

ENGL 305: Technical Writing

West Virginia U. | Fall 2015

Description and requirements

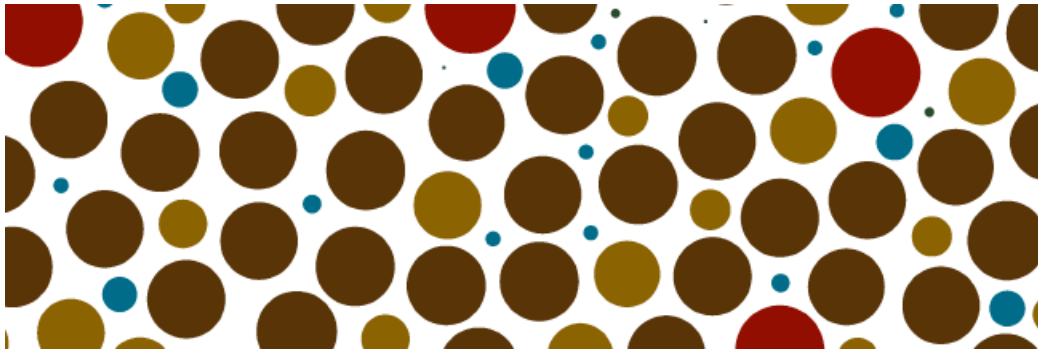


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course information

Course number and name: ENGL 305: Technical Writing

Term and year: Fall 2014

Times: Section W03 (CRN 80455), TR 11:30-12:45; Section W04 (CRN 81266), TR 2:30-3:45

Location: G06 [Colson Hall](#)

Instructor: John Jones ([about](#)), Assistant Professor

Email: john dot jones at-sign mail dot wvu dot edu

Twitter: [johnmjones](#)

Office: 231 [Colson Hall](#)

Office hours: Tue, 1-2p in 231 [Colson Hall](#)

Virtual office hours: Wed, 3-4p via [Google Hangouts](#)

description

Welcome to English 305! This course will introduce you to strategies for translating between discipline-specific knowledge and audiences of interested outsiders. In other words, you will be introduced to a range of skills that will enable you to communicate technical information in a form that is understandable to people who were previously unfamiliar with that information.

In this course we will explore the forms of technical writing that are common in the professions, including resumes, instructions, memos, and reports. Drawing on the expertise developed in your major, you will develop technical writing skills through your engagement with topics and issues important to the work you plan to do. While we will cover topics traditionally understood as technical—such as those in engineering, architecture, and computer science—technical writing encompasses any topic that must be explained to an involved, but not expert, audience. Because a primary assumption of this course is that all writing emerges from and responds to a particular problem, audience, and purpose, the course will focus on helping you develop multiple writing strategies for diverse communication situations.

course objectives

By the end of the semester, students who earn a passing grade in the course (C- or above) will have demonstrated their ability to:

- Specify and adapt to the constraints of the rhetorical situation, especially an audience's knowledge of a topic and its desired uses for a document.
- Conduct research to gain command of a technical subject and to invent the contents of communication, including navigating the WVU library and external databases to access peer-reviewed research sources and citing research materials using the APA Style.
- Convey clearly and precisely the technical aspects of a topic to a non-specialist audience.
- Evaluate and modify a document to ensure its usability and accessibility for an audience.
- Apply technology to organize and design a document in ways that support reader comprehension.
- Speak persuasively in a professional setting by presenting a pecha kucha presentation that summarizes the findings of their scientific or technical controversy report.

In line with the goals of the WVU BA Program in English, these objectives will enable students who successfully complete the course to

- Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts;
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language; and
- Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

required texts

- Alred, Brusaw, & Oliu (2011). *Handbook of Technical Writing*. 10th Edition. Bedford /St. Martin's. ISBN: 9780312679453
- Wong (2013). *The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics*. W. W. Norton & Co. ISBN: 9780393347289

other requirements

- Regular access to a computer and the Internet (on-campus computer access is provided by the Office of Information Technology, the Center for Literary Computing, and the WVU Libraries)
- A MIX email account which is checked daily. This account can be used to access Google Drive for submitting course assignments and Google Hangouts for accessing my virtual office hours

- A means of keeping track of your course files, using
 - a **USB drive** you can bring with you to class (good) or
 - a **cloud backup service** like [Dropbox](#) that can archive your work automatically (better) or
 - **both** (best)

additional recommendations

Tools for tracking your research, like

- [Evernote](#) or a similar app for note-taking,
- [Delicious](#) or a similar link-tracking service for managing Web sources, and
- [Zotero](#) or [RefWorks](#) or another citation manager for tracking your research and formatting citations

A Note about this course site

This site is hosted on WordPress.com. to cover their hosting costs, WordPress occasionally shows advertisements on portions of the site. I am not in control of these ads (I generally can't even see them). Although this is unlikely to happen, if you should see an ad on this site that is inappropriate or offensive, please let me know immediately.

