

Intro to Professional Writing

English 501, Spring 2008

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Print syllabus: Adobe PDF version
Acrobat: Free PDF Reader

Course Information

Course Description:

This course provides an historical and theoretical introduction to professional and technical writing. We'll inspect the rise of professional writing against the backdrop of rhetoric and composition as a scholarly field with a focus on key theoretical issues. The course is conceptualized as both seminar and practicum, challenging students with writing tasks that probe the historical and theoretical issues being presented. These tasks will include: participating on a class weblog, writing short papers to be examined in detail and presented to the class, using a minimal amount of technology for one of the presentations, and producing a final portfolio of past and current writing projects related to professional, technical, or editorial work along with a reflective essay that examines this work in the context of the class readings and discussions.

Texts:

Required

Peebles, Tim, ed. *Professional Writing and Rhetoric: Readings from the Field*. New York: Longman, 2003.

Gurak, Laura and John Lannon. *A Concise Guide to Technical Communication*. 2nd ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2004.

Suggested

Gibaldi, Joseph. *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*. 6th ed. Modern Language Association of America, 2003.

Course Goals:

The goals of the course are to:

- provide a rhetorical foundation for each student's future coursework in the program,
- provide practice in writing a variety of genre related to professional writing,
- provide experience in close reading of documents/texts,

- provide the opportunity to apply effective principles of document design.

Technology Responsibilities:

While technology is an important aspect of professional and technical writing, this course will emphasize the rhetorical foundations of professional writing. The minimal requirements to participate on the class blog will be discussed in class, but there will also be a PowerPoint presentation and the option to do a web-based final portfolio. Mason provides a number of workshops and labs for additional help with these 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:

Each week we will discuss the readings, do short assignments, give presentations, read each other's work, and/or have class time to blog. Consequently, attendance is extremely important and will count towards participation grades. If you stop coming to class, it will be your responsibility to drop. Failure to do so will result in an 'F'.

Office Hours:

I will have office hours R from 3:00 to 6:00 in Sci-Tech I 105, though I will be on campus before class on T as well. If you need to speak to me and cannot make the office hours, then ask me to set up an alternative time to meet. I 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. The only other option is to call and leave a phone message, but I will not receive it immediately.

Grades:

Students in English 501 receive a final grade of 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).

Rewrite and Late Policy:

Papers and projects are always due on the dates specified in the online syllabus. The entire class will comment verbally on class presentations and small groups will provide feedback on the short papers. These papers should subsequently be revised for inclusion in the final portfolio. If a student does not have a paper on the specified day, it will not count towards participation and there will be no commentary upon which to base a revision; hence, no rewrite. Peer reviews will also count toward participation and is a requirement. The only other paper that cannot be revised is the final reflective essay in the portfolio.

Specific Needs:

If you require accommodation based on a disability, then meet with me 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.

Course Assignments

Class Weblog:

Before class starts I will set up a single weblog for the course. Everyone will post to the main blog. The first day of class I'll give a quick tutorial and we'll make initial posts. Students will then be expected to post regularly in response to readings (at least 2 solid paragraphs, 400-500 words). There is a particular question or prompt to discuss listed for each week in the syllabus. I encourage students to look ahead in the syllabus for the topics and think about them as they read. Students should take notes for ideas or gather up material before class. In class, I will post further prompts based on the reading for that week to the blog. The prompts should be seen as conceptual starting places, not rigid guidelines to follow. In general, posts will be open to any topics related to the readings and work being done in class. If another idea seems important or another prompt from the book generates interest, then explore that line of thought. It is important to take advantage of the class time to write and post, but entries can be finished and posted after class. It will then be vital to comment on other posts. This work is time consuming but the interaction with others and their workplace experiences will be central to the development of the class. Blog posts tend to be more formal; comments more informal. Blog posts and comments will count toward participation grades. Don't get seduced into the idea that this doesn't count.

Short Papers:

Approximately every three weeks (week 4, week 7, week 11, week 14) students will write short papers (1.5 to 2 pages single-spaced, 1000-1250 words) that either directly apply concepts and genre under discussion or that summarize some of the readings from the previous two weeks and then apply that theory to an object in the field (a web site, a technical document, a workspace or workplace, etc.). I will typically give two or three options in the daily syllabus (generally straight out of Peeples). These options are meant as conceptual starting places for invention, not as mandates. Students should feel free to pursue other prompts out of Peeples or contact me if they are unsure whether an ulterior paper idea meets the goals for that section. After writing the paper, students will then bring in enough print copies for their peer review group and will deliver the paper orally to the entire class. We will spend the class period listening to the papers and commenting on them orally. Students from the reading group will take home the paper copies and comment on them in more detail. I will also comment on them, grade them, and ultimately average those for the short paper grade. Students will need to take the commentary given orally in class, by the peer review group, and by me and revise the papers for their final portfolios.

