

# English 421: Technical Writing

Technical Writing - 21306 - ENGL 42100 - Y04

Course Location: Online

Semester: Fall 2023

Days/Times: Asynchronous Online

3 Credit Hours

Instructor: Dee McCormick, PhD (she/her/hers)

Email: mccormid@purdue.edu

Office Hours (on Zoom): Tuesday 9:00-11:00am EST (or email me to set up an appointment)

Course Site: Brightspace Course Site

Required Textbook: *Technical Communication*, 13<sup>th</sup> ed., by Mike Markel and Stuart Selber

ISBN: 978-1-319-24500-9

## Course Description

English 421 helps students become better technical writers, across multiple global audiences, for multiple purposes, and in a variety of media. The work of the course is centered on presenting technical material in written and visual formats that demonstrate an awareness of audience needs and contexts, effectively achieve implicit and explicit rhetorical purposes, and work to effectively address workplace, social, or global problems.

This course introduces students to the genres and conventions of technical communication and documentation. Students will compose documents directed toward lay, expert, and administrative audiences; your writing will be oriented toward the purposes of instruction, recommendation, and requesting resources. You will work on your own and in teams to plan your projects, conduct research, and incorporate data and design. Ultimately, the goal of this course is to help you develop skills in producing written documents that provide information in order to facilitate decisions and tasks that your intended audience needs to carry out.

## Course Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Use technical writing theories and approaches to analyze and solve problems individually and in teams
- Communicate complex technical information, processes, and procedures via a variety of media, genres, technologies, and presentations to a range of audiences and stakeholders
- Adapt written genre conventions and expectations to both technical and non-technical audiences with changing organizational needs
- Apply primary and secondary research methods and strategies to produce technical documents
- Demonstrate awareness of both the technical and human needs of users, paying special attention to accessibility, cultural diversity, and global sensitivity
- Interpret, contextualize, explain, and visualize data sets in specific rhetorical contexts or problems

## Assignment Descriptions

The process for each assignment will include drafts, feedback from me, and peer feedback. **You must complete each of the three projects in order to pass the class.**

### Project 1: User Manual (200 points)

The first project of the course asks students to compose definitions, descriptions, and instructions for an object or process of their choosing. The final product will be a brief user manual that is written and designed to be technically accurate to the object or process while also making it easy for a lay reader to understand and navigate the document. The audience of this project will be non-specialized users who need to engage with the object or process without having any previous experience or knowledge of it. You will need to write a proposal memo at the beginning of the project and a reflective memo to turn in with the final draft.

### Project 2: Recommendation Report (250 points)

The second project asks students to conduct further investigation into the object or process and propose recommendations for improvement in order to meet user needs. Data visualization and infographics will be included to demonstrate the benefits of suggested improvements. The audience for this project will be an expert or professional audience that has the capacity to make decisions about and take action regarding the object or process. You will need to write a proposal memo at the beginning of the project, two progress memos as you go through the process of composing, and a reflective memo to turn in with the final draft.

### Project 3: Funding Proposal (350 points)

The third project in this course is a collaboratively-written proposal that requests funding for user/consumer research and/or technical improvements with regard to one of the objects or processes written about in the first two projects. This will involve gathering and presenting information to show the costs and benefits of this endeavor, including a budget, methodology, and expected results. We will use an adapted version of the IMRD (Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion) format typical of research articles to compose this grant. The final project will make use of informative text, visual elements, and document design to present a clear picture of the proposed project. The audience for this project will be an administrative audience that may or may not have prior knowledge of the topic at hand but does have the capacity to make decisions regarding funding through a company, non-profit, or government agency. Each team will write a charter that outlines the project and assigns roles to each member, and you will also individually write progress memos and a final reflective memo.

### Discussion Board (200 points)

Each week we will use the discussion board either for a supplemental discussion assignment or for peer response to drafts. During weeks in which we have a discussion assignment, you will need to make an initial post to the discussion board by Wednesday and two responses to your group's thread by Friday. During weeks in which we are conducting peer response, you will need to post your draft by Friday and your responses by the following Monday. For the first two units, students will be broken up into small groups and will conduct discussions and peer response within these groups. For the third unit, the project groups will use a combined discussion board to conduct peer response discussions in response to that week's drafts.

## Grade Points Breakdown

### Project 1

- Proposal memo (25 points)
- Draft (50 points)
- Final (100 points)
- Reflective memo (25 points)

### Project 2

- Proposal memo (25 points)
- Progress memos (2 x 10 points)
- Draft (50 points)
- Final (130 points)
- Reflective memo (25 points)

### Project 3

- Team charter (25 points)
- Section drafts (4 x 25 points)
- Progress memos (4 x 10 points)
- Final (150 points)
- Reflective memo (35 points)

### Discussion Board

- Group discussions (7 x 20 points)
- Peer response discussions (6 x 10 points)

The grading scale for the total course grade is as follows:

A+ = 1000 – 970; A = 969 – 930; A- = 929 – 900

B+ = 899 – 870; B = 869 – 830; B- = 829 – 800

C+ = 799 – 770; C = 769 – 730; C- = 729 – 700

D+ = 699 – 670; D = 669 – 630; D- = 629 – 600

F . = less than 600 points

## Course Policies

### Online Attendance

It is vital that you attend digitally every week if you want to perform well in the course. You should plan on logging onto the Brightspace page three to four times per week, to review course content early in the week, to participate in discussion boards and peer review, and to submit your assignments or view my feedback. I will be sending out emails to the class list regularly, but you are responsible for keeping yourself on track and/or reaching out to me if you run into any problems that you need to communicate with me about.