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Policies

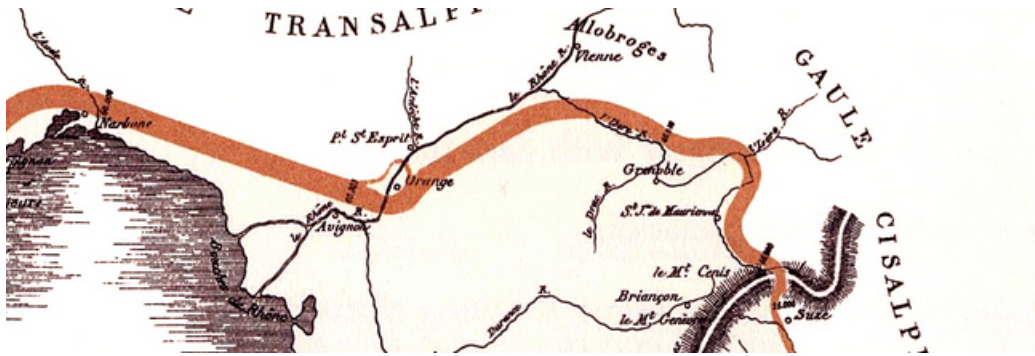


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1. [Professional conduct](#)
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professional conduct

ENGL 305: Technical Writing is part of the [Professional Writing and Editing \(PWE\)](#) program at WVU. The PWE program is designed to prepare students for careers as professional communicators, and for this reason many aspects of PWE courses are designed to replicate professional work experiences. In this course you are expected to conduct yourself as a professional both in your work as well as in your interactions with myself and each other.

As is the case with professionals, you are expected to complete all of their assigned work and take part in all activities, to reply to course communication in a timely manner, and to respond to all course activities and assignments as they would to comparable work activities and assignments.

social justice policy

The English Department and the Professional Writing and Editing Program support WVU's commitment to social justice. In this course, you will work with your classmates to create a positive learning environment based on open communication and mutual respect.

Inclusivity

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. 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 Accessibility Services (293-6700). For more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Work visibility

Due to the nature of the course, you will be sharing your work with your fellow classmates as part of workshops and peer review sessions. Additionally, you may share your work publicly on the Web (e.g., on this course site) and with the WVU community. By taking this course, you are indicating that you accept these requirements; **if you have any questions or concerns about this policy please contact me immediately.**

official communication

I will contact students in the course in two primary ways. First, I will initiate official communication to the class or individual students via my WVU email account. I will send these messages to your MIX email addresses and include "[ENGL 305]" in the subject line of the email.

I will also use the course blog (you can access the blog via the "[Course news](#)" link in the left sidebar) to inform you of updates to the course site—such as changes to the course schedule, or additional information about assignments.

In order to make sure you do not miss important information, **you should regularly check your MIX accounts as well as the [course blog](#) for updates about the course.** (An effective way to keep track of the course blog is via an RSS reader like [Feedly](#).)

NOTE: I am teaching two sections of ENGL 305 this semester, and this course site will serve both sections. If it ever becomes necessary to distinguish between the two—say, a change to the schedule for one section, but not the other—I will do so by referencing the meeting time for that section. For example, if I need to make a change for the section that meets at 2:30 on TT, I will include "[2:30 section]" in the title of the post.

My tendency in course communication initiated by students is to respond in the medium in which the message was sent. For example, if you ask me a question via Hangouts, I will tend to respond to you via Hangouts; if you send me an email, I will email you back; etc.

I will do my best to respond to your messages within 24 hours during the work week (9-5, M-F); on the weekends and during breaks my responses may take longer.

office hours

If you have questions about the readings, assignments, or any other issues related to the course, come talk to me; I will be happy to answer them. The best times to meet with me will be during my office hours.

My **in-person** office hours will be held on Tuesdays from 1-2 p.m. My office is in 231 [Colson Hall](#).

In addition to my in-person office hours, I will also hold regular **virtual office hours** using [Google Hangouts](#). My virtual office hours this semester will be on Wednesdays from 3-4 p.m. I will frequently (but not always) be in my office during this time. (If you are new to Hangouts, you can find more information on how to initiate a hangout [here](#).)

If you would like to meet with me but are not free during my scheduled office hours, please contact me directly via [email](#) and I will be happy to arrange an alternative meeting time that fits both of our schedules.

If for some reason it becomes necessary for me to cancel or reschedule either my regular office hours or a meeting with an individual student, I will notify the class or the student as soon as possible. Similarly, if it becomes necessary for you to cancel a meeting with me, you should email me to let me know about the cancellation as soon as you can.

technology policies

There are no prerequisite skills courses required for ENGL 305. The course is designed to teach students how to master basic genres of technical communication, such as instructions and scientific reports. Additionally, we will explore techniques for creating visual arguments within these genres. However, the course assumes that all students have basic skills in word processing as well as in accessing and navigating the Internet.

working with new technologies

In this course, we will be experimenting with many different technologies for writing and reading, ranging from document design using word processors to data manipulation using spreadsheets. In this course you may be introduced to a new way of communicating that you find indispensable. Alternatively, you may find yourself using technologies that you cannot imagine yourself using again outside of the course, and you may experience these technologies as being difficult or unrelated to your career goals.

That is ok.

