

ENGL 305: Technical Writing

West Virginia University, Fall 2017

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Getting started

Contacting me

Welcome to English 305! The best way to contact me is via email at john.jones@mail.wvu.edu. If you would like to speak with me on the phone, meet in my office, or chat online, you should contact me via email to schedule an appointment. My scheduled office hours are from 1–2 p.m. on Mondays and Tuesdays. Additionally, I am available most weekdays (M–F) between 9–4 (and some evenings). Barring emergencies, I will respond to all emails M–F within 24 hours; my responses may take longer on weekends and holidays.

This course is based on tutorial-style learning. You can contact me anytime for help; however, **it is crucial that you take a personal, vigorous initiative for your own learning in this course.** I will act as your mentor, not as a lecturer or a day-to-day monitor of your learning. In order to succeed in this course, you have to have the self-direction to keep track of work due, to keep up a pace of continuous learning, to contact me when necessary, and to keep a record of what you've done.

Required texts and readings

You must have the required textbook for this course.

- Richard Johnson-Sheehan (2018). *Technical Communication Today*. 6th Edition. ISBN: 978-0-13-442573-3

You can purchase this textbook at the WVU Bookstore, either in person, by phone at 304-293-7461, or via the Internet at <http://wvu.bncollege.com>.

For some assignments, you may be required to locate additional reading material on your own using the Internet or WVU Libraries' search tools (<http://lib.wvu.edu>). **The library will be**

your primary search portal for the assignments related to the report, so be sure that you are familiar with the site and its search tools. These readings and all other textbook reading assignments are listed by week in the "Weekly Coursework" section of our WVU Ecampus course site and in the schedule below (see **Table 3**).

Other requirements

- Regular access to a computer and the Internet (on-campus computer access is provided by the Office of Information Technology and the WVU Libraries)
- A MIX email account
- Reliable access to Ecampus

In order to make sure you don't miss important information, **you should check your MIX email and the announcements section on Ecampus at least once a day.** Most work will be submitted via Ecampus as attached documents (rich text [.rtf], MS Word [.doc, .docx], or PDF [.pdf]). This means your computer and Internet connection must be reliable. Prepare a back-up plan for yourself in the case that some technology mishaps occur.

Finally, if you want to participate fully in online office hours, it would be useful to have a webcam and headset with microphone in order to communicate visually, orally, and aurally. If your computer has a built-in webcam and microphone, this should suffice for our needs in this class. If you have headphones with a microphone (such as those that sometimes come with smartphones) these will likely work with your computer as well. If you don't have this equipment, then you will be limited to text chatting (which is much less effective).

Course information

Description

This course will introduce you to strategies for translating between discipline-specific knowledge and audiences of interested

outsiders. In other words, you will be introduced to a range of skills that will enable you to communicate technical information in a form that is understandable to people who were previously unfamiliar with that information.

In this online course, we will explore the forms of technical writing that are common in the professions, including résumés, instructions, memos, reports, and presentations. Drawing on the expertise developed in your major, you will develop technical writing skills through your engagement with topics and issues important to the work you plan to do. While we will cover topics traditionally understood as technical — such as those in engineering, architecture, and computer science — technical writing encompasses any topic that must be explained to an involved, but not expert, audience. Because a primary assumption of this course is that all writing emerges from and responds to a particular problem, audience, and purpose, the course will focus on helping you develop multiple writing strategies for diverse communication situations.

Objectives

By the end of the semester, students who earn a passing grade in the course (C- or above) will have demonstrated their ability to:

- Specify and adapt to the constraints of the rhetorical situation, especially an audience's knowledge of a topic and its desired uses for a document or genre.

Course work and grading

You will be graded on your scores on quizzes, your participation in discussion board forums, and a range of technical communication assignments (major assignments) — a collection of job materials, a set of instructions, a memo detailing a usability test of those instructions, and a report (including a proposal and presentation). The points for these assignments can be found in **Table 1**.

	%	TOTAL POINTS
Quizzes	13%	130
Discussion Board Forums	10%	100
Job Materials	12%	40/80 (1st/2nd submission)
Instructions	15%	50/100 (1st/2nd)
Usability Test Memo	10%	100
Report	25%	55/30/165 (proposal/peer review/final)
Presentation	15%	150

Table 1: Course point breakdown by assignment

Grading

Grade descriptors. The following descriptors will give you an idea of the expectations that I have when evaluating your work.

