Technical Writing   **Summer I 2015**
English 393   **Sections 0108**
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COURSE PHILOSOPHY

The purpose of this course is to prepare you for the kinds of writing you will do in the workplace. Rather than attempting to cover the many document types you might be asked to write in a professional setting, we will instead focus on strategies and tools that can (and should) be applied in any writing situation. To that end, for each of the major assignments, you will be asked to develop a clear *purpose* for writing and a keen understanding of the *audience* for whom you will write. A thorough exploration of purpose and audience in any writing situation will influence the *content, organization,* and *style* of each document you produce. In grading each writing assignment, I will assess how well these elements—content, organization, and style— advance your purpose and serve the needs of your audience.

Technical Writing, which is part of the Professional Writing Program, differs from academic writing courses in two important respects: the purposes the writer advances and the audiences that are addressed. In much of the academic writing you've done, the purpose is often to prove to your instructor—your audience—that you have absorbed the course content. Although we cannot erase the fact that this is a university course, that I (your instructor) will evaluate your work, and that you will write to me for a grade, you will get more out of this course if you think of the writing you do in this class as having a real-world purposes and directed at real-world audiences that have concerns about, a need to know about, or the ability to act in relation to your topic. For this reason, I encourage you to think of the projects you work on in this course a way to effect change, in your workplace, your community, or the larger world.

Writing can be thought of as a "gateway" task that must be done well so that other goals can be reached; it is not an end in itself, but a means to an end. By applying the strategies and skills we cover in this course, you will increase your chances to progress in your field, to determine the course of your career, and to contribute positively to your community, society, and the world.

It is my hope that the assignments in this class will (a) provide meaningful writing practice, (b) allow you to pursue a topic of that is important or for your goals, and (c) prepare you to act in the world to bring about positive change.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Aside for the *personal statement* and the *cover letter/resume*, the writing assignments in this course are linked—that is, *the topic selection memo, project proposal and presentation, annotated bibliography, problem paper, solution paper* will be on the same topic and will each advance your progress on or contribute to the *final project*. Although the final project can take

any number of forms, the sequence of assignments favors a proposal or a recommendation report.

Because we meet only once a week, by the third class meeting you must have a solid idea of the topic you will work on throughout the semester. The best topics are those that focus on real-world problems (or situations) and actions/solutions related to those problems. Topics that interest you, that are familiar to you, and that have real-world applications work best. In addition, your topics should have some exigency—that is, there must be a need for communication regarding the topic. Keep in mind, as well, that you have only 6 weeks—topics that are extremely complicated or technically demanding may cause trouble.

The topics you choose from this semester will be related to a central theme, sustainability, an area of study that is not only growing in importance, but is also relevant to any field, particularly technical disciplines.

Learning Outcomes

On completion of the Technical Writing course, students will be able to:
- Analyze a variety of professional rhetorical situations and produce appropriate texts in response.
- Understand the stages required to produce competent, professional writing through planning, drafting, revising, and editing.
- Identify and implement the appropriate research methods for each writing task.
- Practice the ethical use of sources and the conventions of citation appropriate to each genre.
- Write for the intended readers of a text, and design or adapt texts to audiences who may differ in their familiarity with the subject matter.
- Demonstrate competence in Standard Written English, including grammar, sentence and paragraph structure, coherence, and document design (including the use of the visual) and be able to use this knowledge to revise texts.
- Produce cogent arguments that identify arguable issues, reflect the degree of available evidence, and take account of counter arguments.

Required Texts
Style: The Basics of Clarity and Grace, Joseph M. Williams (3rd. 4th, of 5th edition)

Although there will be homework assignments based on readings from the text, you will demonstrate your understanding of the content covered in the texts by applying the concepts in your peer review, in your own written work, and in the reflective writing assignments.

Paper Submission Requirements

Unless otherwise instructed, you will submit all draft and final assignments through Canvas. Because I grade through Canvas, I ask you to set your margins at 1.5 inches. I prefer Word documents, as other document types sometimes do not work properly in the grading system. Unless I state otherwise, all papers should be in 12-point font and double-spaced.

Drafts

For each assignment, you will submit the draft on ELMS. For each assignment that has an associated draft, the draft will make up about 20% of the total grade for the assignment. You will not receive credit for drafts that are not submitted on time.

