

Syllabus for Technical Writing, Spring 2026

Last updated January 15, 2026

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

Course Details

English 3764: Technical Writing
CRNs #15247, #15261, #15267, & #15268
Spring 2026 (Jan 20–May 13)

Instructor



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

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

Hoarder of stickers. Lifetime Girl Scout. Hokie
alum. Steelers fan. Poodle lover.

Course Texts

All readings are **free**, coming from

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

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 is expensive and time-consuming, so I don't require it. Just let me know what you need by Canvas Inbox or email as soon as possible. SSD's new system gives me access to official accommodation details, but if there's something beyond the forms you want me to know, please message me. Keep in mind I can only apply accommodations moving forward, not 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 using 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



What's in a Module?

This course has a Module for each class week. Each Module is like a backpack: It includes everything you need for the week. You'll find these 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, and then **begin with the Module introduction page**.

Course Modules

This is a tentative schedule. More information is available in Canvas.

Dates	Week	Topics
Jan 20–23	Week 1	Introduction to Technical Writing
Jan 26–30	Week 2	Foundations & Semester-Long Project Initiation
Feb 2–6	Week 3	Proposals & Research
Feb 9–13	Week 4	Plain Language, Audience, & Accessibility
Feb 16–20	Week 5	Finalizing & Submitting Your Proposal
Feb 23–27	Week 6	User Documents, Instructions, & Support Resources
Mar 2–6	Week 7	Document Design, Audience, & Accessibility
Mar 7–15		Spring Break
Mar 16–20	Week 8	Finalizing & Submitting Your User Document
Mar 23–27	Week 9	Informational Reports
Mar 30–Apr 3	Week 10	Progress Reports
Apr 6–10	Week 11	Workplace Correspondence & Visual Aids
Apr 13–17	Week 12	Finalizing & Submitting Your Informational Report
Apr 20–24	Week 13	Fact Sheets & Other Visual Documents
Apr 27–May 1	Week 14	Data Visualization & Submitting Your Fact Sheet
May 4–6	Week 15	Final Thoughts
May 8–13	Exam Week	Optional Final due by 11:59 PM on May 13

Work Categories & Weights

Assignment Basics

This course includes weighted categories of work, described below.

All work is open book. Use the textbook, Canvas, and any notes you have.

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

Your course grade is comprised of two categories (Homework and Major Projects), arranged in six weighted categories, as shown in Figure 1, on the right.

Homework (15%)

These are various short activities, similar to in-class or independent work in a campus-based class. The activities include all of the following:

- Weekly Activities
- Textbook Quizzes
- Draft Self-Checks
- Check-In Surveys

Major Projects (85%)

These written documents range from 1–15 pages, including visuals. Each project has a rubric that explains how it will be graded. The weight per project varies, as shown below and in the pie chart.

- Subject Selection Form (5%)
- Research Proposal (20%)
- User Document (15%)
- Progress Report (5%)
- Informational Report (25%)
- Fact Sheet (15%)

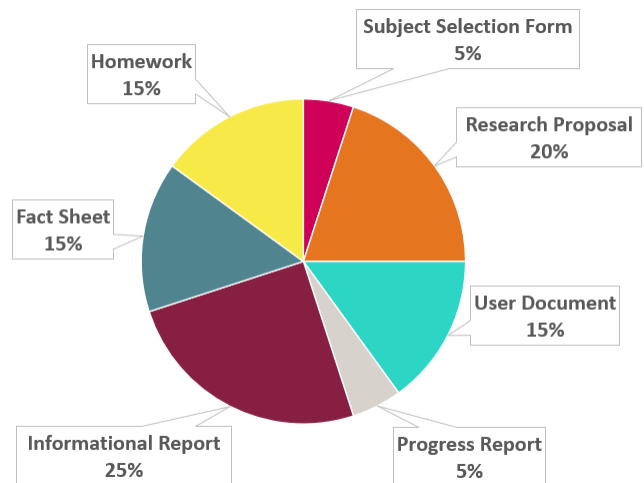


Figure 1. Work Categories and Weight

Grading Process for Major Projects

Assessing a Document in the Workplace



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 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 revision deadline.

What Is the Standard for Major Projects?

To meet the standard, your major projects need to be ready to send out in the workplace. Generally, major projects you submit need to do the following:

- Match the assignment's purpose, audience, and situation.
- Follow VT's Honor Code and Principles of Community.
- Meet or exceed all rubric criteria.
- Include all required information and elements.

