A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing

Traci Gardner
Spring 2024

For more information on this course, see the Course Policy Manual and our Canvas site.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the Tutelo/Monacan people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognize their continuing connection to the land, water, and air that Virginia Tech consumes. I pay respect to the Tutelo/Monacan Nations, and to their elders past, present, and emerging. To learn more, visit the VT Library exhibit The Land Speaks: The Monacan Nation and Politics of Memory. You can also visit the American Indian & Indigenous Community Center in 122 Squires Student Center.

I also acknowledge the enslaved Black people who lived and worked on the former plantation lands upon which Virginia Tech stands. These families include the Fractions, McNortons, and Saunders, as well as others. Read more about these families in the *Virginia Tech Magazine* article "Family Tree."

Your Access to this Course

Everyone needs special accommodation at some point because we all learn differently. 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.

For anyone who needs extra time on assignments

No problem. You can arrange whatever you need. If you need more time on a project, take the time you need. This course has a grace period that allows everyone extra time if needed. Check the details on Due Dates & the Late Policy for more details.

For anyone who needs a less-distracting environment

You can arrange to do your work for this course any place that works for you. Since all work is done online and independently, you have complete control over where you work.

Providing documentation of special needs

I generally do not require official documentation unless the university requires it for some reason. I do require that you let me know of any accommodation you need **during the first week of classes** so that I can make sure I arrange the support you need. I can only make accommodations for the future. I don't have a time machine (oh, how I wish I did!), so I can't apply them to past situations.

For anyone with official documentation:
Contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) in 310 Lavery Hall (map link, above the Turner Place Dining Center) as soon as possible to ensure that you have the resources you need to participate in the class. The procedures and forms you need are also available on the SSD website.

For anyone without official documentation:
I know that the official testing can be expensive and time-consuming. Send me a private message in Canvas **during the first week of classes** that tells me what you need, and I will try to help.

Technical Writing Overview

English 3764 ● CRN #15216, 15231, 15233, & 15237 ● Spring 2024 ● January 16 to May 10

Who

Traci Gardner

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she, her, hers

Straight, cisgender, white. Disabled. Lifetime Girl Scout. Hokie alum. Steelers fan. Poodle lover.

What

This course examines how to

- write about technical subjects in ways readers understand.
- analyze your situation so you present information clearly and effectively.
- choose the best design strategies for composing in digital environments.

Where

Online course site on Canvas: canvas.vt.edu/courses/186152

Low bandwidth:
- Streaming videos
- PDFs
- Web pages
- Google Drive or OneDrive

Times and dates correspond to the Blacksburg Campus (Eastern US Time Zone).

When

Anytime! This course is asynchronous, so you can

- Work at your own pace.
- Set your own schedule.

No required real-time sessions. Course begins January 16.

Why

To succeed in the workplace, you need skills in writing and communications.[1] In this course, we will focus on these skills so that you learn strategies that will help you prosper in your career.

How

Follow the Announcements & the Schedule in Canvas to **complete projects in these units:**
- Foundational Information
- Usability
- Project Management

What You Need

Course Texts

All readings are free, from
- open online textbooks.
- pages & files in Canvas.
- external PDFs & websites.

Computer

A reliable computer—Linux, FreeBSD, Windows, or Mac.

A/V Gear

- A camera or a phone with a camera. Screenshot support on your computer.
- Earbuds and a microphone.

Internet

Working, dependable Internet access and a backup plan.

If the connection where you live goes out, know where you can go for free WiFi.

Software

- Word processor & slide software that saves DOCX, PDF, & PPTX files.
- Spreadsheet software that saves XLSX files.
- Image editing software that saves JPG & PNG files.
- Microsoft Teams app for group communication.

Email

I will use your VT.EDU email and 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.

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[1] Pew Research Center, October 2016, "The State of American Jobs: How the shifting economic landscape is reshaping work and society and affecting the way people think about the skills and training they need to get ahead."

