Technical Writing Course Policies

English 3764 @ Virginia Tech, Taught by Traci Gardner, Spring 2026
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Image created with Midjourney

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 Ati: Wa:oki 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."

? If you have any questions about the course, please ask them in the General Q&A Discussion Board.

Table of Contents

Policies (listed alphabetically)

Absences & Missed Work

You need to participate in this course on a regular basis every week by turning in your work and participating in Canvas Discussions (See Participation). If something prevents you from turning in your work, let me know as soon as possible so that we can find a way for you to catch up.

If you miss work because of an illness, death in the family, or family emergency, see information from the Dean of Students Office for details on how to document the situation. *Please provide official documentation within one week of any situation if you can.*

If you have an issue that affects your ability to complete the course, you may qualify for Academic Relief. For personal medical issues, contact the Schiffert Health Center, and for psychiatric or psychological issues, use the resources from the Cook Counseling Center.

About Your Teacher

I'm Traci Gardner, an instructor in the Technical & Scientific Communication program in the English Department. In the past, I worked at an educational software company in Austin, Texas, where I did technical writing, user support, and interface design. I did just about everything except coding, though I did hack code a bit.

I also worked as a web developer and curriculum developer for a nonprofit, educational association (National Council of Teachers of English). I created and maintained flat-file and database-driven websites, wrote online and print content, and wrote blog posts and social media updates for the association.

I have a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Virginia Tech. I originally taught in the English Department from 1986 to 1994, before I set off for Austin. I returned to the English Department in the Fall of 2013. My research focuses on ways to use digital tools for writing and teaching, including the use of artificial intelligence.

♿ Accessibility

I may need help with this course. What do I do? Everyone needs special accommodations 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.

How do I document what will help me? To document special accommodations, 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. I know that the official testing can be expensive and time-consuming. Send me a private email message that tells me what you need, and I will try to help.

When do I need to let you know what I need? Let me know of any accommodation you need during the *first week of classes* so that I can arrange the support you need. I can only make accommodations for future activities. I can't apply accommodations to past situations.

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 by using the Grace Period. Check the late policy in the Syllabus for more details.

What course accessibility resources are available online?

- Virginia Tech Accessibility Portal
- Canvas: What are the Canvas accessibility standards?
- Kaltura: Accessibility in Kaltura Products
- Panopto: Learn About Accessibility Features
- Zoom: Accessibility | Zoom

What course resources are designed for accessibility?

- I test HTML content with WebAIM's Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool (WAVE).
- Most resources we use can be magnified on your computer if the font is too small.
- All LinkedIn Learning videos have text transcripts and captions.
- Images in Canvas have descriptive alt attributes (unless they are purely decorative).
- Canvas is accessible by screen readers.

What course resources may be inaccessible? Student projects used as examples may not be fully accessible. For instance, there may not be captions or alt attributes for the images in student work. Let me know if you encounter a resource that you cannot access, and I'll do what I can to fix it.

Where can I find information on technical accessibility for software used in this course?

- **Canvas:** Learn about Canvas Learning Management System's accessibility policies at the Accessibility Standards section of the LMS website. Click on the "Help" link in the vertical toolbar in Canvas for direct help.

- **Google Docs:** Check out the Belonging Website or review the Accessibility Features of each Google product for information about accessibility. Access support while you are working by clicking on the "Help" link in the primary toolbar across the top of your Google Doc.

- **Microsoft Word:** Read about accessibility at Microsoft's accessibility statement page. Provide feedback or ask questions about Word and other products at Microsoft Support. Click on the "Help" link in the primary toolbar across the top of the page in Microsoft Word for assistance while you're working on a document.

- **YouTube:** Check Accessibility for YouTube mobile app or details in the Accessibility documentation. Provide feedback or ask questions at YouTube's Help Center.

- **Zoom:** Check out Zoom's accessibility policy. Provide feedback or ask questions at Zoom Support.

- **VT 4Help:** To request assistance with technology or check on the status of a campus outage, please visit Virginia Tech 4Help or call (540) 231- 4357).

Anonymous Use of Student Texts

Your work and that of your classmates may be used anonymously to demonstrate revision strategies or to show examples of projects and other activities.

In the case where student texts are used to show a weakness or error, the presentation will also include examples of how to revise and strengthen the text. As the author of such a text, you will gain direct examples of how to change your draft.

When I use student work in this course, I follow these guidelines:

- Student work is always used anonymously.

- Anonymous texts are typically analyzed in one of two ways:
  - To demonstrate a weakness and then show how to revise.
  - To model strengths and show how to use similar strategies.

