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English 305

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ENGL 305, Scott Wible, Fall 2007

English 305: Technical Writing

Fall 2007

Class schedule: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 2:30 p.m. – 3:45 p.m., 244 B&E

Instructor: Dr. Scott Wible

E-mail: swible@mix.wvu.edu

NOTE: On the subject line of your email, begin with "ENGL 305" and follow with a specific description of the subject about which you are writing. Following this procedure helps to ensure a prompt reply to your email.

Office: 431 Stansbury

Office Hours: Tuesday, 12:30 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.; Thursday, 4 p.m. – 6 p.m.; and by appointment

English 305, Technical Writing, serves students who are studying and preparing for careers in fields that require them to make technical information available to those who need it. Those professionals and academics who compose technical writing include not only scientists, engineers, and fashion designers but also technical editors, content developers, documentation specialists, technical illustrators, instructional designers, information architects, usability and human factors professionals, visual designers, Web designers and developers, and translators. This advanced course in writing will give you the opportunity to explore and identify the discourse practices prized in your disciplinary, institutional, and professional communities—and help you to manage those practices effectively in your own written work. In this way you will learn and practice those writing strategies and tactics that scientists, engineers, designers, and a wide range of technical writers and editors all need in order to write successfully on the job.

You will produce many different types of technical writing in this course, but the centerpiece will be your web portfolio. The portfolio will be the end product in the course, containing your best works and marking the culmination of your efforts to produce rhetorically savvy and precisely executed documents. This course makes use of web portfolios because portfolios place emphasis where it should be in any composition course—on giving you the opportunity to develop as a writer. Developing as a writer comes as you reflect on your own writing habits and processes, so you will be given plenty of opportunity to cultivate this habit of reflection as you progress through the course. For subsequent writing assignments, you will apply these insights as you continue practicing and

sharpening your craft as a writer. Equally as important, the web portfolio assignment encourages you to develop and demonstrate your skills in writing and designing multimedia texts, skills that have become increasingly important in today's information economy. With three weeks to go in the semester, then, your attention will shift from the process of writing and designing documents to the final product. At the end of the semester, you will publish your web portfolio—revised, edited, and polished to meet your rhetorical purposes as well as your audience's demands—and I will evaluate it.

With these various elements in mind, this course has been designed to give you the following learning and writing opportunities:

- Develop a habit of reflection that allows you to engage with your own writing before you ask others to engage it.

- Discover and understand the discourse features that distinguish your disciplinary and institutional communities from others.

- Discover and specify the purposes of your writing.

- Develop a range of writing processes appropriate to various writing tasks in technical and scientific communities.

- Identify and describe the characteristics of your readers in a way that forms a sound basis for deciding how to write to them.

- Invent the contents of your communications through research and reflection.

- Arrange material to raise and satisfy your readers' expectations, using rhetorical patterns of organization.

- Reveal the organization of your communications by using forecasting and transitional statements, headings, and effective page/document design.

- Observe appropriate generic conventions and formats for technical documents.

- Design and use tables, graphs, and technical illustrations.

- Compose rhetorically effective sentences.

- Test documents to be sure they fulfill the needs of users.

- Collaborate effectively with your peers in a community of writers who provide feedback on each other's work.

- Develop and demonstrate functional literacies in webpage design.

- Connect your technical writing and designing (via the web portfolio) to other work in your field as well as to the wider world.

- Communicate in an ethically responsible manner.

Required Texts and Tools

Dobrin, Sidney I., Christopher J. Keller, and Christian R. Weisser. *Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice, 2008. ISBN 0131172883.

Reynolds, Nedra, and Rich Rice. *Portfolio Keeping: A Guide for Students.* 2nd ed. Boston: Beford/St. Martin's, 2006. ISBN: 0312419090.

Kimball, Miles A. *The Web Portfolio Guide: Creating Electronic Portfolios for the Web.* New York: Longman, 2003. ISBN 0321093453. Companion website

You will need to have access to, at minimum, a non-HTML-based web page editor such as Netscape Composer, Microsoft FrontPage, or Macromedia Dreamweaver. While The Web Portfolio Guide refers to a graphics-based web page editor, you certainly may use HTML (HyperText Markup Language, the basic language of web pages) in order to create a more sophisticated web portfolio. See the book's companion website for links to tutorials about using HTML.

NOTE: Macromedia Dreamweaver is available on computers in WVU's on-campus labs. The companion website for Kimball's *Web Portfolio Guide* provides links to sites where you can download other freeware and shareware web development tools. You also will need to secure personal web space where you can display your portfolio. You can sign up for space via "Community," WVU's free web-hosting service.

Writing Folders

A successful portfolio for this course will reflect three major principles: choice, reflection, and variety (we will discuss these principles more fully as the semester progresses). In order to meet these criteria, you will collect in a folder everything that relates to the individual projects and the course as a whole. For example, as you work on each major writing assignment, *keep (within reason) hard copies of all your notes, drafts, outlines, peer reviews, and photocopied articles; keep the documents organized, dated, and labeled, both for my benefit and your own.* The contents of your folder will demonstrate to me, your peers, and yourself how much collecting, drafting, and revising that you have done. Moreover, as you prepare your final portfolio, you will review these materials in order to learn how your discovery, drafting, and research processes have evolved throughout the course. *Bring this writing folder to each class.*

Conferences

Meet with me when you have questions about an assignment, when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due, when you have questions about a comment, when you want to know where you stand in the course, and when you want to discuss your revision strategies for your web portfolio. You should also see me to get help with particular writing or web-portfolio related problems or to resolve differences about grades. Finally, I am extremely open to your suggestions for improving the course, so please feel welcome to discuss with me your ideas about how the course is going. If you cannot make my scheduled office hours and would like to meet with me, we can work together to find a convenient time for conferencing.