Short Course Schedule & Major Project Target Dates

This schedule may change to adapt to your needs and those of others taking the course. Check Canvas Announcements for changes to the dates. This table does not include weekly activities due in the course. Check each week's Preview Announcement for specific details on all the work that is due each week. *Last updated January 15, 2024.*

Dates	Week	Course Focus	Major Project Target Dates
Unit 1: Foundational Information			
Jan 16–19	Week 1	Course Intro	
Jan 22–26	Week 2	Rhetorical Awareness Jan 22: Last Day to Add	
Jan 29–Feb 2	Week 3	Ethics & Tech Writing	Feb 2: Websites Analysis
Unit 2: Usability			
Feb 5–9	Week 4	Plain Language	
Feb 12–16	Week 5	UX & Document Design	
Feb 19–23	Week 6	UX Document Revision	Feb 23: User Doc Revision & Reflection Memo
Unit 3: Project Management			
Feb 26–Mar 1	Week 7	Intro to Project Management Feb 26: Last Day to Drop	
Mar 2–10	Spring Break. I will respond to any email messages on Monday, March 11.		
Mar 11–15	Week 8	Proposals and Group Logistics	
Mar 18–22	Week 9	Submitting Your Proposal	Mar 22: Proposal
Mar 25–29	Week 10	Conducting Research Mar 26: Last day to resign w/o penalty	
Apr 1–5	Week 11	Submitting Your Progress Report	Apr 5: Progress Report
Apr 8–12	Week 12	Drafting the Body Sections of Your Report	
Apr 15–19	Week 13	Documentation & Drafting Your Front & Back Matter Apr 17: Last day to reschedule exams	
Apr 22–26	Week 14	Submitting Your Report	Apr 23 Recommendation Report Apr 26: Grace Period for All Open Work Closes
Apr 29–May 1	Week 15	Evaluating Your Progress May 1: Last day of classes; Last day to withdraw	
May 3–8	Exam Week	Exam Week May 3: Exam opens at 12:00 AM	May 8: Exam due by 11:59 PM (No Grace Period)

Suggested Weekly Schedule & Target Due Dates

The schedule outlined below suggests how to break up your work during the week and submit your work on the suggested due dates. Take this as a suggestion, not as a required schedule. Everyone works differently, and we all have other obligations. Adjust the schedule to make it work for you.

Day of the Week	To Do	Due Dates & Grace Period
Monday	• Check the Week's Preview Announcement in Canvas for the specific activities for the week. • Schedule time to complete the activities for the week as well as any work remaining from the previous week. • Check in with your group on Teams and schedule any group work, discussions, or meetings.	
Tuesday	• Read or view the texts and videos, looking for details that will help you complete the activities for the week. • Complete the Tuesday Try-It Activity, after reading or watching the related information.	
Wednesday	• Continue work on the week's activities. • Check in with your group on Teams for any updates or messages from your group.	Grace Period ends at 11:59 PM for activities from the previous week (including Try-Its and Check-In Surveys).
Thursday	• Continue work on any other readings and activities for the week, including group work. • Complete the Thursday Try-It Activity, after reading or watching the related information.	
Friday	• Complete any remaining individual and group work for the week. • Check in with your group on Teams to ensure you're up-to-date and ready for next week.	Target Due Date for the week's work.
Weekend	• Take a break. No one should work all the time! • If you do want to work, go for it You can work ahead or catch up. • Remember that I take the weekends off, so you'll receive replies to any emails on Monday.	

Target Due Dates & the Late Policy

I accept late work for most of the assignments in this course. You don't need to ask in advance or explain why your work is late. Just take more time when you need it, as many times as you need it. Turn your work in when you can before the grace period ends.

> **I accept late work**
> (no questions asked)

In the case of group assignments, be aware that your failure to meet a deadline affects the entire group. Keep your group members informed if you believe you will be unable to meet a deadline that your group sets. Groups will set procedures for such matters in their group contracts.

Grace Period

The grace period covers most situations, whether a religious holiday, academic conflict, illness, or a personal issue. If you cannot meet a due date, use the grace period.

The grace period occurs between the target due date and the last moment that you can submit work in the course. Canvas indicates the end of the grace period as the "available until" date, shown in the screenshot on the right.

Turtle Anatomy Exam 🐢
Due: Fri Jul 23, 2021 11:59pm ← **Due Date**

Attempt 1 ⌄   ○ IN PROGRESS
Next Up: Submit Assignment

Unlimited Attempts
Available: Jul 20, 2021 12:00am until Jul 28, 2021 11:59pm ← **End of Grace Period**

⌄ Details

Identify all of the portions of turtle anatomy or fail this course.

