Syllabus Review

If we were meeting in a classroom, I would go over parts of the course documents with you—like the kinds of projects the course focuses on and the assessment system for the class.

This syllabus review is a substitute for that discussion that we would have in class. I will summarize key information from the course documents and ask you to respond to related questions. There are no tricks or memory tests. Just tell me how you feel about the information and let me know about any questions that you have. I'll also ask you to tell me some basic information about yourself. That's it.

Because the accompanying information for some questions is long, each question appears on a separate page.

All of the information in this review is available in the Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing and/or the Technical Writing Course Manual. If you want to download the text of this review however, you can save a copy of the PDF copy of the Syllabus Review.

Question 1
Basic Personal Information

Please call me Traci, or if that feels strange, Ms. Gardner.

My name is pronounced tray-see guard-ner.

My pronouns are she/her/hers.

I will be in Blacksburg during the Summer I Term.

Tell me the basics about yourself: What name do you go by? How do you pronounce your name? What are your pronouns? Where are you geographically*?

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*I ask where you are geographically so that I can understand how your time zone will influence your work. Also, I like to know where you are so that I can be aware of challenges you may have (like being in the path of a hurricane, the effect of the pandemic, and so forth). FYI: In all cases, please focus on your safety and well-being and that of your family first. We can figure out the class work once you're safe.

Question 2

Plan Your Work for the Course

Because this is an online course, your time management matters a lot—especially since this is an asynchronous course. We have no planned meeting times, so you have to plan specific times to get your work done.

The workflow below suggests one way to spread your work across the week. Most weeks, plan on working 8 to 12 hours on the course. That said, everyone works differently, and we all have other obligations. Adjust this schedule to it work for you.

Day of the Week	What to Do
Monday	• Check the Module Instructions in Canvas for the specific activities for the week. • Complete Peer Feedback Discussions for your classmates.
Tuesday	• Read the textbook and other readings, looking for details that will help you complete the activities.
Wednesday	• Complete writing activities that will help you write your draft. • Use feedback from your classmates to revise your draft from the previous week.
Thursday	• Compose a rough draft of your project. • Continue work on any other readings and activities for the week.
Friday	• Compose a cover letter for your draft. • Post your cover letter and draft in Discussions by 11:59 PM. Canvas automatically assigns peer feedback partners at 12:00 AM Saturday.
Weekend	• Take a break. No one should work all the time!

More information in "Typical Weekly Schedule," from A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing.

When do you think you will do your work for this course? Choose all the answers that fit.

☐ I have taken an asynchronous course (a course without a set meeting time) before.

☐ I have not taken an asynchronous course (a course without a set meeting time) before.

☐ I will probably try to do a little work every weekday.

☐ I will do most of the work on two or three days each week.

☐ I have a complicated schedule. It will probably change every week.

☐ I will probably catch up or work ahead on the weekends.

☐ I am confident about managing my schedule.

☐ I'm not sure about my time management skills. I will let you know if I need help setting a schedule.

What Is a Module in Canvas?

This course uses Modules to organize the readings and activities for each week. Modules work like a bucket of content. I place details on all the readings and activities for each week in a Module.

To find out what is happening during the first week of class, you would check the Module for the first week. For the second week of class, you'd check the Module for the second week, and so forth.

How Do You Navigate a Module?

You will see a list of text information and links to readings and activities. Start with the Instructions, which tell you what to do with everything in the bucket and give you the suggested due dates for the work. After you read the Instructions, you will know what you need to do with the rest of the things in the Module bucket.

The module is arranged in this order:

- Instructions for the Week (a webpage in Canvas)
- To Read section: the textbook chapters, Canvas pages, and LinkedIn Learning videos
- To Write section: informal and formal document assignments
- To Discuss section: peer feedback and self-reflection Discussions
- To Track section: writer's log template for the week

You can find more information in "A Module in Canvas is like a bucket," from A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing.

Do you feel confident about using Modules in this course?

○ I've used Modules before, so navigating the course should be no problem.

○ I've never used Modules, but I think that understand how they work.

○ I'm not sure I understand, but I'll try it out.

○ I may need more help before I understand.

Question 4

Technical Writing Projects

In this course, you will compose formal and informal documents that build toward your Recommendation Report. The report can be 15–18 pages long with all the details and information included, but you'll be working on it little by little all term. The sequence of projects outlined below will be your primary focus for the entire term.

Choose Your Topic

Following the details on the [Recommendation Report Topic Requirements](#), you will choose a topic for your Recommendation Report that
- relates directly to your major and future career, and
- focuses on a specific situation that you can easily observe.

Once you choose a topic, you will fill out a proposal form to tell me what you've decided. You can include information from your proposal in the introduction and front matter of your Recommendation Report.

Conduct Secondary Research

You will gather secondary research (information other people have collected) to support your project by finding books, journal articles, and/or professional websites. After conducting secondary research, you will create a working bibliography, which will later form the bulk of the References section in your Recommendation Report.

Conduct Primary Research

You will also include primary research (information you collect). You might conduct a survey, observe the situation, or interview people who know about the situation. Ideally, primary research is designed so that someone else can duplicate the research, confirming the findings. As a result, you'll write a how-to document, with a technical description and step-by-step instructions on how to conduct the primary research, which will later become an Appendix in your Recommendation Report.

Make Your Recommendation

Your recommendation report identifies the situation you examined, outlines your research methods and findings, explains the possible options, draws conclusions about each option, and finally makes a recommendation to your audience. We will work through the different portions of the report one-by-one, building the entire report by assembling all your informal and formal work by the end of the term.

More information in "[Sequence of Technical Writing Projects](#)," from A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing.