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and to have your textbook and all of your work with you. An occasional absence is perhaps understandable, but habitual absence is inexcusable. *If you amass more than three unexcused absences, your grade for the course will be lowered one full letter grade.* For each unexcused absence after three, I reserve the right to lower your final grade by an additional grade (e.g., A becomes a A-, A- becomes a B+, and so on).

It is particularly important for you to attend—and be prepared to participate in—in-class workshops on drafts of

your documents. The more you have written before peer review sessions, the more you will benefit from them. Although your drafts need not be "polished," in general they should be complete enough for you to receive substantial help from your peers. Under no circumstances will I accept a "final" version of a document unless I have seen a rough draft.

NOTE: An absence on the day a draft is due counts as two absences. If you show up to class on the day a draft is due without your draft work (or with draft work that is incomplete), you will be given two absences for the day. I will follow the WVU Faculty Senate's policy on "excused absences" such that legitimate reasons for missing a class include regularly scheduled, University-approved curricular and extracurricular activities (such as field trips, debate trips, and athletic contests); medical illness; and religious observances.

Assignments

In this course, I will try to hold you to the professional standards that prevail in your field. For example, of the requirements listed below, your employer will take some completely for granted, such as promptness, neat appearance, and correct mechanics.

Promptness. In this course, as in the working world, you must turn in your work on time. All projects are due at the <u>beginning</u> of class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Assignments turned in late will be penalized one letter grade for each day late unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance.

Appearance. All work should be neatly prepared on a computer, using margins and spacing and design techniques that are conventional for the genre. Whether it is a resume, set of instructions, or report, your communication should exhibit complete and appropriate format. All writing for the course should be printed clearly, including draft work.

Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading. At work, even a single error in spelling, grammar, or proofreading can jeopardize the effectiveness of some communications (depending on the rhetorical situation). Grading will reflect the great seriousness with which these matters are frequently viewed in the working world. If you would like special assistance with any of these skills, I can recommend sources for extra help.

Back-up Copies. Always prepare two legible copies of each major assignment. I will grade one copy and hand it back; the other copy will be for your own safe keeping and permanent records. Sometimes I will request a copy of one of your documents so that I can use it as a sample, to illustrate effective and problematic responses to assignments. Unless I completely obliterate any marks that might identify it as yours, I will never use your work in class without your permission.

Revisions. You will receive feedback on your writing at various stages of the writing process, from your peers as well as me. Since you will be revising three of the four major assignments for your web portfolio, you should try to apply the comments to improve not only the particular assignment you are working on, but also your strategies for writing in general.

Expectations

In addition to the requirements outlined above, you are expected to work until the class period has ended; to complete all reading assignments on time; to help your classmates learn by your responses to their writing; to choose projects that require significant research and analysis; to spend at least six hours per week out of class for writing and class preparation; to be courteous and considerate.

Grades

When grading each of your assignments, I will ask one overriding question: "Does this document do its job successfully?" That is, would your communication have the intended effect on the reader you are addressing. I will, of course, recognize the difference between a competent performance (a "C") and good and excellent performances ("B" and "A"). A competent performance is one that stands a chance of succeeding; an excellent performance is one that seems assured not only of success but also of winning praise:

A superior; the work is of near professional quality. The document meets or exceeds all the objectives of the assignment. The content is mature, thorough, and well-suited for the audience; the style is clear, accurate, and forceful; the information is well-organized and designed so that it is accessible and attractive; the mechanics and grammar are correct.

B good; the document meets the objectives of the assignment, but it needs improvement in style, or it contains easily correctable errors in grammar, format, or content, or its content is superficial.

C competent; the document needs significant improvement in concept, details, development, organization, grammar, or format. It may be formally correct but superficial in content.

D marginally acceptable; the document meets some of the objectives but ignores others; the content is inadequately developed; or it contains numerous or major errors.

F unacceptable; the document does not have enough information, does something other than the assignment required, or it contains major errors or excessive errors.

Your final grade will be determined by the grades you receive on written and in-class assignments, according to the following weighting:

- Job Application Package 10%

- Technical Description 10%

- Instruction Set 15%

- Usability Memo 15%

- Web Portfolio 35%

- Reflective Writing 10%

- Class Participation 5%

Instructions for each assignment are explained in detail elsewhere in this packet. As a class, we will develop grading criteria for the web portfolio assignment.

Undergraduate Writing Center

Please consider taking your ideas and your written work to the WVU Writing Center, where trained peer tutors will consult with writers about any piece of writing at any stage of the writing process. The Writing Center is located in 44 Stansbury Hall, and its Fall 2007 tutoring hours are Monday – Thursday 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Friday 10 am – 3 pm. To schedule appointments or to ask questions, call 293-3107 ext. 3340. For more information about Writing Center programs as well as for materials to help you negotiate various stages of the writing process, visit this

website.

Plagiarism (Cheating)

West Virginia University defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity; respect other students' dignity, rights, and property; and help to create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts.

Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. For university procedures that I intend to follow when addressing academic dishonesty cases, please consult the current Student Code of Conduct.

