# **Semester-Long Project Overview: Writing with *Ut Prosim* in Mind**

Virginia Tech’s motto, *Ut Prosim (That I May Serve)* is not just part of the university logo; it is a guiding principle that shapes how Hokies approach learning, research, and professional life. This semester-long writing project is designed in that spirit. Over the course of this term, you will research, write, and design a series of interconnected documents about a subject rooted in your major that serves others and contributes to the greater good. Each assignment builds toward your ability to explain a complex topic clearly and accessibly to different real-world audiences, always with the goal of informing, guiding, or supporting action that contributes to fairness, accessibility, and the well-being of communities.

This page explains the focus of the project and introduces each of the five major projects.

## Project Focus: Writing that Serves Others

**You** get to choose the subject on which you will focus your work this semester. The caveat is that it must be a technical object, practice, or idea within your field that has the potential to create a positive social impact. In the spirit of *Ut Prosim*, your topic should be:

* **Grounded in your major or area of study.**
* **Clearly connected to community service, problem-solving, or public good.**
* **Feasible to research and explain to multiple non-expert audiences.**

Examples include:

* **Accessible design standards** for public websites
* **Water purification systems** for underserved areas
* **Renewable energy solutions** for communities with limited resources
* **Assistive technologies** that promote independence

You’ll explore this subject from multiple angles, starting with identifying and proposing your topic, then explaining it in depth, supporting real-world use, and finally communicating it clearly to the general public. This approach will allow you to develop professional-level skills in research, audience awareness, plain language writing, and visual communication. Further, by taking on a project that aims to serve, you’ll be practicing the Virginia Tech motto: using your expertise not only for professional growth, but also to make a difference.

## How the Assignments Work Together

### Document 1: Subject Selection Email

**Purpose:** To identify and justify your proposed topic in a professional email format.

You’ll write to your instructor with a clearly stated subject related to your major and connected to the spirit of *Ut Prosim*. You’ll explain your interest in the topic and propose why it’s a strong fit for your research and writing this semester.

You’ll develop these skills (among others):

* Professional tone and email etiquette.
* Topic selection and justification.
* Audience awareness and communication planning.

### Document 2: Research Proposal

**Purpose:** To map out your research plan and explain why your topic matters.

Presented in memo format, this proposal lays out your project’s scope, research questions, audience analysis, timeline, and initial sources. You’ll also show how your background prepares you to research this topic and describe how your work will embody *Ut Prosim* by supporting community needs.

You’ll develop these skills (among others):

* Structured project planning and timeline creation.
* Preliminary source evaluation and synthesis.
* Audience analysis for future writing.
* Visual planning (timeline or Gantt chart).

### Document 3: User Document

**Purpose:** To support non-expert users in taking action or understanding your subject.

You’ll create a helpful, easy-to-use document such as step-by-step instructions, a decision guide, a how-to handout, or a troubleshooting checklist connected to the subject with which you have chosen to work. This document helps someone new to the subject interact with it in a real-world setting, demonstrating how technical writing serves people’s needs.

You’ll develop these skills (among others):

* Plain language communication.
* Instructional writing and design.
* Visual communication (diagrams, screenshots, etc.).
* Usability and accessibility awareness.

### Document 4: Progress Report for Informational Fact Sheet

**Purpose:** To communicate your project progress in a professional, structured memo.

This report allows you to reflect on the work you’ve completed for your informational report, outline upcoming tasks, and flag any challenges. You’ll share your progress in a clear, professional format that mirrors a common workplace genre: the memo. By doing so, you’ll practice updating stakeholders—in this case, your instructor—on the status of a project and your plan to move forward.

You'll develop these skills (among others):

* Professional memo writing with clear structure and tone
* Organizing project updates under internal headings
* Using a Gantt chart to visualize timelines and scheduled work
* Reflecting critically on progress and identifying challenges
* Reporting concisely and objectively to a professional audience

### Document 5: Informational Report for Non-Expert Readers

**Purpose:** To present your research findings in a detailed, engaging report for local decision-makers.

This report explains what your subject is, how it works, who developed it, and why it matters. You’ll also explore how it addresses community needs and where future growth may lead. The audience might be a town council, nonprofit board, or school leadership team interested in ways to improve lives. This assignment directly supports *Ut Prosim* by helping leaders make informed decisions for the good of their communities.

You’ll develop these skills (among others):

* Technical explanation for a non-expert audience.
* Research synthesis and ethical citation.
* Use of visual aids (including data visualizations).
* Audience-focused organization and tone.

### Document 6: Fact Sheet

**Purpose:** To translate key findings from your report into a one-page document for the public.

This highly visual document targets the community members served by the decision-makers in your report. Using plain language, accessible design, and key takeaways, your fact sheet will educate or inform readers about how the subject can affect their lives or help their communities. In this way, you are putting *Ut Prosim* into action by offering practical knowledge that serves others.

You’ll develop these skills (among others):

* Summarizing complex ideas clearly.
* Adapting content for new audiences.
* Visual design using headings, bullets, icons, and charts.
* Public communication and engagement strategies.

## Putting It All Together

By the end of the semester, you’ll have created a complete portfolio of technical writing artifacts, all centered around one subject from your field with the potential to serve others. You’ll have communicated that subject across a variety of professional genres, for multiple audiences, and in multiple formats. You’ll gain experience not only in technical communication, but also in writing that makes a positive difference.

This project is about using your skills to **live out the Virginia Tech motto, *Ut Prosim*, by doing good work for good reasons.** As you research and write, keep asking:

**Who benefits from this work? How can I help them understand and use it better?**

Your audience—and your community—are counting on you.