Peer Review

Your timely, constructive, honest, and thorough review of your classmates' work will make up a significant portion of your class participation grade. The peer reviews must be delivered (primarily through ELMS) to the students whose work you review and to me (a "review assignment" will be created for on ELMS for each major assignment—you will submit your reviews there). I understand that some of you may prefer to read and review on paper during the draft stages, and I recognize the benefits of that practice and even encourage it; however, if for any reason you review and mark up a hard copy, you are required to create a pdf of your review work and deliver it to me and to the author. In such cases as well as in cases when the Canvas peer review system is not used, the author must submit the reviewed drafts with the final submission.

For each assignment that is peer-reviewed, I will provide a set of questions to guide your reviews. In addition, I will point you to material in the textbooks, which I expect you to draw on in your response to your peers.

Proofreading

Every graded assignment must be proofread aloud. Before submitting the final, I suggest that you print a hard copy and read it aloud (or listen to a friend do so). Note any errors: typos, inconsistencies, mistakes in grammar, punctuation, mechanics, etc. After doing so, return to your computer for a final edit. The final version must include the following items on the cover paper:

> A. Proofreading pledge: "I have proofread this paper aloud," followed by your electronic signature.
> B. A record of the time this proofreading took.

Any paper that, in my judgment, has not been proofread, despite the presence of the pledge, will not receive a passing grade. No paper will be accepted as complete without this pledge. It may be returned to you for documentation or it may receive a full grade deduction.

Note: In addition to the proofreading pledge, you must also include the honor pledge (see below under "Plagiarism and the Honor Code")

Revision

To emphasize the importance—indeed, the necessity—of revision, you are permitted to revise and resubmit one paper (not the final project), provided that the original version was turned in on

time, complete, and in accord with guidelines for paper submission. In addition, I reserve the right to request that you do further work on a project before I assign a grade. Generally, any graded work, conscientiously done, meriting a C or less is eligible for revision. Furthermore, all graded assignments undergo a built-in draft review and revision process—in other words, each completed will have been shared with fellow students and revised accordingly. Final submissions for which I request revision must be work-shopped with a tutor at UMD's Writing Center before resubmission. (I strongly encourage you to use the Writing Center before you hand in your drafts and your final version—I generally boost the grade by few percentage points for assignments that you have taken to the Writing Center.

The course is structured so that you will revise *problem* and the *solution papers* based on my comments and then incorporate those revisions into *the final project.* In that sense, revision is built into the class.

Homework Assignments

The homework assignments will be based on the assigned chapters *Style* (hereafter referred to as "Williams"). You will receive credit for completing the homework on time and revising it until it is correct. There may be a few quizzes based on the homework, in-class work on Williams, and a few handouts. In addition, several reading assignments and response questions will be posted on ELMS.

Reflective Writing and Portfolio

Finally, throughout the semester, you will respond to a series of reflective writing prompts. These prompts will ask you to set goals, identify areas where improvement is needed, devise strategies for those improvements, and evaluate your progress. In conjunction with the reflective writing tasks, you will prepare a "portfolio" consisting of original excerpts and revisions of your own writing. The portfolio will give you the chance to show me what you've learned and to demonstrate your progress over the semester.

Conferences

Two conferences during class time are required. At the first conference, you will present plans for the "linked assignment" assignment. At the second conference, near the end of the semester, we will discuss your working draft for the final project. You are welcome to make further arrangements to meet with me to discuss your work and your progress. In addition, you are encouraged to meet with fellow students outside class time in face-to-face or virtual environments to plan together.

Your preparation for and engagement during the conference will contribute to your class participation grade. My rationale here is that, in the professional world, you will be asked to meet one to one or in groups to discuss your plans, questions, or concerns about a project and to honestly report on your progress.

Class Participation

As this course is meant to model the type of work that you will do in a professional setting, your participation in class is essential. Most professional work is collaborative; professional writing is no different. As an employee, you may be asked to write one section of a larger report, provide comments and suggest revisions on someone else's report, or provide research summaries in support of a larger project. Even when you are the sole author of a text, you will seek comments and evaluation from qualified peers. For these reasons, your participation during class and outside of class is required. To participate fully, you must complete the assigned readings, the reading questions, and the writing exercises. The individual and collective value of the class depends on your level of effort. By coming to class prepared for discussion and with a positive attitude toward collaborative work, you will increase the chance that we all succeed.

