

**Policies, Practices, Syllabus**  
**Technical Communication (English 393)**  
**Sections 0601, 0701, 0802**  
**Fall 2011**

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**Office Hours:** Mondays and Wednesdays 12:00-1:30 and by email appointment

**Course Objective**

To develop your professional communications skills, particularly—but not limited to—making the technologies, knowledge, data, and ideas you work with accessible to different types of readers for different purposes.

**Overview**

The technical communications developed in this course should be addressed to audiences other than your teacher. Here, you will learn to convey ideas, sometimes quite complicated, to specific audiences whose goals, requirements, and range of expertise may differ considerably from your own. You will learn how to invent, research, and develop persuasive arguments; how to arrange them effectively; and how to apply principles of verbal and visual style to enhance and support their persuasiveness.

Goals will be approached through practice composing different professional documents for differing audiences; research and presentation of a fully argued technical report; collaboration; and vigorous revision.

This course requires considerable writing, and you not considered a novice. You must feel authorized to communicate from the perspective of one who feels authorized, and you must present yourself professionally. Through your research in this course, you often will be positioned with more expertise and information than your audience, and you will be responsible for sharing that expertise toward useful ends. The texts you write must be valuable to the end users (intended audience).

**Text**

Required reading will be either provided on the ELMS site for the class under Course Documents or handed out in class.

**Course Set-up**

English 393 is a practical course—a hands-on workshop in preparing reviewing, revising, and publishing documents typical in the workplace. These include letters of application, resumes, e-mails, memos, definitions or descriptions, instructions, proposals, reports, etc. This course will allow you to enter the workplace and do more than survive; you will thrive. Therefore, our

classroom will operate, as much as possible, like a workplace with the instructor as supervisor, particularly for your written assignments. Imagine the class as a technical writing consultancy with your audiences as clients. It will require teamwork, individual work and engagement.

**Professional Writing Program website:**

<http://www.engl-pw.umd.edu/>

Consult this site for program background, goals and policies.

**Explicit Goals:**

- Recognize that there are different audiences, different objectives for communicating with them, and different rhetorical strategies for achieving those objectives with those audiences.
- Distinguish between and create a number of professional documents that fulfill their purpose for their intended audience.
- Generate and structure arguments based on audience requirements.
- Substantiate those arguments with appropriate resources, used ethically.
- Understand how the above goals apply to writing of a technical nature.
- Demonstrate reasonable competency in Standard English usage.
- Use clarity and brevity for effective writing.
- Read and analyze resources to determine credibility.
- Construct effective paragraphs and easily accessible sentences.
- Critique effectiveness of written products based on purpose, audience, and situation.
- Incorporate acceptable standards of document design into writing projects.
- Perform revision without focusing solely on mechanical issues.
- Wield an identifiable voice within the confines of situational expectations and codes.
- Begin or continue transition from student persona to ...

**Policies and Procedures**

*Assignment*

- Assignments are due in class at the beginning of the class period in which they are to be collected. Grades for late assignments will be discounted 1 full letter for each class period of lateness.
- Much of our work will consist of reading the work of our colleagues and recommending useful revisions; to that end, your willingness to critique vigorously, yet diplomatically and constructively, is required. This also means that a printed (unless otherwise specified) copy of your work is due in class on workshop dates. Workshop drafts may be rough, but they must be complete to sustain a constructive workshop conversation.

*Attendance*

The University excuses class absences that result from a student's own illness. As explained below, the procedures and the documentation a student is required to provide for the purpose of obtaining an excused absence differ depending on the frequency of the absence.

**For medically necessitated excused absence from a single lecture** — no written excuses or documentation from the Health Center is required.

**For absences from single lecture** — students may submit a self-signed note. Such documentation shall be honored as an excused absence unless the absence coincides with a Major Scheduled Grading Event (see below).

Any student who wishes to be excused for an absence from a single lecture due to a medically necessitated absence shall:

- make a reasonable attempt to inform me of his/her illness before class; and
  - present me with a self- signed note attesting to the date of illness upon returning to class.
- Each note also must contain an acknowledgment by the student that the information provided is true and correct. Providing false information to University officials is prohibited under Part 9 (h) of the *Code of Student Conduct* (V-1.00(B) UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT) and may result in disciplinary action.

**For non-consecutive medically necessitated absences from more than a single lecture** — it is your responsibility to notify me in writing that the absences were excusable. If a prolonged absence develops, contact me and maintain contact (if possible) throughout the absence to manage any special circumstances. A prolonged absence is defined as multiple consecutive absences from a course during a semester due to the same illness. Also, please provide written notification verifying dates of treatment and indicating the time frame that you were unable to meet academic responsibilities. No diagnostic information shall be given.