You are not required to love the technologies we experiment with in the course or to embrace them without question. What *is* required of you is that you approach all of our assignments with enthusiasm, an open mind, and your best effort, as a future professional experimenting with different modes of communication.

The course will contain some specific instructions on technology use and software. For example, we will cover basic page layout techniques in programs like MS Word. When we do, I expect that you will take notes so you will have a guide to follow when it comes time for you to use these technologies on your own. Additionally, it is likely that you will find that your particular project will require you to use a software tool not addressed in class, and this will require you to do additional research and adopt additional skills that you will learn on your own.

As experimenters, our method will be trial and error. In all cases, when faced with new tools and technologies you should expect to devote some time to experimenting with and learning these technologies, researching (or discovering) their possibilities and limitations, and, when possible, sharing what you have learned with your classmates when they need help.

troubleshooting technology problems

While I am always available to answer your questions and help you troubleshoot technology issues, if you need assistance with a particular technology you will find that, in most instances, if you have a question about how to accomplish a particular task—for example, creating a histogram in Excel—other people have had the same question and the answer is available on the Internet. For this reason, your first recourse when facing a problem should be to search for a solution on your own.

If examining the course readings and searching for help online does not solve your problem and you need to consult me, please remember that the more detail I have about your problem, the easier it is for me to help you solve it. If you email me saying

I'm trying to create a histogram, but I'm stuck. Help!

I will not have much to go on and this will lead to delays in you finding a solution to your problem. I better email request is

I was using Excel to create a histogram, but my I can't get my axis labels to line up correctly. Help!

In many cases, it is most helpful if you not only describe your problem, but also share with me the files that you are having trouble with.

using technologies in class

During class you are welcome to use the computers in the lab for note-taking and activities that are relevant to the tasks at hand; you are also welcome to bring your own devices for these purposes. However, there may be some occasions when I will ask you to turn off computers and other devices for a period of time.

In general, most technology is welcome in class as long as it is used to aid student learning. Technology that does not serve this purpose—or that actively distracts you or your classmates from learning—is not welcome, and I reserve the right to restrict the use of these technologies in class.

attendance

In this class we will cover a large amount of information in our face-to-face meetings that will be essential to how you understand the course content and eventually complete your assignments. We will also be learning a number of skills that you will be expected to develop incrementally over the course of the semester. For these reasons, it is important that you attend class, arrive on time, bring any assigned work and necessary materials, and participate in all in-class writing, workshopping, and discussion sessions.

For this reason, **there are no excused absences in the course.** You should reserve your absences for truly unavoidable emergencies.

You will be allowed four (4) absences without it affecting your grade. For each absence over four (4), your final grade for the course will be lowered by one letter grade. This includes absences for illnesses and other emergencies.

It is also important that you be in class on time and stay for the entire period. **If you arrive to class more than 5 minutes late or leave class more than 5 minutes before it is dismissed, you will be counted absent.**

If you come to class unprepared on the day of a peer-review session, professor conference session, or workshop—that is, without a draft to discuss with your classmates or myself or in any other way unprepared to workshop or discuss your project—you will be counted absent.

If you find that an unavoidable conflict prevents you from attending class or being on time, you should discuss this conflict with me prior to the absence (if possible). Otherwise, you should contact me about any absences as soon as possible.

submitting course work

Unless otherwise noted, all course assignments will be submitted electronically. I will inform you of the method and procedures for submitting an assignment before it is due. Unless otherwise noted, all assignments are due before the start of class on the day they are listed in the [course schedule](#).

late work

If you cannot attend class on the date an assignment is due, you should discuss a make-up date with me before the absence. With the exception of extreme emergencies, if you fail to turn in an assignment on time and do not contact me before that assignment is due, the assignment will be considered late.

Major assignments—the [job application materials](#), [instructions and documentation](#), [usability test report](#), and [presentation](#)—turned in after they are due **will be penalized by ten percentage points for each calendar day they are late.** Homework, quizzes, and all other in-class assignments will not be accepted late.

If you are absent on a day when you are scheduled to lead a class discussion or give a presentation, you should expect to receive no credit for that assignment.

In general, a problem with technology will not be considered an acceptable excuse for late or incomplete work. If your computer malfunctions, it is your responsibility to find an alternative one to

work on ([links to campus computing resources](#)). If your Internet goes out, you will need to find a different access point. And you should create multiple redundant backups of your work in case you accidentally erase, overwrite, or otherwise lose your files.

academic integrity

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the [West Virginia University Student Conduct Code](#). Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me **before** the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

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Schedule

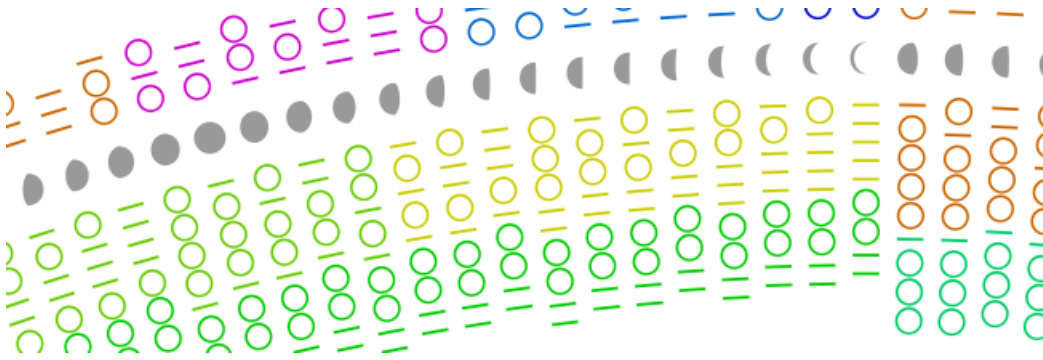


image credit: [Juan Osborne](#)

abbreviations

In the list of readings below, I will use the following abbreviations for the course texts.