Talking over your ideas and getting comments on your writing from friends are NOT acts of plagiarism. Taking someone else's published or unpublished words and calling them your own IS plagiarism: a synonym is academic dishonesty. When plagiarism amounts to an attempt to deceive, it has dire consequences, as spelled out in the university's regulations WVU Academic Integrity/Dishonesty Policy.

Please note: West Virginia University is committed to social justice. I concur with that commitment and expect to maintain a positive learning environment based upon open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. Our University does not discriminate on the basis of race, sex, age, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment in this class will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Disability Services (293-6700).

Assignment #1: Job Application Package Most people obtain jobs through a multi-stage process. First, they research the types of jobs they are qualified for and the types of employers they would like to work for. Then they try to convince specific employers to consider them for a job. These days, most employers have too many applicants per job to interview each one personally. These employers sort through job application packages (cover letters and resumes) to decide which applicants to consider further. Consequently, a person's first communication with her future employer is likely to be in writing and must persuade the employer to continue the conversation.

For this assignment, you will write job application materials for two different jobs. You may search for job listings in a professional or trade journal, on the Internet, or in other print and digital resources at WVU's Career Services Center. The jobs should be different enough that you will have to emphasize different parts of your experience to qualify for the positions. You may also (with my permission) write for a summer job, an internship, or for a scholarship or other award. Note that you must hand in copies of the job ads you use.

Specifically, here are the materials that you will produce for this assignment:

Two **cover letters** addressed to different prospective employers and that apply for two different types of jobs. The letters should highlight different aspects of your experience relevant to the different jobs.

Two **resumes** that may well differ significantly in content or in layout or both. The choices of content and layout

should emphasize appropriate experience for each job.

A **memo** addressed to me that overviews the two jobs, reviews what you know about these particular employers, and describes the strategies and tactics you have used to adapt your cover letters and resumes to each situation. I expect you to make good use of the information in this memo as you craft the arguments you present to the employers in your cover letters.

Memo

Write a brief memo (approximately two or three single-spaced pages) addressed to me that will help me read, understand, evaluate, and "coach" your resumes and cover letters. For each of the two jobs, the memo must contain a separate job description and audience analysis, as well as a commentary highlighting how you adapted your resumes and cover letters to the different jobs. Since the memo will be of use to you in designing the rest of your job application package, you probably should think about it early—even begin drafting it early. But you should look over it carefully at the very end of the project to make sure that it tells me "how to read" your resumes and cover letters.

Job Description. Describe the specific or unique aspects of the jobs for which you are applying. *Provide specific details that help you and me to visualize the types of work you would be doing as well as the types of skills and knowledge you would be applying were you to work in this position.* For example, do not simply say that a job requires the ability to do laboratory research; instead, spell out in specific terms the types of equipment that one would need to be competent in using and the kinds of knowledge and analytical skills that one would need to have in order to effectively perform this laboratory research. Also, read "between the lines" of the job description and explain the types of personal and professional characteristics that would mark the ideal candidate but are not necessarily listed in the job description.

Audience Analysis. Investigate the particular companies you are applying to. You may obtain information on many companies from the library, on the Internet, or from Career Services. You may also contact the personnel office of the company directly. Then write one or two paragraphs explaining the company's history, mission, values and ideals, organizational culture, working environment—anything that seems important to you in better understanding the audience you are writing to and the types of logos, ethos, and pathos appeals that the company would be receptive to hearing. For example, a government agency often looks to hire someone committed to serving the public, while a private company might want to hire a person who shares the same ethical principles and business values on which the company was founded. This is also the place to describe anything you know about the particular person you are writing to. Note: I expect you to make extensive use of this information as you draft and revise cover letter. This information also should influence how you organize and choose details for your resume.

Strategies for Textual and Visual Design. Describe how you adapted each resume and cover letter for its particular type of job, company, and reader. Just as important, explain why you made these decisions. Ideally, your reasons will be closely related to the information in the job description and audience analysis.

Cover Letter

While your resume is addressed to any employer with a certain type of job opening, the cover letter is most effective when tailored to a particular employer. The purpose of the cover letter is to persuade that specific employer to grant you an interview. Just as you appreciate being treated as an individual rather than as a statistic, so does an employer. Are you applying hit-or-miss to every company in the country? Or have you invested some effort into finding a company that you are well suited for?

Content and Organization. The opening of your letter should establish why you are writing to your reader. Be explicit about the fact that you are looking for a particular kind of job and explain why you would like to work at that particular company. Preview the body of the letter by stating your major qualifications for the job. The body of the letter develops each qualification with specific evidence. The goal is to show the reader both that you know what that specific company needs and that you have what it takes. You may organize this section in various ways: around your training and experience, around what the job or the company requires, or some other way. The letter should close by inviting a response.

Style. Cover letters are difficult to write because they aim at somewhat conflicting goals. On the one hand, you want to make a good first impression. So you want to sound polite and fairly formal. On the other hand, you want to stand out from the crowd—otherwise, why should the employer hire you rather than any of the other applicants? The best policy is probably to talk to your reader as directly and naturally as possible. Avoid hype.

Format. Use a conventional business letter format. Be brief: if possible, stick to one page.

Resume

The purpose of the resume is to describe your qualifications for a type of job. Since this assignment requires you to apply for two somewhat different jobs, you may well decide to create two somewhat different resumes.

Content. Your resume should include contact information and relevant details of your educational training, professional training, special accomplishments, and skills. A resume is not a life history. The goal is to argue that you are qualified for a particular type of job and that you would be a capable, responsible, and personable employee who communicates effectively.

