

WRIT 3562w Syllabus

Writing 3562W
Technical and Professional Writing
Time: TTh 01:15p - 02:30p
CO Bldg B36; VoTec 230
Section: 009
Credit: 4 Units

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Course Description

Writing 3562W focuses on writing a variety of documents for technical audiences, e.g., letters, resumes, instructions, memos, proposals, and reports. Students will select a client in their field of study for this class, and many of the documents they create will be directed toward that client. This course stresses the importance of process, audience analysis, technical communication, oral communication, visual design and usability.

Prerequisites

This course is part of the general education curriculum at the university, intended for students with junior and senior standing.

Detailed Overview and Objectives

Technical and Professional Writing. I'll be the first to admit that it sounds dry and even heartless. How creative, how stimulating, and even how "fun" can a course that includes writing instructions be? Therein lies a problem of perception and out-dated practice.

Today's world is in full-color with 5,000 fonts. There's a World Wide Web, podcasting, and video editing on affordable laptop computers. Your résumé might be an online portfolio, featuring samples of your work. An instruction manual might include a DVD, or be available online with supplemental videos.

Safety and usability also go beyond mere words. If you're writing about a potentially dangerous piece of equipment there are even ethical and legal reasons to justify using pictures and diagrams. You have choices to make: illustration or photo; color or grayscale; with or without text?

Specific objectives for this class include the abilities to:

- Analyze the needs of readers (audience) before starting a documentation project
- Create documents that meet both needs and desires so they are useful and used
- Evaluate the usability of documents throughout the development process
- Organize an appropriate professional portfolio

Required Materials

During this course, you will need the following items:

- Index cards of any size, with 4"×6" suggested for convenience
- Three-ring binder for portfolio
- Blank college-ruled paper and writing instruments

Course Text

Anderson, Paul V. *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*. Thomson. Special ed. for Univ. of Minn. 2008

Policies

Several policies that apply to all courses are mentioned in this syllabus. You must also be aware of my policies on late papers, attendance, and scheduling conferences outside of office hours.

Late Assignments

Late assignments are docked one full grade (10%) for each class session past the due date. No assignment will be accepted three or more sessions late. You must turn in work during class to be considered on time, unless the assignment is handed in at the department office or e-mailed directly to me before the due date. If you know you will be absent for a class session, it is your responsibility to meet the assignment deadline. (Missing class does happen, but only a medical absence excuses a late assignment because you can e-mail homework.)

Attendance

Unless excused for a university-sanctioned event, legal proceeding, verified medical reason, family emergency, or a religious observance, attendance and participation are mandatory. Absences will affect your grade: you will lose 2 points of your participation grade per absence. If you have advanced warning that you will miss a session, you should contact me immediately via e-mail or phone.

Entering a lecture late counts as half an absence, whether you enter five minutes or fifteen minutes late. We have limited time for exercises and speeches during the semester; you must not waste any of this time. Also, it is extremely disrespectful to enter the room while another person is trying to participate in a discussion.

Conferences

I will make every reasonable effort to meet with you at a time outside of office hours if you request a personal conference relating to your class performance or academic concerns. There are dates and times when I am not available. I am seldom available on Friday afternoons and never on weekends for student conferences. Please remember that I am a graduate student and must meet the demands of my own courses.

The University Fine Print

The following are policies set forth by the powers that be — a.k.a. The Administration. You should already be familiar with these policies, so they appear here in fine print.

Cheating and Plagiarism

Cheating is the actual or attempted practice of fraudulent or deceptive acts for the purpose of improving one's grade or obtaining course credit; such acts also include assisting another student to do so. Academic fraud includes any and all actions by a student that are intended to gain an unearned academic advantage by deceptive means. Plagiarism is a specific form of cheating which consists of the misuse of the published and/or unpublished works of others by misrepresenting the material used as one's own work.

Penalties for cheating and plagiarism range from a 0 or F on a particular assignment to expulsion from the university.