- Anonymous work will be changed as necessary to remove any personal or potentially identifying information.

- Several examples of student work may be combined to create one composite example when appropriate.

Backup

Save backup copies of all your work for this class. Maintain these backups in multiple places (your laptop, a flash drive, Google Docs, OneDrive, Dropbox). Printed backups can also be useful.

Do not discard any files, notes, or other work until the term is over and you have received your course grade. Be sure that you maintain backups so that you can continue your work when you encounter computer problems.

If you need assistance with your computer, check with the Customer Support Center (4Help).

Canvas Policies

This course uses Canvas for most major resources. You will find all assignments and activities posted in Canvas, and you will submit all your work in Canvas. **I do not accept emailed work.**

- All assignments in Canvas *except the final exam* have unlimited submissions until the end of the relevant grace period. If you find an activity that does not give you unlimited submissions in another situation, send me a message and I will fix it.

- For all assignments, the end of the Grace Period is listed as the "available until" date in Canvas.

- Grades in Canvas keeps track of the work you do. See additional details in the Syllabus.

Contact Info

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

- **Name:** Call me Traci or Ms. Gardner please.

- **Pronouns:** she, her, hers

- **Email:** tengrrl@vt.edu

- **Office:** 231 Shanks Hall (Because of immune system problems, I limit time on campus.)

- **Office Phone:** None. The English Department eliminated them to save money.

- **Office Hours:** My office hours are by appointment in Google Meet. Visit my Booking page to sign up (at least 24 hours in advance). Video is not required. If none of the time slots fit your schedule, send me an email message or a message with Canvas Inbox.

- **Details of Contact:** I check Canvas messages several times a day. I try to answer student messages within 24–48 hours on weekdays. I take a break from the class on weekends, on holidays, and during Spring Break. I'll reply on the next class day.

- **Questions about Your Grade or Work:** Send a Canvas Inbox message. Because Canvas messages are secure, they meet all FERPA requirements and protect your privacy. I prefer to answer questions about grades and course work via Canvas for this reason.

- **Title IX & VAWA:** I am a mandatory reporter and cannot guarantee confidentiality when you talk to me. I am required to report any prohibited conduct. Consult the Safe at VT page and SAFE at VT and Title IX at Virginia Tech for additional information.

- **COVID-19 Info:** I often wear a face mask because I am at high risk for side effects from the virus. Because of breakthrough cases and variants, I prefer to be cautious.

Course Expectations

This course is 100% virtual. We will never meet in a classroom. As a result, it is important that you understand how the course will be conducted and what will be expected of me as the teacher and of you as a student enrolled in it.

My Responsibilities in this Course

As your teacher, it is my responsibility to (among other things)

- Answer any questions you might have that are not covered by the online textbooks or other course readings.

- Provide links or page numbers to information in online books or in other course materials that answer any questions you have.

- Provide feedback to you about your work quickly.

- Inform you promptly of any alterations to the schedule, such as target due date changes.

Your Responsibilities in this Course

To do well in this course as a student, you must

- **Possess Junior-Level Writing Skills**
  This is not a remedial course designed to assist you in the development of basic writing skills (which includes spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills). You are not expected to already know how to write workplace documents (like memos and reports). Since this is a 3000-level course however, I assume that you possess writing skills on the junior level, and I provide feedback on your work based on this assumption.

- **Be Aware of Target Due Dates/Times**
  All assignments are submitted online in Canvas and are due by 11:59 pm (Eastern Time). You can, of course, upload your work earlier. I do not accept emailed course work since I can only grade your work in Canvas to ensure your FERPA rights are protected.

- **Read All Announcements in Canvas**
  Announcements are the primary way I keep in touch with everyone in the course, so read each one completely. If you do not read the Announcements, you may miss information about activities and assignments that are due, changes in course work, or revisions to the class schedule. You are responsible for the information in the Announcements, so be sure that you read them.

- **Read the Online Textbook and Review the Examples**
  I will link to various free, online textbooks to point you to the best information for each task you will complete. You'll also find example documents in the textbook and on Canvas. Review them. Pay attention to them. Many are workplace-ready documents produced in this (or a similar) course.

- **Apply What You Are Learning**
  Do your best to apply what you have read and what you have learned to your own work. Applying these lessons can help you as you produce and improve your projects.

- **Follow Assignment Instructions**
  Each assignment provides you with a description of the work and the specifications, including the project format and expectations. You need to follow the assignment instructions to do well on your work.

- **Conduct Yourself Professionally**

  As a student at Virginia Tech, you are expected to adopt and follow the Principles of Community. For this course, just as for one that meets in a classroom, you should be civil to other participants and to the instructor.

