ENGL 421: Technical Writing
Purdue University, Spring 2019

Instructor: Ryan M. Murphy
Email: murph355@purdue.edu
Office: Heavilon Hall 215
Office Hours: T/Th, 1:30-2:30 & by appointment

Course Information:
CRN/Section: 18997/010
Meeting Times: MWF, 10:30am – 11:20am
Meeting Place: Wetherill Laboratory of
Chemistry, Room 214

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.

This section of Technical Writing is structured around three units that are designed to introduce you to the most common genres of technical writing. Through these units you are encouraged to both rely on your existing knowledge and consider the ways in which practices, strategies, and experiences from this course might apply to your future studies and professional pursuits.

Required Course Texts and Materials

- *Technical Communication Today*, 6th edition, by Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Pearson, 2018. ISBN 9780134425733
- Supplementary readings will be announced in class and distributed on Blackboard.
- 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.)

Course Outcomes

The Professional Writing Program identifies the following outcomes for Technical Writing:

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.

Course Structure

Unit I: Professional Portfolio (200 Points)	Unit I is an opportunity for your to identify your personal, professional, and academic strengths and consider ways of representing them for and applying them to professional situations. The components in this unit are also designed to encourage you to identify new areas of potential growth and development.
	This unit emphasizes rhetorical considerations that will also apply to your work in Units II and III. Rhetorical situation, audience awareness, visual rhetoric, document design, and identifying various means of persuasion are introduced in Unit I.
	Primary Deliverables: • Professional Resume or CV • Job or Position Announcement Analysis • Skills Inventory

Unit II: Technical Documentation Portfolio (250 Points)	In Unit II, you will compose different genres of technical writing framed around the concepts of familiarity and unfamiliarity. This unit is organized in two parts.
	Part A: *Technical Writing from the Familiar*
	In this part, you will write technical documentation (including specifications and technical descriptions) for a topic of your choice. Topics could be the uses of specific technologies, or some particular process or protocol. I encourage you to select a topic with which you are familiar or possess some degree of expertise. In this part of Unit II, you will be relying on your familiarity and genres of technical communication to share your technical knowledge with a specific audience. You will propose your topic in a memo in which you also identify the intended audience of your documentation.
	Part A Deliverables (125 points):
	• Topic proposal and identification of audience
	• Technical documentation with specifications and technical descriptions
	Part B: *Technical Writing for the Unfamiliar*
	In the second part of this unit, you will prepare instructions in which the process or the intended readership (or both) is unfamiliar to you. You may work individually or in pairs—in either case, you should write a memo that briefly identifies your process. Part of this memo should identify what part of the process or how the audience is unfamiliar to you and what steps you intend to take to learn more in order to write your instructions. In addition to composing texts, you can rely on elements of visual design to communicate the instructions effectively.
	Part B Deliverables (125 points):
	• Memo identifying process and choice of pair or solo work
	• Process instructions
	• Letter of transmittal or memo in which you describe and justify your composition choices

Unit III: Collaborative Research, Reporting, and Response to RFP (300 Points)	Unit III is an opportunity for collaborative research and authorship. It includes a report and a response to a request for proposals (RFP).
	Small groups will be assigned through an interest-based process which draws on the topics you write about in Unit II. Groups will establish a code of conduct and timetable for research goals for completing a formal report on the topic identified. These reports will take the form of a white paper and provide background information about the topic. Your group will also look for related requests for proposals (broadly construed). Once you identify an appropriate RFP, your group should prepare a brief analysis and strategize ways in which you might respond to the RFP.
	Primary Deliverables (300 points) • Group-Authored code of conduct • Timetable or schedule for completing report • Literature review • Technical report or white paper • RFP analysis • Proposal draft and response strategy notes • Unit III reflective memo or postmortem

Evaluation:

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. Detailed evaluation rubrics for deliverables for Units I, II, and III will be distributed in class.

Weekly Memos – (150 points)
By the end of each week (11:59 pm on Fridays), you should submit a memo as an assignment in Blackboard. Weekly memos should be a minimum of 250 words. I will usually provide you with a prompt for your memo, although you should feel free to use the memo as a means for communicating privately with me. If you have any thoughts or feedback about the course as it is in progress, you may include that in your memo as well. There are 15 weeks with memos assigned; each memo is worth 10 points.

Participation in Class Activities – (100 points)
Participation in this course will be measured in two specific ways: 1) contributions to online discussion boards related to course reading and 2) submission of any deliverables from in-class activities. In-class activities could include short written responses, participation in a digital activity, working with your classmates, 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.

