ENGL 421 Technical Writing

Instructor Information

Instructor: Don Unger
Office: Heavilon 210
Office Hours: Tues. 2-3 pm or by appointment
Email: ungerd@purdue.edu

Course Overview

English 421 aims to help you become a better technical communicator. A technical communicator's work is characterized by the presentation of technical material in written and visual formats that are user centered; this means that such materials are keenly aware of purpose, audience, and context. The course and its principles are grounded in rhetorical theory and informed by current research in professional and technical communication.

Communication across multiple audiences and for multiple purposes continues to be a desired skill set in technical and professional fields. Beyond field-specific knowledge and experience, successful and ethical communication drives the professional world. This class, in content and form, models these successful communication practices. Working individually and in groups, you will learn effective strategies for communicating about and with technology. To achieve success in this course, you must display the ability to succeed in your future workplaces by developing a variety of informative and visually effective print and electronic documents.

Course Texts

Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. *Technical Communication Today*, 5th ed. ISBN: 978-0-321-90798-1
Additional readings posted to Blackboard course site.

Course Projects & Participation

Projects

Project 1— Designing Professional Identities (Professional Portfolios)
For this project you develop professional portfolios. These portfolios include application letters and resumes, as well as background materials that will help you demonstrate your qualifications to a specific employer. While you may have discussed and developed similar materials in other classes, this project addresses how to approach the job market rhetorically. In other words, you will focus on creating new materials or adapting materials you have already created for a specific employer. If you are planning on applying to graduate schools, then you may opt to work on creating materials for application to a specific program. Finally, we will move beyond the documents that comprise a professional portfolio and include discussions of and practice with interviews.

Deliverables
Step 1: Employer-Background Memo. At the beginning of Project 1, you learn about and use various web-based resources for job seekers and select one job or internship to pursue in this project. At the end of Step 1, you will create an employer-background memo aimed at guiding the construction of subsequent documents.

Steps 2—4: Self-Assessment Memo, Application Letter, and Resume/CV. Throughout much of Project 1, you construct or adapt your professional documents to respond to that employer's needs.

Step 5: Mock Interviews. Working in teams, you will compose mock interview questions and conduct mock interviews. This includes assessing one another based on interview responses.

Project 2—Documenting Changes in Business Practices and Procedures (White Papers)
For this project, consider the following scenario:

> Throughout your college career, you had big dreams of being hired on by a large company known for its innovative business practices and technology. Let's face it, you just really wanted to be hired by Google or Space X. However, come graduation you have been hired at a small company in your field. The company has 20 employees and is located in a mid-sized town roughly the size of Lafayette, IN. Although a smaller company, your boss has big dreams of competing alongside the heavyweights in the industry. However, the company is stuck in a cubicle-filled, dreary workplace with outdated technology and no real idea how to make changes. Because you are a new hire, your boss selects you to gather information on innovative business practices and procedure to be presented to a task force looking to improve the company's standing. This task force includes all the higher-ups in the company, and your information will be one of the deciding factors on what direction the company should go to move into the 21st century.

Task: Scale-down an innovative, high-end business model to a feasible, affordable plan for your company.

In any profession, one educates him/herself about a breaking issue in the field by doing some background research. This may be done formally or informally, through online research, in the library or public records, or at the conference table by asking others what they know about your subject. In this project, you will exercise your profiling, report writing, and document design skills.

You are free to choose what company you would like to profile, as well as the specific industry of your new employer. Choose a field that interests you, one you have worked in before, or one you would like to work with in the future. Use this assignment to show how innovative, creative, and self-disciplined you can be.

Using the material in your textbook on reports, as well as our analysis of models and examples of reports, compose a white paper that documents your research findings. The aim of this report is to profile an industry-leading company in a backgrounder (giving sufficient information on that company's location, size, personnel, workspace, business practices, mission, etc.), then articulate the changes, steps, or positions your new employer could take to emulate that company's success. To that end, use library, web, and field research and your own industry knowledge to compose a white paper of appropriate length (including content, images, appendices, graphs, etc.) that outlines these positions and gives decision makers relevant data for their work.

You may choose one of the following three areas as the focus for your white paper:
1. Work place/space design, including new technology and architectural elements
2. Workplace culture, including scheduling, work flow, and communication
3. Technology, focusing primarily on unique uses or innovative work solutions

Course readings for Project 2 serve two purposes: they introduce you to professional writing practices, and they address ongoing debates about the role technology plays in shaping professional contexts.

Project 3—Designing Instructions (Usability Project)
More than likely, you have used instructions in a variety of circumstances during your lifetime. Often, these types of documents are the least noticed; however, they are one of the most important documents in the technical workplace because they help to guide workers' actions

when completing tasks.

