

University of Washington

Department of English

Introduction to Professional and Technical Writing

ENGL 288A WI 21:



Professional & Technical Writing
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Instructor: Josephine Walwema, PhD

Term: Wi21

Meeting Time: MW 9:30-11:20

Phone:

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Office Location: Padelford A-108

Office Hours: TTH 2:15-3:30, and by appointment

Professional & Technical Writing

Catalogue Description:

Engages in professional genres and communication practices in light of emerging technologies. Students produce texts that prepare them to enter professional spaces. Offered: AWSp.

GE Requirements:

English Composition (C)
Writing (W)

Course Description:

This course explores how professional and technical writers (P&T) find, create, and deliver technical information. We will explore:

- What is professional & technical writing?
- What texts do P&T writers write?
- What are the core concepts of P&T writing?
- What kinds of documents, design principles, digital tools, rhetorical moves, writing strategies, and research skills should P&T writers possess?

Why? Demand for P&T writers is strong. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, career prospects (2012–2022) for technical writers are nearly double that of other media jobs, with projections strongly outpacing the rate of aggregate occupations in the U.S. economy.

This course aims to help you learn skills to communicate effectively and efficiently in your professional life. The course introduces you to the rhetorical principles and composing practices necessary for writing basic professional and technical documents, designing and analyzing technical research, and communicating

about technical issues in common documents such as policies, processes, and reports.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, you will become familiar with:

- theory—understand major theories of the dimensions of technical writing
- inquiry—explore, experiment with, and invent a variety of writing genres in which original ideas combine with suitable and effective expression.
- practice—persuasive written, oral, and visual arguments, organize ideas and language effectively to address specific readers and meet specific purposes

Course resources

Technical Communication, 9th Edition
ISBN-13:9781305672529

- The New York Times; Wirecutter; Howto
- Pdf Readings in Canvas

Instructional Methods:

There will be a variety of instructional methods, including lecture, student-led and small group discussions, research exercises, presentations, and writing assignments.

Course Policies

Course Schedule: Each week will constitute a new unit and related activities containing a combination of the following elements:

- Weekly reading responses
- Major Projects (& drafts)
- Informal and formal writing assignments
- Discussion Boards
- Peer Review & Group Work

Successful course completion requires access to and reading the current course

resources and materials, actively participating in learning activities such as discussions, group projects, and completing all assignments and projects.

Canvas. **Learning Remotely**

Whether you plan to live on a UW campus, nearby or in another part of the world, there are a few steps you should take to help keep yourself and those around you safe and healthy. Follow this [UW Checklist](#) and log into Canvas daily.

Communicating with the instructor Navigating life, both in and out of the classroom during the ongoing pandemic is challenging for all of us. I'm committed to extending as much flexibility with due dates and course requirements as I can to those who need it. I will prioritize your humanity and well-being while also trying to provide you a stimulating learning environment. Collectively, I hope we can build a community that maintains personal connections and academic engagement while recognizing that accommodations may be necessary to foster such an environment. Please reach out to me via Canvas or email.

Collaboration. Working with others is a hallmark of professional & technical writing. Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork and collaboration, such as:

- responding constructively to peers' work
- soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- managing team goals and conflicts constructively

Readings:

Reading assignments typically appear in the syllabus on the date on which they are due. You should have completed these readings before coming to class that day.

Reading Reports. Instead of reading quizzes, which decontextualize reading, and in order to promote the practice of writing, students will be asked to submit weekly reading reports covering the reading for each week. On Friday of each week students post a 300+ reading response (in memo format) addressing (in polished, professional prose) the following:

- What did you read about (summary)?
- What have you learned from it (analysis)?
- How will you use what you read to meet your writing goals for the semester (use)?
- Connect it with something else you have learned up to that point in the readings, from a lecture, or another source (contextualize)

Research. Understand and use various research methods and sources to produce quality documents, including:

- analyzing historical and contemporary contexts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence

Document Design. Make rhetorical design decisions about documents (and other compositions), including:

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and audience expectations
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, and revising visual designs and information architecture

Writing in Context. Analyze cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms

of writing, such as persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse, with an emphasis on:

- writing for a range of defined audiences and stakeholders
- negotiating the ethical dimensions of rhetorical action


Project Management

- understand, develop, and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively
- select and use appropriate styles and technologies that effectively and ethically address contexts and audiences
- build ethos through voice, evidence documentation and accountability

Add/Drop. It is your responsibility to be aware of the university deadline dates for dropping the course.

Technical Assistance All technical support is provided by IT Connect:

 **Email:** help@uw.edu

 **Phone:** 206-221-5000

 **Online:** [Send us a question](#)

 **In-person:** [Walk-in locations](#)

 [Service Status](#)

Access and Accommodations

Your experience in this class is important to me. If you have already established accommodations with [Disability Resources for Students \(DRS\)](#), please communicate your approved accommodations to me at your earliest convenience so we can discuss your needs in this course.

If you have not yet established services through DRS, but have a temporary health condition or permanent disability that requires accommodations (conditions include but not limited to; mental health, attention-related, learning, vision, hearing, physical or health impacts), you are welcome to contact DRS at 206-543-8924 or uwdrs@uw.edu or disability.uw.edu. DRS offers resources and coordinates reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities and/or temporary health conditions. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your instructor(s) and DRS. It is the policy and practice of the University of Washington to create inclusive and accessible learning environments consistent with federal and state law.

Course Assignments: All assignments are due on the dates indicated. They will be available the week prior and submitted through Canvas --never via email. If you anticipate that your assignment will be late, please reach out to me ahead of time so we can work out some accommodation. My philosophy is to accept ALL your work as assigned and completed. Please ask for an extension if you need one. The assignments are broken down in these modules:

1. Communicating Complex Information and User-Centered Documents (25 %)
2. Explaining Complicated Information, Mechanisms, and Processes (25%)
3. Enacting Ethical Decisions (15%)
4. Researching and Writing Reports (25%)
5. Online activities and interaction with classmates (10%)

Grading Policy: We will use contract grading, a system of grading that “decouple[s] evaluation from grades” (Inoue, 2018). This means that you will not receive letter or numerical grades for any of your work during the semester. Instead, for each major assignment, a minimum standard must be met, or the paper will be returned for revision. All major assignments must be completed, with revisions if required, in order to meet terms of the contract. Please see details [here](#)

UW Standard Grading System

Letter Grade	A	A-	B+	B	B-	C+	C	C-	D+	D	D-	E
Number	4.0 - 3.9	3.8 - 3.5	3.4 - 3.2	3.1 - 2.9	2.8 - 2.5	2.4 - 2.2	2.1 - 1.9	1.8 - 1.5	1.4 - 1.2	1.1 - 0.9	0.8-0.7	0.0
Note											Lowest passing grade.	Academic failure. No credit earned.

Course Schedule

Week 1	Professional & Technical Writing Fundamentals. Chapter 1: Introduction to course
Week 2	Chapter 5. Analyzing Your Audience and Purpose
Week 3	Communicating Complex Information Chapter 3. Writing Technical Documents Emphasizing Important Information Chapter 10. Writing Correct and Effective Sentences Chapter 9
Week 4	Visual Ethics -- Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations
Week 5	Descriptions, Definitions, and Processes Writing Technical Documents Chapter 8. Communicating Persuasively
Week 6	Technical Descriptions Chapter 20. Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions
Week 7	Evaluating and Testing Technical Documents Chapter 13. Evaluating and Testing Technical Documents Chapter 14. Corresponding in Print and Online
Week 8	Content and Strategy Audit -- Researching Your Subject; keeping track of your sources
Week 9	Content and Landscape Audit Chapter 17. Writing Informational Reports
Week 10	Research Report