In week 11, I will ask everyone to incorporate technology into their presentation of the short paper for that week. This could include a web page, a PowerPoint presentation, a brochure, or some other document that requires extra technical skill and preparation. Students will have an extra week of class to work on the specific tech skills develop the presentation. If no other technology or genre applies to the paper's topic, students should create a PowerPoint version of their paper. The PowerPoint should function both as an aid for oral delivery and as a visual representation of the argument. In other words, the headlines and bullets should go beyond topic and subtopic to claim and support. Make sure the conceptual connections are made explicit in the visuals. This may create slightly more text but should generate more comprehension. Students may read their papers and click through the presentation but it will be more appropriate, and hopefully affective, to talk through the presentation. Presentations will get up to 5 participation points instead of the typical 1. Short papers will be graded as always.

Final Portfolio:

Each student will compile a portfolio (paper or virtual) of past and current writing projects related to professional, technical, or editorial work set against the backdrop of course readings and discussions. The portfolio should include revised short papers from the semester along with solid examples of your best technical writing, writing for magazines or newspapers, creative nonfiction, or web writing. The portfolio should also contain an end-of-semester reflective essay (1250-1500 words) that examines the work included in the portfolio in the light of the class readings and rhetorical theories discussed over the semester. While the bulk of material is important, a strong cover essay that makes connections between the work in the portfolio and the issues and concepts discussed over the semester is critical. Portfolios will receive a letter grade. For more see the [full assignment](#).

Participation:

Participation will consist of weekly blog posts, blog comments, class attendance, presentations, peer reviews, any attendance at technology workshops or labs, and any other minor exercises that require non-trivial effort. These will be tallied and averaged. Again, don't be lulled into thinking this work doesn't count. (See percentages below.)

Percentages:

The following is a breakdown of percentages.

Blog/Participation	20 %
Short Papers	40 %
Portfolio	40 %

	100 %

Syllabus

This is a tentative schedule by week for readings, assignments, 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/additions to the syllabus on this web page. The updated web version will always override the [printable PDF](#) version.

Week 1 (Jan 22): Introductions to Course

In Class:

- Go over syllabus; introduction to blog; [set up blog](#).
- Write a blog post: introduce yourself to the class—state why you are interested in this class/program and what background you have in professional, technical, or editorial work.
- Comment on other blog posts.

Introduction to Rhetoric

Week 2 (Jan 29): What is Rhetoric?

Required Readings:

- Foss, Foss, Trap. "Perspectives on the Study of Rhetoric." (Peeples 11-19)
- Aristotle. *On Rhetoric* (exerpts). (Peeples 20-36)
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics* (exerpts). (Peeples 37-39)
- Rhetorica Ad Herrenium*. (Peeples 40-43)
- Bitzer, Lloyd. "[The Rhetorical Situation](#)."

Suggested Readings:

- Burton, Gideon. [Silva Rhetoricae: The Forest of Rhetoric](#) (see rhetoric on left)
- Kinney, Thomas. [Corax: The Crow's Nest](#)
- [Rhetoric Resources](#) (Stanford)
- "[A Brief History of Rhetoric and Composition](#)" (Bedford)

- Wikipedia: Rhetoric
- A Glossary of Rhetorical Terms with Examples
- Aristotle, On Rhetoric (See Book I in particular)
- Aristotle, On Sophistical Refutations
- Aristotle, Topics
- Aristotle, Nichomachaen Ethics
- Plato, Gorgias
- Plato, Phaedrus
- Plato, Protagoras
- Plato, Sophist
- Rhetorica Ad Herennium
- Cicero, De Oratore
- Quintilian, Institutio Oratoria

In Class:

- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Define rhetoric and speculate on its implications for professional writing and editing. (See Peeples 1-6)
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 3 (Feb 5): Professional Writing as Rhetoric

Required Readings:

- Faigley, Lester. "Nonacademic Writing: The Social Perspective." (Peeples 47-58)
- Miller, Carolyn. "What's Practical about Technical Writing?" (Peeples 61-70)
- Regli, Susan. "Whose Ideas? The Technical Writer's Expertise in *Inventio*." (Peeples 71-77)
- Miller, Carolyn. "Genre as Social Action."
- CGTC. Ch. 1 Intro to Tech Comm (skim)

Suggested Readings:

- Wikipedia: Genre
- Spinuzzi, Clay. Describing Assemblages: Genre Sets, Systems, Repertoires, and Ecologies
- Spinuzzi, Clay. "Using Genre Ecologies to Study Textual Artifacts."
- Miller, Carolyn. All
- Geertz, Clifford. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight."

