The background image shows a large, multi-story university building with a central tower and arched windows. In the foreground, there are green trees and a large bush of yellow flowers. The title text is overlaid on the upper half of the image.

A Short Guide to English 3764: Technical Writing

Traci Gardner
Fall 2022

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For more information on this course, see the [Course Policy Manual](#) and [our Canvas site](#).

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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 Monacan Nation website](#). 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 give you the support you need.

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:

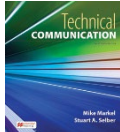
I know that the official testing can be expensive and time-consuming. Send me [a private message in Canvas](#) **during the first week of classes** that tells me what you need, and I will try to help.

Technical Writing Overview

English 3764 ● CRN #84948, 84950, 84952, & 84953 ● Fall 2022 ● August 22 to December 14

Who  Traci Gardner tengrrl@vt.edu she, her, hers Straight, cisgender, white. Disabled. Lifetime Girl Scout. Hokie alum. Steelers fan. Poodle lover.	What This course examines how to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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/156996 Low bandwidth: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Streaming videos • PDFs • Web pages • Google Drive Times and dates correspond to the Blacksburg Campus (Eastern US Time Zone).
When Anytime! Asynchronous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work at your own speed • Set your own schedule No required real-time sessions. Course begins August 22.	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 Canvas Modules to write these documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letters, memos, & email • Instructions • An oral presentation • A technical description • A recommendation report

What You Need

Course Textbook <i>Technical Communication</i> by Markel & Selber. 13th ed. Macmillan, 2021. ² 	Computer A reliable computer—Linux, FreeBSD, Windows, or Mac.	A/V Gear <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Word processor & slide software that saves DOCX, PDF, & PPTX files, OR Google Drive. • Image editing software that saves JPG & PNG files. • Video recording software that saves MP4s or MOVs. 	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.

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.”

² Print or ebook of 13th ed. is fine. Other editions may work, but page numbers will differ. I can’t provide page numbers for every edition. If you choose an alternate edition, consult a classmate to find resources that are not in the text you have.

Short Course Schedule & Full Draft Due Dates







This schedule may change to adapt to your needs and those of others taking the course. Check Canvas Announcements for updates and changes to the dates. Check the Module Instructions each week for specific details on what's due. *Last updated July 27, 2022.*

If you purchased an eBook access code, use this link: <https://achieve.macmillanlearning.com/courses/n9xeq6>

Dates	Activities and Work	Full Draft Due Dates	Markel & Selber Readings
Aug 22-26	Module 1: Course Intro Aug 26: Last Day to Add		Ch 1, "Introduction to Technical Communication"
Aug 29-Sep 2	Module 2: Getting Started in Tech Writing		Ch 2, "Understanding Ethical & Legal Considerations" Ch 3, "Writing Technical Documents"
Sep 5-9	Module 3: Convincing Your Audience Sep 5: Labor Day, No classes or email contact		Ch 5, "Analyzing Your Audience & Purpose" Ch 8, "Communicating Persuasively"
Sep 12-16	Module 4: Pitching Your Topic		Ch 21, "Making Oral Presentations"
Sep 19-23	Module 5: Using Graphics & Visuals		Ch 12, "Creating Graphics"
Sep 26-30	Module 6: Submitting Your Pitch	Sep 30: Pitch	Ch 9, "Emphasizing Important Information"
Oct 3-7	Module 7: Writing Technical Descriptions Oct 3: Last Day to Drop Oct 7: Fall Break, No classes or email contact		Ch 20, "Writing Definitions, Descriptions, & Instructions," pp. 561-569
Oct 10-14	Module 8: Writing Instructions		Ch 20, "Writing Definitions, Descriptions, & Instructions," pp.569-587
Oct 17-21	Module 9: Submitting Your Description & Instructions	Oct 21: Description & Instructions	
Oct 24-28	Module 10: Conducting Research Oct 24: Last day to resign w/o penalty		Ch 6, "Researching Your Subject" App Part A, "Skimming Your Sources & Taking Notes" App Part B, "Documenting Your Sources"
Oct 31-Nov 4	Module 11: Structuring Your Recommendation	Nov 4: Report Outline	Ch 7, "Organizing Your Information" Ch 18, "Writing Recommendation Reports"
Nov 7-11	Module 12: Drafting the Body Sections of Your Recommendation		Ch 18, "Writing Recommendation Reports" Ch 11, "Designing Print & Online Documents"
Nov 14-18	Module 13: Drafting the Front & Back Matter of Your Recommendation Nov 17: Last day to reschedule exams		Ch 14, "Corresponding in Print and Online" App Part A, "Skimming Your Sources & Taking Notes" App Part B, "Documenting Your Sources"
Nov 19-27	Thanksgiving Break, No classes or email contact		
Nov 28-Dec 2	Module 14: Submitting Your Recommendation	Nov 29: Recommendation Dec 2: Grace Period for All Open Work Closes	
Dec 5-7	Module 15: Evaluating Your Progress Dec 7: Last day of classes; Last day to withdraw		Ch 8, "Communicating Persuasively" (Review)
Dec 9-14	Dec 9: Exam opens at 12:00 AM	Dec 14: Exam due by 11:59 PM (No Grace Period)	

