

ENGLISH 421 ONLINE

TECHNICAL WRITING

GENERAL INFORMATION

Instructor

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Office Hours

In-Person and Online

Wednesday 2:30 PM - 4:30 PM

*Additional availability by appointment.

COURSE OVERVIEW

Welcome to English 421. In this class you will learn the rhetorical principles and writing practices necessary for producing effective technical documents, memos, reports, and collaborative projects in professional contexts.

The writing assignments in this class each focus on a different approach to technical information. At Purdue you're developing a basic knowledge of the technical information of your field. **The results of a chemical equation?** That's technical information. **The take-off procedure of a small plane?** That's technical information. **The thrust created by a specific rocket engine?** That's technical information.

When you leave Purdue, you will need to be able to communicate technical information to a variety of audiences, including experts in your field, experts in other fields, and the general public. Sometimes you will need to create documents that meet the needs of several audiences at once. Sometimes the audience will value your expertise, and other times an audience might be skeptical of your expertise.

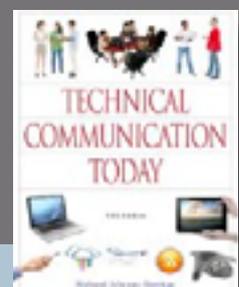
The main goal of this class is to learn how to successfully evaluate the independent needs of each situation, given your audience and purpose.

ABOUT THE TEXTBOOK

The textbook for this class is *Technical Communication Today (5th Edition)* by Richard Johnson-Sheehan.

BUY THE BOOK. WE WILL USE THE BOOK. In a typical week of class you will be required to read one chapter from *Technical Communication Today* (TCT) and complete a short quiz. You can rent the book (\$20) cheaply through Amazon.com.

DO NOT BUY A PREVIOUS EDITION. Other editions have outdated information, different case studies, and different examples. I will not adapt the quizzes or discussions for the other versions of the book.



COURSE GOALS

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COURSE GOALS

AUDIENCE-AWARE WRITING

In this class you will need to analyze professional cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape technical writing. To meet this goal, this class will focus on **writing for a range of different audiences**, from your peers in the workplace, to those in other workplaces, to the public.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

In this class you will learn to look at a variety of technical documents and **evaluate whether those documents are effective**. You should be able to identify the visual, textual, and logistic factors that make a text effective or ineffective.

DOCUMENT DESIGN

As you can see, this document uses design to lead the reader through the information. In this course, you will be **required to make decisions about the visual design** of the documents you create. By connecting visual and textual elements you will be able to make documents more readable, more interesting, and more professional.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Major assignments for this class will involve systematic planning, research, drafting, revising, and editing, both individually and collaboratively. To execute these projects effectively, you will need to maintain a professional identity and maintain accountability for your work.

ETHICAL AWARENESS

This course will also require you to consider the ethical implications of technical communication. How do you explain complicated technical problems to the public? How do you make sure complex technical problems are seen and addressed through corporate communication?



MANAGING ONLINE COURSEWORK

Many aspects of this course are exactly the same as the face-to-face version of this class. The goals are the same. The assignments are largely the same. The workload is largely the same.

However, the online class will be more difficult, not because the content is harder, but because there are more barriers between my instructions and your work.

INHERENT DIFFICULTIES OF THE ONLINE COURSE

-There are few opportunities for me to clarify my instructions. In a face-to-face classroom environment there are visual signs if students are confused or are headed in the wrong direction on an assignment. Online there are no visual cues and less opportunities to check in with students individually.

-It's harder to collaborate. In an in-person setting it's easy to move and talk to other students. You'd also get to know more classmates' personalities. In an online class you will do more work (and I will do more work) to complete group activities and group projects.

ONLINE COURSE TIPS

- #1** Read/Watch course materials carefully.
- #2** Let me know about problems early and often.
- #3** Take participation and collaboration seriously.

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

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ASSIGNMENTS

UNIT 1: JOB DOCUMENTS

The focus of our first unit will be on developing a set of employment documents. In creating these documents, you will need to locate jobs that you might apply to once you leave Purdue and analyze the implicit and explicit requirements of job postings related to that career. Then, you will develop all the necessary materials for applying to that position, including an application letter, a resume, and a cover letter. We will cap off the unit with a live video interview to test your professionalism while thinking on your feet.

UNIT 2: TECHNICAL DESCRIPTIONS

Throughout the second unit you will practice writing about detailed technical information to two different audiences. Toward this goal you will start by choosing a device, a process, or a concept from your field. Then you will compose two descriptive documents about that topic. One document will present the topic to specialists in a field, the other will present the topic to a general public audience. This dual-document approach will lead to discussions about the ethical and practical difficulties of technical communication.

UNIT 3: INSTRUCTION SETS

In the final unit you will compose two sets of instructions, procedures, or protocols that document how to complete some task. One set will be written specifically for the audience on Instructables.com, a social community dedicated to instructional materials. The other set of instructions will be written as a print document. Through the course of this unit we will discuss what it means for instructions to be "clear" or "commonsense." We will also discuss the relationship between text and visuals in instructional materials.

