

English 393: Technical Writing

Course Policies and Syllabus

Fall 2011

Mondays: Location TBA

Wednesdays: Location TBA

Instructor: Zahara Heckscher

Email: ZaharaH@umd.edu. Please write "English 393:" and the topic of your message in the subject field all emails. For example "English 393: Question about Wed.'s Assignment"

Office Hours: Tawes 1228, Wednesday 10 am to 1 pm noon, or by appointment.

Phone: I prefer text but you can also call me at 202-489-8908.

Communication: For short questions I prefer that you text me. For detailed inquiries, email me. For urgent issues, text or call me. I aim to respond within 24 hours. If it has been more than 24 hours and I have not responded, you can text me at 202-489-8908.

Required Texts/Materials:

Laura Gurak and John Lannon, *Strategies for Technical Communication in the Workplace*, Pearson Education, 2010, ISBN 0-205-69824-7

In the first class meeting, we will review an experimental policy that will make the textbook optional. Students will have the option of purchasing the textbook or participating in an online community that will involve research to replace the textbook with online sources.

Spiral bound notebook for in class writing assignments.

Four folders to keep all your class materials. Pocket folders work best.

Bright colored pen to bring to all class sessions for our self and peer editing exercises.

Recommended: Three ring binder with pocket folders.

Course description: English 393 is designed to be a bridge from the academic world to the work world, and from academic writing to real world writing. In this class, you will have to unlearn some of the academic writing practices you have developed over the years, and learn new writing skills.

Good technical writing makes things happen in the technical, engineering, scientific, business, nonprofit and government worlds. Technical writing can get you a job interview, help you obtain required funding, and enable you to successfully complete real world projects.

The course will help you learn real world writing **formats** (document types), develop your writing **skills**, and build your professional **network**.

1. Specific **formats** covered by the class include the following:

- Resumes/cover letters
- Definitions

- Instructions
- Surveys and interviews
- Recommendation reports, research reports, proposals, or another format relevant to your professional interest
- Presentations
- Memos

2. By the end of this class, you will have improved your writing **skills** and ability to

- Define and analyze your audience's needs and expectations
- Structure and format information so that your readers can understand it
- Edit your own work and that of your peers
- Display a professional, responsible, and ethical attitude towards your communications

3. This class will also help you develop a **network** that will enhance your career success. The network will include stronger relationships with faculty, classmates, and organizations you work with on your final project. In addition to helping you with your assignments, I hope the network will help you with career discernment (figuring out what type of career makes sense for you) and with future job searches.

Requirements: The class will involve short lectures, in-class writing assignments, homework assignments in the formats mentioned above, discussions, peer reviews, online work, quizzes, and a final project. All assignments are designed to bridge your academic studies and your career.

Instructions for each assignment will clearly specify the requirements for obtaining full credit.

Resume and cover letter 10%

Definition for two audiences 5%

Instructions 5%

Memo about final project 5%

Final project including primary and secondary research 50%

Presentation and handouts for presentation 15%

Class participation (attendance, preparation, online participation, quizzes, and participation in discussion) 10%

All PWP classes require six graded assignments comprising a minimum of 25 pages of original writing. Papers for this class may not be used in other classes. Structured peer review will be part of your grade for most written assignments.

Extra credit

Turn in your final paper to your primary audience, meet with that person, and write a memo to me (at least two paragraphs) about the outcomes and learning. You must get permission from the instructor to qualify based on your draft a week before the project is due. (1 point added to your final grade)

Late papers: Late papers should be delivered to me at the following class. For *excused* absences that require you to be in bed or out of town only, late papers may be emailed to me, in which case you should note that information in the email and bring a hard copy to the following class.

Assignments will be marked down 10 points for each class meeting they are late. For example, a paper due on Monday's class and delivered to me on Wednesday will be docked 10 points. If it is delivered the following Monday it will be docked by 20 points. Keep in mind that if you don't complete a draft assignment you will also miss the opportunity to get feedback on it.

Print your papers before class. You will have to pay any printing fees for printing in class. Some assignments will be turned in electronically via ELMS; you will know in advance which assignments are due that way.

Resources:

The **Writing Center** www.english.umd.edu/programs/WritCenter/ The Writing Center can help you to improve your papers before handing them in, determine strategies for re-writes, and highlight grammatical errors. Grammar, sentence structure will count as I grade your assignments, so going to the writing center will improve your grade. If your overall writing skills appear to need a lot of work, I may require you to visit the Writing Center for one of your assignments. I encourage you to visit the Writing Center (on the first floor of Tawes) for all assignments. For some assignments you'll get extra credit for visits to the Writing Center.

The **Career Center** www.education.umd.edu/studentinfo/careerservices/ The Career Center can help you with job search advice, career counseling, and other career-related questions. They can also offer specific assistance with the resume and cover letter assignments.

The **Counseling Center** can provide assistance if you want help reaching your academic goals, think you might have a learning issue that requires accommodation, or need support in managing end-of-semester or other stress. www.counseling.umd.edu.

Citation Style. Like academic writing, professional writing requires proper attribution for quotations and ideas that are not your own original work. However, the style of citation will depend on the organization and purpose of the document. If your subject area uses one of the recognized systems for style and attribution (APA, MLA, AMA, or Chicago) you can use <http://www2.liu.edu/cwis/cwp/library/workshop/citation.htm>. If you have any questions about attribution, please contact me. Always err on the side of caution. **See note on plagiarism below.**

Group Work: Most of the final products you produce for this class are individual. However, the process of writing them will involve extensive collaboration with your peers. In class and occasional out of class assignments will involve collaboration of the kind that is typical for a work environment. The opportunity to learn from your peers is an essential part of this class, as is learning how to share appropriate, sensitive, critical, constructive feedback. Your presentation will be a group assignment. I'll assume group is working together smoothly unless you tell me otherwise.

