

Writing in the Technical Professions

ENGL 321, Section 6
3 Credits
Spring 2013
Tuesday & Thursday 9:30 to 10:45
South Engineering RM 314

Instructor: Dr. Josh Webster
Office Hours: Tuesday and Thursday 3:30 to 5:30; by appointment
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"I can't believe it! Reading and writing actually paid off!"

Matt Groening, The Simpsons

Required Texts:

- *Technical Communication Today* by Richard Johnson-Sheehan, 4th Edition

Course Description:

As stated in the *Bulletin*, this course focuses on:

“Intensive practice employing the conventions of professional genres to write about technology development and use for expert, business, and more general audiences. Prereq: ENGL 120, Junior standing.”

Essentially, this course is designed to prepare you to write in your professional career by exposing you to the different genres and mediums of communication utilized by technical professionals in an increasingly tech-savvy world. Furthermore, we will also examine how technological innovations are marketed to their respective publics, so that you might become a more effective advocate of your own technical work. To that end, this course will require you to produce documents that address a wide range of target audiences, and understand the process of rhetorical decision making that allows a writer to perform successfully in a given writing situation.

Goals and Objectives:

This course is designed to fulfill two General Education Outcomes:

- Gen. Ed. Outcome 1: Students will learn to communicate effectively in various genres for different audiences, purposes and situations.

- Gen. Ed. Outcome 6: Students will learn to integrate knowledge and ideas in a coherent and meaningful manner.

In addition, this course also fulfills the following English Department Goal:

- Students will learn to manage sophisticated writing and research projects, planning, documenting, completing, and assessing work on time and within the constraints of the project.

Course Assignments:

To demonstrate achievement of these goals and objectives, students will complete a variety of course assignments including:

- **A Professional E-mail** detailing the students' prior experiences with writing in their field and their understanding of rhetoric.
- **A Cover Letter, Résumé, and Research Memo** rhetorically tailored to an actual position/internship/graduate program.
- **A Tech Blog** consisting of at least four entries including an explanation of the student's particular technical field, a review of a technology, an analysis of a recent technical development and a reflection on an ethical issue in technology. As part of this assignment, you will also be required to read other student's blogs and respond to them in a thoughtful, critical fashion.
- **An Instructions and Documentation Project** consisting of both print instructions as well as video instructions.
- **A Midterm Activity Report** that details the student's performance in the class at the mid-semester point.
- **A Group Marketing Project** designed to spread awareness and interest in a technical innovation. Each group will produce a formal proposal backed by market research, a promotional website, a technical description and design a usability test for their innovation. Each group will be required to present their project to the class.
- **A Final Portfolio** that includes carefully revised documents from at least three different genres as well as an analytical report focused on the student's performance in the course.

I will give you a handout for each formal assignment in the course detailing what is expected of you along with a rubric explaining how I'll grade the assignment. I'm not in the business of confusing or mystifying students in regards to my expectations, and I'll make every possible effort to make them clear to you.

In addition to completing course projects, students are expected to revise, reconsider, re-imagine and revamp their work throughout the semester. Successful writers are rarely, if ever, focused on perfection but almost always concerned with improvement.

Grades:

I grade on a point system in which each formal assignment is worth a set number of points. The point breakdown is as follows:

Professional E-mail	50 Points
Tech Blog	100 Points
Cover Letter/Résumé:	100 Points
Instructions Project:	100 Points
Activity Report:	50 Points
Marketing Project:	250 Points
Final Portfolio:	250 Points
<u>Participation:</u>	<u>100 Points</u>
Total Points:	1000

Your final grade for the course is the sum total of your points translated to a letter grade by the following scale:

A	900-1000
B	800-899
C	700-799
D	600-699
F	599 or Below

Here's the good news: you can revise, with the exception of the Group Marketing Project, any formal assignment in this course and resubmit it as part of your Final Portfolio. I will regrade documents submitted in this fashion, with the revision grade replacing the original. I also encourage you to resubmit documents to me throughout the semester for further feedback.

If you ever have any questions or concerns about a grade you've received in my course, feel free to discuss it with me during my office hours or in a private appointment (I won't discuss grades in class). I do ask that you wait 48 hours after receiving a grade before approaching me about a grade concern; take some time to cool off, consider my comments, and consider your thoughts on those comments so that we can discuss the matter in a productive mindset.

All course projects are required and must be completed in order to pass this course.

Other Policies and Concerns:

Academic Honesty - As stated in the *Handbook of Student Policies*: "The academic community is operated on the basis of honesty, integrity, and fair play. Occasionally, this trust is violated when cheating occurs, either inadvertently or deliberately. This code will serve as the guideline for cases where cheating, plagiarism, or other academic improprieties have occurred. . . . Faculty members may fail the student for the particular

assignment, test, or course involved, or they may recommend that the student drop the course in question, or these penalties may be varied with the gravity of the offense and the circumstances of the particular case” (65). Given that this course is designed to help you gain skills necessary for your success in the workplace, I believe that you’re doing yourself no favors by plagiarizing or cheating. That said, violations of the academic honesty policy may result in an “F” for the assignment (no chance for revision), an “F” in the course or other disciplinary action.

A full description of the Academic Honesty policy used by the English Department can be found at:

http://www.ndsu.edu/english/majors_and_minors/english_department_policies_attendance_and_academic_honesty/

Attendance - In compliance with NDSU University Policy, Section 333: Class Attendance and Policy and Procedure, the English Department has established the following attendance policy. All English Department courses require active learning. Students are expected to speak, listen, and contribute. Therefore, prompt, regular attendance is required. Students who miss more than four weeks of class during the standard academic semester (e.g. twelve 50 minute classes, eight 75 minute classes, or their equivalent) will not pass the course. Moreover, each student is accountable for all work missed because of absence, and instructors have no obligation to make special arrangements for missed work. Additional attendance requirements may be implemented at the discretion of the individual instructor.

I have noticed a direct correlation between a student’s attendance and their ability to pass this course, so it is in your best interest to attend each class session as much of your learning in this course will come from our class discussion and group activities. Also, I will, after your third unexcused absence, subtract fifty points from your final total for each absence thereafter.

Special Needs (ADA) - Any students with disabilities or other special needs, who need special accommodations in this course are invited to share these concerns or requests with the instructor as soon as possible and contact the office of Disability Services at 231-8463.

Cell Phones and Computers – If you haven’t guessed from the course assignments, I’m a fan of technology when it’s used for productive purposes. At times, you will have the opportunity to use your computers and smart phones in class and you’re welcome to take notes on a laptop, but don’t abuse the privilege. If you’re texting on your phone, you aren’t present in our classroom mentally, so I will dismiss you physically and mark you absent. In general, all phones should be turned to silent or shut off entirely in class (certain situations such as pregnant spouses and gravely ill relatives that require you to leave your cell phone on are acceptable, but let me know in advance). If a trend of improper cell phone usage develops for individual students or the class as a whole, I will begin collecting cell phones before class as a condition of attendance.

Late Work and Extensions – As a matter of professionalism and responsible behavior in general, you are expected to submit assignments on time. If an assignment will be late, you need to arrange for an extension in advance, and I make no promise to grade late assignments (any assignment submitted after its due date will, at least, receive fewer points).