

Technical Writing

Engl 410-001, Spring 2008

Course Information

Professor: Byron Hawk
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Office/hours: Sci-Tech I 105, R 3:00-6:00
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Days/Times: TR 1:30 - 2:45
Classroom: Innovation Hall 223
Web syllabus: <http://classweb.gmu.edu/bhawk/410>
Print syllabus: PDF version
Acrobat: Free Adobe PDF Reader

Texts:

Required:

Gurak, Laura J. and John M. Lannon. *A Concise Guide to Technical Communication*. 3rd ed. New York: Longman, 2007.

Suggested:

A handbook such as:

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 4th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.

A style manual such as:

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. New York: MLA, 2003.

Course Description:

410 combines current rhetorical theory with situated practice to prepare students for writing in professional and technical contexts. The course will focus on analyzing complex communication situations and designing appropriate textual and technological responses. The goal of these texts will be to produce a desired rhetorical action in relation to a particular audience. In order to create these effects and affects, students will be asked to analyze rhetorical situations, decide on genre that are appropriate to those situations, plan the production of those genre, and produce those genre individually and collaboratively.

Many standard technical genre (such as reports, instructions, and proposals) and issues (such as usability, document design, and ethics) will be discussed, but generally students will be expected to choose the professional and technical situations they wish to write into and the appropriate genre and strategies for those situations.

Course Goals:

- To identify and adapt to the constraints of specific rhetorical situations, including audiences, purposes, and uses.
- To develop strategies for accommodating various disciplinary, technical, and lay audiences.
- To learn strategies for making documents accessible and user-centered, including elements of document design such as type face, spacing, and navigation.
- To critique and revise your own documents in the light of their situatedness as well as in relation to established rhetorical strategies.
- To refine your writing style for more strategic clarity, concision, coherence, cohesion, and emphasis.

Assignments:

Your grade this semester will be based primarily on three main writing assignments (genre analysis, instructional documentation, and a research project) and class participation. Participation includes attendance, in class discussion, short in class and homework assignments, and peer reviewing.

The projects:

1. Genre Analysis - This assignment will ask you to choose a genre typically used in your discipline or profession and analyze it in relation to its rhetorical situation rather than as an isolated form. A few smaller email and memo assignments and independent research will culminate in a short report.
2. Documentation - This assignment will combine a user document or tutorial with a usability study on that document to improve its functionality in relation to audience. The document, user and moderator task analyses, and a final short report or memo will be combined for the final project.
3. Research Project - This assignment will ask you to examine an academic, technological, or workplace context, identify a rhetorical problem within that situation, and propose a solution. It will combine a proposal, independent research, a presentation, and a final long report (along with a draft of any deliverables--brochure, web page, etc.).

Grades:

The grades will be averaged across the follow percentages. Note that the participation grade is a calculated grade and in many of my classes turns out to be the lowest grade across the board.

Project 1: Genre	20 %
Project 2: Documentation	30 %
Project 3: Research	40 %
Participation	10 %

	100 %

For a final grade, students will receive an A+ (4.0), A (4.0), A- (3.67), B+ (3.33), B (3.0), B- (2.67), C+ (2.33), C (2.0), C- (1.67) D (1.0), or F (0.0).

Technology Responsibilities:

While technology is an important aspect of professional and technical writing, this course will emphasize rhetorical foundations and practices over technology skills (a new course being offered next year, Web Authoring and Design, will focus more specifically on technology). Some minimal requirements for building a basic web page and using publisher or PowerPoint may be covered briefly in class. Otherwise, Mason provides a number of workshops and labs for additional help with technology projects. Students need to sign up for the workshops but are able to get individual, walk-in peer tutoring in the Star labs.

- [Star Workshop Schedule](#)
- [IT Training Workshops](#) (list of all IT workshops, including Star)
- [IRC Workshops](#)
- [Star Lab JC 229](#) (student mentors help walk-in students)
- [Star*T Lab JC 344](#) (open lab if no workshops are being held)
- [Web Star Lab JC 311](#) (also has peer mentors who will help with web development)

Attendance:

Because everything we discuss builds on previous class periods and the class relies heavily on regular in-class writing and group-work, attendance is extremely important. Consequently, attendance will count as a part of your participation grade. If you stop coming to class, it will be your responsibility to drop. Failure to do so will result in an 'F'.

Late Papers:

It is my policy to accept no late assignments. It is crucial, then, to recognize the importance of attendance in relation to late homework. If you have to be absent on a day something is due, you can send the paper to me over email *before class* for a time stamp, but bring a print copy to the next class. I will not print out papers.