Format. Your format may be traditional or innovative as long as it is appropriate and as long as the information is highly accessible and is organized in a way that highlights the most important items (from the employer's perspective).

Style. Your style should be fairly formal. You need not use complete sentences, but you should use a concise, active style and show consistency in expression from section to section.

Standard for Correctness Employers impose a strict standard of correctness on application materials: An error is the equivalent of a bad spot on your shirt. Accordingly, I will mark this assignment on a somewhat stricter scale than usual. If any letter or resume contains more than two typographical or grammatical errors, I reserve the right to deduct the entire package one letter grade. I will lower the grade for the package even more if there are numerous typographical or grammatical errors.

What to hand in:

- Relevant job ads

- Brainstorming or planning work written to prepare for drafting the main documents

- Rough drafts and final drafts of memo, two cover letters, and two resumes

- Pre-draft workshop, post-draft workshop, and final postwrites

Assignment #2: Technical Description

Engineers and scientists are often required to describe a technical object or process to someone who has no idea what the object or process looks like or how it works. Suppose, for example, that you produce a report that examines the feasibility of distributing rainwater collection tanks as part of a comprehensive solution to clean up Decker's Creek; one section of the proposal would precisely describe the rainwater collection tanks in terms of both their composition and how they work. Technical descriptions such as these appear in a wide variety of documents and serve a wide variety of purposes, from explaining a problem that a feasibility report aims to resolve to highlighting the process that users will complete in an instruction set.

Although technical descriptions seem like purely objective documents (i.e. they simply describe how something works), they are also persuasive. As you describe how your product or process functions, you will want to convince readers that your description is accurate, logical, and important for them to understand.

There are two different kinds of technical descriptions to consider. Choose whichever one is appropriate, depending on your topic.

A **product description** explains the features of a specific device, like a scientific instrument or computer program. Possible topics include devices that are specific to your field; you could also describe a device that is used in everyday contexts.

- Breathalyzer

- Saber saw

- Photovoltaic panel

- Catalytic converter

- Radio

- Sphygmomanometer

A **process description** explains how a complex event occurs, including a mechanical process (how donuts are made) or natural events (how lightening is produced). You can choose a process that is specific to your field, or just something people might be curious about:

- How a specific drug works

- How steel is made

- How fuel cells work

- How a computer compiles and executes a program

- How your microwave works

- How food products are irradiated

Audience: Select a specific audience that would be interested in learning about the product or process you explain. For example, you could design a brochure that would be used at the campus health clinic to explain how contraception functions. Or, you could write a letter to members of a local task force or environmental group

explaining a process like biological pest control.

Gathering information: Use Internet and library resources to help you find out more about your topic. You can also draw on material you've used in other courses. If you are describing a specific product, look for technical support documents for the product or process you are describing. Remember to keep track of your sources—you'll need to submit a works consulted list with your final assignment.

Contents:

To help you develop content for your description, first determine whether you are describing a product (an object, mechanism, or phenomena) or a process (a procedure or activity). Composing product descriptions requires you to focus on the parts that make up the product and to describe in precise detail how these different parts work together to make the entire object function. Writing process descriptions, meanwhile, demands that you break up the process into its significant stages and to describe the various activities that unfold at each step of the procedure.

No matter whether you are writing a product description or a process description, review pages 452-458 in your textbook to help you analyze your rhetorical situation and to develop content.

In either case, remember to choose contents based on the audience's level of interest, experience, and knowledge about the topic. Regardless of the type of description, your document should include the following:

- An introduction and overview (including a preview of the parts or stages)

- A body section that describes the various parts or stages in more detail

- A summary section that answers the question, "So what?"—that is, how or why learning about this product or process might affect the audience's thinking or actions.

Format: For this assignment, you can choose an appropriate format for your audience and topic: a brochure, fact sheet, website, article, or memo format. Include design features to help the reader understand the product or process better: diagrams, headers, bulleted lists, and so on.

Length: 3-4 pages

Visuals: You can either develop your own visuals (a rough sketch is fine if you don't know how to prepare one with a computer program), or include a "reference visual" (a published copy with instructions on how it would need to be adapted to suit your purpose). Be sure to cite the source for any published visuals you use.

What to hand in:

- Your planning worksheet

- A list of source materials you used (including sources of visuals, product information, etc.)

- Your rough drafts and final drafts

- Your pre-draft workshop, post-draft workshop, and final postwrites

Assignment #3: Instruction Set

Instruction sets are common technical documents for many disciplines and occupations. Employees read

instructions to learn how to assemble a product or complete a procedure. Supervisors write out company policies that often serve as instruction sets. Customers read instructions for using a product. For this assignment, you will develop a set of instructions advising users to perform a specific task.

Before deciding on a task, consider the following guidelines:

- Choose something you are very familiar with. It can be something related to your field of study (i.e. how to use a particular piece of laboratory equipment) or something related to a more general audience (i.e. how to upload and order photos using Snapfish's online photo service).

- Your audience should be someone who has never performed this task before.

- Your audience should have a general understanding of the topic area.

- Choose a task with an appropriate level of difficulty—neither too easy nor too hard to explain in the space allotted.

- The task may involve a device: assembling it, operating it, or fixing it. Or it may involve some process (e.g., registering for classes using WVU's on-line system). You may choose the task from a course, a hobby, a previous job, or some skill you've acquired in school.

- The device or process should have discrete parts or steps that are fairly easy to name and refer to.

- Your task should be explained in approximately 3-5 pages of written instructions, including visuals.