Disruptive Classroom Behavior

The classroom is an environment in which students and faculty come together to promote learning and growth. It is essential to the learning environment that respect for the rights of others seeking to learn, respect for the professionalism of the instructor, and the general goals of academic freedom are maintained. Differences of

viewpoint or concerns should be expressed in terms that are supportive of the learning process, creating an environment in which students and faculty may learn to reason with clarity and compassion. Students must be comfortable to share of themselves without losing their identities, and to develop an understanding of the community in which they live. Student conduct disrupting the learning process shall not be tolerated and may lead to disciplinary action.

In addition to general university policies, I also consider the following either disruptive or disrespectful: ringing or vibrating cell phones, text messaging, the wearing of casual hats, and sunglasses (unless prescription). This is a course on professionalism, as much as the process of oral presentation.

Computers

In this class, our use of technology will sometimes make student names and university Internet IDs (e-mail addresses) visible within the course website, but only to other students in the same class. Since we are using a secure, password-protected course website, this will not increase the risk of identity theft or spamming for anyone in the class. If you have concerns about the visibility of your Internet ID, please contact me for further information.

At the university, computers and communications links to remote resources are recognized as being integral to the education and research experience. Every student is required to have his or her own computer or have other personal access to a workstation, including an Internet connection and a printer, with all the recommended software. The minimum recommended standards for the workstation and software, which may vary by academic major, are updated periodically and are available from Information Technology Services or the University Bookstore. In the curriculum and class assignments, students are presumed to have 24-hour access to a computer workstation.

Copyright Policy

Copyright laws and fair use policies protect the rights of those who have produced the material. Any copy in this course has been provided for private study, scholarship, or research. Other uses may require permission from the copyright holder. The user of a work is responsible for adhering to copyright law of the U.S. (Title 17, U.S. Code).

Campus academic Web sites contain materials protected by copyrights held by faculty, other individuals or other institutions. Such material is used for educational purposes in accordance with copyright law and/or with permission given by the owners of the original material. The course instructor assumes no responsibility for individuals who improperly use copyrighted materials placed on the Web site.

Students with Disabilities

Upon identifying themselves to the instructor and the university, students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodation for learning and evaluation. For more information, contact Disability Services (<http://ds.umn.edu>).

Evaluation and Grading

This course is graded based on a point system. The following tables indicate assignment values and grading intervals in the course.

Homework

Project	Points
Résumé and Cover Letter	50
Memos and e-mails	50
Instructions	100
Project Proposal	150
Formal Report (long project)	200
Binder w/ User Tests and Reports	150
Weekly Responses	100
Participation (peer reviews)	200

1000

You will receive a detailed description of each assignment, along with an explanation of how the assignment will be graded. The following are mere summaries of major assignments.

Résumé and Cover Letter

Your résumé, in various forms, is likely to be the one document that follows you throughout your professional life. It is a good idea to always have a résumé ready to print or e-mail, so keep it up-to-date with any important changes. The résumé exists to “sell” you to employers and organizations, not as a mere catalog of past educational, work, and volunteer experiences.

In two pages of choppy prose, you have to convince someone to hire you, promote you, or in some other way endorse and validate your existence within an organization. How well does your résumé sell you? By the time we end the semester, hopefully very well.

Memos / E-Mails

In a universe of e-mail and text messages, we risk losing the ability to write coherent memos. A memo is an attempt to persuade individuals within an organization to do something: from complying with a new dress code to preparing for a federal security audit. Today, we send e-mail in place of traditional memos, but the writing style remains important.

Instructions

You will work with a team of students to create assembly instructions for a new product. Instructions should be a mix of text and graphics, recognizing that instructions are increasingly visual documents.

Project Proposal

For this class you will prepare a **real project** for a client company or organization. Before doing so, you must present and defend a proposal for this project to your peers and the instructor. Until you defend your proposal, you may not begin work on the formal project.

Formal Report

Your project may be a formal feasibility study, a document redesign, or a similarly demanding technical documentation project for a real client. Working with non-profit organization is encouraged because they are highly motivated to accept new ideas (and free labor). Past examples will be shared with the class to offer guidance.