Sustainability Topics in 393

Thanks to the support of the Chesapeake Project and the Office of Sustainability, students will have the option of incorporating environmental and sustainability topics into their work for this section of ENGL 393.

1. We will visit an on campus site where students have helped create a more sustainable campus.

We'll meet with the individuals who were involved with the projects and learn about the role of writing in the success of the projects.

2. For your definitions and instructions assignments you will be encouraged to write about topics that relate to sustainability.
3. You may chose to do a final project that relates to sustainability on or off campus. I will provide a menu of possible projects and you may also find a topic of your own.

To be fair to students of all perspectives, you may chose topics that take a different perspective from the projects on the menu of options. You will be graded on the quality of your work, not on whether or not I agree with your assumptions or proposal.

Participation: Because of the collaborative nature of this class, attendance and participation is required. You should come prepared to discuss assigned readings, to make substantive contributions to class discussions, to actively participate during group workshops, and to engage fully with in-class writing assignments. I call on students to share in class.

Professional Etiquette and Use of Technology in Class

One of the aims of professional writing courses is to prepare students the working world, including the types of behavior that are expected from all professionals. Your conduct in the classroom should be the same as it would be in a work environment. I expect you to arrive on time, act respectfully in your interactions with others, and show enthusiasm for your work.

All cell phones should be turned off (not on vibrate) during class. If you have a family emergency that requires you to turn on the phone, let me know before class. No checking email or web surfing in class. I have a zero tolerance policy for texting in class.

Violation of these policies will result in a reduction of participation credit for that day.

Attendance and Absences: Consistent attendance is vital to your success in this class. Unexcused absences will deduct from your final grade (deducted from your participation portion of your grade) as follows:

1st unexcused absence—allowed (but you will lose credit for any in class assignments and your grade will be reduced for assignments due that day)

2nd unexcused absence—1 point deducted

3rd unexcused absence—2 additional points deducted (total 3 points lost)

4th unexcused absence—3 additional points deducted (total 6 points lost)

5th unexcused absence—4 additional points deducted (total 10 points lost)

In addition, your grade will suffer further because you will miss for-credit classroom activities. Any assignments due that day will be considered late and points will be deducted. You may miss important information that relate to future assignments. Tardiness will reduce your participation grade.

Excused absences **must be documented** and include:

1. Illness
2. Death in family or family emergency
3. Official university events (such as a basketball game; for these, notify me at least three weeks in advance)
4. Religious holiday (for these, notify me at least three weeks in advance or by the second class meeting for holidays that fall in the first weeks of class)

If you do have to miss class for any reason, find out what you missed from a classmate and from ELMS, and **do not** email or call me asking for a summary of what you missed. It is your responsibility to catch up on missed work and handouts. However, in the event of documented serious illness or family emergency, contact me to make individual arrangements to help you catch up. I will take into account your specific situation.

Conferences: You are required to attend one student-instructor conference during the semester. Please bring your folders with all work done in class so far. During this meeting, we will discuss your work in progress and you can raise any questions or concerns you might have about the class. Class will be cancelled during the week of the conferences, and sign-up sheets will be distributed several weeks prior to our meetings.

My Teaching Style and Preferences

- I tend to give detailed assignments. Read the details.
- I like difficult questions. If you disagree with me, challenge me; we both may learn something!
- When in doubt, ask.

Rewrites:

There is no good writing, there is only good rewriting” Justice Brandeis

Because this class focuses on the value of rewriting, you may submit most assignments for re-grading, except for the final paper. But you have to earn the right to a re-grade. **An assignment will only be considered for a grade change if it meets *all* of the following criteria:**

- It is turned in by the deadline I give for rewriting, usually a week after the initial assignment is turned back to you.
- You get additional feedback on the assignment from the Writing Center.
- The rewrite is in a folder with the initial assignment with my comments and the comments from the Writing Center.
- The changes you made not only address the specific corrections I made on the paper, but also show some re-thinking of global issues.
- You must write a short memo to me about your approach to the re-write and what you learned from my feedback and the review process. Two paragraphs are sufficient.
- For the final paper, you will only have the option to re-write IF you have visited the Writing Center four times for your paper and IF you have completed all peer reviews. Final paper re-writes may result in grade changes after the close of the semester grading period.

Plagiarism: I refer students who I suspect of plagiarism to the Honors Council. The Honors Council determines the punishment if plagiarism is confirmed. Plagiarism is using other people's

words or ideas without giving them credit. The penalties for plagiarism can include an XF on your transcript for the class and possible dismissal from the University. Avoid problems by giving credit where it is due. Check with me in advance if you are uncertain. I treat errors of sloppiness in the same way I treat intentional plagiarism: referral.

UMD's honor code is here: <http://www.studenthonorcouncil.umd.edu/code.html>. Please review it. I am obligated under university policy to refer suspected plagiarism to the Office of Student Conduct, and I **do** follow this policy. Resources:

<http://www.lib.umd.edu/shadygrove/plagiarism.html>

<http://www.studentconduct.umd.edu/Info/Students/Default.aspx>

Disabilities: If you have a disability and require accommodation please speak to me after class or during office hours.

Evaluation and Feedback: I appreciate feedback with your ideas for how I can improve the class. Some of my best teaching techniques come from student suggestions. You are welcome to submit ideas via email or in person, or anonymously through the Professional Writing Program. In addition to the university's online end of the semester evaluation, there may be a PWP paper evaluation at the end of the class, and a mid-semester evaluation to provide feedback and illustrate the use of online surveys.