! If you turn in your work during the Grace Period, Canvas will mark your work as *Late*. Don't worry about this label. There is no grade penalty for work submitted during the grace period.

Target Due Dates and Grace Period, by Assignment Type

Most work in this course has a grace period, but there are exceptions. Group work must follow your group's established deadlines. The length of the grace period depends upon the kind of activity:

Assignment Type	Open Grace Period	3-Day Grace Period	No Grace Period
Assignments for the First Week of Classes		✓	
Check-In Surveys		✓	
Individual Try-Its & Other Weekly Activities		✓	
Group Try-Its, including Discussions		✓	
Self-Checks	✓*		
Major Projects & Wrappers	✓*		
Optional Final Exam			✓†

* Ends at 11:59 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

† Optional Final Exam must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, May 8, 2024, so I can submit course grades on time. Make-ups and extensions must be approved by the Dean of Students.

Interruptions in Course Progress

In the case of extenuating circumstances, let me know **immediately**. I understand that things happen. As long as you're honest and timely in letting me know, we can try to work something out.

Incomplete Policy

My department's policy states, "Incompletes are for students who did their work during the semester but could not complete course requirements because of a problem or emergency at the end of the term." As a result, I cannot offer Incompletes for anyone who failed to keep up during the term. If you find you have an impossible amount of work to complete by the end of the term, withdrawing from the course is likely the best solution.

Individual Projects & Group Projects

You will complete projects individually and with your group. I will provide more information on how groups work in the coming weeks. This page provides some basic details on the way you'll collaborate.

Individual Projects & Work

You will work individually on the first two Major Projects, though you will share them with your group for feedback and as you work on the Project Management unit.

You will also work individually on many of the weekly activities and all of the Self-Checks and Check-In Surveys. Additionally, you will do individual work that contributes to your group projects. For example, your group can divide the research you need to do among everyone in the group. You'll each do research individually and then everyone will share their findings with the group members.

Group Projects & Work

You will work together on all of the Major Projects in the Project Management unit, writing and submitting a single document for each one.

Your group will use Microsoft Teams to connect with one another, choosing the asynchronous and synchronous options that work best for your group members. While your group is in charge of how and when you catch up, I will require some specific messages to ensure everyone can connect and collaborate with the group.

Group Setup for Projects

I will set up your groups during or after the second week of the course, based on your responses to the student information survey during the first week of class. You will work with your group for the entire semester.

Your groups will include 4–5 members each. There may be a group with as many as 6 members, but I will do my best to avoid any groups with fewer than 4 members.

Group Roles & Logistics

Your group will choose members to fill different roles, like a group leader and a group technology specialist. These roles will help ensure smooth collaboration.

Your group can decide how to collaborate based on your schedules and access. You can meet in person or online. Your whole group can meet, and you can also have smaller meetings with two or three people. I do require that you use Teams to share schedules and messages. Your group can share documents using Office 365 or Google Drive. Either is fine.

Group Project Assessment

I will mark group projects and activities Complete or Incomplete. In some cases, Canvas will auto-mark your work.

Everyone in the group will usually receive the same mark. You need to participate fully in the group projects to earn a Complete on the group projects. If a group member does not participate or participates only minimally, that person will receive an Incomplete. If the group project is marked Incomplete, the group can revise and resubmit as long as the end of the grace period has not passed. Individual students who earn an Incomplete cannot revise if the project itself is already Complete.

Kinds of Work in the Course

This course includes five kinds of work: Try-Its, Check-In Surveys, Major Projects, Project Wrappers, and Self-Checks. A sixth category, Other Weekly Activities, covers less frequent work. All work is submitted and assessed in Canvas to ensure FERPA protection. Read more about each kind of work below.

Try-Its

Try-Its, whether individual or group Try-Its, let you try a writing activity related to the week's work or the current project without worrying about mistakes. Some activities ask you to write a short technical document. Others present you with scenarios or documents to analyze. All Try-Its are open book: you can use the textbooks, Canvas, and your notes. Usually you have two Try-Its each week.

Assessment for Try-Its: As long as you put in the effort for a full response, your work will earn a Complete. Canvas marks most of individual Try-Its Complete automatically. I review them, and if I find you did not give it your full effort or did not complete the activity, I will change the mark to Incomplete. Group Try-Its are marked manually after the grace period ends.