- **HTW:** Alred, Brusaw, & Oliu (2012). *Handbook of Technical Writing*. 10th Edition. Bedford/St. Martin's.
- **WSJG:** Wong (2013). *The Wall Street Journal Guide to Information Graphics*. W. W. Norton & Co.

This schedule is an outline for our activities in the course. It is subject to change with appropriate notice.

Unit 1: Job application materials

date	topic/readings	assignments
Aug 18	topic: Course Introduction; the rhetorical situation and persuasion in technical communication readings: Course Description and Requirements , Policies , and Assignments ; The Situation of Discourse	

Aug 20	topic: Audience, genre, and job materials readings: Read the sections of HTW titled <i>Application Cover Letters, Audience, Correspondence, and Résumés</i>	Identify two potential job ads in your chosen career and be prepared to access and discuss them in class.
Aug 21	Last day to register, add new courses, make section changes, change pass/fail, and audit	<u>Typo bounty claims</u> due before 5 p.m.
Aug 25	topic: Audience (cont.), invention, and proofreading readings: HTW: <i>Five Steps to Successful Writing</i> (pp. xv-xxii), <i>Brainstorming, Outlining, Proofreading, and Purpose</i>	Complete <u>all of the tasks listed here</u> ; bring copies of resume and letter drafts to class
Aug 27	topic: Instructions readings: NA	First submission of <u>job application materials</u> due

Unit 2: Instructions and documentation

date	topic/readings	assignments
Sep 1	topic: Instructions readings: HTW: <i>Clarity, Conciseness, Instructions, and Description</i>	Find a set of instructions and evaluate them using the "Writers's Checklist" on p. 273 of HTW. Be prepared to share the instructions and your evaluation with the class.
Sep 3	topic: Headings and layout readings: HTW: <i>Headings, Layout and Design, Lists, and Parallel Style</i>	Bring to class a well-designed list or organizational style from a print document & be prepared to explain why you think it is well-designed
Sep 7	Labor Day recess: university closed	
Sep 8	topic: Headings and layout (cont.) readings: Hagen and Golombisky, <i>White Space is Not Your Enemy</i> : ch. 4	Bring to class a sketch or document with a proposed layout for the main headings in your instructions
Sep 10	topic: Workshop readings: NA	Bring <u>instructions</u> to class to workshop
Sep 15	topic: Creating your images readings: HTW: <i>Drawings, Photographs, and Visuals</i>	

Sep 17	topic: Creating and altering styles in Word readings: NA	First submission of <u>instructions</u> due
Sep 22	topic: Refining your design readings: <i>White Space is Not Your Enemy</i> : chs. 1, 5	
Sep 24	topic: Placing your images readings: <i>White Space is Not Your Enemy</i> : ch. 6	
Sep 29	topic: Workshop readings: NA	Be able to access your <u>instructions</u> in class
Oct 1	topic: Collaboration; establish groups for usability testing project readings: NA	Second submission of <u>instructions</u> due
Oct 2	Mid-semester	

Unit 3: Usability testing

date	topic/readings	assignments
Oct 6	topic: Usability testing readings: HTW: <i>Usability Testing, Memos, and Test Reports</i>	
Oct 8	topic: Organization readings: HTW: Read the <i>Methods of Development</i> section of HTW along with all the sub-points listed under it in the "Organization, Writing, and Revision" section on the inside front cover.	
Oct 12-13	Fall break: university closed	
Oct 13	No class – Fall break	
Oct 15	topic: Workshop readings: NA	Bring <u>usability report</u> to class to workshop
Oct 20	topic: Speculative usability readings: Rivers and Söderlund, "Speculative Usability"	
Oct 22	topic: Collaboration (cont.); establish groups for report and pecha kucha projects; brainstorm report topics readings: NA	<u>Usability reports</u> due
Oct 23	Last day to drop a class	

