

ENGL 421: Technical Writing

Purdue University, Summer 2019

Instructor: Ryan M. Murphy
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Office: HEAV 215
Office Hours:
M 3:15-4:15, W 11:30-12:30, and at other
times by appointment (request via email)

Course Information
CRN/Section: 16979/003
Meeting Time: MTWRF, 1:00-3:10pm
Meeting Place: HEAV 227

Course Description

English 421 helps students become better technical communicators, whose work is characterized by the presentation of technical material in written and visual formats that are user centered and aware of audience and context. The course and its principles are grounded in rhetorical theory and informed by current research in 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, students learn effective strategies for communicating about and with technology, particularly in networked workplaces and through usability testing. To achieve success in this course, students must display the ability to succeed in their future workplaces by developing a variety of informative and visually effective print and electronic documents.

Technical communication can refer to the content being communicated (e.g. a technical specifications sheet for a jet engine) or the means by which a message is delivered (e.g. an executive memo broadcast via email). Technical communication can focus on technologies or technical processes. Technical communication is both a professional practice and a field of academic inquiry.

Required Course Texts and Materials

1. *Technical Communication Today*, 6th edition, by Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Pearson, 2018. ISBN 9780134425733
2. *Team Writing: A guide to working in groups*, by Joanna Wolfe, Bedford St. Martin's 2010. ISBN 9780312565824
3. Supplementary readings will be announced in class and distributed on Blackboard.
4. Pen or pencil and paper/notebook for class meetings

Technology Requirements

- Access to Blackboard course page and Purdue email account
- Word processor (Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc.)
- A Google account for access to Google Drive

Course Outcomes

The Professional Writing Program identifies the following outcomes for Technical Writing. More detailed descriptions of these outcomes can be found at the program site: <https://guide.rhetorike.org/>

Writing in Context: Analyzing professional cultures, social contexts and audiences to determine how they shape the various purposes and forms of workplace writing—such as persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse.

Project Management: Developing and deploying strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents, both individually and collaboratively.

Document Design: Understanding and implementing design principles such as form and layout, through testing and revising information architecture.

Teamwork: Managing distributed teams online, delivering and implementing effective feedback.

Research: Locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes; triangulating sources of evidence.

Technology: Using and evaluating writing technologies used frequently in the workplace, such as emailing, IM, photo and video editing, presentation design, content management and desktop publishing.

Inclusive Learning Statement

Your success in this class is important to me. We all learn differently, and I am committed to making this class an inclusive learning space. If there are aspects of this course that prevent you from learning or exclude you, please let me know as soon as possible. Together we'll develop strategies to meet both your needs and the requirements of the course.

Accessibility and Accommodations

Purdue University strives to make learning experiences as accessible as possible. If you anticipate or experience physical or academic barriers based on disability, you are welcome to let me know so that we can discuss options. You are also encouraged to contact the Disability Resource Center at: drc@purdue.edu or by phone: 765-494-1247.

Course Structure & Evaluation

The primary assignment sequence of this course is organized into three units. Detailed assignment information sheets and evaluation rubrics for deliverables for Units I, II, and III will be distributed in class.

Unit I: Professional Document Portfolio	Points: 250
<p>Assignment Overview: Unit I is an opportunity to learn and practice document design and professional ethos building through the development of your own set of professional documents. Although you will customize your documents to address a specific job or professional opportunity, we will consider how these documents are designed to be modified and adapted to suit a variety of future needs. The skills inventory is an ongoing document that you build for yourself to record your professional skills along with evidence or examples to illustrate them, including the skills you practice and develop in this class.</p> <p>Key Skills Learned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Professional Ethos 2. Document Design 3. Awareness of Readers 	
Unit I Deliverables:	Due Dates
Professional Document Portfolio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional Resumé or CV • Cover Letter • Job Announcement with Analysis 	Portfolio Draft Workshop: Monday, May 20 Final Portfolio due: Friday, May 24
Skills Inventory	Preliminary Inventory Due: Monday, May 20 Revised Inventory Due: Thursday, June 6