You can revise these activities if I mark them Incomplete, as long at the Grace Period has not ended.

Check-In Surveys

Check-In Surveys are short individual activities that ask you how you are doing in the course. I use your responses to customize the course. The surveys are primarily multiple-choice or true-false questions. There are no right or wrong answers. There is a Check-In Survey for each week of classes.

Assessment for Check-In Surveys: Canvas marks these activities Complete automatically. In most cases, I will only see the survey statistics and answers in summary. I will never see your name with your answers, unless you type your name in your answer. Your responses will not help or hurt you in the course (as long as you don't skip the activity).

Major Projects

Major Projects are the primary assignments in the course. You will compose full technical documents, such as memos, documentation, proposals, and reports. These activities are the most important kind in the course, and they have the strongest impact on your course grade. There are five Full Draft assignments in the course.

Assessment for Full Drafts: I compare your Major Project to the rubric attached to each assignment in Canvas. Your project needs a Yes rating for all the criteria listed in the rubric to earn a Complete.

If your work does not receive a Yes for all the criteria, I mark it Incomplete. You can revise and resubmit Incomplete work as long as the Grace Period for Major Projects is still open. This term, the Grace Period ends at 11:59 PM on Friday, April 26, 2024.

Project Wrappers

Project Wrappers are individual work. They use multiple-choice and short answer questions that ask you to reflect on each Major Project as you finish work on it. These assignments wrap around the project—you complete one when you turn your project in, and another when you receive feedback on your project. There are two Project Wrappers for each Major Project, for a total of 10.

Assessment for Self-Checks: Canvas marks these activities Complete automatically. In most cases I review them, and if I find you did not give it your full effort or did not complete the activity, I will change the mark to Incomplete.

You can revise these activities if I mark them Incomplete, as long at the Grace Period has not ended.

Self-Checks

Self-Checks ask you to compare your working draft to the specifications for a Major Project assignment to assess the status of your project. When you are able to mark all the criteria in the Self-Check as True, you are ready to turn in your Major Project. There are five Self-Checks in the course, one for each of the Major Projects.

Assessment for Self-Checks: Canvas automatically marks your Self-Checks Complete. If you do not earn a 1 (Complete) on the survey, revise your project to meet the criteria you marked False. You can complete the checklist as often as you like while the Grace Period for Major Projects is still open.

Other Weekly Activities

Other Weekly Activities are miscellaneous work that does not fit any of the primary categories, such as the Syllabus Review and Student Info Form during the first week of the course. Their frequency varies during the term. These activities fall primarily during the first week of the course.

Assessment for Other Weekly Activities: As long as you put in the effort for a full response, your work will earn a Complete. When possible, Canvas marks this work Complete automatically. Otherwise, I will mark the work manually.

Sequence of Major Projects

In this course, you will compose a series of documents that focus on analyzing, using, and improving technical documents. Additional details on these projects are included on the Canvas site.

Analyze Resources in Your Field

You will find out about some of the types of writing produced by those who work in your field by identifying and analyzing websites a student in your field would use while studying at Virginia Tech.

You will record the details you find in a table that lists the writing type, its purpose, its audience, its medium (how it is usually delivered), and its average length. Finally, you will compose a cover memo summarizing your findings.

Revise User Documentation

You will revise user documentation in order to improve its usability. In other words, you will use plain language and document design principles to make the existing document easier for readers to use as they complete the task it focuses on.

You will discuss the changes you make to the user documentation in a reflection memo. Your memo will analyze the user document you revised and the changes you made to it in order to improve its usability.

Pitch Your Report Topic in a Group Proposal

You and the members of your group will write a proposal for the site you will focus on for your project management projects in the course. Each group member will share their User Documentation Project with the members of their group, and then the group will choose one of the sites to focus on.

In addition to pitching the site you choose, your proposal will provide a schedule for your work, including plans for group meetings and draft deadlines. It will also identify the responsibilities of all group members.

Report on Your Group's Progress

You and the members of your group will assess your work on the recommendation report and compare your progress to the information you included in your proposal.

You will explain the work that the group has completed and the information that you have collected so far. You will include a Gantt Chart that updates your group schedule for the rest of the term.