We will work on the Recommendation Report all term, little by little, so it is important that you understand how the projects connect. What questions or comments do you have about these technical writing projects?

Question 5

Where Your Course Grade Comes From

This course has no grades on the daily work you do or the individual projects you complete. Research tells us that grades are a terrible way to measure learning, so we are doing away with them. You can read more about the problems with grades in "So Why Formative Assessment Instead of Grades?" in A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing.

There is only one grade in this course: the course grade that I enter for you at the end of the term. Rather than averaging grades for all the work you complete during the term, I base course grades on three things that you tell me about:

- The time and intensity that you put into your writing.
- What you learn by engaging in the course activities and assignments.
- How you improve your writing and communication skills over time.

I will ask you to report your work in the following ways:

- By keeping entries in a work log that record everything you do and reflects on how well you have done.
- By assessing your work at midterm in a progress report.
- By writing a performance review at the end of the term that evaluates your work and proposes the grade you should receive.

To summarize, you are in control of your course grade. You track how well you are doing, and you use the information you have tracked to tell me the grade you believe you have earned. I will review what you report about your work in the course, and then I will usually record the grade you suggest as your course grade.

I reserve the right to change your grade as appropriate however. We'll talk more about the reasons I might not take your suggestion later in the course, but generally, it happens when someone has pitched a grade that is lower than they deserve for reasons that have nothing to do with learning in the course.

You can read more about these activities in "So Where Do Course Grades Come From?" from A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing.

How do you feel about a course without grades? Choose all the answers that fit.

☐ Sounds good to me. I'm in charge of my grade as I understand this.

☐ I've had a teacher who used a system like this before, and I liked the way it worked.

☐ I've had a teacher who used a system like this before, and I didn't like it.

☐ I'm worried about whether this system will work for me. It makes me nervous not to have grades.

How Will I Know How I'm Doing in the Course?

Being in a course without grades doesn't mean you won't hear from me. I will respond to everything you compose. I will focus on formative assessment, the kind of feedback that helps you improve your writing.

Here's the kind of feedback you can expect from me:

- Comments that suggest how you can improve your work.
- Advice on how to proceed, such as helping you set priorities for revision.
- Questions about things that confuse me in your projects.
- Encouragement to try new strategies and take risks.

You will get lots of feedback as I ask you to put in your best effort. You just won't get grades.

What can you do to be successful in a course without daily grades? Where do you think you might struggle, and what can you do to overcome those concerns? How do you think this system will support you as a writer? Write a short paragraph that tells me.

Late Work & Grace Period

I accept late work. Yes, you read that right. If you cannot meet the suggested due dates for any reason, take the time that you need. You do not need to ask in advance or to explain why your work is late. Just take the time you need and turn your work in when you can.

Most of your work has a grace period until the last day of classes. **All course work must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Thursday, July 1, 2021.** You can take the time you need, but you must turn in your work by the end of the term.

Exceptions

There are a few exceptions:

- The **work assigned during the first week of the term** focuses on basic information and tasks that are important for success during the term. The grace period for this work ends on Wednesday, June 2.

- There is no grace period for the **drafts you submit for peer feedback**. These drafts are due by 11:59 PM on Fridays, starting with the second week of class, because of technical requirements for peer feedback. Canvas automatically assigns peer feedback partners at 12:00 AM Saturday. If you do not turn in a draft, Canvas cannot assign peer feedback for you. The good news is that you can turn in whatever you have. You don't have to have a complete draft to get feedback. Just be sure to turn something in by 11:59 PM each Friday.

- **Work Logs** have a grace period that ends at 11:59 PM on the Wednesday after their Suggested Due Date. These logs must be timely. It makes no sense to go back to fill out a log weeks later. You need to record the work you do as you do it. It's fine to write, "I didn't work this week," in your Work Log if that is accurate. Nothing bad will happen to you (no grades, remember?).

- **Your Final Performance Review** must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Friday, July 2, 2021 so that I can submit course grades on time. There are no make-ups or extensions unless approved by the Dean of Students.

This is not the typical practice for classes, so I want to make sure you understand. What's the muddiest point of the Late Policy & Grace Period for you? What questions do you have?

Accessibility

Everyone needs special accommodations at some point because we all learn differently. I am happy to work directly with you or with the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) staff to make sure that you have the support you need.

How do I document what will help me?
To document what will help you the most, please 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.

What if I do not have official documentation?
That's okay too. I know that the official testing can be expensive and time-consuming. Send me a private message in Canvas that tells me what you need, and I will try to help.

When do I let you know what I need?
Please let me know what you need during the first week of the term so that I can be sure you have the resources you need as soon as possible. Also email me your documentation from the SSD office by the end of the first week of class if possible. If not possible, send the information as soon as you can. Because I am not on campus due to COVID-19, do not take your documentation to my office.

I need extra time on projects.
No problem. If you need more time on a project or need to complete work in a less distracting environment, take the time you need. Check the late policy for more details.

I have a service animal.
EXCELLENT! I love pets. Be sure to share a photo if you can.

More information in "Accessibility," from Technical Writing Course Manual.

Are there any accommodations you need for this course? Tell me about how I can help you succeed.

Question 9

What do you find most interesting or exciting about this course? What are you looking forward to?

Question 10

What questions do you still have about the course?

Question 11

If there's anything else you want me to know, this is your chance. Add it here.

Question 12

Finally, please confirm that you understand this course requires that you follow the Undergraduate Honor System and the Virginia Tech Principles of Community for all work in this course.

As a Hokie, will you conduct yourself with honor and integrity at all times? Will you pledge not to lie, cheat, or steal and not to accept the actions of those who do?

○ Yes, I will follow the Honor System and the Principles of Community.

○ No, I want to make the HokieBird cry by being a dishonest Hokie.