surveys (ends Wednesdays at 11:59 PM).

Weekly Activities: Short writing tasks, quizzes or Canvas Discussions. Worth 25% of your grade.