Make Your Group Recommendation

You and the members of your group will write a recommendation report that analyzes the usability of a website that a Virginia Tech student would use in the course of their academic work at the university.

You will include customary sections (e.g., intro, methods, results, conclusions, and recommendations), along with front and back matter. Your report will probably be 10–15 pages long, including all sections.

Weekly Preview Announcements

This course uses Weekly Preview Announcements in Canvas to organize the work that you will do for each week.

You may notice that some of the sidebar navigation, like Assignments and Quizzes, is not shown in the course Canvas site. That's because everything you need is listed in the Weekly Preview Announcements.
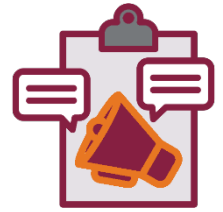
Where Will I Find the Preview Announcements?

The Preview Announcement for the current week will be listed at the top of the Course Homepage in Canvas.

Depending upon how you set up your Notifications for the Course, Canvas may also send you an email or text message when the Previews are posted.

What's Inside the Preview Announcements?

The Preview outlines the directions for the week, and it gives you the suggested due dates for the work.

The Preview usually includes the following sections:

- **Religious & Cultural Events**: A list of all the events I know about that might affect your progress in the course (like Ramadan and Passover).

- **Readings:** Details on the online textbook chapters, Canvas pages, webpages, and videos you need to read and watch for the week.

- **Assignments & Due Dates:** All the work that is due or that will reach the end of its grace period for the week. May also include reminders for major projects due the following week.

How Assessment Works

This course does not use letter or number grades on the work you submit. Research[2] tells us grades are a terrible way to measure learning, so I don't use them. Your work in this course is marked Complete or Incomplete, based on whether the work meets the expectations for the assignment.

Complete

I mark your work Complete in Canvas when it meets ALL of the following requirements:

- Submitted before the end of the Grace Period.
- Matches the assignment.
- Follows the Undergraduate Honor System and the Principles of Community.
- Fulfills all of the criteria for the assignment (all criteria in the rubric are marked Yes).

Incomplete

I mark your work Incomplete when it falls into ANY of the following categories:

- Submitted after the end of the Grace Period.
- Is not finished.
- Does not match the assignment.
- Does not follow the Undergraduate Honor System and the Principles of Community.
- Does not fulfill all of the criteria for the assignment (one or more criteria in the rubric is marked No).

If your work earns an Incomplete, **you can revise and resubmit** as long as the Grace Period for the assignment is open.

Complete and Incomplete Notation in Canvas

The Grades tool in Canvas keeps track of your work using a simple binary code:

- Complete work is marked with a one (1) or a checkmark (✔) in Canvas.
- Incomplete work is marked with a zero (0) or an X mark (X) in Canvas.

This binary code does not bear any grade value. Your goal is to earn a Complete on as much work as you need to reach your goal for the course.

When Is Work Marked Complete/Incomplete?

Use the table below to determine when I mark your work in Canvas Grades. If a personal issue comes up for me (like I get sick), I may not be able to work as quickly as usual. Allow an extra day or two just in case.

Kind of Work	When It's Marked in Canvas
Syllabus Review & Contact Info Form	Marked within 48 hours after the Grace Period ends but allow a few days.
Weekly Activities (including Check-Ins, Self-Checks, & some Try-Its)	Marked immediately by Canvas after submission, unless noted otherwise.
Try-It Discussions and Group Try-Its	Marked within 48 hours after the Grace Period ends but allow a few days.
Major Project Submissions	Marked after the Suggested Due Date, by comparing the work to the criteria. Allow a week.
Optional Final Exam	Marked after the end of exams.

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[2] If you want to learn more about grades and assessment, check out the work of Jesse Stommel, Alfie Kohn, and Susan D. Blum.

How Course Grades Are Calculated

There is only one letter grade in this course: the course grade I enter for you at the end of the term. Your course grade is determined by comparing the amount of work you have earned a Complete on to the expectations shown in the table below, which serves as a contract for course grades.