Topics

Your instructions should help users to perform any kind of task that requires several steps or stages. Here are some topic ideas:

- how to draw a scaled sketch of evidence at a crime scene

- how to create a monthly budget

- how to add another component (CD-ROM, hard drive, sound card, etc.) to your computer

- how to create a spreadsheet using Microsoft Excel

- how to fully use your ATM card (include many options and features, not just how to withdraw money)

- how to operate a Rotary Evaporator or how to use a micropipette

NOTE: Although many people consider them to be a form of technical writing, you may not choose a food or drink recipe as your topic for this assignment.

Rhetorical Situation

Before you begin to write, consider the rhetorical situation for your instructions. Use the rhetorical analysis worksheet to help you determine the purpose, audience, and context for your instructions. Next, use the instructions planning worksheet to help you develop the contents for your instructions (see below).

Contents:

Depending on the nature of your task, you may wish to include some or all of the following contents.

- Introduction or background information. Here you'll provide your reader with the following information, if applicable:

  -a technical description of the process that readers will be completing

  -definitions of terms or concepts they need to know before they proceed

  -cautions or warnings that apply to the task as a whole

  -a sense of how long the task will take

  -where they should perform the task (i.e. in a well ventilated area, outside, on a flat surface, etc.)

- List of materials needed.

- Diagrams, drawings, photographs, figures, or tables. (Pencil sketch or description of the diagram is fine).

  -Include captions for each illustration or figure.

  -Label charts and diagrams clearly.

  -Make sure to give a sense of scale and orientation.

- List of steps, in chronological order.

  -Make sure you use active verb commands.

  -Phrase each step clearly and concisely.

  -Provide "feedback" that informs the reader what will happen after they complete each step.

  -Anticipate questions that readers might ask (e.g., "What do I do if VALUE X does not appear in the calculation screen?" or "How do I complete this step if I don't have access to a ventilation hood?") and present appropriate answers and information to address these concerns.

  -Include warnings or cautions **before** readers will encounter problems.

  -Break long lists into sections with appropriate sub-headings.

  -Make sure sub-headings and steps are phrased in parallel form.

- Troubleshooting tips. Here you'll offer readers advice on how to rectify problems that might be wrong with a product. Be sure to note the difference between questions that readers need to have answered immediately in order to complete a step successfully and unanticipated problems that might occur with a product—the former need to be addressed in the list of steps, while the latter can be handled in a troubleshooting section.

- Glossary of key terms and definitions.

Organization

Obviously, instructions are normally organized in a chronological order. Beyond that, here are some other guidelines:

- The focus of instructions should be on tasks the user performs, not capabilities of a system or product. Headings and sub-headings should reflect this focus. For instance, "Compiling your program" puts the focus on the audience's task, while "Program compilation" puts the focus on the system.

- If there is no necessary chronological order for your instructions, then choose another rationale for the organization. For example, you could move from most to least important tasks, from general to specialized

tasks, from most to least common, and so on.

Format

Your instructions should be designed to accommodate multiple reading styles and user needs. Accordingly, your design should include:

- A clear hierarchy of headings and subheadings.

- Well-chosen fonts. For print documents, sans-serif fonts are usually best for headings; serif fonts are best for body text. (For online documents, the reverse is true.)

- Numbered lists and bulleted lists, where appropriate. Know the difference. Make sure bullets and numbering are consistently formatted. Do not number bullet lists with fewer than two items.

- An appropriate amount of white space—neither too much nor too little.

- Effective use of alignment. Centered alignment may make it harder for users to skim headings and sub-headings; left alignment or indentations can be more effective for this.

- Effective use of contrast. Too much contrast means that nothing stands out; too little makes it hard for users to find what they need. Consider emphasizing elements like headings, key words, and warnings.

- Effective and consistent design features, including fonts, font sizes, and forms of emphasis.

Length should be 3-5 pages.

Evaluation:

- **Audience Accommodation:** The instructions are appropriate for the intended audience. They're written from a user-centered, rather than system-centered, perspective. They anticipate the user's questions, difficulties, and needs.

- **Content:** The instructions include all of the information needed to complete the task at hand. Background information, warnings, and definitions are included where appropriate.

- **Organization:** The instructions are organized logically. Items within numbered lists are organized chronologically. Sub-sections are clearly marked with headings.

- **Format:** The instructions use the format features listed above (fonts, white space, contrast, alignment, headings and sub-headings) appropriately and consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.

- **Style:** The instructions effectively create a professional ethos. The tone is effective for the audience. Instructions are written as active voice commands. Headings and numbered and bulleted items are in parallel form. The document is free from typographical or grammatical errors.

What to hand in:

- Your instruction set

- Your planning worksheet

- Your rough drafts and draft worksheets

- Your pre-draft workshop, post-draft workshop, and final postwrites

Assignment #4: Usability Memo

This fourth assignment in part tests how well you are learning the concepts in this course, especially the rhetorical concepts of audience, purpose, organization, style, and visual design. Moreover, this assignment will give you an opportunity to practice usability testing, an activity that many technical writers use to assess the effectiveness of their documentation.

As you have learned in this course, technical communication happens all around us; it is indeed a central part of our professional and personal lives. You read the user's manual to learn how to set up the speed-dial function on your cell phone. You access the help menu to find out how to put footnotes into a Word document. You check the ITS FAQ to determine how to upload files to your Website. Yet, more often than not, these activities lead to feelings of frustration and powerlessness. How come technical writing so often doesn't work? Why doesn't anyone know how to program a VCR? How come 80 percent of child safety seats are improperly installed? And why is filing taxes such a painful process?