Unit 4: Scientific and technical reports

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date	topic/readings	assignments
Oct 27	topic: Reports readings: HTW: Read the <i>Reports</i> section along with all of the sections listed under "Report Components" in the inside front cover	Report topic proposal memo submitted to instructor by end of class
Oct 29	topic: Library research session readings: HTW: <i>Revision, Research, Note-Taking, Literature Reviews, Quotations, Paraphrasing, Plagiarism, Documenting Sources, Bibliographies, and Copyright</i>	
Nov 3	topic: Information literacy and data graphics readings: WSJG: Chs. 1-2	
Nov 5	topic: Workshop readings: NA	Bring drafts of <u>controversy report</u> to class to workshop
Nov 10	topic: Advanced data manipulation readings: WSJG: Chs. 3-4	
Nov 12	topic: Presentations readings: NA	First submission of <u>controversy report</u> due
Nov 17	topic: Presentations (cont.) readings: TBA	
Nov 19	topic: Workshop pecha kucha presentations readings: NA	
Nov 21-29	Fall recess: university closed	
Dec 1	topic: Presentations readings: NA	<u>Pecha kucha</u> presentations
Dec 3	topic: Presentations readings: NA	<u>Pecha kucha</u> presentations
Dec 8	topic: TBA readings: NA	Second submissions of <u>controversy report</u> and <u>job application materials</u> due

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Assignments

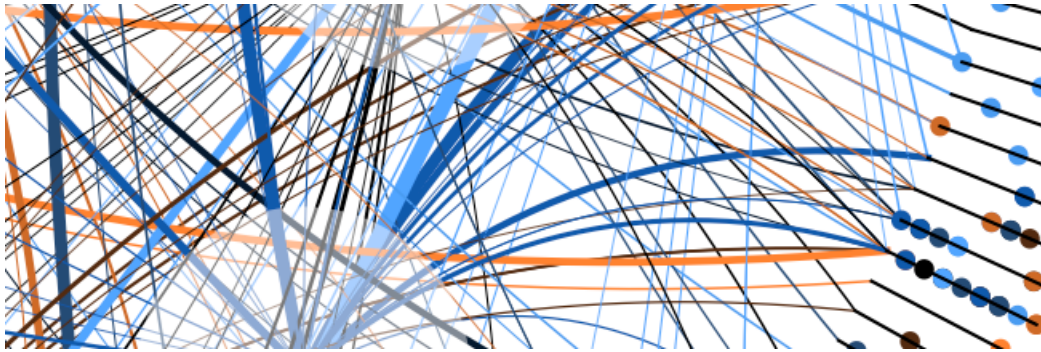


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1. Course participation (10%)
2. Quizzes (10%)
3. Job application materials (10%)
4. Instructions and documentation (20%)
5. Usability test (15%)
6. Scientific or technical controversy report (20%)
7. Pecha kucha presentation (15%)

Grading

The descriptions below will give you an indication of the the expectations that will guide my evaluation of your individual projects. I round up from one letter grade to another, but not for plus/minus grades of the same letter. (For example, a final grade of 79.9% will round up from a C+ to a B-, but a 86.9% will not round up from a B to a B+.)

Grade descriptors	+/- grades
<p>A: Outstanding represents superlative participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all course work.</p> <p>B: Excellent represents above-average participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in</p>	<p>A+: 97-100 A: 93-96 A-: 90-92 B+: 87-89 B: 83-86</p>

activities, all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in course work.

C: Average represents good participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in course work.

D: Below average represents uneven participation in course activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in course work.

F: Inadequate represents minimal participation in course activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in course work.

D: 63-66

B-: 80-82

C+: 77-79

C: 73-76

C-: 70-72

D+: 67-69

D: 63-66

D-: 60-62

F: 0-59

participation (10%)

description

This course is designed to be a participatory learning experience, combining discussions and in-class workshop activities and assignments. As such, it is important that you fully participate in all in-class activities, specifically by committing yourself to the learning community consisting of your classmates and myself.

You will have multiple opportunities to earn participation credit. However, if it becomes necessary for you to demonstrate your participation in the course, it will be your responsibility to save relevant materials (such as your class notes or peer review evaluations) as evidence of this participation.

In general, if at the end of the semester you can demonstrate that you were able to substantially enhance or contribute to the course learning community and you fully participated in course activities, you will be able to earn full credit for participation. **While preparation times may vary depending on our weekly schedule, you should generally plan to spend 6 hours a week—or, 2 hours for every hour of class time—working on course assignments and preparing for class meetings.**

what does class participation look like?

Participation can take different forms for different students. However, some participatory behaviors hold true for everyone.

First, you cannot participate if you do not attend class or if you regularly show up late or otherwise interfere with course activities. For these reasons, course attendance is a necessary prerequisite for participation. However, *attending class does not equal participation*, for it is possible to be in every class meeting without engaging with or contributing to the learning that occurs in class.

Second, it will be impossible for you to participate in course learning if you come to class unprepared. You can prepare in the following ways. Before each class meeting you should complete all assigned readings and homework. You should bring all materials to each session, including course texts, additional readings, your notes, homework, assignment files and research sources, discussion notes from previous meetings, and any other relevant materials.

Finally, while in class, you should be engaged in all activities by taking notes on our discussions and participating in those discussions. Similarly, during peer-review sessions and technology workshops you should conference with your classmates and myself and engaging with the workshop deliverables.

All of these activities allows you to engage with and make the most of your learning experience in the course, and, consequently, improves the course experience for everyone.

quizzes (10%)

Description

You will receive a quiz grade for each of our class meetings. On any day on which readings are assigned you should be prepared to demonstrate your comprehension of those readings, not simply by discussing them in class, but also by being quizzed on the content of the readings and/or successfully completing any assigned proof-of-reading activities. On workshop days, this quiz grade will be based on your participation in and/or completion of workshop activities.