Effort Expectations Contract for Each Grade Level

Grade Level	Effort Expectations
A	Earn a Complete on the following: • Five Major Project Submissions • 95% of the Project Wrappers • 95% of the Check-In Surveys • 95% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
B	Earn a Complete on the following: • Four Major Project Submissions • 85% of the Project Wrappers • 85% of the Check-In Surveys • 85% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
C	Earn a Complete on the following: • Three Major Project Submissions • 75% of the Project Wrappers • 75% of the Check-In Surveys • 75% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
D	Earn a Complete on the following: • Two Major Project Submissions • 65% of the Project Wrappers • 65% of the Check-In Surveys • 65% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
F	Earn a Complete on the following: • Fewer than two of the Major Project Submissions • 64% or less of the Project Wrappers • 64% or less of the Check-In Surveys • 64% or less of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)

Additional Grade Calculation Guidelines

- There is no math calculation involved. I do not average the percentages or make any other calculation with the numbers to determine your grade.

- I start with your course grade for the Major Projects and then move your grade up or down based on how you did in the other categories.

- The different **categories listed on the Effort Expectations Contract (on the previous page) are not equivalent**. The Major Projects category is the most important category and holds the strongest weight on your grade.

- To earn a Complete for the group projects, you must participate fully in the projects as well as submit documents that meet the basic criteria.

- To earn an A or an A-, you must earn a Complete on all of the Major Projects.

- You cannot pass the course without earning a Complete on at least two Major Projects. If you have an F for the Major Projects category, you have an F as your course grade.

Checking Your Progress

Use these instructions to determine where your work in the course falls at any point:

1. Find the percentages for the work you have Completed on the **Grades** page in Canvas. Scroll to the bottom of the page to find a table of categories and details on the work you have completed, like this example:

Name	Score	Out of
Major Projects	80%	4.00/5.00
Project Wrappers	80%	8.00/10.00
Check-In Surveys	85%	12.00/14.00
Weekly Activities	75%	27.00/36.00

2. Check the chart of Effort Expectations Contract for Each Grade Level (on page 10) to find the expected percentages for each category.

3. Compare the percentages on the Canvas Grades page to the expectations on the Effort Expectations Contract for Each Grade Level. For instance, the student in the example image has 85% for Check-In Surveys; therefore, I marked that the student is in the B range for that category.

4. Determine your progress strictly according to the percentage cut-offs. Do not round up.

5. Look at the overall numbers to decide which course grade you are closest to. Keep the Additional Grade Calculation Guidelines listed above in mind.

Optional Final Exam: Performance Review

At the end of the term and after all work has been marked, I'll review the work you've completed and compare it to the effort expectations. I will fill out the Effort Expectations Rubric, so that you can see your potential course grade. You'll find this information in the Effort Expectations-Based Course Grade Assignment.

After this course grade information is posted, you have two options:

- **If you agree** with the course grade, do nothing. The grade in the rubric will become your course grade. You can skip the final exam.

- **If you disagree** with the course grade, you can propose a different grade by completing the final exam. Use the information in the rubric as the baseline for the course grade you propose in your Final Exam. Use details from the work you have done during the term to support your proposal. Your course grade will be indicated as the grade on the final exam.

The Grades page will compare the effort-based grade to the final exam grade and then show the higher letter grade as your course grade. Canvas makes this calculation automatically.

If you decide to complete the Final Exam, submit your work by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, May 8, 2024.

Make-ups and extensions for the final exam must be approved by the Dean of Students. If you are a graduating senior this term, any make-up or extension may keep you from graduating on time.

VT Grade Scale with +/-

I enter your course grade as a letter with a + or -, as needed. I do not use numbers at all because I am not doing any mathematical calculations.

Canvas and other systems that show you course grade may convert the letter grade to a number. In that case it is using the numbers from the standard VT Grade Scale with +/-, shown below:

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

How to Do Well in This Course

You do well in this course by working on everything until you reach your goal. If you don't do well on an activity, you can always try again (as long as its grace period is still open). Place your effort on doing your best work on every task. Keep the following guidelines in mind.

Focus on Ideas (Not Mistakes)

Focus on what you're trying to say. Forget about the pressure to be perfect. Why? Your ideas and the purpose of your message are the most important parts of what you write.

Focusing on perfection can distract writers from developing their ideas. Because we will focus on what you accomplish by the end of the course, mistakes won't undermine your course grade.