- **Conduct Yourself Honestly**

  All work and participation in this course is governed by the Undergraduate Honor System. In this course, you are expected to be honest and forthcoming as you assess your work, to follow all self-assessment guidelines fully, and to document any work that you borrow from others. All work that you submit in this course must be your own, original work. See the AI Policy in the Syllabus for additional information.

Early Work Policy

All the work for the term will be posted in Canvas. You can work ahead if you desire. There are some limitations to early work however:

- Check-In Surveys cannot be completed in advance. The goal of these activities is to update me on your week and ask any questions. You can't guess how your week is going in advance.

- I will provide feedback to early work as I can; however, I give priority to the current work. If you have a specific question about a project you are working on early, send me a message and I'll help you out.

Honor Code

All work and participation in this course is governed by the Undergraduate Honor System, following this official university policy.

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

> "As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do."

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for working according to the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation.

Students are strongly discouraged from misusing sites such as Chegg and CourseHero, as well as misusing ChatGPT and other Generative Artificial Intelligence. Students are strongly encouraged to consult their faculty members regarding the use of such outside materials as the misuse of these sources may constitute a violation of the Honor Code. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. The Undergraduate Honor System is able to effectively investigate online incidents, including those related to Chegg, ChatGPT, and other AI tools. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit the Undergraduate Honor System page.

Incomplete Course Grade

Incompletes are given only in provable emergency situations—and only if you have completed *at least 75%* of the coursework. 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 fails 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. Contact your college for details on how to withdraw.

Interruptions in the Course

If something interrupts your progress in the course, I will do what I can to help you. In the case of such 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.

Late Policy & Grace Periods

Find details in the Syllabus.

Learner Support

Please contact me with concerns or questions about special needs or considerations that fall outside of the services listed in this section. All information shared will be kept confidential. For complete information on student services at Virginia Tech, see the Division for Student Affairs and the Dean of Students.

Primary Contacts for Mental or Physical Well-Being

- **Emergencies**: Dial 911. Subscribe to campus alerts, the Emergency Warning System.
- **Personal Counseling** (including help with drinking, drug abuse, mental health, stress, sexual assault recovery): Contact the Cook Counseling Center (220 Gilbert Street, Suite 2400) at 540-231-6557 or visit the Cook Counseling Center online.
- **Reporting sexual assault**: Dial 911, or call the Student Health Care Center at 540-231-7642, or contact CARES (Campus Advocacy, Resources, and Education for Survivors) Program, The Women's Center at Virginia Tech (206 Washington Street) at 540-231-7806 or The Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley at 540-639-1123.
- **Health Care Appointments**: Call the Schiffert Health Center at 540-231-6444, or visit the Health Care Website.
- **Legal Concerns**: Contact Student Legal Services at 540-231-4720 or visit the services website.
- **Food Pantry**: 209 Market Place helps VT students in need. Email 209marketplaceatvt@gmail.com with questions. You may also find help from the Interfaith Food Pantry and The Market of Virginia Tech. Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the Dean of Students for support.
- **More options:** Visit the Dean of Students page on Basic Needs and Services.

🎓 Academic Support Services

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

- Student Success Center
  220 Gilbert Place, 540-231-8440, studentsuccess@vt.edu
  (help with services such as tutoring or developing time management skills)

- Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program
  2110 Gilbert Place, 540-231-8440, maop@vt.edu

- Student Athlete Academic Support Services
  3rd Floor Lane Stadium—Westside, 540-231-6165, saass@vt.edu

- University Academic Advising Center
  220 Gilbert Place, 540-231-8440, advising@vt.edu

- Office of Veterans' Services
  220 Gilbert Place, 540-231-5815, veteran@vt.edu

There are orientation services for new graduate students and for new or transfer undergraduate students. For tutoring, visit the Student Success Center at Gilbert Place, call the center at 540-231-8440 or visit their website. For career counseling, visit Career Services in the Smith Career Center, call them at 540-231-6241 or refer to the Career Services website. For study skills advice, visit Cook Counseling Center at 220 Gilbert Street, Suite 2400, or call 540-231-6557.

♿ Virginia Tech Official Accessibility Policy

Students will be provided access to educational materials, buildings, library, computer, and classroom opportunities. Videos will have closed captioning. All lecture videos have audio. It is uncertain whether the textbook or reading material outside of the textbook is offered in a braille version or on audio. Visually-impaired students may request that the instructor verbally describe the required figures and the images used in the video lectures. Students may request that any requirement to do a field delineation project, attend a field trip, and to lead Zoom sessions be waived, modified, or enabled. Review questions and exams may be presented in audio format upon request, and questions answered verbally by voice recording. Read more information in the university's accessibility policy.