Office Hours:

I will have office hours on R from 3:00 to 6:00 in Sci-Tech I 105. If you need to speak to me and cannot make this time, then ask me to schedule a time that is convenient for both of us. I also check my e-mail several times daily, so this will be the best way to contact me in a hurry if you have a question or problem, especially about what is due the next day. The only other option is to call and leave a message, but I will not receive it immediately.

Plagiarism and Collusion:

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or end notes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting. Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this include factual information which can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research, (what has been called common knowledge). What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may not be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly." In other words, writers

provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism. See the [GMU Honor Code](#) for more detail on plagiarism and its consequences.

Specific Needs:

If you require accommodation based on a disability, I would like to meet with you privately after class on the first or second day to be sure you are properly accommodated. If you need a faculty contact sheet, call the [Disability Resource Center](#) at 703-993-2474.

Syllabus

This is a tentative schedule by week and day, for assignments, readings, and activities. Tentative means I can vary it as much as seems appropriate. However, plan on sticking very close to this outline especially on major due dates. I will post all revisions of and additions to the syllabus on this web page. The updated web version will always override the printable [PDF version](#). (Free [Adobe Acrobat Reader](#))

Week 1: Introductions

T Jan 22 - Go over syllabus; sign up for class list: homework--read CGTC ch.1, do exercise #1 (p.12 in 2nd ed)

R Jan 24 - discuss ch.1 and the documents you bring to class: homework--read Lloyd Bitzer, "[The Rhetorical Situation](#)"

Week 2: Genre Analysis

T Jan 29 - discuss rhetorical situation: homework--read CGTC ch.2, decide on a genre you'd like to investigate that is related to your disciplinary or professional field and someone you could interview who writes and/or uses that genre, write an email to the list that explains your interest (see CGTC p.186-89, 2nd ed)

R Jan 31 - discuss ch.2, genre, audience, and purpose: homework--read Carolyn Miller, "[Genre as Social Action](#)," interview a person about your selected genre, write up your interview notes as a short memo (see CGTC p.189-92, 2nd ed)

Week 3:

T Feb 5 - Memo due; discuss genre as action: homework--read "[Using Genres](#)" and "[Genre List](#)," and start gathering examples from the Internet

R Feb 7 - Discuss *Genre analysis assignment* and other places you can gather examples: homework--gather more examples and write an initial draft of your short report (see CGTC p.189-92, 2nd ed)

Week 4:

T Feb 12 - peer review: homework--write a solid draft of the Genre analysis short report, skim CGTC Appendix A

R Feb 14 - briefly discuss style, peer review: homework--finish the final draft, read CGTC ch.5

Week 5: Documentation

T Feb 19 - Genre Analysis due; discuss the rhetorical situation of digital writing: homework--read CGTC ch.3 and identify a familiar technical activity related to your discipline or profession

R Feb 21 - Do exercise #1 in class and discuss task analysis: homework--read Robert Johnson "User-Centered Design"

Week 6:

T Feb 26 - discuss user-centered design and audience: homework--read CGTC ch.8

R Feb 28 - in class, locate technical documentation or a tutorial online, or a web site related to your discipline or profession, do CGTC exercise #2 p.147, 2nd ed (email/memo), be prepared to discuss your analysis in class: homework--identify a technology that typically gets used in your discipline or profession (preferably one you have access to at home, work, and/or school), read CGTC p.225-28, 2nd ed (Brief Instructions)

Week 7:

T Mar 4 - discuss *Tutorial and Usability assignments*

R Mar 6 - workshop tutorials in class: homework--finish tutorials and plan usability studies

Spring Break March 10 - 16

Week 8:

T Mar 18 - tutorial draft due; conduct usability studies in class: homework-- revise tutorial in the light of user feedback

R Mar 20 -

Week 9: Research Project

T Mar 25 Tutorial/Usability due; discuss final *Research project assignment*: homework--read CGTC ch.4 (Research) and proposal (see CGTC p.281-94, 2nd ed)

R Mar 27 - start proposal in class and discuss projects: homework--read articles on research proposal writing

Week 10:

T Apr 1 - NO CLASS: begin research and work on proposal

R Apr 3 - NO CLASS: continue research and work on proposal

Week 11:

T Apr 8 - Proposal due; homework--read CGTC ch. (ethics)

R Apr 10 - discuss ethics: homework read Neilson or Katz?

Week 12:

T Apr 15 -

R Apr 17 - discuss oral presentations (CGTC p.208-17, 2nd ed) and PowerPoint; sign up for presentation time: homework--develop presentation on your research progress

Week 13:

T Apr 22 - oral presentations on research progress

R Apr 24 - oral presentations on research progress

Week 14:

T Apr 29 - peer review on final long report

R May 1 - peer review on final long report

Week 15: Finals Week

T May 6 - reading day

May 7-14 - exam period

Final Research Projects due on May ____ at 5:00 in my box: English Department, RobA 487