Grades are calculated in the project's rubric. Documents that meet the standard, earn an **A** or an **A-**. To find specific expectations, check the assignment and rubric for the Major Project in Canvas.

What If a Major Project Doesn't Meet the Standard?

If your work earns any grade **lower than an A-**, don't panic—it's just a sign that your project needs more work.

As long as you submit your work by the end of the grace period, you can revise and resubmit your project until you earn an A or an A- or until 11:59 PM on the revision deadline, whichever comes first.



Grading Process for Homework

A Pass/Fail System (More or Less)

Homework grades use a basic Pass/Fail system, following these guidelines:



Complete

You'll earn full credit as long as you do these things:

- Respond to the assignment.
- Meet basic requirements.
- Put in a strong effort.
- Submit before the grace period ends.



Incomplete

You won't earn credit if you do any of these things:

- Don't do or submit the work at all.
- Don't meet the basic requirements.
- Don't put in the full effort.
- Do work unrelated to the assigned task.

How Homework Is Graded and Marked in Canvas

Canvas grades your homework automatically in all but one situation (see the table below). When the grade is automatic, I spot-check the work to ensure the grade is accurate. If I notice that you shouldn't have earned credit, I will change the grade and ask you to try again.

Homework Type	Mark in Canvas	Grading System
File Upload	Complete/Incomplete (✓ or X)	Automatically marked by Canvas when submitted. I then review the work.
Discussions	Complete/Incomplete (✓ or X)	Manually reviewed and graded.
Textbook Quizzes	Numerical Feedback (0 to 100)	Automatically marked by Canvas.
Draft Self-Checks	Numerical Feedback (0 to 100)	Automatically marked by Canvas.
Check-In Surveys	Complete/Incomplete (✓ or X)	Automatically marked by Canvas when submitted, maintaining anonymity.

What Happens When You Earn No Credit?



Everything in Canvas is set to have unlimited submissions. If you have not earned full credit (100), you can redo and resubmit your work as long as the grace period is still open.

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. Remember these facts about the Target Due Date:

- It applies to all work in the course.
- It ends each week at 11:59 PM on **Fridays**.

Grace Periods

All assignments, with one exception, have an automatic extension, called the **Grace Period**. The Grace Period follows these guidelines:

- Lasts **3 weekdays**.
- Requires that work is submitted to the relevant assignment in Canvas.
- Ends for each week at 11:59 PM on the Wednesday following the Target Due Date.
- Once the grace period passes, you can no longer submit an assignment and, therefore, it earns an Incomplete.

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, May 13, 2026.

Example Dates

Week 1 Work

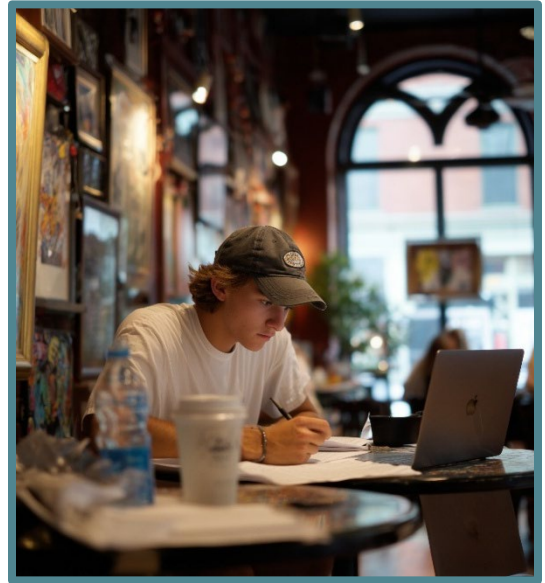
- Target Due Date: Friday, January 23 at 11:59 PM.
- Grace Period: Ends on Wednesday, January 28 at 11:59 PM.

After 11:59 PM on January 28, you can no longer submit work from Week 1.

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 topic, focus, length, and format).
- You earn a **grade lower than an A-** on that Major Project.



Length of Revision Deadlines

You may revise as often as you'd like **until the revision deadline**, which is typically **6 weekdays after graded Major Projects are returned**. The Revision Deadline is posted in the Feedback Announcement when grades are posted.

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 the letter or number grade**. 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 automatic.

Unfortunately, the **Late** label is permanent. Canvas won't let me remove it. Try not to stress about it. After all, it doesn't affect your grade.

Key Tips

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

AI Policies

Does AI Matter in Technical Writing?



