

ENGL 202C

Technical Communication

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Class: MWF 12:20 PM - 1:10 PM, 002 Sparks
Office Hours: MWF 1:15-3:30

Course Description

English 202C, Technical Communication, serves students who are studying and preparing for careers in the sciences and applied sciences, including engineering. Through a combined emphasis on learning the discourse practices prized in their disciplinary and institutional communities **and** a focus on the technical skills necessary to engage in such communities, this class prepares students to be effective communicators in their lives after Penn State.

Technical communication is nonfiction writing meant to make the complex simple. It informs, instructs, and persuades. And it can take many forms – manuals, references, instructions, correspondence, reports, and proposals, among others. Whatever form is used, technical communication's focus is to ensure that readers can make informed choices, understand complex information, and follow complex procedures.

Students can expect to:

- Identify their readers and describe the characteristics of their readers in a way that forms a sound basis for deciding how to address them.
- Arrange material to raise and satisfy readers' expectations, using both conventional and rhetorical patterns of organization.
- Collaborate effectively with their peers in a community of writers who provide feedback on each other's work.
- Understand that communication involves both the content of a message *and* that message's form.
- Use a variety of traditional and new media to effectively and concisely convey highly technical information to non-specialists.

Required Text

The Handbook of Technical Writing, 9th Edition by Gerald J. Alred, Charles T. Brusaw, & Walter E. Oliu (ISBN: 978-0312575120)

Course Policies

Attendance

You are expected to attend class every day and to have your work with you. Regular attendance is required, because course instruction depends on your active participation. Three absences will not affect your performance (unless you miss a rough draft session—a major problem); but try to limit it to that. Additionally, I grade attendance (unlike all other assignments in this class) on a curve, so it *might* be possible to miss more than three days (however, in every semester I've taught 202, there's always been at least one person to get perfect attendance. You've been warned). Excused absences are

appropriate, of course, but beyond that, let me repeat English department policy: A student whose absences are excessive “may run the risk of receiving a lower grade or a failing grade,” whether some of those absences are considered “excused” or not. If you miss class, it is your responsibility to get assignments, complete any work, and submit any due papers.

If you are late (where late is defined as arriving to class after attendance has been taken), you will be marked “tardy” in my records. For grading purposes, a tardy counts as 1/2 of an absence. This is the result of the disruption caused to myself and your fellow students by a late (and inevitably loud) entry into class. If you have concerns with buses or walking a distance from your previous class (and, I totally understand that this is a problem), you should consider changing to a different section (and investing in a better campus map), because your inability to cross campus is still a disruption to class.

In all cases, students are required to submit documentation for an excused absence. If sick, a doctor’s note is required within two class periods for the absence to be excused. Family emergencies and religious functions require an email at least two class periods before the event (when possible; obviously emergencies are emergencies). University sponsored activities require official University documentation.

It is particularly important for you to attend—and be prepared to participate in—in-class workshops on drafts of your documents. The more you have written before peer-review sessions, the more you will benefit from them. Although your drafts need not be “polished,” in general they should be complete enough for you to receive substantial help from your peers.

Grading

In grading your assignments, a number of factors will weigh on my decision:

- **Promptness.** In this course, as in the working world, you must turn in your work on time. All projects are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the syllabus. Assignments turned in late will be penalized one letter grade for each day late unless you have made other arrangements with me in advance. **If you would like an extension, please inform me of this need 24 hours before the assignment is due.** I will be more than happy to accommodate you.
- **Appearance.** All work should be neatly prepared on a computer, using margins and spacing and design techniques that are conventional for the genre. Whether it is a résumé, memo, or report, your communication should exhibit complete and appropriate format. All writing for the course should be printed clearly, including draft work.
- **Grammar, Spelling, Proofreading.** At work, even a single error in spelling, grammar, or proofreading can jeopardize the effectiveness of some communications (depending on the rhetorical situation). Grading will reflect the great seriousness with which these matters are frequently viewed in the working world. If you would like special assistance with any of these skills, I can recommend sources for extra help.
- **Proper File Format.** All work in this class will be turned in using a drop box on ANGEL. Unless otherwise noted in class, your work will need to be submitted as PDF file. We are going to be using MS Word for a number of assignments, but you need to learn how to export from MS Word to PDF. This gets around any incompatibility issues between your computer and mine when grading. Click here for instructions on doing this in Windows and Mac OSX. **Corrupted files will be considered late, so please make sure to check your submissions to the drop box.**