### Late Work Policy

Deadlines are an unavoidable part of being a professional, and this course is no exception. Course requirements must be completed and posted or submitted on or before the specified due date. If you know that you won't be able to turn an assignment in on time, then you need to contact me as soon as possible. I will grant extensions on a case-by-case basis, but you have to

arrange this with me before the stated deadline has passed, not after. If you do turn in an assignment after the deadline, you will receive half-credit.

## Plagiarism Policy

Plagiarism is academic theft and may be intentional or accidental. When in doubt, you can always check with me, your textbook, or the writing center if you have questions. Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and can result in failure of an assignment, failure of the course, or expulsion from the university.

## AI/LLM Statement

You may be aware of recently developed artificial intelligence (AI) programs that use large-language models (LLMs) to generate writing that is on par with the writing that humans typically produce. My attitude toward these programs, as someone who teaches writing and conduct research on language and argument, is that they are tools with a relatively limited function: to produce plausible-sounding language and information in response to human-produced prompts. What you can do that they cannot is engage with a specific, concrete context and make judgments about how to address an audience with verifiably correct information. So if you are interested in these programs and how they might assist you in your writing, I would recommend that you consider them on the same level as a reasonably smart roommate—they could provide you with the spark of an idea or specific phrasing or general information, but any specific information they tell you about your subject may be distorted or patched together with something they made up on the spot. I do not recommend that you rely on AI/LLM programs for research, and I do not recommend that you copy and paste text they produce into your own writing. Ultimately, you need to be responsible for any writing you submit for this class, so whatever your process, you need to make sure that the language you use is appropriate for the context and the information you convey in it is accurate.

## Diversity and Inclusion

In our discussions, structured and unstructured, we will explore a variety of challenging issues, which can help us enhance our understanding of different experiences and perspectives. While we will design guidelines as a group, everyone should remember the following points:

- We are all in the process of learning about others and their experiences. Please speak with me, anonymously if needed, if something has made you uncomfortable.
- Intention and impact are not always aligned, and we should respect the impact something may have on someone even if it was not the speaker's intention.
- We all come to the class with a variety of experiences and a range of expertise, we should respect these in others while critically examining them in ourselves.
- Links to the various cultural centers on campus are provided in Brightspace.

## Nondiscrimination Policy

All class participants are expected to conduct themselves in a respectful and sensitive manner towards others and the course material. Purdue University is committed to maintaining a community which recognizes and values the inherent worth and dignity of every person; fosters tolerance, sensitivity, understanding, and mutual respect among its members; and encourages each individual to strive to reach his or her own potential. In pursuit of its goal of academic

excellence, the University seeks to develop and nurture diversity. The University believes that diversity among its many members strengthens the institution, stimulates creativity, promotes the exchange of ideas, and enriches campus life.

### Accessibility and Accommodation

Purdue University strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, please let me know immediately so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at: [drc@purdue.edu](mailto:drc@purdue.edu) or by phone: 765-494-1247. If you have a disability that requires special accommodations, please see me privately within the first week of class. Disabilities in DRC accommodations may encompass chronic illness or chronic pain conditions. Medical information, however, does not need to be disclosed to me for Purdue's official accommodation process. Please do not hesitate to arrange a meeting with me to discuss accommodations or any concerns and questions you have about the course.

### 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 beyond the instructor's control. Information about possible changes will be communicated by me through email. If you have questions, please email me, and for more information, see ITAP's Campus Emergency website: <http://www.itap.purdue.edu/tlt/faculty/>.

## Course Calendar

Note that the schedule is subject to change, so please refer to the Brightspace page for the most up-to-date information on readings and due dates.

<b>Unit 1</b>	<b>Topics</b>	<b>Readings</b>	<b>Discussion or Peer Response</b>	<b>Assignments due Friday 11:59pm EST</b>
Week 1 08/21 – 08/25	Course introduction	Chapters 1 and 2	Discussion	n/a
Week 2 08/28 – 09/01	Instructional writing	Chapters 3 and 20	Discussion	Project 1 proposal
Week 3 09/04 – 09/08	Audience and purpose	Chapter 5	Peer Response	Project 1 first draft
Week 4 09/11 – 09/15	Finalizing your draft	Chapter 9	Discussion	Project 1 final draft and memo
<b>Unit 2</b>				
Week 5 09/18 – 09/22	Information and recommendation	Chapters 18 and 19	Discussion	Project 2 proposal
Week 6 09/25 – 09/29	Gathering data	Chapter 6	Discussion	Project update #1
Week 7 10/02 – 10/06	Evaluating and testing	Chapter 13	Peer Response	Project 2 first draft
Week 8 10/09 – 10/13	Organizing content	Chapter 7	Discussion	Project update #2
Week 9 10/16 – 10/20	Visual design	Chapters 11 and 12	Discussion	Project 2 final draft and memo
<b>Unit 3</b>				
Week 10 10/23 – 10/27	Collaboration	Chapters 4 and 16	n/a	Project 3 Team Charter
Week 11 10/30 – 11/03	Proposal writing	n/a	Peer Response	Project 3 Introduction and project update #1
Week 12 11/06 – 11/10	Group work	n/a	Peer Response	Project 3 Methods and project update #2
Week 13 11/13 – 11/17	Group work	n/a	Peer Response	Project 3 Results and project update #3
Week 14 11/20 – 11/24	Thanksgiving break	n/a	n/a	n/a
Week 15 11/27 – 12/01	Group work	n/a	Peer Response	Project 3 Discussion and project update #4
Week 16 12/04 – 12/08	Wrapping up	n/a	n/a	Project 3 final draft and memo