Quizzes will typically be given at the beginning of class. If you are absent or if you are late and miss a quiz or proof-of-reading activity, your daily quiz grade will be zero. Missed quizzes cannot be made up.

Evaluation

Where appropriate, quizzes, homework, and in-class activities will be graded on a percentage basis (i.e., correctly answering 4 out of 5 questions on a quiz will lead to a grade of 80% on that quiz). When this is not appropriate, these assignments will be graded on a pass/fail basis. Your final quiz grade will be calculated from the average of your daily quiz grades.

Job application materials (%10)

Description

Resumes and cover letters are the first opportunities a potential employer has to judge your fit with the job he or she is offering. Because most jobs receive applications from many more people than an employer can easily interview, it is important that these materials not only accurately portray your qualifications for the job at hand, but suggest how those qualifications are appropriate for this particular job. This assignment will give you practice in making both the resume and cover letter persuasive and it will also give you practice in shaping your personal history for different rhetorical situations.

For this assignment, you will find two different job or internship ads that you are qualified for or that you will be qualified for when you graduate. They may be for different kinds of positions or for similar positions at very different kinds of companies. It is important for the assignment that your job ads ask for different versions of your chosen career.

You will craft two different sets of resumes and cover letters, one for each job ad. (You can search for jobs at sites like Careerbuilder.com or Monster.com, but you do not have to use these sites exclusively.) You will also write a memo to me outlining the different rhetorical strategies you used for each set of materials: i.e., what was different and why? In the memo, you should include links to the original job ads. If you do not include these links or if the links do not work, I will be unable to fully evaluate your job materials.

Your resumes and job letters should be no more than 1 page each. Your memo should be 1-2 pages long.

Note: if your resumes are identical or nearly so, it means one of two things. Either your job ads were too similar, or you are not making a clear argument about what your particular qualifications are for each job.

Evaluation

You will submit this project on two occasions. The first submission will be due during the first weeks of the course. I will respond to this version of the project, then, at the end of the semester, you will choose one of your resumes and cover letters to revise and resubmit, with a particular focus on addressing the skills you have learned in this course. Each submission will be worth half of your total grade for this assignment. I will evaluate your job application materials using the following criteria:

- **Audience accommodation:** Each set of materials must attend to the expectations, needs, and values of the different audiences represented by the job ads you have chosen. These differences will manifest in word choice, argument choice, and details you highlight.
- **Content:** Job application materials are designed to persuade an employer to interview you, so they should extend beyond a summary of what you have done to date. Every list of skills and every job description should be crafted to demonstrate how you are a fit for this position.
- **Format:** Resume and cover letter formats are very conventionalized and precise. You must adhere to them carefully except for cases where you wish to produce a specific, carefully constructed rhetorical effect.
- **Style:** Together, each resume and letter effectively creates a professional ethos. The written and visual tone is appropriate and effective for the audience. Grammar, spelling, and punctuation should be impeccable, since employers will use the smallest excuse to whittle their application piles down to manageable levels.

instructions and documentation (20%)

description

Instructions are important documents in the real world. They are a way companies can connect to their customers. They structure the way individuals do their jobs. They help ensure everyone does the same thing for the same task. They can show people performing tasks how to do so safely and effectively.

Unfortunately, instructions are often the worst-written documents we encounter. They can skip important steps, fail to orient the reader to essential tools or concepts, assume too much or explain too much, or generally confuse the reader who is likely to be unfamiliar with the task at hand.

Writing instructions is harder than it seems, but more important than we assume.

For this assignment, you will produce a set of written instructions for a task of your choosing. Your

For this assignment, you will produce a set of written instructions for a task of your choosing. Your instructions will be designed for users who have not necessarily worked through the process that you are describing. Your instructions will include both text and visuals and should allow even novice users to move successfully through your selected step-by-step process.

You will submit the instructions digitally. Your final instructions should include a minimum of 1,000 words, 5 individual steps, and 10 accompanying images. All visual aids are to be created by you; no third-party visuals will be allowed.

This project will be both an exercise in writing effective instructions as well as clear document design that makes effective use of headings, bullets, lists, body text, and image placement.

Some sample tasks include: Cropping and resizing images in Photoshop, signing up for courses, designing a webpage in MIX, testing soil for heavy metal contamination, scanning and OCRing text with the library photocopiers and Acrobat, making beeswax candles, or building a campfire.