You must document the entire project experience, from “pitch” through either acceptance or rejection of the final work product. It is not unusual to create an accurate, thoughtful feasibility study or document redesign only to have someone in a position of authority reject your work.

Binder

All documents created for this course should be assembled into a single binder for review at the end of the semester. This binder will demonstrate your growth as a technical communicator. More importantly, the binder can serve as the start of a professional portfolio that can be shown to prospective employers.

Weekly Responses

Every week you will respond to an issue relating to technical communication. Your responses will be online, where every member of the class will participate in threaded discussions. Issues explored range from résumé faux pas to the legal implications of confusing instructions. The responses average 300 words each.

Grading Scale

Final grades are based on the following scale:

Points	Percent	Grade	
900 – 1000	90 – 100	A	Excellent work, demonstrating creativity while also meeting the demands of clients. Both the functional needs and aesthetic desires of a client are met.
800 – 899	80 – 89	B	Good work, with signs of creativity, while meeting most of the demands of clients. Functional needs are generally met.
700 – 799	70 – 79	C	Average work, lacking originality but meeting most of the functional needs of a client. The work would probably meet legal requirements.
640 – 699	64 – 69	D	Poor work, revised several times, unlikely to meet client demands. Functionality is lacking.
0 – 639	0 – 63	F	Incomplete work, unlikely to be accepted by any client.

For any assignment to receive an “A” grade, it must be exceptional. Every assignment will be graded on the following criteria:

- 1) Does it meet the functional needs of the intended audience?
- 2) Is it free of grammar and spelling errors?
- 3) Does it show an awareness of potential legal and ethical concerns?
- 4) Does it appeal to an audience aesthetically?

Additional criteria will be unique to each assignment. The question to always ask yourself and your peer reviewers is if an employer would be impressed with the document. If an employer or client would not be impressed, the odds are that the assignment will not receive a grade of A.

Course Calendar

Note: Readings are assigned the day listed, due by the next class session unless otherwise noted. Homework is due when noted in **bold type**, with the exception of weekly responses. Questions will be posted online each week.

Wk.	Dates	Topics	Homework	Reading
1	Jan 22	Introduction to technical writing		Ch. 1 – 2
	Jan 24	Word processing and résumé formatting	Résumé Outline	Ch. 20
2	Jan 29	Audience and writing objectives		Ch. 3
	Jan 31	Work on résumé designs	Résumé Draft Due	Ch. 4 – 5
3	Feb 5	Usability and persuasion		Ch. 13
	Feb 7	Word: using editing / revision features	Cover Letter Draft Due	Ch. 14 – 15
4	Feb 12	Revising and Testing Documents LEGO project introduced		Ch. 7
	Feb 14	Technical writing style is...	Résumé and Cover Letter	Ch. 8
5	Feb 19	LEGO group time		Ch. 23
	Feb 21	Preparing a memo	Memo: LEGO Project	Ch. 16
6	Feb 26	Writing instructions		Ch. 12
	Feb 28	Using LDD for graphical instructions	LEGO Text Instructions Draft	Ch. 9
7	Mar 4	The value of graphics		Ch. 10
	Mar 6	LEGO group time	Graphical Instructions Draft Due	
8	Mar 11	Peer review: instructions Long project introduced		
	Mar 13	Word: creating a TOC	Memo (E-Mail): Long Project	
Break	March 18, 20			
9	Mar 25	Legal issues and technical writing		
	Mar 27	In-class evaluations of LEGO projects	LEGO Project Due	Ch. 22
10	Apr 1	Preparing a formal proposal		
	Apr 3	Writing a proposal, continued	Long Project Proposal Due	
11	Apr 8	Introducing feasibility studies		Ch. 21
	Apr 10	Feasibility studies continued	Analysis of a feasibility study	Ch. 19
12	Apr 15	Front and back matter		Ch. 11
	Apr 17	Word: front and back matter		
13	Apr 22	Discussion: big projects	Memo (E-Mail): Project Status	
	Apr 24	Wrap-up day...		
14	Apr 29	Reserved		
	May 1	Reserved		
15	May 6	Reserved		
	May 8	Reserved	Feasibility Study Due; Binders Due	