ARTIFACT ANALYSIS

Throughout the course we explore different artifacts through a rhetorical lens, asking questions about the textual

and visual factors that lead to effective communication. In the second half of the course you will be asked to analyze an example of technical communication. The example could be a set of instructions, a technical description, or a popular article. Using terms and concepts from the rest of the course, you will write a paper that explains why the example is effective for some audiences, an ineffective for others.

QUIZES AND EXAM

You will be responsible for keeping up with the readings in the class. For some readings you will be asked to post a response to the class blog (see below). For other readings (primarily those from the course textbook) you will be asked to take a short quiz to demonstrate rudimentary knowledge of the concepts.

At the end of the semester there will be a final exam that will test your understanding of the central course concepts in audience analysis, critical thinking, and document design.



BLOGGING

Nearly every week you will also be required to post on the class blog. The goal of the blog posts is to build an active class discussion about the course concepts. Over the course of the semester you'll be required to post regularly, and also read and comment on the posts of your classmates. No matter the reading, your blog post will need to demonstrate an in-depth engagement with the topic. The blog posts also work as practice runs for a section of the final exam.

GRADING BREAKDOWN

20%	Job Documents
20%	Technical Descriptions
20%	Technical Instructions
15%	Artifact Analysis
10%	Blog Posts & Activities
5%	Quizzes
10%	Final Exam
TOTAL = 100%	

GRADING ISSUES

LATE WORK

The majority of missed class assignments cannot be made up. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me in writing prior to the deadline to determine whether an extension for the work will or will not be granted. In most cases, if I grant an extension on a project, there will be an automatic deduction of one letter grade per day after the deadline.

COLLABORATION

There will be group activities and group assignments in this class.

I will offer some guidance about how to communicate and divide group work effectively, but it is up to you to let me know early if group member is not communicating or completing work.

FINAL GRADES

Your final course grade will be evaluated on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale: A=100-94, A-=93-90, B+=89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D+=69-67, D=66-64, D-=63-60, F=59 or below. All major assignments will be graded on this scale as well. I do not round up.

ADDITIONAL POLICIES

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EMAIL POLICIES

The easiest way to ask a question, clarify an assignment, or generally connect with me is through email. I check my email regularly and tend to respond promptly. However, I'm also a human being (not a robot!) with other things to do besides waiting for, reading, and responding to emails. Consider these ground rules before sending your email. I promise I will do the same.*

AIM FOR CLARITY

By the end of your email I should know 1) The problem or issue you've been working on 2) What you've already tried to solve the problem 3) What you need from me. **Don't re-read your emails to check your spelling.** Re-read your emails to make sure your point is clear.

GIVE ME 24 HOURS

I check my email fairly often, but this class is not the only activity going on in my life. **I will give you at least 24 hours to respond to any emails** I may send you, and I expect the same courtesy from you. If you have a problem or a question about an assignment the night before it is due, consult google, the assignment sheet, or your fellow classmates before emailing me.

BUT ... DO BUG ME IF I FORGET SOMETHING

With all that said, if I don't respond to your question after a few days or if you can't move forward without my feedback, please write me another email. I'm a busy man, and sometimes I forget things.

PRO TIP: STARTING AN EMAIL

How you start an email is important, but it can be hard to know how to address new professional contacts. For this class go with: "Dear Mr. Liddle," or "Mr. Liddle," or "Hey Mr. Liddle."

And then all the emails in my inbox ate me alive. Like a pack of wild dogs.



your eCards
someecards.com

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is not a simple concept. There are many kinds of writing that count as plagiarism even though the writer wasn't trying to cheat or get away with something. For example, maybe the writer forgot to cite a source. Perhaps in the writer's home country it is allowable to use material without citing it. Perhaps the writer forgot that a paraphrase still needs a citation. I would still count these as instances of plagiarism. In this class plagiarism will be taken very seriously, because in the working world plagiarism can get you fired or sued. Better you receive a lower grade in this class and learn a lesson than go to jail ten years from now.

If I find that you have plagiarized, I will give you an automatic 50% grade on the assignment. I will also email you and ask for a one-on-one meeting to discuss the incident of plagiarism in question. I reserve the right to allow you to make up the assignment for a reduced grade

if I find that the instance of plagiarism wasn't intentional. If I find that you have plagiarized a second time I will report the incident to the Dean of Students Office.

I will also be checking for instances of cheating and issues with academic integrity other than plagiarism. In those cases I will report the issue directly to the Dean of Students Office.

PURDUE'S OFFICIAL STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Purdue students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students," which students are encouraged to read here:

<https://www.purdue.edu/odos/academic-integrity/index.html>

The preamble of this guide states the following: "Purdue University values intellectual integrity and the highest

standards of academic conduct. To be prepared to meet societal needs as leaders and role models, students must be educated in an ethical learning environment that promotes a high standard of honor in scholastic work. Academic dishonesty undermines institutional integrity and threatens the academic fabric of Purdue University. Dishonesty is not an acceptable avenue to success. It diminishes the quality of a Purdue education, which is valued because of Purdue's high academic standards."

Academic dishonesty is defined as follows: "Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [University Regulations, Part V, Section III, B, 2, a] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972]" If you have any questions about this policy, please ask.