During this project, you will work in a production team to create a set of instructions for http://www.instructables.com. Your group will create a usable product that costs under $50 to produce.

Here are a couple examples of the types of projects you might consider:
Tacuino: a low-cost, modular, Arduino-compatible educational platform
http://www.instructables.com/id/Tacuino-a-low-cost-modular-Arduino-compatible-educ/

Coinflip: The coin flipping catapult
http://www.instructables.com/id/Coinapult-The-Coin-Flipping-Catapult/

Cheap Artbots for Workshops
http://www.instructables.com/id/Cheap-Artbots-for-Workshops/

Deliverables

Step 1: Project-Plan and Audience-Analysis Memos. Your group will compose one memo that outlines how your group will complete the project and divide the labor involved (including a project overview and rationale, as well as a timeline with a corresponding set of tasks). When drafting the memo, you will imagine your reader as being your immediate supervisor in a professional workplace. You will also compose an audience-analysis memo using information from our textbook as a guide. This memo should address who would use your product and when, where, and how they would use it.

Step 2: Draft Instructions. Following our analysis of models/examples of Instructables documentation, you will compose instructions that will be posted on instructables.com. You will be required to thoroughly document your instructions using both images and text.

Step 3: Usability Testing. At the same time that you work on Step 2, you will begin usability testing. As part of this process, you will need to have your friends, co-workers, etc. use your instructions to see (a) how useful and usable your instructions are and (b) what improvements you need to make to your instructions. In addition, you will design a questionnaire that both addresses items that correspond to the instruction's features and goals and elicits informative and useful responses from your users regarding their interaction with your group's instructions. You will administer the questionnaire as a survey that users will complete as they work with your instructions. Following the completion of all of your group's questionnaires, groups will be responsible for handing in two items:
1. An assessment report that documents your usability findings, including images of your users testing the instructions, that includes: Overview and Summary (project background, preview findings, report's outline); Methods (dates, numbers of participants, procedures users engaged in, group members' responsibilities), Findings/Results (suggestions users made, necessary revisions made to the instructions); Conclusion (recap findings).
2. A copy of the original questionnaire, and your original instructions used to for usability testing. Your report should account for the changes your group made to revise instructions.

You will turn these in through the course site, also individually, but with each group member turning in the same materials.

Step 4: Final Instructions. You will revise your instructions based on your usability testing. Final instructions will be posted to Instructables.

Step 5: Project Assessment. After completing your deliverables, your group will assess its composing practices. Specifically, your group will describe its reasoning for the rhetorical decisions it made when composing the project deliverables. In addition, your group will comment on its use of technology in completing the deliverables. The focus of this deliverable is to help group members practice the act of documenting the processes/activities of group work in a professional workplace. Your project assessments will be composed individually, so each team member is required to turn in an assessment.

Team Activity-Report Memos. Production teams are responsible for creating an activity report memo at the beginning of each week. Activity reports are similar to the reports you will have to give a boss about your group's progress. Bosses want to keep track of what a team is doing, what problems are arising, how much things are costing, etc, so they often request reports at regular intervals to check in. These activity reports do the same thing for your team. I want to make sure things are going smoothly, and I want to address problems that arise. Accordingly, make your activity reports specific and detailed so I know how things are progressing for your groups. TARs will be due as deliverables every Sunday.

Participation

Assigned readings should be completed before class. All students are expected to be prepared for class sessions with comments and questions related to the reading. Being unprepared will negatively affect participation grades.

This portion of your grade will be based on:
- the quality and frequency of your questions and comments in class discussions and group activities related to the readings and course projects.
- the degree to which your comments offer insightful feedback and suggestions to your colleagues.
- the degree to which your comments engage with the course content.
- turning all coursework in completed and on time.

Grading

Project 1—Designing Professional Identities (Professional Portfolio)	100 points
Project 2—Documenting Changes in Business Practices (White Paper)	100 points
Project 3—Designing Instructions (Usability Project)	100 points
Participation	100 points
Total	400 points

The three major projects in the course include components, each of which will be worth a portion of your grade.

All major assignments will be graded on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale:
A=94-100, A-=93-90, B+==89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D+=69-67, D=66-64, D-=63-60, F=59 or below.

You **must** participate in all of the three major projects and complete a majority of the required posting assignments in order to pass this class.

IMPORTANT: You are expected to keep track of your own progress in this course—so be sure to save those emails that include feedback and current grades for each of the three major projects you'll complete during the course of the semester. While final project grades will be posted to Blackboard Learn, I won't have time to provide on-demand individual "grade reports" during the semester.

Other Course Requirements & Expectations

Technology Requirements
In order to participate fully in the course, you should already be able to use the technology platform and applications listed below.