Suggested Weekly Schedule & 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 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check the the Module Instructions page 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. 	
Tuesday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Read the textbook and other readings/viewings, 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue work on the week's activities. 	Grace Period ends at 11:59 PM for activities from the previous week (including Try-Its and Check-In Surveys).
Thursday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue work on any other readings and activities for the week. Complete the Thursday Try-It Activity, after reading or watching the related information. 	
Friday 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complete any remaining for work the week. 	Suggested Due Date for the week's work.
Weekend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember that I take the weekends off, so you'll receive replies to any emails on Monday. 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. 	

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)

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 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.

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

Due Dates and Grace Period, by Assignment Type

Most work in this course has a grace period, but there are exceptions. The length of the grace period depends upon the kind of activity:

Assignment Type	Open Grace Period	3-Day Grace Period	No Grace Period
Syllabus Review		✓	
Contact Info Form		✓	
Check-In Surveys		✓	
Try-Its		✓	
Self-Checks & Other Weekly Activities	✓*		
Full Draft Submissions	✓*		
Optional Final Exam			✓†

* Ends at 11:59 PM on Friday, December 2, 2022.

† Optional Final Exam must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 14, 2022, 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, please 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.

Sequence of Technical Writing Projects

In this course, you will compose a series of documents (labeled as Full Drafts) that focus on food-related issues. This sequence of projects will be your focus for the term.

Analyze Food or Beverage Packaging



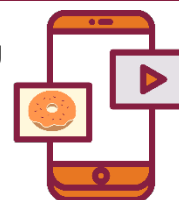
You will analyze the packaging and labels for a food or beverage (e.g., a cereal box, can of soup, wine bottle) to see how it works as a technical document.

You will record the details you find in a table that lists the characteristics of a technical document, measures of excellence in technical documents, and principles for ethical communication. Finally, you will predict the likely characteristics of the audience for this technical writing, using the data you have recorded as supporting evidence.

Pitch Your Recommendation Report Topic

You will pitch your recommendation topic in a video presentation that describes your topic. Your video should be 3 to 5 minutes long and should show either yourself talking to the audience or slides that illustrate your story.

You will explain your topic, why you chose it, and why your readers will be interested. The presentation should also include details on your planned research on the topic and be accompanied by a transcript.



Write a Technical Description



You will choose an object or process related to food and compose a technical description in the form of a fact or info sheet. Objects can include tools (e.g., wok, mortar and pestle), ingredients (e.g., ginger, hops), and food items (e.g., uramaki, Chicken Kyiv). Processes can include julienning, fermenting, and fertilizing.

You will include specific details and relevant illustrations that describe the item or process is, how it works, and its principal parts or steps.

Compose Instructions

You will create instructions for how to prepare, grow, select, or serve food. Your project can be a recipe, but you are not limited to recipes. You can also focus on topics such as how to pair a beer with a meal, how to harvest strawberries, how to choose the fresh produce, or how to season a cast iron skillet.

You will write numbered steps, using action verbs in the imperative mood. Your project will include photos or illustrations demonstrating the steps.



