

# English 305

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**Carolyn Nelson, ENGL 305, Spring 2004, Technical Communication**

English 305: Spring 2004, 8:30/10:00 TR

Instructor: Carolyn Nelson

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## **Technical Communication**

Required Text: *Judith S. Vanalstyne & Merrill D. Tritt, Professional & Technical Writing Strategies (2002)*

### **Introduction**

English 305, Technical Communication, introduces students to the kinds of tasks and situations for which technical writers are responsible in a professional context. Technical writers are the employees responsible for connecting the technical expertise of the programmers, designers, or engineers to the needs of the consumer. The technical writer is also an advocate for the user, for making things easier, more accessible, and more available to him.

Although the course will be focusing on the specific documents written by technical writers, the skills and the insights generated are equally appropriate for anyone writing within a professional context. Because all writing is rhetorical, that is, it emerges out of and responds to a particular purpose, audience, and situation, this course will focus on exploring the strategies and choices writers can make to craft their documents to a specific audience and occasion.

The purposes of this course are:

- To emphasize the importance of writing for a specific reader.
- To provide strategies for crafting documents for specific purposes.
- To familiarize students with the common genres and tasks of technical writing.
- To introduce issues of visual rhetoric, including effective document design.

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Analyze and address the needs of the reader.
- Make conscious and appropriate choices in your writing process.
- Design usable, clear, persuasive, accessible documents.
- Use visual strategies as well as textual ones.

## **Requirements**

**Attendance:** You are expected to attend class every day with the textbook, a disk, and all materials on which you are working. An occasional absence is understandable, but habitual absence is inexcusable. If you have more than 3 absences, you will have 3 points for each absence subtracted from your final grade. Missing a scheduled conference will count as 2 absences. Because instructions for each day's activity are given at the beginning of class, it is important that you arrive on time.

There are some class days when attendance is optional. On those days I will be in the classroom and will give individual help to any student who comes and desires help. I encourage any student who has questions about the assignment or his/her work to come on those days. Those days are indicated by an asterisk next to the date on the syllabus.

**Expectations:** Much of your work will be done in class. Many classes will have specific assignments to be completed and handed in by the end of the class period. Your work on, and completion of, these assignments will be an important factor in your participation grade. You are expected to work until the class period has ended, help your classmates learn by your responses to their writing, choose projects that are sufficiently challenging, and spend time outside of class working on your assignments.

**Paper Topics:** You will be responsible for choosing appropriate and challenging topics on which to write. The instructor must approve all topics before you begin and you cannot change your topic without prior approval. It is ultimately your responsibility to choose a topic that will satisfy the requirements of the assignment. Topics that are too simple and require little work will not get high grades.

**Peer Review of Drafts:** It is particularly important for you to attend, and be prepared to participate in, in-class peer review of a draft of your papers. Your draft needs to be substantially completed on those days in order for you to receive help from your fellow students. Before accepting any paper I must see a rough draft that you have worked on in class.

## **Plagiarism**

Talking over your ideas and getting comments on your writing from friends are not examples of plagiarism. Taking someone else's published or unpublished words and calling them your own is plagiarism, another name for cheating or academic dishonesty. Copying material from the Internet without giving credit by listing the source is also plagiarism. Plagiarism has serious consequences, including failure of the course.

## **Grades**

When grading each of your assignment, I will ask this question: "Does this paper fulfil the requirements of

the assignment and does it do so effectively?" Your final grade will be determined by the grades you receive on written and in-class assignments, according to the following weighting:

Resume and Cover Letter 10%

Critique of User Manual 10%

Description 1 5%

Instructions 20%

Proposal 25%

Participation/Class Work 20%

Requirements for Papers In order to meet professional standards in your field, your work needs to adhere to the following requirements.

- Promptness: All projects are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. If you cannot be in class that day, your paper is due in my mailbox by class time. Assignments turned in late will be penalized 5 points each late day unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance.
- Appearance: All work should be neatly typed, using standard margins and spacing in a word processing program. Design your paper using appropriate headings, fonts, spacing, etc.
- Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading: Pay careful attention to the mechanics of writing. Proof read your paper aloud so that you will note errors in grammar or diction.
- Back-up Copies: Always prepare two copies of each major assignment. I will grade one copy and hand it back, the other copy will be for your safekeeping and record.
- Revision: During the class period, I will give you feedback on your papers at various stages of the writing process. Use the comments to improve the paper you are working on at the time as well as your writing in general. Do not take criticism about your writing personally but use it for improvement of your work.

## **Readings & Assignments**

All readings are from the text: Judith S. Vanalstyne & Merrill D. Tritt, *Professional & Technical Writing Strategies*(2002)

Week 1

1/13 Introduction to the course

1/15 Review Appendix A: Conventions of Construction, Grammar, and Usage, 645-70. Ethical Considerations, 8-17: Bring to class a description of an ethical issue in which you were involved or one which you observed.

Week 2

1/20 Chapter 4: Designing Documents, 115-38

1/22 Complete document design assignment. Locate online a job in your field.

Week 3

1/27 Chapter 13: Resume & Cover Letter, 423-39

1/29 \*Complete resume and cover letter assignment

Week 4

2/3 Chapter 3: Using Graphics & Visuals, 72-107 Paper #1 due: Cover letter and resume

2/5 Chapter 7: Preparing Manuals, 234-50. Bring to class a poorly written user manual.

Week 5

2/10 \*Preparing Manuals, continue work on assignment. Choose topic for description paper.

2/12 Chapter 9: Describing Mechanisms, 278-303. Paper #2 due: User manual critique.

Week 6

2/17 Student conferences in my office, 329 Stansbury. Bring draft of your paper to conference

2/19 Student conferences

Week 7

2/24 Student conferences

2/26 Bring a complete rough draft of description paper to class.

Week 8

3/2 Chapter 10: Giving Instructions, 310-25. Bring topic for approval & begin paper. Paper #3 due:

Description of a Mechanism

3/5 Continue work on instruction paper.

Week 9

3/9 \*Continue work on instruction paper.

3/11 Bring complete rough draft of instruction paper to class.

Spring Break: March 13 - 21

Week 10

3/23 Documenting Research, 194-224, and Creating Surveys & Questionnaires, 175-85

3/25 Complete survey and questionnaire in class. Paper #4 due: Giving Instructions.

Week 11

3/30 Chapter 15: Proposals, 492-531. Bring topic for proposal paper and begin research.

4/1 Continue work on proposal paper.

Week 12

4/6 Student conferences in my of fice. Bring a rough draft of your proposal paper to the conference.

4/8 Student conferences

Week 13

4/13 Student conferences

4/15 Student conferences

Week 14

4/20 Bring a complete rough draft of proposal to class.

4/22 \*Revisions of proposal paper

Week 15

4/27 \*Revisions of proposal paper

4/29\_Paper #5 due:\_Proposal