An [April 2023 Pew Research Survey](#) found 6 in every 10 Americans (**62%**) said that AI would have a “major impact on workers generally”



75% of global knowledge workers already use AI, according to a 2024 Microsoft/LinkedIn study

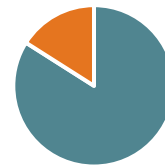
Employees who use AI say it helps them . .



90% Save time



85% Focus on their most important work



84% Be more creative

Employers say . . .



66% would not hire someone without AI skills



71% would hire less-qualified people with AI skills over more-qualified people without them

Sources

Rainie, Lee, Monica Anderson, Colleen McClain, Emily A. Vogels and Risa Gelles-Watnick. (2023, April 20). [AI in Hiring and Evaluating Workers: What Americans Think](#). Pew Research Center.

Microsoft, & LinkedIn. (2024, May 8). [AI at Work Is Here. Now Comes the Hard Part \(2024 Work Trend Index Annual Report\)](#).

Policy Details

To prepare for the writing you'll do in the workplace, we'll consider how to use AI to improve your critical thinking and writing.

What AI tools can I use?

You can use **Copilot** for assignments that require generative AI tasks. Copilot is the only AI tool officially approved by Virginia Tech because it protects your personal work when you login with your VT PID. It will not use any content you upload, so your writing will not be part of the language learning database.

I will design our activities to be compatible with Copilot to streamline the activities I ask you to complete. You are welcome to use other AI tools that you have access to. If an alternative tool cannot accomplish an assigned task however, you'll need to switch back to Copilot.



What can I use AI for in this course?

For each activity, I will provide detailed instructions on how AI can be used. Generally speaking, you can use AI in these ways:

- **Brainstorming Ideas:** You can ask Copilot to generate a list of topics that interest you by creating a prompt that includes the assignment parameters. You can also use AI to help you evaluate the brainstormed list for the most promising ideas.
- **Editing Checks:** Have AI check your draft for accuracy. Copilot can check for basic grammatical mistakes, punctuation errors, and spelling issues. Ask AI to tell you where the errors are and even what they are, but make updates yourself. Do not have AI correct your work.
- **Research Assistance:** Ask AI to help you research a topic. Copilot can help you find relevant sources and gather information. However, it's crucial to verify the accuracy and credibility of the sources and information that Copilot suggests. AI does not consistently provide real references. Always make sure the references exist and then cross-check with reliable references.
- **Draft Review:** AI can be used ethically for draft reviewing. You can think of AI as a computer peer review partner. I'll provide instructions for these tasks. I'll ask you to try some of the following AI tasks as you work on drafts:

- **Develop ideas:** AI can help expand on initial ideas, providing additional perspectives or angles that you might not have considered. Use it to deepen your understanding of a topic and develop a more comprehensive approach.
- **Outline and Organize:** Copilot can create outlines and organize your thoughts. Input your main points and ask AI to suggest a logical structure or flow for your document.
- **Summarize:** You can use AI to summarize content. This can save time and help you focus on the most critical information.
- **Check Document Design:** Use Copilot to review design elements like layout, use of white space, font choices, and overall design effectiveness. AI can then suggest improvements to enhance readability and aesthetic appeal. Be aware however that AI may not accurately analyze visual elements. Verify its suggestions.

What if I want to use Copilot in a way you haven't mentioned?

If you want to use AI in another way, send me a message in Canvas explaining your plan and how it relates to use of AI in the workplace. I'll review your request and let you know if it's acceptable.

Are there things I can't use AI for?

For most of the work in this course, you cannot ask AI to write or revise your drafts or final submissions for you. Using it to review your draft and make suggestions (as described above) is fine. Having AI do the writing or revision for you directly violates the [Cheating and Plagiarism sections of the Virginia Tech Honor Code](#). There may be some exceptions. I'll be clear about these exceptions in the assignments.

What if Copilot gives me incorrect information or makes other mistakes?

Regardless of how or where you use AI in this course, you are fully responsible for the work you submit. Just as in the workplace, you need to stand behind your work. If AI introduces errors and you pass them along, you are accountable for those mistakes. The goal here is not to discourage you from using AI but to help you develop the critical skill of verifying AI-generated content—an essential practice in any professional setting.

What do I need to keep track of when I use AI?

Keep track of what AI tools you used and how you used them. In some cases, the assignment will ask you to save specific artifacts, like the prompt that you used and the response that the AI tool gave you. Always read the assignment carefully to determine the information you need to track as you use AI.

How do I need to acknowledge my use of AI?

When you use AI as you work on your assignments, include details on which AI tools you used and how they contributed to your work in a submission comment when you submit your work.