- Conduct research to gain command of a technical subject and to invent the contents of communication, including navigating the WVU Libraries and external databases to access peer-reviewed research sources and citing research materials using the APA Style.
- Convey clearly and precisely the technical aspects of a topic to a non-specialist audience.
- Evaluate and modify a document to ensure its usability and accessibility for a particular audience or audiences.
- Apply technology to organize and design a document in ways that support reader comprehension.

In line with the goals of the WVU BA Program in English, these objectives will enable students who successfully complete the course to

- Interpret texts within diverse literary, cultural, and historical contexts;
- Demonstrate a general knowledge of the social and structural aspects of the English language; and
- Demonstrate a range of contextually effective writing strategies.

A: Excellent represents excellent participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all course work.

B: Above average represents above average participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in course work.

C: Average represents good participation in all course activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in course work.

D: Below average represents uneven participation in course activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in course work.

F: Inadequate represents minimal participation in course activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in course work.

+/- Grades. I will use +/- grades for the final course grades. The +/- grades correspond to the numeric ranges below.

A+: 97+	C+: 77–79	F: 0–59
A: 93–96	C: 73–76	
A-: 90–92	C-: 70–72	
B+: 87–89	D+: 67–69	
B: 83–86	D: 63–66	
B-: 80–82	D-: 60–62	

Unless extenuating circumstances intervene, **I will provide you with grades on all of your major assignments within one week of their due date (this does not apply to work turned in late; feedback on late work may take longer).** If I am unable to grade your projects in this time frame, I will inform you of this fact as soon I am able to do so.

Additional information about the major assignments will be provided throughout the semester as these assignments become due.

Quizzes

For each week in which readings are assigned you will take a quiz. These quizzes and activities are designed to ensure that you are reading the material and to help you remember that material as you prepare for the major assignments. The quizzes are comprehensive of that week's readings and material previously covered in the course and/or posted to the Ecampus site

Discussion board forums

There will be 10 graded Discussion Board Forums (DB Forums). Prompts and other guides for your posts will be speci-

fied within weekly coursework modules. For the majority of the DB Forums you will post both an initial post and response(s) to the posts of your classmates. When both initial and response posts are required, the points for that week's DB Forum will be equally split between the initial post and the replies (i.e. if you post an initial post and fail to post the replies, you will receive half the available points for that DB Forum).

It is a good practice to write your posts in an offline text editor (like Notepad or MS Word) and then copy and paste them into the Ecampus discussion board. If Ecampus automatically logs you off of the course page while you are in the midst of writing a post, all of your work will be lost, and you'll have to start over from scratch.

Points for weekly forum posts are earned based on the quality and substance of both your initial post and your response posts to peers. The rubric in **Table 2** (by WVU's Jill Woods) will give you an idea of my expectations for your posts.

	A: EXCELLENT	B: ABOVE-AVERAGE	C: AVERAGE	D: BELOW AVERAGE	F: INADEQUATE
Critical Thinking	Rich in content, insight and analysis	Contains substantial information, thought, insight, and analysis has clearly taken place	Generally competent, yet information is thin and commonplace	Rudimentary and superficial, displaying no analysis or insight	Displays no analysis or insight
Connections	Clear connection to previous or current content, course readings, and to real-life situations	Contains new connections that lack depth or detail	Limited, if any connections or vague generalities	No connections are made or are off topic	Makes no connections
Uniqueness	New ideas and new connections made with depth and detail	Contains new ideas that lack depth or detail	Few, if any, new ideas; rehashes or summarizes other postings	No new ideas or "I agree/disagree with..." statement without explanation	Contributes no new ideas
Timeliness	All required postings appear early and throughout the discussion	All required postings with some not in time for others to respond	All required postings with most at the last minute without allowing time for others to respond	Some or all required postings missing	Most or all required postings missing
Stylistics	Few grammatical or stylistic errors	Several grammatical or stylistic errors	Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors that interfere with the readability of content	Obvious grammatical or stylistic errors that make understanding nearly impossible	Grammatical or stylistic errors make understanding nearly impossible or impossible

Table 2: DB forum grading rubric

Schedule

The information in **Table 3** will give you an idea of course requirements and due dates. Be advised: items on the schedule

are subject to change. However, I will notify you (via Ecampus) of any changes to the schedule.