Your final grade will be determined by the following weights:

- Rhetorical Analysis Memo 10%
- Professional Biography 10%
- Procedural Instructions 20%
- Proposal Memo for Technical Solution Report 10%
- Pitch for Technical Solution Report 10%
- Technical Solution Report 30%
- Participation 10%

The grading scale, as defined by the College of Liberal Arts, determines final letter grades based on the following values for the final grade (as defined using the rubric above):

- A - $\geq 95\%$
- A- - $< 95\% \ \&\& \ \geq 90\%$
- B+ - $< 90\% \ \&\& \ \geq 88\%$
- B - $< 88\% \ \&\& \ \geq 83\%$
- B- - $< 83\% \ \&\& \ \geq 80\%$
- C+ - $< 80\% \ \&\& \ \geq 73\%$
- C - $< 73\% \ \&\& \ \geq 70\%$
- D - $< 70\% \ \&\& \ \geq 60\%$
- F - $< 60\%$

On this chart, “ \geq ” means “greater than or equal to” and “ $<$ ” means “less than”, so that an A-, for instance, is any value greater than or equal to a 90 and less than a 95.

Additionally, I will mark your papers with letter grades when I grade. These letter grades translate to the follow values in my grading book:

- A - 100
- A- - 92
- B+ - 88
- B - 85
- B- - 81
- C+ - 77
- C - 72
- D - 65
- F - 20

With this information, you should be able to calculate your grade, as we go along, but if you have any questions about the grading of this class, please contact me in office hours.

202C Memo Format

We will write several memos in this class and it is important to have a standardized format for all communications. This is a standard practice within most organizations. For this class, all memos that do not conform to the following rules will not be graded:

- Except where otherwise noted, all memos **must** be set in 12pt., Times New Roman font.
- Document will begin with word “Memo” in 18pt., Times New Roman, bolded font at the top left of the document. This will be followed by a blank line.

- Next, there will be routing information. Routing information consists of four fields, displayed one field per line. This will be single spaced, followed by a blank line, and introduced by the name of each field followed by a colon (:) and then followed by the appropriate information. The fields are:
 - Date
 - Subject
 - To
 - From
- Memos for this class must be broken into sections. Sections will be indicated by bold font. Subsections, when used, will be in italic font. Skip a line after each section and subsection before beginning the contents of that section or subsection.
- The first section of the memo will be labelled “Overview.” This will be a short, 2-3 sentence paragraph explaining what the memo is. Why did you write it? What is it responding to? Do not treat this as an introduction to what you are talking about in the memo. This section is purely about the memo.
- Following the overview section (above), there will be a section called “Key Points.” This will consist of a bulleted list of **at most 3** bullet points. These bullet points will reveal the three key points covered in the memo.
- In each section, all content will be single-spaced. Each paragraph will be followed by a blank line. Paragraphs will not be indented.

Again, it is important to state: memos that do not conform to this standard will not be graded. If you do not know how to set up this memo format in MS Word, I will be happy to explain how either in class or in office hours.

Plagiarism (Academic Dishonesty)

Penn State defines academic integrity as the pursuit of scholarly activity in an open, honest and responsible manner. All students should act with personal integrity, respect other students’ dignity, rights and property, and help create and maintain an environment in which all can succeed through the fruits of their efforts (Faculty Senate Policy 49-20).

Dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated in this course. Dishonesty includes, but is not limited to, cheating, plagiarizing, fabricating information or citations, facilitating acts of academic dishonesty by others, having unauthorized possession of examinations, submitting work of another person or work previously used without informing the instructor, or tampering with the academic work of other students. Students who are found to be dishonest will receive academic sanctions and will be reported to the University’s Judicial Affairs office for possible further disciplinary sanction.

Note to Students with Disabilities

Penn State welcomes students with disabilities into the University’s educational programs. If you have a disability-related need for modifications or reasonable accommodations in this course, contact the Office for Disability Services, ODS, located at 116 Boucke Building at 814-863-1807. For further information regarding ODS please visit their web site at <http://www.equity.psu.edu/ods>. Instructors should be notified as early in the semester as possible regarding the need for modification or reasonable accommodations. Since many students have disabilities not readily noticeable this announcement or statement encourages students to identify their needs early in the semester so timely adaptations can be made.

Assignment Descriptions

Rhetorical Analysis Memo

Individual Project

This class is built upon the standard rhetorical triangle of ethos, logos and pathos. You need to understand how these elements work together as forms of persuasion and construction since I will evaluate your presentation of ethos, logos and pathos in every work you create for this class. Following our discussion of the ways in which technical communicators use visual and textual means to establish these three forms of persuasion, you will find a piece of technical communication from the real world (this can be anything from a corporate website to a flier you see around campus) and study how the authors of the document deployed the three appeals in the document's creation. Report your findings to me in a 600 word memo that conforms to the our class format (see "202C Memo Format" above).

Professional Biography

Individual Project

Many business people are well-served by having a brief professional biography. For this assignment, you will be writing a 1 page biography that describes:

- your work experience
- your career goals
- your relevant skills
- your hobbies

This document could form the basis of a professional website or be incorporated into a profile for a service such as LinkedIn. In any case, your document needs to be more than just a collection of facts: it must capture a sense of purpose, direction, and an overwhelming sense of what makes you unique and interesting. Your document must also include a professionally appropriate photograph of yourself.

Procedural Instructions

Group Project

In order to further understand the role audience plays in determining the shape of technical documents, you will be producing a set of procedural instructions for a specific task. You will create a document detailing how a task is accomplished, with in-depth, step-by-step instructions. The readers of your procedures are not technical people or specialists with the technology you're documenting—they are using your documentation for help and advice because they are new to this piece of equipment, technical process or new to this technology. Your document will conform to the requirements listed in the "process explanation" entry in your textbook. In addition to the actual instructions, the document will contain the following elements:

- Introduction explaining the purpose of the document
- Definition of key terms
- Safety information
- Illustrations to assist the reader

Your final document needs to use some color and have an innovative way of presenting its information (inviting prose voice, attractive color use and have a new way to organize old information). You will

be working in groups of two to complete this assignment.

Proposal for Technical Solution Report

Individual Project

In anticipation of the Technical Solution Report (see below), you will write an informal proposal outlining the topic of your report and the solution you will be suggesting. This project has two purposes: 1) to familiarize you with the process of proposing a project and waiting for approval before continuing; 2) to make sure that your group is on the right track before you get too involved in writing your final project. This document should be between 600 and 1200 words, and will be in correctly formatted memo (see “202C Memo Format” above). Upon submission and review on my part, I will give you feedback on your proposal. At this point, you will all divide into groups of three, select a proposal that seems to be most promising for completion of the Technical Solution Report (see below). This proposal will then provide the basis for your final group project.

Pitch for Technical Solution Report

Group Project

As Powerpoint slides are an increasingly important element of any technical communication strategy, your group will assemble a pitch for your Technical Solution Report (see below). A pitch is a dynamic, fluid presentation meant to get feedback about a project. Unlike formal “presentations” you may have done in other venues, pitches should be interesting as well as informative. Due to their informal nature, pitches are more interactive than other presentations. You may be interrupted in the middle of your talk. Plan accordingly. For this pitch, your group is to share with your classmates and myself what problem your group will address in the Technical Solution Report (below) and to outline the solution you will propose. You will present a 5 minute pitch, lead a question and answer session afterwards (around 5 minutes in length), and design a set of attractive and functional slides in Powerpoint or one of the online slide tools discussed in class (Prezi, Google Documents, etc.). After the meeting, you will upload your presentation to ANGEL.

