

ENG 381: Technical Communication

Department of English & Journalism • Western Illinois University
Spring 2007 • Simpkins 027 • T Th, 12:30–1:45 pm
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Introduction

This course is designed to provide an introduction to technical communication, the art and craft of writing useful, informative, reader-centered communication. Our focus will be the methodologies technical communicators use to develop all kinds of spoken and written forms. We will consider communication problems related to presenting specialized or difficult material to non-technical audiences, understanding the forms often involved in the production of technical communication, evaluating audiences and customizing material for them, and best practices for working in environments where communication is critically important.

Two formalities:

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

Expectations

I have high expectations for myself and for you as well. I work very hard to create a well-designed course and to provide the careful instruction, detailed feedback, and out-of-class help you need to grow as a writer. In turn, I expect the following from you:

- Plan for three to five hours of work outside of class every week, and more the weeks before large assignments are due.
- Come to class with your textbooks, ready to talk about *all* the readings and the current assignment.
- Manage your time effectively, so that you begin writing assignments well in advance of final due dates.
- Purchase the office supplies needed to submit properly formatted work—a stapler, paper clips, folders, a flash drive or other means of backup, etc.

- Be prepared to work hard on every level of your writing, completing multiple drafts of every assignment, with an eye towards achieving the course objectives listed below.

If these expectations seem unreasonable, this is probably not the class for you.

Objectives

By reading and discussing *Technical Communication*, and producing and revising written and electronic communication, learn:

- common conventional genres of technical communication;
- how to evaluate the audience of a communication;
- how to select the best genre for a given situation, and when to bend (or break) the rules which govern it;
- basic principles for designing eye-pleasing communication.

By writing frequently, with feedback from me and your fellow students:

- learn to use writing to generate and improve ideas;
- improve your ability to evaluate and revise writing—yours and that of others;
- develop the habit of writing detailed, informative prose.

By analyzing writing from periodicals, our textbook, and other sources:

- learn to recognize and differentiate common writing styles;
- understand the way writing style affects the form-content relationship.

Readings and supplies

Please purchase the required text immediately. It is available at the WIU bookstore. A specific edition is required; if you wish to purchase texts online or at other bookstores, fine; just check the ISBN number.

- John M. Lannon. *Technical Communication* 10/e. ISBN 0321270762.

I will also supply some handouts and copied readings.

Actively engaging with the course readings—reading them multiple times, and taking notes or at the least highlighting—is a must. I will ask that you learn some content “by heart,” but some you’ll just have to become familiar with, so you can look up the necessary material quickly when writing. I will provide you with more details about my expectations for reading during the semester.

Assignments

You'll complete three major assignments this semester:

1. **Job search materials.** A résumé, cover letter, and other materials tailored to a specific job description.
2. **Instructions.** A set of instructions for a task such as using the Web to register for courses, writing an evaluation portfolio, or operating a machine.
3. **Writing project.** An individual technical communication project which serves a personal need or that of a service-learning client.

Detailed assignment sheets will be distributed and discussed in class, and we'll devote some class time to working on drafts and other assignment components. I ask that you turn in graded drafts with final projects, so plan to keep careful track of your work.

Minor assignments which contribute to your class participation points include oral presentations, group work, library research, and in-class writing. Regular reading quizzes or notes help ensure that everyone is up to speed. We will have a comprehensive final examination on May 8.

Course policies

Please read the following carefully.

Attendance and participation

Please be on time and attend as many classes as possible. You can miss up to three classes for any reason with no penalty, but after that, more absences, for whatever reason, will lower your class participation grade. The sole exception is military service; I will arrange alternative activities for anyone whose service obligations require missing classes.

Everyone should participate actively in class activities and discussions. If you aren't asking to speak in every class, you aren't participating enough. Bring your textbooks to class and be ready to discuss all assigned readings. If you aren't prepared for class, stay home; if you come to class unprepared, I will ask you to leave. I'll evaluate your participation in writing twice: at midterm and the end of the semester.

Ethical and professional conduct

I expect every student to follow the highest professional standards for ethical behavior, especially regarding respect for other students. In class, lively discussion is great, but rudeness or antagonism are 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 ethical lapses will be reported to CAGAS in accordance with WIU policies, and can result in an F grade for the course.