In Class:

- Set up peer review groups.
- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Discuss a passage from Faigley, Miller, or Regli as compared with your experience as a writer and/or editor, academic or professional. (Also see bulleted prompts on Peeples 45).
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 4 (Feb 12): Short Papers

Required Writing:

- See Peeples p.44 #1 (rhetoric as audience-centered), #2 (defining rhetoric) and p.99 #1 (defining professional writing as rhetorical). Or, you can do a genre analysis of documents from work (see readings)

below). Pick one of these as a jumping off point for a short paper or summarize some key points from the readings and then apply that theory to an object (any print document, media text, or workplace). Print out enough copies of the paper for your peer review group.

-CGTC. See appropriate genre.

Suggested Reading: Genre

- Using Genres
- Genre-List

Suggested Reading: Argument

- Wikipedia: Argument (lots of links)
- Toulmin Project Homepage
- The Toulmin Method
- What is the Toulmin Model?
- UNC: Argument (also see handouts)
- Harvard: Counter Argument (also see resources)
- Princeton: Terms and Methods
- Argument Mapping
- Argument, Persuasion, Propaganda (also see chart)

In Class:

- Exchange papers and emails with group.
- Read papers aloud.
- Comment orally on content and delivery.

After Class:

- Examine and download the peer review sheet.
- Write a brief summary of your essay and email it to the people in your group.
- Examine the genre and definition handouts.
- Comment on the papers, looking at content, argument, form, language, style, and grammar.
- Using the brief summary from the author and your comments on the paper, fill out the peer review sheet, thinking more broadly about the rhetorical effectiveness of the paper. (Use Lanham, the argument links, and the genre handouts as references for giving feedback.)
- Give the paper and review sheet back to the author in the next class.

Professional Writing as Rhetorical Action

Week 5 (Feb 19): Organizationally Situated Social Practice

Required Readings:

- Slack, Jennifer Daryl, David James Miller, and Jeffrey Doak. "The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority." (Peeples 80-96)
- Driskell, Linda. "Understanding the Writing Context in Organizations." (Peeples 105-119)
- Spilka, Rachel. "Orality and Literacy in the Workplace." (Peeples 146-167)
- Spinuzzi, Hart-Davidson, and Zachry. "Modeling Knowledge Work."
- CGTC. Ch. 2 People and Purposes (skim)

Suggested Readings:

- Pratt, Mary Louise. "[Arts of the Contact Zone](#)."
- Duin, Ann Hill, and Craig J. Hansen. *Nonacademic Writing: Social Theory and Technology*.

In Class:

- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Briefly interview a practicing professional writer in your workplace and post a comment on how some aspect of his or her work relates to this week's readings. (This can be as simple as an informal chat or a couple of emails. Just fish for some information on organizational context and/or writing practices.)
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 6 (Feb 26): Professional Writing and Ethical Action

Required Readings:

- Ornatowski, Cezar M. "Between Efficiency and Politics: Rhetoric and Ethics in Technical Writing." (Peeples 172-181)
- Katz, Steven B. "The Ethic of Expediency: Classical Rhetoric, Technology, and the Holocaust." (Peeples 183-200)
- Porter, James E. "Framing Postmodern Commitment and Solidarity." (Peeples 202-216)
- Lanham, Richard. "[The 'Q' Question](#)."
- CGTC. Ch. 6 Ethics in Tech Comm (skim)

Suggested Readings:

- Reynolds, John Frederick, Carolyn B. Matalene, Joyce Neff Magnotto, Donald C. Samson, Jr., and Lynn Veach Sadler. *Professional Writing in Context: Lessons from Teaching and Consulting in Worlds of Work*.

In Class:

- Class visit by [Roger Lathbury](#).
- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Reread the memo from Katz against the backdrop of Porter's discussion of ethics. Post commentary on Just's purview and ethics as culturally driven.
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 7 (Mar 4): Short Papers

Required Writing:

- See Peeples p.169 #1 (white paper), #3 (manifesto) and p.218 #2 (ethical action plan--focus on the first bullet under #2). Pick one of these as a jumping off point for a short paper or summarize key points from the readings and then apply that theory to a professional document (a memo, a white paper).
- CGTC. See appropriate genre.