	DUE DATES	READINGS	FORUM POST	QUIZ	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 1 Course Introduction	Wed. 8/16				
	Sun. 8/20	Course materials, including "Start Here" section of Ecampus, announcements, & syllabus; <i>Technical Communication Today (TCT)</i> Ch. 1–2	DB Forum #1: Syllabus questions	Quiz #1: Course materials; <i>TCT</i> Ch. 1–2	
WEEK 2 Job Materials	Wed. 8/23	<i>TCT</i> Chs. 5–6	DB Forum #2: Class introductions	Quiz #2: <i>TCT</i> Chs. 5–6	
	Sun. 8/27		DB Forum #2: Response posts		1st submission of Job Materials due
WEEK 3 Job Materials	Wed. 8/30	<i>TCT</i> Chs. 15–16		Quiz #3: <i>TCT</i> Chs. 15–16	
	Sun. 9/3				2nd submission of Job Materials due
WEEK 4 Instructions	Wed. 9/6	<i>TCT</i> Ch. 8	DB Forum #3	Quiz #4: <i>TCT</i> Ch. 8	
	Sun. 9/10		DB Forum #3: Response posts		
WEEK 5 Instructions	Wed. 9/13	<i>TCT</i> Chs. 17–18		Quiz #5: <i>TCT</i> Chs. 17–18	
	Sun. 9/17				1st submission of Instructions & Documentation due
WEEK 6 Instructions	Wed. 9/20	<i>TCT</i> Ch. 16	DB Forum #4	Quiz #6: <i>TCT</i> Ch. 16	
	Sun. 9/24		DB Forum #4: Response posts		Revised version of Instructions & Documentation due for peer review
WEEK 7 Instructions	Wed. 9/27	<i>TCT</i> Ch. 4		Quiz #7: <i>TCT</i> Ch. 4	Peer reviews of Instructions & Documentation due
	Sun. 10/1				2nd submission of Instructions & Documentation due
WEEK 8 Usability Testing	Wed. 10/4	<i>TCT</i> Ch. 19	DB Forum #5	Quiz #8: <i>TCT</i> Ch. 19	
	Sun. 10/8		DB Forum #5: Response posts		
WEEK 9 Usability Testing	Wed. 10/11	<i>TCT</i> Ch. 13	DB Forum #6	Quiz #9: <i>TCT</i> Ch. 13	
	Sun. 10/15		DB Forum #6: Response posts		Usability Test Memo due

	DUE DATES	READINGS	FORUM POST	QUIZ	ASSIGNMENTS
WEEK 10 Reports	Wed. 10/18	TCT Chs. 9 & 14	DB Forum #7	Quiz #10: TCT Chs. 9 & 14	
	Sun. 10/22		DB Forum #7: Response posts		Scientific or Technical Controversy Report proposal due
WEEK 11 Reports	Wed. 10/25	TCT Ch. 11	DB Forum #8	Quiz #11: TCT Ch. 11	
	Sun. 10/29		DB Forum #8: Response posts		
WEEK 12 Reports	Wed. 11/1	TCT Ch. 3	DB Forum 9	Quiz #12: TCT Ch. 3	Scientific or Technical Controversy Report due for peer review
	Sun. 11/5		DB Forum #9: Response posts		Peer reviews of Scientific or Technical Controversy Report due
WEEK 13 Reports	Wed. 11/8				
	Sun. 11/12				Scientific or Technical Controversy Report due
WEEK 14 Presentations	Wed. 11/15	TCT Ch. 20	DB Forum #10	Quiz #13: TCT Ch. 20	
	Fri. 11/17		DB Forum #10: Response posts		
WEEK 15 Presentations	Wed. 11/29				
	Sun. 12/3				Scientific or Technical Controversy Presentation due

Table 3: Course schedule

Policies

Professional conduct

ENGL 305: Technical Writing is a course in the Professional Writing and Editing (PWE) program at WVU. The PWE program is designed to prepare students for careers as professional communicators, and for this reason many aspects of PWE courses are designed to replicate professional experiences. In this course, you are expected to conduct yourself as a professional both in your work as well as in your interactions with the professor and your fellow students. As is the case with professionals, you are expected to complete all of your assigned work and take part in all activities, to reply to course communication in a timely manner, and to respond to all course activities and assignments as you would to comparable work activities and assignments.