- Mac OS X or Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7
- Microsoft Office for the PC or Mac (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) or Apple counterparts (Pages, Keynote, Numbers)
- Web Browser (e.g., Firefox, Safari, or Internet Explorer 8)
- Email Program (e.g., Purdue Webmail, Thunderbird, Gmail, etc.)
- Adobe Acrobat and Reader (for PDF documents, collaborative review)

Technology Responsibilities
Familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for participation and success in the course. If you need any assistance now or at any point during the semester, please do not hesitate to ask.

During the semester, you'll need regular access to the Internet and email. Because the course Blackboard Learn site is the main locus of the class community, you are responsible for reading and keeping current with all content posted there, including what has been submitted by both the instructor and your fellow students. You'll be responsible for configuring your system to access course materials, to read course email and participate in online discussions, and to submit your work. Over the course of the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate that you can meet these responsibilities:

- Becoming proficient sending and receiving email attachments, resolving file compatibility issues, and following professional email decorum.
- Becoming proficient participating in the class Blackboard Learn space.
- Becoming more proficient with unfamiliar composing technologies and applications, including various web-based, desktop publishing, and graphic design applications.
- Maintaining back-up copies of all assignments via your home directory, portable storage devices (e.g., USB drives) or various cloud storage spaces (e.g., DropBox).

IMPORTANT: If at any time you have problems accessing the Internet from home, you'll need to find a public lab or connection point. Problems with computers will not be an excuse for falling behind or failing to complete required assignments. If your Internet service goes down, find another connection point. If your computer breaks, use another one. In other words, find a way to complete the assignments on time. Because computer problems are a fact of life, always work to complete your assignments early and make frequent backups to multiple storage devices.

Collaborative Work
Teamwork is a required component of the course. You and your production team members are responsible for updating one another and me about assignment development and progress. In addition, you also are responsible for negotiating all aspects of your work together, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and delegating assignments. When a collaborative project is assigned, you will receive explicit guidelines for successful collaboration.

Attendance
Attendance is required at all scheduled face-to-face and online meetings. Because you will be working in production teams for part of the semester, you also will be required to attend any scheduled out-of-class meetings with your team in order to complete course assignments. **More than four absences from regular class meetings will result in your current project grade being lowered by a letter (e.g., from a "B" to a "C").** Excused absences may be granted for religious holidays or university-sponsored events, provided you make a written request to me no less than two weeks in advance and that you complete any required work before the due

date. Being excessively or regularly late for class or team meetings, both face-to-face and online, can also be counted as an absence. Do not send or bring me Doctor's notes or notes from PUSH. If you require medical attention during class time, then contact the Office of the Dean of Students. They will contact your instructors for you.

Academic Integrity

Purdue students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students," which students are encouraged to read here: http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php

The preamble of this guide states the following: "Purdue University values intellectual integrity and the highest standards of academic conduct. To be prepared to meet societal needs as leaders and role models, students must be educated in an ethical learning environment that promotes a high standard of honor in scholastic work. Academic dishonesty undermines institutional integrity and threatens the academic fabric of Purdue University. Dishonesty is not an acceptable avenue to success. It diminishes the quality of a Purdue education, which is valued because of Purdue's high academic standards."

Academic dishonesty is defined as follows: "Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [University Regulations, Part V, Section III, B, 2, a] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972]

If you have any questions about this policy, please ask.

IMPORTANT: I will assign a grade of F (zero) to written work that violates this policy, and reserve the right to fail policy violators for the course. I also reserve the right to initiate proceedings with the Dean of Students, for particularly egregious cases of academic dishonesty. If you have any questions about this policy, please ask!

In Case of a Campus Emergency

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. You can acquire updated information from the course website, by emailing me, or by contacting me through the English Department at 765-494-3740.

Late Work

Missed class assignments *cannot* be made up. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact me in writing prior to the deadline to determine whether or not an extension for that work will or will not be granted.

Calendar		
Project 1	Week 1: 1.12—1.18	**Course Intro**
	Week 2: 1.19—1.25	**Project 1 Intro**
Designing Professional Identities	Week 3: 1.26—2.1	
	Week 4: 2.2—2.15	
	Week 5: 2.16—2.22	**Project 1 Due 2.22**
Project 2	Week 6: 2.23—3.1	**Project 2 Intro**
	Week 7: 3.2—3.8	
Documenting Changes in Business Practices	Week 8: 3.9—3.15	
	Week 9: 3.16—3.22	**(Spring Break)**
	Week 10: 3.23—3.29	**Project 2 Due 3.29**
Project 3	Week 11: 3.30—4.5	**Project 3 Intro**
	Week 12: 4.6—4.12	
Designing Instructions	Week 13: 4.13—4.19	
	Week 14: 4.20—4.26	
	Week 15: 4.27—5.3	**Course Wrap Up**
	Finals Week: 5.4—5.9	**Project 3 Due 5.6**