Feedback

Final course evaluations—required by WIU—are May 3. But I'd prefer feedback from you much earlier than that. I always shape courses through student suggestions—I'm willing to change almost anything to help you learn more effectively. That's why we do midterm evaluations.

Help me be a better teacher by telling me when you enjoy a class or benefit from an assignment. If something doesn't go well, I'd also like to know. 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. Some assignment sheets break down the number of points even further than the distribution printed below. 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. (See the course web site for a more detailed explanation of the way I calculate percentages for letter grades.)

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

assignment	points
Job search materials	100
Instructions	250
Project	350
Reading quizzes	100
Class participation	100
Final examination	100
Total points	1000

grade	points
A	900–1000
B	800–899
C	700–799
D	600–699
F	599 or fewer

Help

I want to help you achieve success in this class and all your studies at Western. If you have a concern which you think others might share, please bring it up in class discussions. Please ask me when you need some assistance. For individual help, come to my office hours. I hope to see everyone at least once in my office during the semester. I'm happy to talk to you about this course or other things related to your studies in my department or in general at Western.

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

Late work

Generally speaking, I don't accept late work. If you know you are going to miss a class, turn in any assignments early. If you would like to turn an assignment in after the due date, please speak with me about it in advance. No matter what the circumstance, late work will not be accepted after three calendar weeks.

Course grades of "incomplete" will only be given for documented medical emergency.

Privacy

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 never post grades in public in any form.

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.

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. For the instructor to provide the proper accommodation(s) you must obtain documentation of the need for an accommodation through Disability Support Services and provide it to the instructor. 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 (i.e. fire, tornado, etc.) should contact the instructor as to the most appropriate procedures to follow in such an emergency. Contact Disability Support Services at 298-2512 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.

Course schedule

This schedule will almost certainly change. Please see the course web site for an up-to-date schedule which includes more details and links to course assignments.

wk	dates	readings	activities
1	Jan 16, 18	Course syllabus and assignments	
2	Jan 23, 25	Ch. 1, "Introduction to Technical Communication" (1–13); Ch. 2, "Preparing an Effective Technical Document" (16–26)	Job materials draft 1/25
3	Jan 30, Feb 1	Ch. 3, "Delivering the Essential Information" (27–42); Ch. 12, "Organizing for Users" (218–42); Ch. 17, "Memo Reports & Electronic Mail" (384–408)	
4	Feb 6, 8	Ch. 4, "Making a Persuasive Case" (43–73); Ch. 23, "Proposals" (567–604)	Project memo 2/8
5	Feb 13, 15	Ch. 5, "Weighing the Ethical Issues" (74–95); Ch. 6, "Working in Teams" (96–115); Ch. 22, "Instructions & Procedures" (532–66)	
6	Feb 20, 22	Ch. 26, "Oral Presentations" (653–75)	Instr presentation 2/22 or 2/27
7	Feb 27, Mar 1	Ch. 7, "Thinking Critically About the Research Process" (118–27); Ch. 8, "Exploring Electronic & Hard Copy Sources" (128–48); Ch. 9, "Exploring Primary Sources" (149–63)	Instr proposal 3/1
8	Mar 6, 8	Ch. 16, "Designing & Testing... for Usability" (365–381)	Job materials final 3/8 Project draft 3/8
SB	Mar 13, 15	None	None
9	Mar 20	Appx. C, "Editing for Grammar, Usage, and Mechanics" (751–78)	Instr draft 3/20
10	Mar 27, 29	Ch. 13, "Editing for Readable Style" (243–85)	
11	Apr 3, 5	Ch. 14, "Designing Visual Information" (288–338); Ch. 15, "Designing Pages & Documents" (339–64)	
12	Apr 10, 12	Ch. 10, "Evaluating & Interpreting Information" (164–96); Ch. 11, "Summarizing & Abstracting Information" (197–215); Appx. A, "Recording & Documenting Research..." (680–717)	Instr final 4/12
13	Apr 17, 19	None	Project presentation 4/17 Project report draft 4/19
14	Apr 24, 26	None	
15	May 1, 3	None	Course evaluations 5/1 Project final 5/3
EX	May 8	None	Project report 5/8 Final exam 5/8 1:00pm