Make Your Recommendation



You will identify a food-related challenge that Virginia Tech students face, investigate solutions, and make a recommendation to your readers. You will have a range of projects to focus on, including recommendations on decreasing grocery bills, eating vegan on campus, optimizing food truck access, and addressing food insecurity.

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

A Module in Canvas is like a Bucket

This course uses Modules 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, does not show in the course Canvas site. That's because everything you need is in Modules.



What Is a Module?



In this course, a module is like a bucket. It contains everything you will need for a week.

Inside, you will find details on the readings and other activities that you are to complete for the relevant week.

What's Inside the Bucket?

The Instructions Page



The Module Instructions page outlines the instructions for the week. This page tells you what to do with everything that is in the bucket, and it gives you the suggested due dates for the work.

Be sure to notice these details on the Module Instructions page:

- General details on the current projects in the first paragraphs
- Sections on what you need to read, to write, to check, and to assess
- Links to the resources and activities for the week

Activities for the Week



The activities you need to complete for the week are listed under these headings on the Module Instructions page:

- To Read: textbook chapters, Canvas pages, webpages, and videos
- To Write: informal and formal document assignments
- To Check-In: weekly surveys to tell or show me how you are doing
- To Assess Yourself: self-assessment assignments

How Assessment Works

This course does not use letter or number grades on the work you submit. Research³ 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 the effort you put into the task and on whether the work meets the criteria for the assignment. Since this course focuses on technical writing, the work you do needs to meet specific genre requirements. These requirements drive the criteria for each task you complete.



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 fulfill the criteria for the assignment.



If your work earns an Incomplete, **you can revise and resubmit** as long as the Grace Period is still 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 (✗) 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 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 24 hours after the Grace Period ends but allow a few days.
Weekly Activities (including Check-Ins, Self-Checks, & Try-Its)	Marked immediately by Canvas after submission, unless noted otherwise.
Full Draft Submissions	Marked after the Suggested Due Date, by comparing the work to the criteria. Allow a week. If submitted during the grace period, marked within a week of submission.
Optional Final Exam	Marked after the end of exams.

³ 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 all of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• All Full Draft Submissions• All Check-In Surveys• All Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
B	Attempt and submit all five of the Full Draft Submissions Earn a Complete on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Four Full Draft Submissions• 85% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
C	Attempt and submit all five of the Full Draft Submissions Earn a Complete on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Three Full Draft Submissions• 75% of the Check-In Surveys• 75% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
D	Attempt and submit fewer than five of the Full Draft Submissions Earn a Complete on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Two Full Draft Submissions• 65% of the Check-In Surveys• 65% of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)
F	Attempt and submit fewer than five of the Full Draft Submissions Earn a Complete on the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• None of the Full Draft Submissions• 64% or less of the Check-In Surveys• 64% or less of the Weekly Activities (including Try-Its & Self-Checks)

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
Full Draft Submissions	80%	4.00/5.00
Check-In Surveys	85%	12.00/14.00
Weekly Activities	75%	27.00/36.00
Course Grade	0%	0.00/0.00

2. Check the chart of Effort Expectations Contract for Each Grade Level (on the previous page) 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. There is no rounding or bumping up.
5. Look at the overall numbers to decide which course grade you are closest to. Keep this information in mind:
 - o The Full Drafts category holds the strongest weight on your grade.
 - o I start with your course grade for the Full Drafts and then move your grade up or down based on how you did in the other categories.
 - o You cannot earn an A if you do not earn a Complete on all of the Full Drafts.
 - o I do not average the percentages or make any other calculation with them to determine your grade.

Midterm Feedback Report

At midterm, 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 where your progress places you.

Your Midterm Feedback Report is a snapshot of a moment in time. As you continue working in the course, the numbers will change. You can check the Grades page at any time to see the percentages for your work and compare them to the Effort Expectations Contract for Each Grade Level, using the instructions in the Checking Your Progress section above.



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 again 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.

If you decide to complete the Final Exam, submit your work by 11:59 PM on Wednesday, December 14, 2022. Make-ups and extensions must be approved by the Dean of Students.

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 part 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 how hard you work 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](#).

