

# ENG 381: Scientific & Technical Writing

Department of English & Journalism, Western Illinois University  
Simpkins 321, MWF, 2:00 to 2:50 pm

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Course web site: <http://faculty.wiu.edu/CB-Dilger/s04/381/>

## Introduction

This course will provide an introduction to scientific and technical writing—which I prefer to call “technical communication.” During the semester, we’ll work individually, in small groups, and as a class to learn the theory and practice of technical communication. Our focus is writing, but we’ll also consider speaking, graphic design, and electronic communication.

The course has two major units. In the first six weeks, we’ll build theoretical foundations by discussing ways to plan, develop, revise, and polish technical communication. In the concluding ten weeks, we’ll put this knowledge to work in a service learning project which involves developing communication in context.

Two formalities:

1. The course has two prerequisites: ENG 180 and ENG 280. If you have not earned credit for both those courses, you may not be able to take this course. *Please speak with me immediately if this is the case.*
2. This is a Writing in the Disciplines (WID) course which requires a substantial amount of original writing.

## Course objectives

1. By writing frequently, with feedback from me and your fellow students:
  - a) learn to use writing to generate and improve ideas;
  - b) improve your ability to evaluate and revise writing—yours and that of others;
  - c) develop the habit of writing detailed, informative prose.
2. By reading and discussing *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*, and producing and revising written and electronic communication, learn the following:
  - a) common conventional genres (or “superstructures”) of technical communication;
  - b) how to evaluate the audience of a communication (a. k. a. “rhetorical situation”);
  - c) how to select the best genre for a given situation, and when to bend (or break) the rules which govern it;

- d) four basic principles for designing eye-pleasing communication;
  - e) popular conventions of Web design and information architecture.
3. By analyzing writing from periodicals, our textbook, and other sources:
    - a) learn to recognize and differentiate common writing styles;
    - b) understand the way writing style affects the form-content relationship.
  4. By following usability testing procedures outlined in our textbook, and further explained by me and other University professionals, learn how to revise communications and smooth the development of large communication projects.

## Required texts and supplies

1. Paul Anderson, *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach* (5/e).  
See the companion Web site, at <http://english.heinle.com/anderson/>.
2. A current writing handbook, such as Andrea Lunsford's *The Everyday Writer* (2/e).
3. A stapler, notebook, Zip disk (100 or 250 MB) or USB flash drive (64 MB minimum), and red, black, and blue pens.

## Assignments

Unit one (weeks 1-6) includes one major individual assignment: the production of job search materials (a memorandum requesting a reference, a résumé, and a job application cover letter). The major assignment in unit two (weeks 7-16), produced in small groups, will be a service learning project to be determined later in the semester.

At the end of the semester, you will compile a portfolio which documents and reflects on the work you have done through the semester. Plan accordingly—save all your assignments and drafts!

Throughout the semester, you will complete small assignments which put concepts from our textbook and/or discussions into practice. These include:

- **Frequent reading quizzes** ensure you are keeping up with the assigned material. Because of point overload, a few low scores won't adversely affect your grade.
- In-class **discussions of readings** help you understand our textbook and share ideas regarding major projects, permitting intensive study of critical skills and content.
- A variety of **group work** supports assignments of all sizes, while providing you with excellent opportunities to speak in the language of your academic discipline.
- **Peer reviews and usability testing** help improve your communication skills and your ability to read and think critically about your own communications.

Detailed assignment sheets are available on the course Web site, and will be distributed throughout the semester.

## Policy guidelines

### **Attendance**

Please be on time and attend as many classes as possible. You begin the semester with 75 attendance points (out of 50). You lose ten points for each absence and five for each lateness. So, you can be late and/or absent a few times without hurting your grade, but repeated absence will lower your grade considerably. Missing class causes a “double dip”—your class participation points suffer as well.

### **Class participation**

Everyone should actively participate in class activities and discussions. *If you aren't speaking in every class, you aren't participating enough.* I'll evaluate your participation in writing twice: at midterm (2/20) and the end of the semester (5/5).

Please bring your textbook (*Technical Communication*), notes, writing materials, and computer disk to class every day.

### **Ethical conduct**

We will discuss the ethical demands of communication this semester. I expect every student to show respect for other students. Honest, enthusiastic, opinionated discussion of ideas and communication is great; but rudeness or antagonism is unacceptable.

I also expect academic honesty. Plagiarism (use of another's ideas, data, and statements with little or no acknowledgment), collusion (unauthorized or undocumented collaboration), or re-submission (presenting an assignment previously completed for course credit) are not permissible. These types of academic dishonesty will be reported in accordance with WIU's Academic Dishonesty Policy.

### **Extra credit**

- You can earn more than the allocated number of points for any assignment. Extremely high quality work can earn up to 110% of the number of available points.
- Your points from all quizzes are counted in your quiz point total. If you take most quizzes and score well, you will probably earn extra points.
- Students who are always present and on time will earn 25 extra points.

### **Feedback**

Please help me be a better teacher by telling me when you enjoy a class or benefit from an assignment—I'll keep it up. On the other hand, if something doesn't work well, I'd also like to know. I always shape courses through student suggestions—I'm willing to change almost anything about the course to help you learn more effectively.

If you want to remain anonymous, put a printed note in my mailbox, or contact me through Dr. David Booker, Chair of the Department of English & Journalism.