Suggested Reading: White Paper

- o [White Paper on White Papers \(examples\)](#)
- o [Writing White Papers](#)
- o [Preparing White Papers \(CWRL/white papers\)](#)

- [Blakesley excerpt \(html\)](#)
- [SAGE Guidelines](#)
- [White Papers FAQ](#)
- [What are White Papers?](#)

In Class:

- Exchange papers with group.
- Read papers outloud.
- Comment orally on content and delivery.

After Class:

- Examine the [peer review sheet](#).
- Write a brief summary of your essay and email it to the people in your group.
- Examine the [policy](#) and [white paper](#) handouts.
- Comment on the papers, looking at content, argument, form, language, style, and grammar.
- Using the brief summary from the author and your comments on the paper, fill out the peer review sheet, thinking more broadly about the rhetorical effectiveness of the paper. (Use Lanham, the white paper links, and the genre handouts as references for giving feedback.)
- Give the paper and review sheet back to the author in the next class. (If you **have** to take longer, please email your group and notify them.)

Spring Break March 10 - 16

Rhetoric and Technology

Week 8 (Mar 18): Technologically Situated Action

Required Readings:

- Kalmbach, James R. "Publishing Before Computers." (Peeples 221-232)
- Bernhardt, Stephen. "The Shape of Text to Come." (Peeples 232-248)
- Howard, Tharon. "Who 'Owns' Electronic Texts?" (Peeples 250-263)
- Lessig, Lawrence. "[Some Like it Hot](#)."
- Open University. [Design Principles for Web Layout](#) (section four)
- Open University. [Four Basic Principles of Visual Design](#)
- Nielsen, Jakob. [Top Ten Mistakes in Web Design](#)
- CGTC. Ch. 5 Tech Comm in a Digital World (skim)
- CGTC. Ch. 7 Copyright and Privacy (skim)

Suggested Readings:

- Review of [Free Culture](#)
- Wikipedia: [Lessig](#), [Fair Use](#), [Copyright](#)
- [Graphic Design Rules](#)
- [Web Style Guide](#) (see Chapters [2](#) and [4](#))
- Sullivan, Patricia, and Jennie Dautermann, eds. *Electronic Literacies in the Workplace: Technologies of Writing*.

In Class:

- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Examine a web site and comment on design, or discuss your use of online texts from the perspective of copyright and ethics.
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 9 (Mar 25): User-Centered Documents as a Productive Art

Required Readings:

- Kostelnick, Charles. "A Systematic Approach to Visual Language . . ." (Peeples 271-284)
- Johnson, Robert. "When All Else Fails, Use the Instructions." (Peeples 287-316)
- Kapper, Michael. Mixing Media: Textual, Oral, and Visual Literacies
- Nielsen, Jakob. Usability 101
- Nielsen, Jakob. Top Ten Guidelines for Homepage Usability
- Johnson-Eilola, Johndan. "Writing Online: Strategies for Designing Usable Texts."
- CGTC. Ch. 3 Usable Info (skim)
- CGTC. Ch. 8 Page Layout(skim)

Suggested Readings:

- National Cancer Institute. Web Usability Guidelines
- Wroblewski, Luke. Visible Narratives: Understanding Visual Organization
- Design Eye for the Usability Guy
- Norman, Donald. The Life Cycle of a Technology.
- Usability Testing
- Usability Test Storyboard
- Tufte, Edward R. *Envisioning Information, Visual Explanations, The Visual Display of Quantitative Information.*
- Schriver, Karen A. *Dynamics in Document Design.*
- Hassett. *Shaping Information.*

In Class:

- Class visit by William Miller.
- In groups of three, pick one of the documents brought to class and plan a re-design. Discuss as a class.
- Write a blog post: Apply Nielsen's usability guidelines to a web site of your choice and evaluate it.
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 10 (Apr 1): NO CLASS

Required Writing:

- In addition to writing your short paper (see prompts under week 11) students should incorporate technology into the next presentation either via web pages or PowerPoint or some other genre appropriate for your topic. Use some of the general web and page design rules to construct your presentation, but also see the links below for some other ideas.

Suggested Reading: General

- o CGTC. Ch. 9 Visual Info
- o CGTC. Ch. 10 Everyday Comm (oral comm)

Suggested Reading: PowerPoint

- Cyphert, Dale. The Problem of PowerPoint: Visual Aid or Visual Rhetoric? (click on full text pdf link)
- DuFrene, Debbie. Concept, Content, Construction, and Contingencies: Getting the Horse Before the PowerPoint Cart (click on full text pdf link)
- Byrne, David. Learning to Love PowerPoint
- Tufte, Edward. PowerPoint Is Evil: Power Corrupts. PowerPoint Corrupts Absolutely
- Uses of PowerPoint in the 314L Classroom
- Skim tips and other articles from the links page.