In this assignment, you'll write a usability memo that helps to answer this question. You will plan, set up, and conduct a usability test of your instruction set—working with real members of your intended audience—in order to assess its effectiveness and to deepen your understanding of how technical writers can make documents more usable.

For this assignment, then, you will evaluate the usability of your instruction set. You will (1) plan and conduct a usability test to analyze the document's usability; and (2) write a usability report that organizes your analysis in both a logical and convincing way.

1) Plan and Conduct a Usability Test

For this assignment you will tailor your usability test in ways that enable you to gather the specific kinds of information you're interested in learning about your document. Everyone will complete the Usability Test Planning Worksheet in order to identify the specific information you want to gain from your test, to select the most effective testing methods to gather this information, and to establish a means for recording data as you conduct the test. Once you have planned the usability test and your data-gathering methods, you will set up testing sites in the real-world spaces where you imagined readers would want or need to use your document, and then you will test your instruction set with two or more real-world members of the audience you envisioned for your instruction set.

2) Write the Usability Memo

Your report should take the form of a memo, and your memo should be addressed to me. The purpose of your document is present an evidence-based evaluation of your document's usability as well as to outline revisions suggestions for improving the document's usability. As you write, provide specific details and examples to support your usability claims. Although I'm certainly familiar with the usability principles we've discussed in class, you still need to explain why a certain feature makes the document ineffective and why a certain suggestion would improve the document.

Contents

- **Introduction.** Briefly describe the purpose of your memo and give an overview of what it will cover. You should explain the means by which you have arrived at your claims (that is, the methods you used for testing the document's usability), and you should give me, your reader, a sense of why this memo will be important for you (i.e. how it will benefit your aims in producing the instruction set, how it will guide revision of your instruction set, why usable documents are important).

- **Rhetorical analysis.** Who is the audience for the instruction set you created? What was the purpose of your document? *Why* did you believe the audience would be using the document? What were the different needs or questions you anticipated the audience having? *How* and *in what context* did you imagine the audience would be using the document? And, most importantly, how did your answers to these questions guide the major decisions you made as your composed your instruction set?

- **Usability analysis.** You will want me to know how you went about analyzing the document's usability, so begin this section by *explaining your testing methods.* Then provide your detailed analysis of the elements that effect the document's usability in positive and negative ways: -Content, -Organization, -Style, -Design, -Ethical, legal, and cultural considerations. For each paragraph within these sections, make the following three moves: (1) describe the major aspects of the document you identified as problems through usability testing; (2) present evidence from usability testing that led you to see this aspect as problematic; and (3) explain how specific revisions would begin to resolve this problem.

- **Conclusions.** Summarize your analysis.

- **Recommendations.** Make specific recommendations to improve the document.

Format

See Chapter 11 in your textbook for sample memos and their conventions. You can change certain design features for the memo (e.g., type face and size), but you should include the following:

- The word Memo or Memorandum at the top

- The Date, To, From, and Subject lines, including your initial news in the Subject line

- Topic headings (this memo won't be short)

- Proper paragraph spacing (single-space within paragraphs, double-space between paragraphs)

- Headers on pages after page 1

- Copy, distribution, and enclosure notations if applicable

The length should be at least three single-spaced pages.

Grading & Evaluation

Research. The usability testing methods were logical ones to use. The usability test was well planned and conducted with professionalism and attention to detail. The results of the usability test were recorded thoroughly. The data was analyzed in a way that acknowledges the strengths and limitations of the particular testing method employed.

Content. The memo includes each of the sections listed above. Within each section, the usability claims are supported by concrete examples and evidence. The section goes beyond reporting answers to the usability questions—it explains why a given item is effective or ineffective. That is, the memo moves well beyond description and into analysis.

Organization. The memo is organized in a logical manner overall and within each section. Headers mark each section.

Format: The memo includes each of the format features listed above. The overall design is clear and consistent. The memo uses fonts, white space, headings and sub-headings appropriately and effectively.

Style: The memo creates a professional ethos, one that demonstrates a solid understanding of the basic principles of technical communication. The tone is effective for the audience. The document is free from typographical and grammatical errors.

What to hand in:

- A copy of your Instruction Set

- Your Usability Testing Planning worksheet

- The data you collected during your usability test

- Your Usability Memo, including rough drafts and the final copy

- Your pre-draft workshop, post-draft workshop, and final postwrites

Assignment #5: Web Portfolio

Throughout the course, you have continually recorded and reflected on the strategies you use to work through writing and research projects. Your tasks as a portfolio keeper have included tending to your developing ideas about individual writing projects in particular and technical writing more generally; keeping watch over your learning patterns; and collaborating with your peers. Now, your responsibility shifts to putting together and polishing a final product. The final web portfolio marks the culmination of your efforts in this course, as you display to me your ability to be a reflective technical writer and to analyze and respond to rhetorical situations effectively.

By the final day of class, then, you will have published your portfolio to the World Wide Web and sent me an email containing the URL where I can view it. Your portfolio should be revised, edited, and polished to presentation quality, and I will evaluate the argument it makes about your ability to make rhetorically informed choices. In effect, the purpose of your final portfolio is to convince me that your portfolio represents your best work, that you have become a reflective learner, and that you have developed abilities in writing and designing documents that match the high evaluative standards set for the course.

There are three major principles that should guide your choices as you begin to build this argument: choice, reflection, and variety.