Social justice

The English Department and the Professional Writing and Editing Program support WVU's commitment to social justice. In this course, you will work with your classmates to create a positive learning environment based on open communication and mutual respect.

Inclusivity

The West Virginia University community is committed to creating and fostering a positive learning and working environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and inclusion. If you are a person with a disability and anticipate needing any type of accommodation in order to participate in this class, please advise me and make appropriate arrangements with the Office of Accessibility Services (304-293-6700). For

more information on West Virginia University's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives, please see <http://diversity.wvu.edu>.

Late work

If you cannot turn your work in by the date an assignment is due, you should discuss a make-up date with me before the due date. If you do not contact me before the time an assignment is due, the assignment will be considered late.

Major assignments that are turned in after they are due will be penalized by ten (10) percentage points for each calendar day they are late.

Weekly forum posts, quizzes, and any other assignments will not be accepted late.

Although each situation is unique, in general a problem with technology will not be considered an acceptable excuse for late or incomplete work. If your computer malfunctions, it is your responsibility to find a different place to work. If your Internet goes out, you will need to find a different access point. And you should create multiple redundant backups of your work in case you accidentally erase, overwrite, or otherwise lose your files.

Academic integrity

The integrity of the classes offered by any academic institution solidifies the foundation of its mission and cannot be sacrificed to expediency, ignorance, or blatant fraud. Therefore, I will enforce rigorous standards of academic integrity in all aspects and assignments of this course. For the detailed policy of West Virginia University regarding the definitions of acts considered to fall under academic dishonesty and possible ensuing sanctions, please see the West Virginia University Academic Catalog at <http://catalog.wvu.edu/undergraduate/coursecredittermsclassification/#academicintegritytext>. Should you have any questions about possibly improper research citations or references, or any other activity that may be interpreted as an attempt at academic dishonesty, please see me **before** the assignment is due to discuss the matter.

Online etiquette

The following is adapted from WVU-Parkersburg's online etiquette policy.

Taking an online course and corresponding via the Internet presents students and educators with the task of overcoming the lack of nonverbal signals in communication. When taking a course online, it is important to exercise etiquette in order to ensure proper interaction between the students and their instructors. The following guidelines should be followed by students participating in an online class.

Participate in the online environment. Your classmates need to hear your voice in order to feel your presence. By actively participating in your online course, your comments and ideas contribute to the collective learning and the sense of community in each class.

Share tips, help others, and ask questions. For many of us, taking online courses is a new experience. There are no "dumb" questions. Please share with your classmates by posting your questions — and answers to others' questions — on the discussion forms or via another channel.

Think before you post. Remember that we cannot see the smile on your face when you make a sarcastic comment or the experience your concern about an issue if you only state it in a few words. In other words, help us "see" you by explaining your ideas fully.

Remember a course is a course... You may be familiar with many of the previous items if you have participated in other forms of electronic communication in the past. However, Web-based courses have some added constraints not present in other arenas. Keep in mind these additional points:

Remember where you are. A virtual classroom is still a classroom, and comments that would be inappropriate in a traditional setting are likely to be inappropriate in a Web-based course as well. Treat your instructor and your fellow students with respect.

Stick to the message. Contributions to a discussion should have a clear subject header, and you need to stick to the message. Don't waste others' time by going getting sidetracked in your postings.

Read first, then write. Don't add your comments to a discussion before reading the comments of other students unless the assignment specifically asks you to. Doing so is tantamount to ignoring your fellow students and is rude. Comments related to the content of previous messages should be posted under them to keep related topics organized, and you should specify the person and the particular point you are following up on.

Work visibility

Due to the nature of the course, you will be sharing your work with your fellow classmates as part of class discussions and peer review sessions. By taking this course, you are indicating that you accept these requirements. **If you have any questions or concerns about this policy please contact me immediately.**