Week 11 (Apr 8): Short Papers

Required Writing:

-See Peeples p.265 #2 (value of professional writers), #3 (navigation and usability--just pick 4 in one category or one each across 4 categories) and p.318 #1 (revision plan), #2 (revision of visual design), #3 (develop documentation). Pick one of these as a jumping off point for a short paper or summarize key points from the readings and then apply that theory to a visual document (a brochure, a flyer, a web site).
-CGTC. See appropriate genre.

In Class:

-Exchange papers with group.
-Read papers aloud.
-Comment orally on content and delivery.

After Class:

-Examine the peer review sheet.
-Write a brief summary of your essay and email it to the people in your group.
-Comment on the papers, looking at content, argument, form, language, style, and grammar.
-Using the brief summary from the author and your comments on the paper, fill out the peer review sheet, thinking more broadly about the rhetorical effectiveness of the paper. (Use Lanham and the web style links from weeks 9 and 10 as references for giving feedback.)
-Give the paper and review sheet back to the author in the next class. (If you **have** to take longer, please email your group and notify them.)

Writing Social Space and Workplace

Week 12 (Apr 15): Producing Social Spaces

Required Readings:

-Killingsworth, Jimmie, and Betsy Jones. "Division of Labor or Intergrated Teams?" (Peeples 321-338)
-Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, and Stuart A. Selber. "After Automation: Hypertext and Corporate Structures." (Peeples 341-355)
-Grabill, Jeffrey T., and W. Michele Simmons. "Toward a Critical Rhetoric of Risk Communication." (Peeples 360-379)
-Henry, Jim. "Writing Workplace Cultures." (CCC online article)

Suggested Readings:

- Deleuze, Gilles. "Society of Control."
- Spinuzzi, Clay. "Weaving and Splicing Networks."
- DeLanda, Manuel. "Panspectron."
- Reviews of "Connected, or What It Means to Live in the Network Society."
- DeLanda, Manuel. "Markets, Antimarkets and Network Economics."
- Head, Simon. *The New Ruthless Economy: Work and Power in the Digital Age.*

In Class:

- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Analyze your organizational position. If you are not employed, interview a professional writer or editor to discern where s/he fits in the organizational hierarchy and how different departments or divisions collaborate in "producing social spaces."
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 13 (Apr 22): Becoming-Writer

Required Readings:

- Anson, Chris, and Lee Forsberg. "Moving Beyond the Academic Community." (Peoples 386-407)
- MacKinnon, Jamie. "Becoming a Rhetor." (Peoples 411-422)
- Dias, Freedman, Medway, and Pare. "Virtual Realities." (Peoples 423-439)
- Katz, Susan. "Writing Review as an Opportunity for Individuation." (Peoples 122-145)

Suggested Readings:

- Wardle, Elizabeth. "Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces."

In Class:

- In class visit by Susan Lawrence.
- Discuss readings.
- Write a blog post: Think about your experiences with the transitions between school and work, company and company, and old position and new position within the same company.
- Comment on other blog posts.

Week 14 (Apr 29): Short Papers

Required Writing:

- See Peoples p.383 #2 (plan *or* report on social space), #3 (redefining professional writers) and p.441 #3 (internship plan). Pick one of these as a jumping off point for a short paper or summarize key points from the readings and then apply that theory to a workplace.
- CGTC. See appropriate genre.

Suggested Reading: Proposal

- o How to Write a Research Proposal
- o Guide to writing a research proposal
- o Proposal Writer's Guide
- o Writing a Research Proposal

- Beginner's Guide to the Research Proposal
- Developing the research proposal
- Proposal Writing & Research Development

In Class:

- Exchange papers with group.
- Read papers outloud.
- Comment orally on content and delivery.

After Class:

- Examine the peer review sheet.
- Write a brief summary of your essay and email it to the people in your group.
- Comment on the papers, looking at content, argument, form, language, style, and grammar.
- Using the brief summary from the author and your comments on the paper, fill out the peer review sheet, thinking more broadly about the rhetorical effectiveness of the paper. (Use Lanham and the proposal links above as references for giving feedback.)
- Give the paper and review sheet back to the author in the next class. (If you *have* to take longer, please email your group and notify them.)

Finals Week/Final Portfolios

Week 15 (May 6): Reading Day--no class

Required Writing:

See Peeples p.440 #2 for some extra details on your final portfolios.

No Class:

Final Portfolios due by _____ at 7:00 in my box, RobA 487, or email me the URL if you do a web based portfolio.