Unit II: Technical Description Poster	Points: 300
<p>Assignment Overview: Unit II is an opportunity for you to write technical documentation about a topic that interests you using the form of a poster. You will have the choice to work with a partner or individually to prepare technical descriptions and specifications using text and images. Instructions or safety information could also be included if your topic warrants it. Final posters will be shared in class on Friday May 31.</p> <p>Key Skills Learned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Technical writing genre awareness 2. Context-sensitive composition 3. Composition with technology 	
Unit II Deliverables:	Due Dates
Technical Description Poster (scalable to 48"x36")	Poster Drafts: Monday May 27 Final Posters Due: Friday May 31

Unit III: Usability Report		Points: 300
<p>Assignment Overview: Unit III is an opportunity for you to work in small groups to research and report on the usability and accessibility of a product or website design. This unit is just as much about collaboration and teamwork as it is about research and report-writing. We will form teams based on common topical interests and skills and work to develop usability reports that take the common IMRaD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Analysis and Discussion) report form.</p> <p>Key Skills Learned:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborative Project Management 2. Research and report writing 3. Usability & Accessibility 		
Unit III Deliverables		Due Dates
Team Charter		Due Tuesday, May 28
Team Schedule		Due Tuesday, May 28
Usability Report: Draft for workshop		Due Tuesday, June 4
Usability Report: Final draft (group upload)		Due Friday, June 7
Peer and self-evaluation		Due Friday, June 7

Evaluation:

In addition to my written comments on your work, you are always welcome to ask me for additional feedback, ask that I review additional preliminary drafts or otherwise talk with me if you have questions or concerns about your grade. Final letter grades in this class will be based on the cumulative total of the points that you have earned on the assignments in this class. 1000 total points are possible.

Assignment	Points
Unit I Deliverables	250
Unit II Deliverables	300
Unit III Deliverables	300
Participation	150
Total	1000

Letter Grade	Point range
A	1000–930
A–	929–900
B+	899–870
B	869–830
B–	829–800
C+	799–770
C	769–730
C–	729–700
D	699–600
F	599–0

Participation – (150 points)

Participation in this course will be measured in two specific ways: 1) contributions to online discussion boards related to course reading and 2) in-class activities that ask you to produce deliverables. In-class activities could include short written responses, participation in a digital activity, or contributing to a case study. While not all-class activities will necessarily count for credit in this category, I will notify everyone during class when an activity is being counted as participation. Participation missed due to absence cannot be made-up.

Please note that although attendance is not a factor in the 1000 points possible, absences in excess of two (2) will result in a reduction of your final point total.

There is no planned extra credit in this class; however, circumstances may arise that warrant creating an extra credit opportunity. No extra credit opportunity will be made unless it is made available to every member of class.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy

You are permitted two (2) absences over the course of the semester, regardless of documentation or excuse. In other words, there is no distinction between an excused or unexcused absence. Each absence over two will result in a 50-point deduction to your final grade. For example, missing class 3 times would result in a 50-point deduction, missing 4 times would result in a 100-point deduction, and so on.

Absences reported through the Office of the Dean of Students and for religious holidays are the only exceptions to this policy. If you are absent, you are still responsible for any content covered in class or assignments turned in.

Attendance will usually be recorded with a sign-in sheet that will circulate around the room. If you don't get the sheet or forget to sign in, please send me an email (murph355@purdue.edu). If you would like to inquire about your recorded absences at any time in the class, please email me or visit me during office hours.

Arriving to class late or leaving early often have the same effect as class absence. They can also be distracting to members of the class. For these reasons, arriving to class more than ten (10) minutes late or leaving more than five (5) minutes early will be considered a tardy attendance and every two (2) accumulated tardy attendances will be counted as an absence.

Late Work and Extensions

I do not accept late work; however, due date extensions can be offered if you have a circumstance that warrants one. As soon as you think you might need an extension, please contact me by email and we can discuss your situation and whether an extension might be appropriate. Extensions are available only before assignments are due.

Email Etiquette, and Digital Privacy/Security

Communicating via Purdue email accounts will be the primary means of communicating outside of class meetings and Blackboard. I aim to respond to all emails within 48 hours (usually less). Please send email from your Purdue email account and include a meaningful subject line and your name in your message. Because identities of senders from non-Purdue accounts cannot be guaranteed, I generally do not communicate any class or personal details when responding to external email addresses. Finally, federal legislation pertaining to educational privacy (FERPA) prohibits me from discussing protected information, specifically student grades, via email. If you have questions or concerns about your grade in this course or a specific grade on an assignment, please visit me during office hours or request to make an appointment.