Some tips on choosing a task:

- Choose a task you are reasonably familiar with. If you are a novice, you might miss steps and mislead the reader unknowingly.
- Choose a task with specific steps that are not based on technique. "How to sink a free throw" or "how to ballroom dance" are interesting topics, but a reader's success will depend on form, not function.
- Choose something appropriately complex. "How to put on a band-aid" involves too few steps for an effective project.
- Do not choose a recipe. **Any task involving cooking or mixing drinks is off limits for this assignment.**

evaluation

You will submit this project twice. The first submission will consist of a draft of the project that I will provide feedback on, and the final version will be revised according to your evolving understanding of the project and my and your classmates' feedback. The first submission will be worth one quarter of the total grade for the assignment and the second submission will be worth the remaining three-quarters. Your instructions will be graded according to the following criteria:

- **Audience accommodation:** The instructions are appropriate for the intended audience. They're written from a user-centered, rather than author- or expert-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, visual aids, and definitions are included where appropriate. All visual aids are the original creation of the author; no third-party visuals will be allowed.
- **Organization:** The instructions are organized logically. Items within numbered lists are organized chronologically. Sections and sub-sections are clearly marked with headings.
- **Format:** The instructions use the elements of document design (font choice, white space, contrast, alignment, headings and sub-headings) appropriately and consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.
- **Style:** The instructions are written as active voice commands and effectively create a professional ethos. The written and visual tone is appropriate and effective for the audience. Headings, along with numbered and bulleted items, are in parallel form. The document is free from typographical or grammatical errors.

Usability test (%15)

Description

As the advocate for the user, the technical communicator is responsible for anticipating and accommodating the level, needs, and assumptions of the reader. But because the technical communicator occupies a hybrid position—not quite expert, not quite novice—it can be difficult to know when this accommodation is successful. In order to discover and correct problems of expression and interpretation for particular audiences, then, the technical communicator can design and run a usability test.

In this assignment, you will work in groups of 3-4. Your group will choose one group member's instructions from the instructions and documentation assignment to test with a selection of potential users. That is, the group will define success criteria, design a test, run the test on some subjects, collect and analyze data from the test, and write up a report analyzing the instruction's strengths and weaknesses.

Requirements of the test

What to test for: Your goal is to see if the instructions work. Can the intended readers understand them and carry them out successfully? To evaluate success, your group must set some reasonable standards of successful performance. For example, you may decide that the instructions are successful if 80% of the readers can follow the instructions in less than 10 minutes, making no more than two minor mistakes. The details of the standards of success will depend upon the instructions you test.

Who to test: While everyone will test the instructions on 8-12 real readers, your group may use either of two kinds of readers:

1. Readers who are all roughly similar. Which one is more effective? In what ways does each set of instructions succeed? How do they fall short? Which one (if either) would you recommend as the set to distribute to the waiting public? Test at least four people on the original instructions and at least four on the new set.
2. Readers from different user populations. Assuming that the instructions were written for a particular user community (e.g. math majors, anxious car owners), see how well readers from this group can use the instructions as compared to readers outside the community (e.g. English majors, budding car mechanics). Test at least 5 intended readers and at least 3 unintended readers.

Members of the group should all help to find readers and plan and conduct the tests.

How to conduct a usability test: The basic technique is to observe a reader trying to follow the instructions without offering any assistance. You may employ any and all of the following techniques to measure your readers' success:

- Time them on individual steps and overall time on task
- Record their success or failure at completing individual steps
- Take notes on their comments or problems as they read and follow the instructions
- Give them a questionnaire about how they liked the instructions

The method you choose should reflect the criteria you set out at the beginning. Remember, whether subjects like or feel comfortable with a set of instructions is only one aspect of success (even though it is an important one).

What attitude to take: Take a professional attitude toward the test, whether you wrote the instructions or not. Your goal as a group is to find the best instructions for performing the task—not to judge the writer’s ability to write or the user’s mental agility. Remember that the reader is always right. A “careless” mistake on the part of a reader may be due to information that is not as easy to spot as it should be.

Requirements for the Usability Test Report

Rhetorical situation: Assume that your group is a team of document design consultants that has been hired by some organization to evaluate the instructions and recommend whether they are good enough to distribute to the public. Invent any details necessary to fill out this scenario. For example, you may assume that employees are accidentally destroying data in photographs when they modify them due to faulty instructions, and that the company hired you to revise the instructions and show that these revisions are successful. Or your team may have been asked to write the instructions for a new commercial product that the company is planning to market. In any case, your report must make some recommendation about what the company should do with the instructions you evaluated: (1) go ahead and distribute them, or (2) do more revision and testing.

Topics to address: Your goal is to present a professional report that is both informative and persuasive. It should inform your reader(s) of your activities. It should also persuade your readers that you conducted a responsible investigation, that your conclusions are valid and that your recommendations are worth following. Remember that reports are saved as documentary evidence; you are also writing to an implicit audience of consumers, regulators, and future administrators.

Your report will take the form of a memo and follow the model of a *Test Report* (see *HTW* for more details). Within the body of the memo, you should review the purpose of the instructions, state the objectives of the study, describe the testing methods used, analyze the results (including tables and figures, as necessary), and use the analysis to support your recommendations. Each of these requirements will be further discussed in class.

Remember, you have to live with your results, however messy or unpopular they are. The user test is not a final evaluation but a tool for improving a company’s documentation.

The final report will be 750-1,250 words in length.