Choice: You will need to make many conscious decisions as you choose what to include and how to arrange and present—through both textual and visual rhetoric—your entries. Good decisions will reflect your understanding of the rhetorical situation of the portfolio and shape the reader's impression of you as a composer.

Reflection: This final portfolio assignment asks you to examine carefully your own patterns, strengths, and preferences for negotiating writing tasks and for learning new skills. To compose an effective web portfolio, you must do more than merely put the materials together. You also must articulate why you made the choices that you did and what these choices are meant to convey to your reader. In a sense, the portfolio project assesses your ability to think about your own habits of thinking and writing.

Variety: All writers have different strengths and different interests, so your web portfolio gives you a space in which to display your writing ability across a range of assignments, for different audiences, or with different amounts of time for each piece of writing. You may be tempted to think of "variety" only in terms of different types of documents, but the portfolio assignment also encourages you consider pieces of different lengths, for different purposes, or even at different points in your experiences as a writer. When thinking about "variety," consider the full picture of your writing ability that you want me to see.

As we've discussed this semester, the visual design of your web portfolio also plays an important part in readers' assessment both of its content and of you, its composer. I certainly expect students to come to this portfolio project with a wide range of abilities in publishing documents for the web. Our readings and in-class demonstrations (plus on-line tutorials at *The Web Portfolio Guide*'s companion website) should help everyone to develop basic web-authoring skills that they can use to build effective web portfolios. Ultimately, my concern while evaluating your portfolio will be not on whether your portfolio reflects highly advanced web-authoring skills but instead on whether every element of the portfolio—from its textual contents to its visual design—supports your purposes and goals for the project.

(Loose) Guidelines

The only firm guideline for the contents of your final portfolio is that it include three of your four major assignments (you choose which three to include), revised and polished for final presentation, along with five additional pages of any writing that you wish to include. These five pages could come from your five postwrites, peer response forms, impromptu pieces composed in class, email correspondence, or the two remaining major assignments.

Questions to Get You Thinking about Your Selections

To begin making your selections for the final portfolio, sit at a large table and spread out the contents of your working folder, with ever piece already dated, labeled, and organized in the fashion that you have chosen. You now need to make decisions about the type of argument that you want your portfolio to make about yourself as a writer. Here are some questions to help you get started, but also realize that these are not the only possibilities for shaping your portfolio:

- Do you want to show progress—that is, how much your writing and thinking has improved? *Do you want to show steadfastness, your ability to stick with a project for a long period of time?* Do you want to show your flexibility, that you can write in different styles or voices? *Do you want to show creativity, or how you have made the assignments your own?* Do you want to show independence, that you have revised well beyond the suggestions, or made considerably more changes than were recommended?

You naturally will want to select those documents that your readers (me and your peers) thought were your best, or that you most enjoyed writing. But, you do have other options. For example, you might choose a document that

you think has considerable potential. You might need to work with it a bit more to prepare it for the final portfolio, but you could talk about these revisions in your reflective introduction. As compositionist Nedra Reynolds suggests, "Being able to demonstrate an understanding of revision through a smartly revised paper could be just as satisfying as including one already considered 'the best.'"

The Reflective Introduction

This essay will explain the analysis that guided your decision-making about what to include in your portfolio. You will use the various documents in the portfolio as evidence to support the claim that you want to make about yourself as a writer. For example, you might discuss how the extensive revisions you made to your instruction set illustrate your greater sensitivity to audience's informational needs. Or, you might explain how your comments on a colleague's technical description show you becoming a more savvy reader of technical writing. So, after you have selected your materials and built a cohesive argument, you will explain to me what cohesive argument they make and how they do so. Your goal with this essay is to show me what you have learned about the qualities of good writing, anticipating readers' needs, and the importance of careful presentation. Therefore, as you make your decisions about the portfolio and begin to draft your reflective introduction, consider how you have already responded to the various "Tasking Stock" activities in *Portfolio Keeping* and the "planning tasks" in Chapter 2 of *The Web Portfolio Guide*; they are meant to sharpen your focus on the rhetorical nature of this assignment.

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ENGLISH 305: TECHNICAL WRITING

FALL 2007 SYLLABUS

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NOTE:

* -- Class will meet in the White Hall 1 Computer Classroom.

** -- Class will meet in the White Hall 2 Computer Classroom.

WEEK 1

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
8/21	T	Course introduction. Defining characteristics of technical communication.		
8/23	Th	Introduce Assignment #1: Job Application Package. Locating and interpreting job advertisements. Conducting audience research.	TC: Read Chapter 13, "Finding and Obtaining Employment" (pp. 376-387). PK: Read Introduction, "Understanding Writing Portfolios" (pp. 1-7).	"Taking Stock 1: Establishing Expectations" (PK, p. 7).

WEEK 2

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
8/28	T	Rhetorical elements of the resume.	TC: Read Chapter 13, "Finding and Obtaining Employment" (pp. 387-401) and Chapter 2, "Rhetoric and Technical Communication" (pp. 22-41).	Locate three possible jobs for Assignment #1 and draft descriptions of each. Job-Related Skills Freewrite due.
8/30	Th	Rhetorical elements of the cover letter.	TC: Read Chapter 13, "Finding and Obtaining Employment" (pp. 401-402). Scan Chapter 12, "Letters" (pp. 348-370) for relevant information on formatting formal letters.	Conduct and draft audience analysis of two employers.

