Technical Writing Course Overview

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For more specific information and specific course policies, see the [Course Policy Manual](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1-DJfChblc_zJ-wuheECMqXcHYiA-5JqMYF6nc-4fZcs/edit?tab=t.0).

## Course Details

English 3764: Technical Writing

CRNs #85298, #85300, #85304,& #85305

Fall 2025 (Aug 25–Dec 17)

## Course Texts

All readings are free, from

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

## Teacher

**Traci Gardner**

[tengrrl@vt.edu](mailto:tengrrl@vt.edu)

she, her, hers

Straight, cisgender, white. Disabled. Night owl. List maker. Planner addict. Sticker hoarder. Lifetime Girl Scout. Hokie alum. Steelers fan. Poodle lover.

## Accessibility IconAccessibility

Everyone needs special accommodation at some point. I am happy to work with the [Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) staff](https://ssd.vt.edu/) 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](#_Late_Policy_&) 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 can be expensive and time-consuming, so I don’t require it. Just tell me what you need, and I’ll try to help. Send me a message with Canvas Inbox or email message that tells me what you need as soon as you can. Attach info from the SSD office if you have it. I’ll do what I can to help, but can only apply changes to the future. I cannot apply accommodations 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](https://lib.vt.edu/spaces/writing-center.html) 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](https://vt.mywconline.com/) 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](mailto:tengrrl@vt.edu) using your VT.EDU email or 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](https://calendar.app.google/Rm4L5kwDwTFbH62z9) 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 Work

## Assignment Basics

This course includes three weighted categories of work, desecribed below.

All 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

### Major Projects

**60%**

These are written documents ranging from 1–15 pages.

They ask you to compose memos, instructions, proposals, and informational articles. All major projects have visual design elements.

Grading criteria are in the rubric for each project. There are five Major Projects in the course.

### Weekly Activities

**25%**

These are short exercises, discussions, and assignments, similar to in-class work or homework in a campus-based class. They may ask you to write something, fill out a form, or complete a quiz.

All Weekly Activities are open book.

You usually have two Weekly Activities each week.

### Check-In Surveys

**15%**

These are brief, anonymous polls that ask you how you are doing in the course. Surveys are primarily multiple- choice or true-false. There are no right or wrong answers.

I use your responses to customize the course and write a class newsletter.

There is a Check-In Survey for each week of classes.

# Course Structure



## Course Modules

This course has five modules:

Module 1: Foundations & Project Initiation

Module 2: Proposing a Project

Module 3: Writing to Instruct

Module 4: Writing for Decision-Makers

Module 5: Writing for the General Public

## What’s in a Module?

Each Module includes everything you need for a unit. Think of it like a backpack that has just the right materials for a task.

You’ll find the following 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.



## Module Starting Point

Begin with the module introduction page, which provides:

* A brief intro to the subject(s) covered in that module
* A set of module objectives
* Links to readings and assignments

# Module & Project Overview

*Tentative schedule with more specific dates and information is available in Canvas.*

## Blue letters with light blue linesModule 1 (Weeks 1–2): Foundations & Project Initiation

Explore how rhetoric, ethics, and audience awareness shape technical communication. You’ll choose a topic you’ll return to throughout the course and write a **Subject Selection Memo** that justifies its importance and identifies key audiences. This memo sets the foundation for all your major projects, so thoughtful topic selection and audience analysis are essential.

## A couple of people pointing at a graphModule 2 (Weeks 3–5) Proposing a Project

Develop a **Research Proposal** that outlines how you’ll approach your topic. You’ll learn to write clearly using plain language, support your ideas with research, and plan a project that meets real-world needs. This assignment also introduces techniques for evaluating sources and documenting your research professionally.

## A blue clipboard with a paper clipModule 3 (Weeks 6–8): Writing to Instruct

Create a user-focused instructional document that explains a process or task for a non-expert audience. You’ll apply principles of document design and usability to make the information clear, helpful, and actionable. This module emphasizes accessibility and testing your writing from the user’s perspective.

## A blue and black graph on paperModule 4 (Weeks 9–12): Writing for Decision-Makers

Research and write an **informational report** on a topic related to social justice, equity, or community benefit. You’ll focus on clarity, evidence, and purpose, targeting non-expert decision-makers. You’ll also complete a **progress report** and a **letter of transmittal** as part of the project.

## A blue and black logoModule 5 (Weeks 13–15): Writing for the General Public

Convert your report into a **one-page (front and back)** **fact sheet** for a general audience. Your task is to simplify complex information, highlight key takeaways, and use visuals to communicate clearly with the public—like community members or constituents. You’ll learn to distill content for readability while maintaining accuracy and impact.

# Course Grading Process

## Like a Performance Review on a Job



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 expected 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 final deadline.

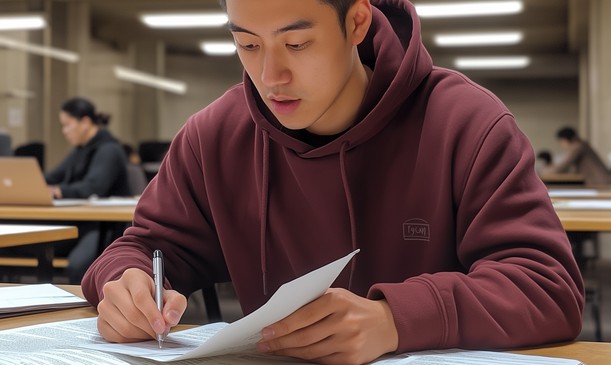
## What “Complete” Means

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Criteria** | **Complete** | **Incomplete** |
| Matches the assignment | ✔ | ✘ |
| Follows VT’s Honor Code & Principles of Community | ✔ | ✘ |
| Meets every rubric item | ✔ | ✘ |
| Includes everything required | ✔ | ✘ |

## Incomplete Isn’t a Failure—It’s a Draft

If your work is marked Incomplete, don’t panic—it’s just a sign that something needs more work.