Much of the work in this class is collaborative. You will share drafts with classmates, contribute thoughtfully to the work of others, explore ideas together, etc. This collaboration is especially important for the class periods devoted to draft workshops. To ensure that the peer-review workshops are useful, you are expected to have your own completed draft and have something helpful to say to those with whom you work. Failure to do so will negatively affect your class participation grade.

For each class, you will receive a participation grade. This grade will reflect your timely *presence* (meaning more than simple attendance) in class, your involvement in class discussion, the level of thoroughness and thoughtfulness in your answers, your preparation for class, and the degree of respect and maturity you show in communicating with others. Students who are present and on time, prepared, involved in discussion, thoughtful and thorough in their answers and who comport themselves respectfully and maturely will receive high grades in class participation. Students who are frequently absent or late, do not participate in discussions, are unprepared, and/or do not comport themselves respectfully and maturely will receive low marks for participation.

COURSE POLICIES

Communication

I will communicate with you primarily through Canvas's Announcement function—set your notifications to receive my Announcements. Because I have so many students, it is important for me to manage the incoming messages. Use e-mail only for questions that are of a private nature (lateness, absences, etc.) or for scheduling an appointment with me. I ask that you use the Discussion tool in Canvas for all other communication. In many cases, your classmates would benefit from reading my response to your questions or they can answer the questions for you. The Discussion tool allows me to communicate with the entire class rather than individual students. Finally, I will not respond to questions about grades on e-mail; if you want to discuss grades, you must schedule an appointment with me during my office hours.

Class Conduct

An atmosphere of mutual respect is expected in all class activities. Use of cell phones, I-pods, or computers for anything other than class work is prohibited. Failure to adhere to this policy will be interpreted as rude, unprofessional behavior and will negatively affect your class participation grade.

Beverages in containers without sealable lids are prohibited. Eating is not permitted in the computer classrooms.

Attendance

Class attendance is important. Peer-editing workshops, discussion about assignments and readings, group exercises, oral presentations, and in-class writing assignments are vital components of this class. Daily attendance is both expected and required.

Absence: If you miss one class, which is equivalent to one week during a normal semester, your class grade will be affected; if you miss two classes, your grade will be affected severely; if you miss 3 classes for any reason, you will likely fail the class.

Lateness: You are expected to attend class on time. In the first minutes of class, I may make important announcements, establish the syllabus for the class meeting, begin immediately with an important lesson, or field questions you have about the subject matter under consideration. When you come in late, you miss more than a few *minutes*. Therefore, it is particularly important for you to arrive on time.

When you are late, please enter class quietly. If you are more than a few minutes late, I generally expect a polite explanation after class. Repeated or extreme lateness will be considered in the category of absences. Thus, two late arrivals of more than a few minutes (or unexplained early departures) will convert to 1 absence.

Late Papers: Papers are due at the beginning of class unless I have stated otherwise.
I do not accept late papers.

Plagiarism and the Honor Code

You are hereby reminded of your ethical obligations for academic honesty. You will be informed about the mechanics of proper citation and documentation during this course. You will be pursued with vigilance following evidence of failure to abide by accepted academic conventions, especially for those failures that seem to stem from intention rather than ignorance. Proven charges of plagiarism will likely result in an automatic F in any Professional Writing Course.

The following statement from the Student Honor Council provides additional guidance:

The University of Maryland, College Park has a nationally recognized Code of Academic Integrity, administered by the Student Honor Council.

This Code sets standards for academic integrity at Maryland for all undergraduate and graduate students. As a student you are responsible for upholding these standards for this course. It is very important for you to be aware of the consequences of cheating, fabrication, facilitation, and plagiarism. For more information on the Code of Academic Integrity or the Student Honor Council, please visit http://www.shc.umd.edu

Beginning in Spring 2002, all undergraduate and graduate students were asked to affirm their commitment to a University of Maryland Honor Code by writing, in longhand, and signing the following honor pledge statement on all major assignments: **"I pledge on my honor that I have not given or received any unauthorized assistance on this assignment." Your graded assignments should include this honor pledge and the proofreading pledge on final document**. Because you will be submitting most of the work electronically, the honor code can be copied and pasted on the cover page of each assignment.

Accommodation

If you have a documented disability, including learning disabilities (registered with DSS) and need accommodations, please speak with me as soon as possible. If you have not registered with DSS, you should do so immediately (Shoemaker Hall; 4-7682 or 5-7683 TTY/TDD).