WEEK 3

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/4	T	In-class peer review of Job Application Package.		Draft of Job Application Package due.
9/6	Th	Introduce Assignment #2: Technical Description.	PK: Read Chapter 1, "Setting Goals and Planning Ahead" (pp. 8-10).	**Assignment #1 due: Job Application Package.**

WEEK 4

Reminder : The Employment Expo is Wednesday, September 12 in the WVU Coliseum. For more details, see the WVU Career Services webpage: <http://www.wvu.edu/~careersc/>. Good luck with your job or internship search!

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/11	T	Rhetorical elements of Technical Description.	TC: Read Chapter 14, "Technical Descriptions" (pp. 442-458).	
9/13	Th	Technical writing as problem-solving.	TC: Read Chapter 1, "Technical and Professional Communication in the Workplace" (pp. 2-21). PK: Read Chapter 2, "Staying Organized and Keeping a Working Portfolio" (pp. 11-16) and Chapter 3, "Becoming a Reflective Learner" (pp. 17-23).	"Taking Stock 3: What is Reflective Learning?" (PK, p. 19). *Be sure to address the entire prompt.*

WEEK 5

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due

| 9/18 | T | Visual Display in Technical Descriptions. | TC: Read Chapter 10, "Visual Rhetoric and Using Visuals" (pp. 164-215). | Technical Description Planning Worksheet due. |
| 9/20 | Th | Drafting Technical Descriptions. | TC: Read Chapter 6, "Organizing and Drafting Documents" (pp. 130-160). | |

WEEK 6

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
9/25	T	In-class peer review session. Revising Technical Descriptions.	PK: Read Chapter 4, "Keeping Company with Others" (pp. 24-27).	Draft of Technical Description due. "Taking Stock 5: Assessing Peer Response" (PK, p. 25).
9/27 *	Th	Introduce Assignment #3: Instruction Set. Defining Web Portfolios.	WPG: Read Chapter 1, Understanding Web Portfolios" (pp. 5-40).	**Assignment #2 due: Technical Description.**

WEEK 7

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/2	T	Rhetorical dimensions of Instruction Sets.	TC: Read Chapter 17, "Technical Instructions" (pp. 500-527, 530-32).	
10/4	Th	Creating user-centered instruction sets.	Read James Paradis, "Text and Action: The Operator's Manual in Context and in Court" (electronic reserve).	Rhetorical Analysis Worksheet due.

WEEK 8

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/9 *	T	Creating a functional design for Instruction Sets.	TC: Read Chapter 8, "Layout and Design" (pp. 216-246).	Instruction Set Planning Worksheet due.
10/11	Th	Document design and packaging (cont.)		

WEEK 9

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due

10/16	T	In-class peer review of Instruction Set.		Draft of Instruction Set due.
10/18	Th	Introduce Assignment #4: Usability Memo.	PK: Read Chapter 6, "Understanding Assessment" (pp. 32-39).	**Assignment #3 due: Instruction Set.** "Midterm Self-Assessment" (PK, p. 23).

WEEK 10

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/23	T	Planning usability tests.	TC: Read Chapter 10, "Usability" (pp. 292- 310).	"Taking Stock 7: Determining Your Program's Values" (PK, p. 34).
10/25 *	Th	Planning and conducting usability tests.		Usability Testing Planning Worksheet due at end of class.

WEEK 11

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
10/30	T	Evaluating data from usability tests. Drafting your Usability Memo.		
11/1	Th	Revising and editing to address audience needs and concerns.	TC: Read Chapter 9, "Revising, Rewriting, and Editing" (pp. 252-282).	

WEEK 12

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/6	T	In-class peer review of Usability Memo.		Draft of Usability Memo due.
11/8 *	Th	Planning your Reflective Essay. In-class review of working folder.	PK: Read Chapter 7, "Putting It Together: Selecting and Arranging Artifacts" (pp. 40-47) and Chapter 8, "Preparing to Write the Introduction and Other Reflective Components" (pp. 48-52).	**Assignment #4 due: Usability Memo.** "Taking Stock 10: Revisiting Your Expectations" (PK, p. 48).

WEEK 13

			Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/13	T		Planning your Web Portfolio.	WPG: Read Chapter 2, "Planning Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 41-61).	Web Portfolio Planning Tasks 2, 3, 4, 10, and 11 (WPG, pp. 44-48, 56- 57).
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11/15	Th		Revising for the Final Portfolio.	PK: Read Chapter 9, "The Final Stages" (pp. 53-57).	"Taking Stock 11: Assessing Revision" (PK, p. 54).
*			Constructing Web Portfolios.	WPG: Read Chapter 3, "Creating Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 63-85).	

WEEK 14

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
11/27	T	Constructing Web Portfolios (cont.)	WPG: Read Chapter 4, "Graphics and Multimedia in Web Portfolios" (pp. 87-127).	
**				
11/29	Th	In-class peer review of Reflective Essay.	WPG: Read Chapter 5, "Revising and Editing Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 129-139) and Chapter 6, "Publishing Your Web Portfolio" (pp. 141-149).	Draft of Reflective Essay due.
**		Testing, revising, and editing your Web Portfolio.		
		Publishing your Web Portfolio.		

WEEK 15

		Topic	Reading Due	Writing Due
12/4	T	In-class draft workshop of Web Portfolio.		First Draft of Web Portfolio due.
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12/6	Th	In-class draft workshop of Web Portfolio (cont.)		Second draft of Web Portfolio due.
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Assignment #5: Web Portfolio due on Tuesday, December 11 at 2:30 p.m.

PLONE POWERED

This site conforms to the following standards: