

[Professional Writing Theory & Research](#)

ENGL 605, WVU, Fall 2012

- [Description and Policies](#)
- [Schedule](#)
- [Readings](#)

Description and Policies

Course information

Course number: ENGL 605**Course name:** Professional Writing Theory and Research**Term and year:** Fall 2012**CRN:** 87742**Location:** G10 Colson Hall**Times:** Tuesday, 4:00-6:50 p.m.**Professor:** [John Jones](#), Assistant Professor**Prof. email:** john dot jones at-sign mail dot wvu dot edu**Prof. Twitter:** [johnmjones](#)**Office location:** 231 Colson**Office hours:** T 2:30-3:30, Th 10-11, and by appointment [in person](#) or [virtually](#)

Course description

In this course, we will examine the historical development of professional and technical writing, including historical and contemporary debates in the field, pedagogical approaches to professional and technical writing, its relation to rhetoric and composition studies, and qualitative and quantitative methods for conducting professional and technical writing research. While the course is designed for [PWE](#) students, it is ideal for all students who wish to expand their understanding the theory, practices, and research methods of rhetoric and professional writing.

Course objectives

By completing the course, students will

- Know the theories that inform and validate the practices of academics and professionals working in the broad field of professional writing.
- Comprehend the similarities, differences, and disputes regarding definitions for professional, technical, and business writing.
- Evaluate the role of ethics and the law in the professional writing classroom and workplace.
- Analyze critical approaches to the uses of technology in the professional writing classroom and workplace.
- Apply theories of professional writing to English 304: Business Writing and English 305: Professional Writing classroom pedagogies.
- Understand and apply qualitative and quantitative methods for conducting professional and technical writing research.

Resources

Required texts

- Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, *Central Works in Technical Communication*, ISBN: 0195157052.
- A textbook suitable for ENGL 304 or ENGL 305.

Other requirements

- Regular access to a computer and the Internet,
- a [MIX email account](#) which is checked daily,
- a [Twitter](#) account, and
- a [Google Docs](#) account.

Recommended

- An automated backup service for your data like [SpiderOak](#) or [Dropbox](#), and
- services for tracking your research, like [Evernote](#) for note-taking, [Delicious](#) for tracking Web sources, and [Zotero](#) or [RefWorks](#) for managing research and formatting citations.

Work visibility

Due to the nature of the course, you will be sharing your work with your fellow classmates as part of presentations and workshops. Additionally, you will share your work publicly on the Web (e.g., on the class blog). By taking this course, you are indicating that you accept these requirements. If you have any questions about these requirements, please contact me immediately.

Attendance and late work

You are expected to attend every class meeting, arriving on time and staying for the duration of the meeting. While there will be no excused absences for the course, you will be allowed one absence without penalty. The penalty for absences over the allowed limit will be one letter grade for each absence.

Any work submitted after it is due will be reduced one letter grade for each calendar day it is late. If you miss a presentation due to an unavoidable emergency, we will try to reschedule it, if possible. However, such rescheduling is not guaranteed, and you should make every effort to be present when you are required to present.

Assignments

[Weekly reading response](#) 10%[Journal review](#) 15%[Research proposal](#) 10%[Textbook analysis](#) 10%[Mock conference presentation](#) 20%[Research paper](#) 35%

Weekly reading response (10%)

For each week when readings are assigned, you will post a response to those readings on the course blog. These posts will serve as a starting point for our discussions about the readings, and for many of you they will be the place where you form the ideas that will lead to your presentation and paper projects. Your responses can take many different forms: you can engage with a single author or text, digging deeply into a particular idea; you can engage ideas that you agree with and expand on them or apply them to new objects of study; you can challenge ideas you disagree with; you can make connections between current and past readings or with outside sources that you feel would benefit the class discussion. As long as you are engaging with the material, you will have broad latitude with the form of your response. Additionally, you should make an effort to read and respond to your classmates' posts. Part of this response will be not only providing comments, but also following up on those comments and responding to them.

While blogging is often thought of as an informal genre, it is informal only in the sense that blogs are often used for sharing ideas that may be speculative or not fully formed with a community of readers and writers so that that community can provide feedback on those ideas. Your responses should adhere to the standards of both scholarly and Web writing, including citations for offline sources you that reference and working links to online sources. I encourage you to include images and other multimedia in your posts when they are appropriate, but, like other sources, they should be properly cited.

Posting

During the first week of class, you should register for an account on this site. Your responses are due by midnight on the Sunday of each week when readings are assigned. For example, for week 2, your blogs should be posted to the site before midnight on 8/26 and they should address the readings listed for 8/28. This schedule will give your classmates and myself a chance to read and respond to your posts before our Tuesday meetings.

If you are new to the WordPress platform, you can watch [this video](#) on how to post a blog entry or read [this description of the posting process](#).

Journal review (15%)

You will work with a small group of your classmates to deliver a 15-20 minute presentation on a journal in the field of professional and technical communication. The presentation will contain the following elements:

1. A brief description of the journal, such as current editor(s), structure, submission processes, copyright and access policies, and any other relevant information.
2. A more detailed publication profile of the journal that describes its particular focus. This profile will be based on a review of the most recently available five years of journal issues. Group members will not need to exhaustively read these issues as they would assigned readings for class, but rather should skim them to identify representative features. The questions below should be considered a starting point for the group's profile of the journal, as groups will be free to elaborate on these areas of focus, or add additional ones, as they see fit.
 - o *Subject matter*: What topics are primarily covered by the journal? What topics receive less coverage? Does the journal have a particular focus or speciality within professional and technical communication that is demonstrated in the choice of topic for articles?
 - o *Theoretical focus*: Does the journal focus on particular theorists of schools of thought? If so, what are they, and what forms of inquiry does this focus encourage or discourage?
 - o *Methodological focus*: Does the journal favor certain methodologies over others? If so, how

- o does this choice affect the other features of the profile?
 - o *Style*: What are the stylistic characteristics of the journal? Do articles have a standard structure, or is there variety in how they are organized? What other patterns can you detect across the journal's articles?
3. Finally, groups will choose 1-2 representative articles from the journal and then describe how they illustrate the features they have identified in their profile.

You will work in groups of 2-3 on this project. The groups will coordinate with each other and myself to ensure there is minimal overlap in the selection of journals. All presentations must be accompanied by either a handout or digital resource—such as a slide deck or Web post—that summarizes their findings. Further, groups will post this resource to the course blog no later than 24 hours after their presentation using the tag *journal* so that it will be available to other members of the class.

We will assign journal review groups during our second class meeting on Aug. 28. Presentations will be scheduled for Sep. 11, 18, & 25.

Research proposal (10%)

The major project for the course will be a [research paper](#) on a topic related to professional and technical communication. As the first step in completing this project, you will write a one-page proposal with an accompanying annotated bibliography. The goal of the proposal is to convince your reader(s)—in this case, myself—that the project is both viable and addresses a research area related to the field of professional and technical communication. To that end, the proposal should detail the goals of the project, the work you have completed on it up to this point, and your plans for achieving those goals within the context of the research paper assignment.

Proposals will be due via GoogleDocs on Oct. 9 before the beginning of class. You will schedule a short meeting with me sometime between Oct. 10-16 (more information to follow) where we will briefly discuss the content of your proposal.

Textbook analysis (10%)

You will create an analysis of a textbook appropriate for ENGL 304 or 305. This analysis will consist of a short introduction that explains the unique features or emphases of the text along with descriptions of how the text addresses the topics listed below.

Topics:

- Writing process
- Rhetoric and persuasion
- Style and tone
- Document design
- Document genres and types of writing
- Visuals and oral communication
- Research and writing technologies

This analysis should be between 750-1,000 words and will be posted on the class blog with the tag *textbook*. Additionally, you will give an informal 10-minute overview of the analysis in class.

You may choose any textbook listed in "[New Instructor Resources](#)" documents for 304 or 305, or any other

text that would be appropriate for one of those classes. You can buy a text, request a desk copy if you will be teaching one of the courses in an upcoming semester, or acquire a text from the library. Before the project is due, we will discuss textbook selection as a class so as to ensure broad coverage of available texts.

Textbook analysis presentations will be scheduled for Oct. 23 & 30.

Mock conference presentation (20%)

During the second half of the semester, we will hold a series of mock conference panels where students will present their work in progress on the research paper in the form of a conference presentation. In groups of 3-4, you will form a panel, give it a title and description, and then give presentations of 15 minutes each after which you will answer questions from the class about your projects.

These presentations can be speculative. While they should contain more detailed research and arguments than your [proposals](#), they are not required to be finished, polished arguments (although finished, polished arguments are certainly welcome). Rather, you can use these presentations as an opportunity for you to showcase your work in progress for an audience of engaged colleagues, testing your arguments before you submit the final version of the project as your research paper.

Your presentation should be accompanied by some form of visual or handout that helps elucidate your argument or supplies your audience with crucial evidence or sources that are difficult to share via an oral presentation.

We will schedule presentations for Nov. 6, 13, & 27.

Research paper (35%)

You will write a 12–15 page research paper on a topic related to professional or technical communication. The paper should be of publishable quality and demonstrate the argumentative, organizational, methodological, and stylistic features characteristic of the genre. The paper should be formatted according to the APA guidelines.

This paper will be the culmination of your work for the course, and it should incorporate feedback that you have received on the project from your peers and myself during the proposal and presentation stages.

These papers are due before our at our last class meeting on Dec. 4, and should be shared with me via Google Docs.

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- [Description and Policies](#)
- [Schedule](#)
- [Readings](#)

Schedule

Date	Schedule/Readings	Assignments Due
Aug 21	Topic: Course Introductions Readings: Course Description and Policies	
Aug 28	Topic: Historical Formations Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Central Works in Technical Communication (CWTC)</i> 1. Connors, "The Rise of Technical Writing Instruction in America" • CWTC 2. Rutter, "History, Rhetoric, and Humanism: Toward a More Comprehensive Definition of Technical Communication" • Miller, "What's Practical about Technical Writing?" (Readings) • Sullivan, "After the Great War" (Readings) 	Assign Journal Review groups
Sep 4	Topic: Rhetoric Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Smith, "What Connection does Rhetorical Theory have to Technical and Professional Communication?" (Readings) • Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" (Readings) • CWTC 6. Rude, "The Report for Decision Making: Genre and Inquiry" • CWTC 7. Johnson, "Audience Involved: Toward a Participatory Model of Writing" 	
Sep 11	Topic: Theories/Foundations Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWTC 9. Thralls & Blyler, "The Social Perspective and Professional Communication: Diversity and Directions in Research" • CWTC 10. Lay, "Feminist Theory and the Redefinition of Technical Communication" • CWTC 11. Slack, Miller, & Doak, "The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, 	Journal Review presentations

- Power, Authority"
- CWTC 12. Johnson-Eilola, "Relocating the Value of Work: Technical Communication in a Post-Industrial Age"