Technical Solution Report

Group Project

You will choose a problem in the local area (Penn State, State College, or another community in Pennsylvania) that requires a technological or scientific solution, and then you will research, create and propose a solution for this problem. You should choose a problem that is fairly straight-forward, and propose a solution that is equally straight-forward. You do not have much time to complete this project so do not choose a problem that requires a full week of research from everyone in your group—choose something that arises from the expertise of the members of your group. This proposal should contain a table of contents, an executive summary (introduction), a historical overview of the problem, a review of the technical specifications required as part of your solution, a detailed narrative of how your proposed solution will be put into effect, and provide a timeline for the solution that indicates starting point, review/evaluation points, testing points, and delivery (end) point. You need to assemble all this information into a clear, precise package with a professional cover, using professional layout and graphics. The final report should be at least 25 pages long, but most good, comprehensive technical solution reports tend to be longer.

Class Schedule

Readings from *The Handbook of Technical Writing* to be completed for class are in parentheses.

- 1
 - 01.09 M Syllabus Overview, What is Communication?, Rhetorical Triangle
 - 01.11 W Writing Concisely, More Rhetorical Theory (“Persuasion”, “Voice”, “Telegraphic Style”)
 - 01.13 F Communicating Clearly, Communicating With Purpose (“Audience”, “Context”, “Style”, “Technical Writing Style”)
- 2
 - 01.16 M **No Class for MLK Day**
 - 01.18 W Basic Design Theory (“Layout & Design”)
 - 01.20 F Design Activity
- 3
 - 01.23 M Rhetorical Analysis Assignment Introduction, Memo Writing
 - 01.25 W Organizing a Memo; Rhetorical Analysis Exercise
 - 01.27 F Rhetorical Analysis Exercise
- 4
 - 01.30 M Rough Draft of Rhetorical Analysis Due
 - 02.01 W Professional Biography Assignment Introduction (**Rhetorical Analysis Due By 5PM**)
 - 02.03 F Writing About Yourself or You’re So Vain ... (“The ‘You’ Viewpoint”)
- 5
 - 02.06 M Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Google+
 - 02.08 W
 - 02.10 F Biography Writing Exercise
- 6
 - 01.13 M Introduction to Instruction Set Assignment (**Biography Due By 5PM**)
 - 01.15 W Instruction Set
 - 01.17 F Instruction Set
- 7
 - 02.20 M Instruction Set
 - 02.22 W Instruction Set
 - 02.24 F Instruction Set
- 8
 - 02.27 M Instruction Set
 - 02.29 W Instruction Set
 - 03.02 F Instruction Set
- 9
 - 03.05 M **Spring Break**

	03.07 W	
	03.09 F	
10	03.12 M	In-class Consultations on Instruction Set
	03.14 W	Rough Draft Review for Instruction Set
	03.16 F	Proposal (Instruction Set Due by 5PM)
11	03.19 M	Proposal
	02.21 W	Proposal
	03.23 F	Proposal
12	03.26 M	Introduction to Pitch Assignment (Proposal Due By 5PM)
	03.28 W	Designing Effective Slides
	03.30 F	Pitch Design Exercise
13	04.02 M	In-Class Pitch Presentations (Upload Slides By 5PM If Presenting Today)
	04.04 W	In-Class Pitch Presentations (Upload Slides By 5PM If Presenting Today)
	04.06 F	In-Class Pitch Presentations (Upload Slides By 5PM If Presenting Today)
14	04.09 M	Report
	04.11 W	Report
	04.13 F	Report
15	04.16 M	Report
	01.18 W	Report
	04.20 F	Report
16	04.23 M	Report
	04.25 W	Report
	04.27 F	(Technical Solution Report Due By 5PM.)