## **Grading**

You earn points for each completed assignment. A ten percent per letter grade scale is used for all assignments and final grades. Since there are 1,000 points in the semester, it's easy to figure out where you stand at any time.

Please keep track of your grades and keep all graded assignments.

<i>assignment</i>	<i>points</i>	<i>grade</i>	<i>points</i>
Unit one	250	A	900-1000
Unit two	350	B	800-899
Class participation	125	C	700-799
Attendance	50	D	600-699
Quizzes	75	F	599 or fewer
Group work	50		
Portfolio	100		
<b>Total points</b>	<b>1000</b>		

## **Help!**

I want to help you achieve success in this class and all your studies at Western. Help me help you by asking me when you need some assistance. If you have a concern which you think others might share, please bring it up in class discussions, before or after class, or by sending an email to our class list. This is a communication course, after all.

For tutoring or other assistance, come to my office hours. *I hope to see everyone at least once in my office during the semester.* Stop by any time you are in Simpkins Hall—I'm there quite often, and if the door is open, I'm happy to see you. Please keep in mind I share my office with another professor.

Students with special learning needs requiring pedagogical accommodation should speak with me as soon as possible.

## **Late work**

Avoid late work. If you must turn in an assignment after the due date, *I must know at least 48 hours in advance*, or you will suffer a point penalty. Unless you have permission from me, late work will not be accepted after one calendar week.

Course grades of "incomplete" will only be given in the case of documented medical emergency (e. g. your arm fell off, and your doctor can prove it).

## **Privacy**

There is no need to put your social security number or WIU ID number on any work turned in to me; your printed name will suffice.

By law (20 USC § 1232g, commonly called the "Buckley Amendment"), educational records must be kept confidential. So: I will only discuss your progress in the course

with you in my office, where your privacy can be ensured. I will only email grades or progress reports to wiu.edu accounts. *I will never post this information in public.*

We will be using computers at WIU and in other locations. I will make every effort to ensure your privacy while using these systems. You can help by choosing good passwords, keeping your passwords secret, and logging out of computers after you use them. Should you ever suspect your privacy has been compromised in any way because of a computer system used in the course, contact me immediately by telephone.

If you have a problem with computers, please ask for help—but never email me or any other WIU staff member a password. Passwords should never be emailed.

***WIU brings you the following announcements***

In accordance with University policy and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), academic accommodations may be made for any student who notifies the instructor of the need for an accommodation. It is imperative that you take the initiative to bring such needs to the instructor's attention, as he/she is not legally permitted to inquire about such particular needs of students. Students who may require special assistance in emergency evacuations should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2515 for additional services.

It is the responsibility of the student to comply with the prerequisites/corequisites for a course that he/she plans to take. Instructors who place the appropriate information on the syllabus and emphasize it during the first three class periods may exclude a student from the class who does not meet the prerequisites/corequisites by sending a note to the student with a copy to the registrar within the first two weeks of the term.

## Brief schedule of course activities

This schedule is subject to change. Check the course Web site for an up-to-date schedule which includes more details about readings and assignments.

### Unit One: Getting Acquainted with Technical Communication

#### *Production of Job Search Materials*

<i>wk</i>	<i>dates</i>	<i>readings</i>	<i>assignments and/or activities</i>
1	Jan 12, 14, & 16	Ch. 1	Syllabus review; basic principles (usability & persuasiveness; writing process)
2	Jan 21, & 23 (MLK day 1/19)	Ch. 2 & 3	Objectives; audience analysis <b>Letter of introduction due 1/21</b>
3	Jan 26, 28, & 30	Ch. 4 & 5; S&B excerpt	Planning (outlining & other methods) <b>Prospectus due 1/30</b>
4	Feb 2, 4, & 6	Ch. 7 & 12	Drafting; organization; graphics & design <b>Draft of job search materials due 2/6</b>
5	Feb 9, 11, & 13	Ch. 10, 13, & 15	Style; Reviewing, editing & revising <b>Peer reviews due 2/13</b>
6	Feb 16 & 18 (No class 2/20)		Individual conferences <b>Final versions of job search materials due 2/20</b>

### Unit Two: Service Learning Project

#### *Proposal Research & Development, Communication Production, & Usability Testing*

<i>wk</i>	<i>dates</i>	<i>readings</i>	<i>assignments or activities</i>
7	Feb 23, 25, & 27	Ch. 18 & 19	Project orientation Service learning & collaboration
8	Mar 1, 3, & 5	Ch. 6, 6R & 16	Library research, invention, creativity <b>Project proposal rough draft due 3/5</b>
9	Mar 15, 17 & 19	Ch. 20 & 21	Writing formal proposals and reports <b>Project proposal due 3/19</b>
10	Mar 22, 24, & 26	Ch. 17	Oral presentations
11	Mar 29 & 31; Apr 2	Ch. 14; Krug excerpts	Usability testing and reporting <b>Preliminary project draft due 4/2</b>
12	Apr 5, 7, & 9		Group conferences
13	Apr 12, 14, & 16		<b>Full project draft due 4/16</b>
14	Apr 19, 21, & 23		Polishing and editing
15	Apr 26, 28, & 30		<b>Final project due 4/30</b>

There is no class after April 30, and no final examination.

**Final coursework portfolio due May 5, 2004.**