Write for Yourself (Not for Me)

In this course, you are learning writing strategies you will use in the workplace. Don't worry about writing to impress me as your teacher. Why? I am not going to be with you when you enter the workplace.

You need to develop your own sense of what makes writing effective. Your course grade is based on the work you put in to find that out.

Take Risks (Don't Play It Safe)

Try writing strategies that stretch your abilities and help you learn new things. There's no need to play it safe. Why? Taking risks doesn't count against you.

In fact, taking risks can demonstrate that you're putting in more effort. After all, the safe, easy route doesn't push you to learn and improve.

Have a Do-Over (No Penalty)

If you take a risk and it doesn't turn out, just try again. If my comments ask you to revise, there is no impact on your grade. Just as in a game, you have unlimited do-overs, as long as the Grace Period is open. Why? Making mistakes is part of the learning process.

Whether it takes two tries or more, you are investing yourself in your writing. As long as you are working to improve, you can't fail.

Put in the Effort (No Pain, No Gain)

Going through the motions won't produce strong workplace writing. You have to put in hard work and try all the projects. You need to write, rewrite, start over, and try again to improve your projects. The more you work, the better you'll do in the course.

Why? All your work counts toward your course grade, as long as you do the work, listen to feedback, incorporate what you hear, and reflect on how to improve your writing and communication.

Tips for Success

The key to success in this course is to focus on consistent, regular interaction—with the course materials and with me. Here are five specific ways to make that happen.

1. Use Courses Resources

Explore everything on our course Canvas site, and always do the readings. These resources are the online classroom for the course. You'll do better if you use them.

2. Check Canvas Daily

If anything changes (like a suggested due date or an assignment), you'll find it in Canvas Announcements first. Check in at least once daily so that you always know what is going on. Alternately, you can set your Canvas Notifications for the course so that you receive an email or text message when a new Announcement is posted.

3. Set a Schedule

Schedule regular class sessions for yourself. Dedicate three or four two-hour sessions on different days, rather than a one-day marathon session of 6 to 8 hours. If your work schedule makes this difficult, do what you can to spread your work out.

4. Avoid Last-Minute Work

You'll do better in the class if you get started early. If you wait until the last minute, you may not have time to complete your work or improve your draft before its suggested due date. Once the grace period ends, you're out of time!

5. Questions? Talk to me

I have no way to know when you need help. Tell me how it's going—what works for you and what you're unsure about. Use your weekly Check-in Survey to update me. If you have a question that can't wait for the Check-In Survey, use the Inbox tool in Canvas.

Get Help with the Course

Use any of these options to connect with me or others in the class for help.

General Questions in Canvas Discussions

Post your general 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.

Personal Questions in Canvas Inbox

For personal questions, send a private message in Canvas, using the Inbox tool. Canvas messages are secure, so they meet all FERPA requirements and protect your privacy. Be sure to use private Canvas Inbox messages if you want to discuss your grades, accommodations, and other personal issues.

Messages Using Teams

Send me a message in the #General channel in Teams, and I will reply as soon as I see it. Teams is the best place to look for real-time answers to your questions. I mute Teams while I am sleeping or otherwise unavailable.

For help, see the 4Help page Building an Online Collaborative Space in Teams and Microsoft's Quick Start Guide for Teams. If you want more detailed help, consulted the videos in the LinkedIn Learning Path, Getting Started with Microsoft Teams (Free with your VT Login).

Remember that everyone in the class will be able to see your question though. Save private questions for Canvas Inbox.

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 WCOnline or call the Writing Center director at 540-231-9270.

Help with Other Academic Areas

If you require academic support, investigate the University's services. Service areas include

- Student Success Center
- Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program
- Student Athlete Academic Support Services
- University Academic Advising Center
- Office of Veterans' Services

My Availability During the Term

Typical online hours

Normally, I am **online from late afternoon through early morning hours**, so look for responses from me during those hours.

Appointments

If you can't get what you need on Teams or through the Canvas Inbox, we can set up an appointment. Send me a message using the Canvas Inbox and tell me what you want to discuss and when you're available.

Typical offline hours

Weekdays:
- 5 AM to 3 PM
- 7:30 PM to 10 PM

Weekends:
- After 5PM on Friday
- All Day Saturday & Sunday

I will check in during the weekend, and I may reply. Do not worry if you don't hear from me until Monday however.