Following non-consecutive unexcused absences, there is no making up missed assignments. More than a week's worth of unexcused absences (2 days) or 2 or more lates triggers a decline in your participation grade. When absent for unexcused reasons, it is your responsibility to contact another student for that day's material, including assignment specs and emendations. It is incumbent upon you to record the contact info for 2 other students in the space below:

Student 1:

Student 2:

A student who wishes to contest a decision not to grant a medically necessitated excused absence should first try to resolve the issue with me. If I cannot resolve the issue, the student should seek the advice of the instructor's Department Chair; the Dean's Office of the Department's College; the Health Center Director; or the Department of Disability Support Services (DSS) Director, if the student is registered with the DSS, in order to identify the proper procedure for resolution.

*Other Communications*

As in the workplace, use e-mail to contact me with queries or comments. Please obtain or recycle a two-pocket folder (portfolio) in which to retain your work for the semester. This portfolio may be required with each assignment and at semester's end to evaluate your progress. Maintain a backup copy of all of your work on at least two different media to avoid data loss.

University policy recommends accompanying final versions of all assignments with the following pledge, hand-written and signed:

“I pledge on my honor that I have neither given nor received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment.”

Violations of the University's Honor Code will result in an automatic F for the assignment in question and may result in a grade of XF for the course and expulsion from the University.

Please familiarize yourself with the University's Honor Code

(<http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html>) and the Office of Judicial Programs and Student Ethical Development (<http://www.jpo.umd.edu/>).

- Students with documented disabilities should provide documentation from Disability Support Services to arrange accommodation. For disability that develops during the semester, please provide documentation as soon as available.

## **Assignments**

Job Application Package 5%

Personal Statement 5%

Presentation on Sustainability 10%

Persuasive Argument

Memo (1) 5%

Topic Selection

Letters (2) 20%

Inductive

Deductive

Research Proposal/Executive Summary 10%

Research Project 35%

Peer Editing/Quizzes/Participation/Attendance 10%

## **Grading Breakdowns**

Your papers will include the following responses from me:

- Margin notes indicating your successes as well as suggestions for improving your work. I will respond to your higher order thinking (including organization, appropriate text and strategies for your audience and purpose, rhetorical techniques, and page design) and help you assess your efforts in comparison to your purposes.
- Proofreading and line-edits—as examples of what you must do to refine the mechanics of your writing. I will not do an exhaustive edit of your work. That is your job. I will point out those low-order concerns that you should identify and practice. I will do my best to weigh the effect of mechanical errors against their impact on your clarity and your credibility (ethos). To that end, a missing comma will not harm you as much as an idea

not transmitted clearly. But, you must also recognize that when those low-order items add up, readers notice and draw conclusions about your competence; this undermines effectiveness and persuasiveness.

- End notes summarizing my overall impression of your work based on the assignment's objectives and the plans that you developed as part of your drafting activity. You will hear my "editorial voice" discuss what success and challenges your finished product embodies for you as a developing writer.
- A letter grade quantifying your work as a finished product measured against my assessment of your effectiveness in responding to the concepts, techniques, methods, and purposes that have been discussed and practiced in class, read in our text, and produced in your drafts and final product.

**A:** You met most if not all of the stated requirements for the assignment.

**B:** You met most of the stated requirements of the assignment; however, there were some grammatical or other technical errors that hampered readability or clarity.

**C:** You met some of the stated requirements of the assignment; however, there were significant problems with content, grammar or other technical errors that hampered readability or clarity.

**D:** There were too many technical errors that hampered readability or clarity.

**F:** You failed to meet most if not all of the stated requirements for the assignment.

## **Goodwill**

I was once a beginning writer, and sometimes I still have difficulty writing for varied audiences. Writing takes time and a lot of commitment, but somewhere along your journey you will find the space in which to succeed. In other words, the more you write the more you learn how to write and the better you become as a writer.

I chose writing as a career because I love to write. Some of you may not possess that same passion for writing, but in almost any career you pursue writing and communicating effectively (with clients, supervisors and employees) is a must.

This course requires a lot of writing in a single semester. The assignments will be challenging. However, I also want to make this semester as exciting as possible. I will be flexible to the various writing styles and document designs to ensure that "you" and "your voice" come across in the assignment. Creativity is encouraged, but never let your creativity get in the way of what you are trying to communicate—it will cost you in this class and in the workplace.

## **Course Evaluations**

CourseEvalUM will be open for you to complete your evaluations for the spring semester during the last few weeks of classes. We encourage you to fill out the online evaluations. Please go directly to the Web site ([www.courseevalum.umd.edu](http://www.courseevalum.umd.edu)) to complete your evaluations starting

December 1. **Note:** The Professional Writing Program uses its own evaluation that will be distributed during the last two weeks of the semester.