☝ Accommodations for Special Needs

Any student who has been confirmed by the University as having special needs for learning should notify me in the first week of the course. The university provides services for students with disabilities. If you are a student with disabilities and/or challenges, visit the student services website for course support.

📚 Library Assistance

The library has extensive help services, including services and guides for those using the library through the Internet. There are several methods to contact a librarian.

🛠 Technical Support

I cannot provide technical support. For technical support for Canvas, use the Help button at the end of the leftmost toolbar in Canvas. VT specific technology support can be directed to 4Help via the Help Site, or by calling (540) 540-231-HELP (4357). You can also refer to Zoom support for help.

📝 Writing Support

The Writing Center—located on the second floor of Newman Library—is for all writers. You can go if you have a draft, an outline, or just ideas. Bring your assignment description with you. You can make appointments online by setting up an account with WCOnline or call the Writing Center director at 540-231-9270.

🗣 Participation

Expect to spend about 8–10 hours per week on the activities and completion of assignments during the semester. This estimate is similar to the time one would invest in a course in a traditional classroom setting.

Some weeks require more time and some less time to complete all assignments and activities. Participation is defined as the completion of all activities within the unit or module period. There is not a participation grade in this course however.

👥 Principles of Community

This course adheres to the Virginia Tech Principles of Community:

- We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.

- We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely.

- We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.

- We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.

- We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.

- We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).

🔒 Privacy

Please be aware of these privacy policies:

- **Canvas**: Canvas's privacy policy states, among other things, that the Learning Management System (LMS) is "committed to protecting the information we process by doing our best to ensure that the information is used only to support students and education."

- **FERPA**: Student educational records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). These rights apply to all students aged 18 and above, and it may benefit you to know your FERPA rights so that you can best protect your own educational records. Please visit the Office of the University Registrar's Student Privacy (FERPA) Page for more information.

- **Google Docs**: Information about Google's privacy policies can be found on the Privacy Policy page of the website.

- **Microsoft Word**: Privacy at Microsoft covers the company's privacy policies.

- **Title IX & VAWA:** SAFE at VT and Title IX at Virginia Tech. Note that I am a mandatory reporter and cannot guarantee confidentiality when you talk to me. I am required to report any prohibited conduct. Consult the Safe at VT page for additional information.

- **YouTube**: The page How Does YouTube Maintain User Privacy? covers the company's privacy policies.

- **Zoom**: Read the Zoom Privacy Statement.

★ Program Assessment

The Department of English may use your written work in its assessment of its teaching and learning goals. In such cases, your name will be removed and your work assessed anonymously. Your work will not be shared with any individual outside of the department. It will be used strictly to help the department offer students the best possible academic experience.

☪☆✝🌏 Religious Holidays & Events

If the due date for any work in the course coincides with a religious holiday that you celebrate, take the time to mark the holiday. The grace period should cover any time away from your work. You can contact me if we need to come up with a special plan for your holiday.

I gather information on upcoming holidays from the Virginia Tech Interfaith Calendar.

Technology

You need a working, reliable computer and Internet access that will allow the use of Canvas, Google Meet, Zoom, Kaltura, and any online resources provided. If you need assistance with your computer technology, check with the Customer Support Center (4Help).

You are not required to purchase any special software, but you will need access to a word processor. Either Microsoft Office products or Google Drive products will fulfill these requirements. We will also use Microsoft Copilot, which you have access to with your VT PID login. Optionally, you may want to use free online tools like Canva or Firefly for some assignments.

As part of your online course experience, you can expect to utilize a variety of technologies:

- Communicate via Canvas Inbox, including sending attachments.

- Navigate the Internet using a Web browser such as Chrome or Firefox.

- Use office applications such as Microsoft Office (or similar) to create documents.

- Be willing to learn how to communicate using a discussion board and upload assignments to a classroom Canvas site.

- Be comfortable uploading and downloading saved files.

- Have easy, reliable access to the Internet.

- Navigate Canvas, including using the Inbox component within Canvas.

- Collaborate and discuss projects with others in the class using Canvas Discussions.

Mobile Access Disclaimer

Though Canvas provides a mobile app which works well for the majority of course content, the course site is still best viewed via a desktop or laptop computer running a complete operating system, as opposed to a tablet or smartphone. Some interactive course elements may not be viewed via mobile devices, and it is certainly not recommended that you attempt to complete assignments or take graded quizzes or tests via mobile devices.