As long as you submit your work by the end of the grace period, you can revise and resubmit as many times as you need, up until you earn a Complete or reach the final deadline at 11:59 PM, whichever comes first.



## Why This Grading System?

It helps you focus on learning, not just grades. This approach:

* Encourages revision and growth through feedback.
* Reduces pressure by treating Incompletes as part of the process.
* Rewards persistence, not perfection.

You always know what needs improvement, and you always have a chance to revise.

## Tracking Your Work in Canvas



You’ll see these marks in Canvas Grades:

✔ or 1 = Complete

✘ or 0 = Incomplete

Canvas chooses symbols or numbers based on the kind of assignment. I can’t change it sadly.

These aren’t grades. They’re status updates that tell you when your work is finished.

## Where Your Course Grade Comes From

Canvas calculates your course grade by tallying all the work that is Complete in each category of work and assigning a score based on the weight of the category. The math is straightforward:

# of Complete Tasks

Total # of Tasks Available

X

Weight for the Category

Add up the calculations for all the categories, and compare the number to the VT Grade Scale with +/- (below). Canvas does the math for you, so your current course grade is always visible on the Grades page.

**Keep in mind:** Canvas calculates based only on work that has been assigned and is due—your grade may change as more work is added and as I add feedback.

## Virginia Tech Grade Scale with +/-

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

# 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.

* Applies to all work in the course.
* Ends at 11:59 PM on **Fridays**.

## Grace Periods

There are **two different grace period systems**: one for weekly activities and check-in surveys, and another for major projects. For both systems, once the grace period passes, you can no longer submit the assignment and, therefore, it earns an Incomplete.

### Grace Period for Weekly Activities and Check-In Surveys

* Lasts **3 weekdays.**
* Requires that work is submitted to the relevant assignment in Canvas.
* Ends at 11:59 PM on **Wednesdays**.

### Grace Period for Major Projects and Self-Checks

* Lasts **6 weekdays.**
* Requires that work is submitted to the relevant assignment in Canvas.
* Ends at 11:59 PM on **Mondays**.

## Major Project Revision Deadlines

You can revise Major Projects as long as you meet these requirements:

* You turn in a **Major Project** by the end of the 6-Day Grace Period.
* Your submission meets the expectations for a **good-faith effort** (meaning it responds to the assignment and meets basic requirements like length and format).
* You earn an **Incomplete** on that Major Project.

You may revise as often as you’d like **until the revision deadline**, which is **two weeks after its Target Due Date**.



## Late Labels and 0 or ✘ 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 **✘** (Incomplete)

These are automatic labels Canvas applies. **There’s no penalty** for being late as long as you submit within 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 1** (Complete). The **0 or ✘** will go away. If it doesn’t, I’ll let you know if you can revise and resubmit.

Unfortunately, the **Late** label is permanent. Canvas won’t let me remove it. I do hide it from my view though, so I never see it. Try not to stress about it. After all, it doesn’t affect your grade.

**Keys Tips**

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

To Add:

Schedule

Where to Get Help

## Key Terms at a Glance

**✔ / ✘ in Canvas**: Canvas marks assignments as ✔ (or 1) for Complete and ✘ (or 0) for Incomplete. These are *status updates*, not grades.

**3-Day Grace Period:** Applies to Weekly Activities and Check-In Surveys (ends Wednesday 11:59 PM).

**6-Day Grace Period:** Applies to Major Projects (ends Monday 11:59 PM).

**Check-In Surveys**: Anonymous weekly polls about your progress and experience. Used to improve the course. Worth 15% of your grade.

**Complete**: Your work meets *all* assignment expectations and rubric criteria. It's considered finished—no revisions needed.

**Grace Period**: Extra time to submit your work with no penalty.

**Incomplete**: Your work needs revision or is missing something. It’s not a failure—it’s just a draft. You can revise and resubmit it until the final deadline.

**Late Label in Canvas**: If you turn in work after the Target Due Date, Canvas marks it “Late.” This label is permanent, but it doesn’t affect your grade. The instructor doesn’t see it.

**Major Projects**: Formal documents like proposals, instructions, or articles with visual elements. Worth 60% of your grade. You may revise these projects through the grace period and a two-week revision window.

**Modules**: Course units organized in Canvas. Each includes a starting page, objectives, readings, and assignments. Begin every module at the introduction page.

**Target Due Date:** The day an assignment is *due* in order to stay on schedule. You won’t be penalized for turning work in after this date, as long as it’s within the grace period. Most Target Due Dates fall on Fridays.

**Weekly Activities**: Short tasks or quizzes worth 25% of your grade. Open book. Typically, due twice each week.

 This page contains invisible dragons If you can see a dragon, you are magical

## Help with Other Academic Areas

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

* [Student Success Center](http://www.studentsuccess.vt.edu/index.html)
* [Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program](http://www.maop.vt.edu/)
* [Student Athlete Academic Support Services](http://www.saass.vt.edu/)
* [University Academic Advising Center](http://www.advising.vt.edu/)
* [Office of Veterans’ Services](http://www.veterans.vt.edu/)