Evaluation

The report will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- **Audience accommodation:** The report is appropriate for a non-technical audience and is written from a user-centered perspective. The report anticipates the reader’s questions, difficulties, and needs.
- **Content:** The report meets the genre expectations for usability testing as described above and is cited using the APA citation format. Visual aids are included where appropriate.
- **Organization:** The report is organized logically. Items within numbered lists are organized chronologically. Sub-sections are clearly marked with headings.
- **Format:** The report is formatted according to the expectations of a formal report and uses the elements of document design (fonts, white space, contrast, alignment, headings and sub-headings) appropriately and consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.
- **Style:** The report effectively creates a professional ethos. The written and visual tone is appropriate and effective for the audience. The document is free from typographical or grammatical errors.

Scientific or technical controversy report (20%)

Description

Issues in contemporary American society are increasingly scientific and technological in nature. One of the problems facing an open public conversation on many issues is a lack of public understanding about the nature of the problem or problems that underlie the issue and potential responses to it. For this assignment, you will participate in a group that will thoroughly research and write a summary report on a current scientific or technical controversy.

Such controversies include, but are not limited to: cloning, genetically modified produce, bioterrorism, global warming, and stem cell research.

To prepare for this report, your group will:

- Research all sides and viewpoints of the controversy. Remember that, despite what we imply through debating techniques, every issue has more than two sides, and every viewpoint is embedded in a specific set of values, experiences, and goals. As you research, keep an open mind.
- Synthesize your researched information to figure out what the public needs to know to make informed decisions about the controversy. This might include a definition of terms, a sense of what the actual topics of disagreement are, a history of the controversy, an explanation of scientific or technical principles, the range of viewpoints represented by key players and the impetus behind these viewpoints, the implications or consequences of this controversy, or future events that make impact the understanding or state of this controversy.
- While there is no such thing as a completely objective report, avoid explicit bias (such as supporting one viewpoint over others) and be aware of how your tone, style, and arrangement might influence your audience to choose a particular response or outcome.

Your report should follow the conventions of formal business reports and should include a title page, an abstract/executive summary, a table of contents, a table of figures and graphs, a clear organization forecasted with obvious headers, and appendices (see *HTW* for more details).

Evaluation

The report will be submitted twice. The second version should address any feedback from the instructor and your classmates. The first submission will be worth one quarter of the total grade for the assignment and the second submission will be worth the remaining three-quarters. The report will be evaluated according to the following criteria:

- **Audience accommodation:** The report is appropriate for a non-technical audience and is written from a user-centered perspective. The report anticipates the reader's questions, difficulties, and needs.
- **Content:** The report meets the genre expectations of a formal report, is exhaustively researched, and is comprehensively cited using the APA citation format. Visual aids are included where appropriate.
- **Organization:** The report is organized logically. Items within numbered lists are organized chronologically. Major sections and sub-sections are clearly marked with headings.
- **Format:** The report is formatted according to the expectations of a formal report and uses the elements of document design (fonts, white space, contrast, alignment, headings and sub-headings) appropriately and consistently. The overall design is clear and consistent.
- **Style:** The report effectively creates a professional ethos. The written and visual tone is appropriate and effective for the audience. The document is free from typographical or

appropriate and effective for the audience. The document is free from typographical or grammatical errors.

Pecha Kucha presentation (15%)

Description

Where the report will educate your audience about the range of viewpoints and considerations that inform a particular controversy, in this presentation your group will advocate for a particular response to the controversy in the form of a 6 minute and 40 second presentation. The presentation will follow the pecha kucha format—20 images displayed for 20 seconds each.

The pecha kucha format will not provide you with much time to communicate the full complexity of your report. For this reason, your goal for the presentation should be to give as thorough a summary of the controversy as is necessary to establish the persuasiveness of your advocacy without omitting important or contradictory information. That is, you should aim to persuade an audience of informed individuals without misleading them, either explicitly or implicitly by omitting important information that should inform their decision-making. To do so you will need to succinctly give the topic, major players, and main points of contention in the controversy along with the reasons why your proposed response is the best/most effective/most desirable one.

You can only improve your oral presentation skills through practice: standing and delivering a talk. Such practice is especially important given the precision necessitated by the pecha kucha format, so I strongly encourage your group to perform a full dress rehearsal of the talk sometime before your speaking date.

Evaluation

You will present your talks for the university community and a time that we will determine later in the semester. I will evaluate your talks using the following criteria:

- **Audience accommodation:** The presentation is appropriate for a non-technical audience and is given from a user-centered perspective. The choice of content anticipates the audience's questions, difficulties, and needs. Responses to specific questions from the Q & A session directly address audience concerns.
- **Content:** The presentation effectively and clearly advocates for a response to the scientific or technical controversy from the group's report.
- **Organization:** The presentation is structured—with an introduction, body, and conclusion—so as to effectively communicate the content, including clear (oral or visual) signals to indicate major points or introduce new topics.
- **Format:** The presentation adheres the requirements of the pecha kucha format—20 images shown for 20 seconds each. The images chosen for the slides are appropriate and effective for communicating the content of the presentation.
- **Style:** The presentation adheres to best practices for oral communication. Speaking time and other presentation tasks are distributed as evenly as possible among the team. Speakers are able to be heard in the back of the room. Speakers address the audience instead of the screen, making eye contact with the audience and using appropriate and effective body language.

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