Sep 18	Topic: Research Methods Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWTC 19. Charney, "Empiricism Is Not a Four-Letter Word" • CWTC 20. Sullivan and Porter, "On Theory, Practice, and Method: Toward a Heuristic Research Methodology for Professional Writing" • Koerber and McMichael, "Qualitative Sampling Methods: A Primer for Technical Communicators" (Readings) • Slavin, "A Practical Guide to Statistics," from <i>Research methods in education</i>, 2nd ed., (1992) (Readings) 	Journal Review presentations
Sep 25	Topic: Writing Process Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Faigley, "Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and a Proposal" (Readings) • Flower and Hayes, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing" (Readings) • Hart-Davidson, Spinuzzi, and Zachry, "Visualizing Writing Activity as Knowledge Work: Challenges & Opportunities" (Readings) • Slattery, "Undistributing Work Through Writing: How Technical Writers Manage Texts in Complex Information Environments" (Readings) 	Journal Review presentations
Oct 2	Topic: Pedagogy Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWTC 31. Bosley, "Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Whose Culture Is It, Anyway?" • CWTC 32. Brasseur, "Contesting the Objectivist Paradigm: Gender Issues in the Technical and Professional Communication Curriculum" • Wilson, "Technical Communication and Late Capitalism" (Readings) • PWE guides for teaching ENGL 304 and 305 	
Oct 9	Topic: Digital Texts Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CWTC 27. Tharon W. Howard, "Who 'Owns' 	Proposals due

Electronic Texts?”

- *CWTC 28.* Stephen A. Bernhardt, “The Shape of Text to Come: The Texture of Print on Screens”
- *CWTC29.* Selfe & Selfe “The Politics of the Interface: Power and Its Exercise in Electronic Contact Zones”
- Haas, “Race, Rhetoric, and Technology” ([Readings](#))

Oct 16 Proposal meetings Oct. 15-19

Oct 23 **Topic:** Design: Visual Communication

Readings:

- Brumberger, “Making the Strange Familiar: A Pedagogical Exploration of Visual Thinking” ([Readings](#))
- Hocks, “Understanding Visual Rhetoric in Digital Writing Environments” ([Readings](#))
- George, “From Analysis to Design: Visual Communication in the Teaching of Writing” ([Readings](#))
- Lauer and Sanchez, “Visuospatial Thinking in the Professional Writing Classroom”

[Textbook overviews](#)

Oct 30 **Topic:** Design: Documents and the Internet

Readings:

- *CWTC 16.* Barton and Barton, “Ideology and the Map: Toward a Postmodern Visual Design Practice”
- Kumpf, “Visual Metadiscourse: Designing the Considerate Text” ([Readings](#))
- Salvo & Rosinski, “Information Design: From Authoring Texts to Architecting Virtual Space” ([Readings](#))
- Tufte, “The Cognitive Style of PowerPoint” ([Readings](#))

[Textbook overviews](#)

Nov 6 **Topic:** Workplace Studies

Readings:

- *CWTC 21.* Jack Selzer, “The Composing Processes of an Engineer”
- *CWTC 23.* Dorothy A. Winsor, “Engineering Writing/Writing Engineering”
- *CWTC 24.* Nancy Allen, Dianne Atkinson, Meg Morgan, Teresa Moore, and Craig Snow, “What Experienced Collaborators Say about Collaborative Writing”

[Presentations](#)

- *CWTC 26.* Barbara Mirel, “Writing and Database Technology: Extending the Definition of Writing in the Workplace”

Nov 13

Topic: Ethics

Readings:

- *CWTC 14.* Sullivan, “Political-Ethical Implications of Defining Technical Communication as a Practice”
- *CWTC 15.* Herndl, “Teaching Discourse and Reproducing Culture: A Critique of Research and Pedagogy in Professional and Non-Academic Writing”
- Gough and Price, “Developing Ethical Decision-Making Skills: How Textbooks Fail Students” ([Readings](#))
- Dombrowski, “Can Ethics Be Technologized? Lessons from Challenger, Philosophy, and Rhetoric” ([Readings](#))

[Presentations](#)

Nov 27

Topic: Digital Literacy

Readings:

- Dicks, “The Effects of Digital Literacy on the Nature of Technical Communication Work” ([Readings](#))
- Blakeslee, “Addressing Audiences in a Digital Age” ([Readings](#))
- Clark, “Shaped and Shaping Tools: The Rhetorical Nature of Technical Communication Technologies” ([Readings](#))
- Thatcher, “Understanding Digital Literacy Across Cultures” ([Readings](#))

[Presentations](#)

Dec 4

Topics: Course evaluations, course wrap-up

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