Academic Honesty

The following statement about honesty and the use of sources is from the Department of English:

When writers use material from other sources, they must acknowledge this source. Not doing so is called plagiarism, which means using without credit the ideas or expressions of another. You are therefore cautioned (1) against using, word for word, without acknowledgment, phrases, sentences, paragraphs, etc., from the printed or manuscript material of others; (2) against using with only slight changes the materials of another; and (3) against using the general plan, the main headings, or a rewritten form of someone else's material. These cautions apply to the work of other students as well as to the published work of professional writers.

If you are in doubt about whether something might count as plagiarism, please ask me, since the consequences for plagiarism are severe. The university policies about plagiarism include penalties ranging from failure of an assignment to expulsion from the university. In this class, anyone who plagiarizes could fail the course and will be reported to the Office of the Dean of Students. The Department of English considers the previous explanation to be official notification of the nature and seriousness of plagiarism.

Purdue University students have also adopted an Honor Code which states:

“As a Boilermaker pursuing academic excellence, I pledge to be honest and true in all that I do. Accountable together - we are Purdue.”

In this spirit, I trust that we will all work to advance a culture of academic integrity in order to promote personal and institutional reputation.

Respect, Reporting, & Resources

Names and Pronouns

As a matter of personal recognition and respect I will address you using the name and pronouns with which you identify. If you go by a name other than the one on the class roster, please let me and the class know so that we can acknowledge you correctly.

Classroom Environment

Often reasonable people have different views, beliefs, and opinions. It may be that during our discussions, those differences will become apparent. Despite any such differences, I expect that our class will maintain a professional ethos at all times. I support the College of Liberal Arts Statement on Classroom Civility:

Purdue University is committed to fostering diversity and inclusion and welcomes individuals of all ages, religions, sex, sexual orientations, races, nationalities, languages, military experience, disabilities, family statuses, gender identities and expressions, political views, and socioeconomic statuses. Please respect the different experiences, beliefs and values expressed by everyone in this course. Behaviors that threaten, harass, discriminate or that are disrespectful of others will not be tolerated. Inappropriate behaviors will be addressed with disciplinary action, which may include being referred to the Office of the Dean of Students.

If anything or anyone in this class makes you feel unsafe or unwelcome, or is creating an environment that is impacting your ability to learn, please report it to me, Ryan Murphy, by private conversation or email

(murph355@purdue.edu). If you do not feel comfortable reporting something to me, you may contact Dr. Jennifer Bay, the Director of Professional Writing at jbay@purdue.edu.

CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services)

Purdue University is committed to advancing the mental health and well-being of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. For help, such individuals should contact Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at (765)-494-6995 and <http://www.purdue.edu/caps/> during and after hours, on weekends and holidays, or through its counselors physically located in the Purdue University Student Health Center (PUSH) during business hours.

Cultural Centers on Campus

The following Cultural Centers are open to all students at Purdue University. They help to promote supportive learning and community spaces beyond the classroom; I encourage you to visit them.

[Asian American and Asian Resource and Cultural Center](#)

[Black Cultural Center](#)

[Latino Cultural Center](#)

[Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Center](#)

[Native American Educational and Cultural Center](#)

Land Acknowledgement Statement

We acknowledge that Indiana, “Land of Indians,” is the Ancestral Homeland to many woodland peoples including the Myaamiaki (Miami), Bodewadmi (Potawatomi), Lenape (Delaware), and Shawnee. As traditional custodians and inhabitants of the land which supports Purdue University and the learning in our class, we recognize, support, and advocate for the sovereignty of the native peoples who live here. We recognize that while a land acknowledgement is not enough, it is an important decolonial practice whose goal is promoting indigenous visibility and sovereignty. We respectfully offer thanks to these people past, present, and emerging.

What to do in an Emergency

For any emergency, call 911. Whether you call from a campus phone or your cell phone, your 911 call goes directly to campus police when you are on campus.

Indoor Fire Alarm: Immediately evacuate the building. Do not use the elevator. Move away from the building until emergency response personnel tell you it is safe to return.

All Hazards Outdoor Emergency Warning Siren: If you are outdoors, seek shelter in a building. If you are indoors, remain indoors, away from windows and doors.