In summary, final grades will be calculated as follows:

Assignment	Points
Unit I Deliverables	*200*
Unit II Deliverables	*250*
Unit III Deliverables	*300*
Weekly Memos	*150*
Participation in Class Activities	*100*
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

Please note that although attendance is not a factor in the 1000 points possible, absences in excess of four (4) 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.

If you ever have questions or concerns about your grade, please do not hesitate to contact me. While I will strive to have your current grade accurately reflected on Blackboard, there might be times when the grade that is visible to you might not be current.

Course Policies

Attendance Policy
Purdue University expects that students attend all regularly scheduled class meetings. Writing is a practice that requires physical and mental presence, particularly when class meetings are organized around group or collaborative plans.

You are permitted four (4) absences over the course of the semester, regardless of documentation or excuse. Each absence over four will result in a 50-point deduction to your final grade. For example, missing class 5 times would result in a 50-point deduction, missing 6 times would result in a 100-point deduction, and so on.

Absences reported through the Office of the Dean of Students or other official university channels and religious holidays are the only exceptions to this policy. In other words, there is no distinction between an excused or unexcused absence. If you are absent, you are still responsible for any content covered in class or assignments turned in. In-class activities cannot be made up outside of class.

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). I might send you a notification email if you've accumulated several absences, but I will not notify you every time you are marked absent. 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, except as required by university policy. Although late work is not accepted, 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. If you know you will be absent when an assignment is due, please note that I am happy to accept work early.

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 and Civility

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.

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. Please keep in mind the following 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.

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.

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.

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.

ENGL 421 Course Schedule

This schedule is subject to change. Changes will be announced in class and via Blackboard.
Please complete reading by the day it appears on the schedule.
TCT = *Technical Communication Today*, Sixth Edition
Studio Days are class periods dedicated to assignment work, Q&A, and mini-lessons as needed

	Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Week 1 January 7, 9, 11	Welcome to class Read: Course Syllabus and Schedule Introduction to Technical Writing	Read: TCT Ch 6: E-mail, Letters, Memos (focus on 166-167) Memo on Memos What is a memo? How is it different from an email?	Due: Memo #1 Personal introductions What do you expect from this class? Discuss: Professional Ethos
Week 2 January 14, 16, 18	Introduce Unit I: Professional Portfolio Begin skills inventory Search for position announcement Read: TCT Ch 5: Starting Your Career	ITaP workshop on InDesign or Document Design Principles Read: TCT Ch 17: Designing Documents and Interfaces	Due: Memo #2 Document Design, cont. Resume & Application experience: bring any of your own examples of resumes or find samples you like Reading Review: Chapters 5 & 7
Week 3 January 21, 23, 25	<u>Class Does Not Meet</u> Martin Luther King, Jr. Day	ITaP workshop on InDesign or Personas and Imagining Audiences Read: TCT, Ch 2: Profiling Readers	Due: Memo #3 Studio Day

Week 4 January 28, 30 February 1	Read: Melançon, "Embodied Personas for a Mobile World" Personas: readers and authors	Class Meets Digitally (No in-person meeting) Read: TCT Ch. 13: How to Be Persuasive Video Lesson on Blackboard	Due: Memo #4 Peer Response Workshop--Have drafts of Resume, Cover Letter, and Job Analysis ready to share.
Week 5 February 4, 6, 8	Studio Day	Introduce Unit II: Technical Documentation(s) Read: Longo, excerpts from *Spurious Coin*	Due: Unit I Deliverables Due: Memo #5 Case Study, TBA
Week 6 February 11, 13, 15	Read: TCT Ch 7: Technical Descriptions and Specifications Technical writing from the familiar	Read: TCT Ch 8, Instructions and Documentation Technical writing for the unfamiliar	Due: Memo #6 Reading Review: Chapters 7 & 8
Week 7 February 18, 20, 22	Strategies for Group Work Read: TCT Ch 3: Working in Teams Teamwork: What's your experience? What works & what doesn't?	Project management tools Read: Robales, "Visualizing Certainty"	Due: Memo #7 Case Study, TBA
Week 8 February 25, 27 March 1	Studio Day	Read: TCT Ch 20: Presenting and Pitching Your Ideas Developing short topic pitches	Due: Memo #8 Peer Review of Drafts Bring at least one draft of your deliverables (Part A or B or both)

Week 9 March 4, 6, 8	Introduce Unit III Topic Pitches and Team Selection Due: Upload one slide outlining your topic to Blackboard discussion. Share with class ☺	Read: TCT Ch 10: Brief Reports White Papers, and research for a literature review	Due: Memo #9 Individual Conferences & Extended Office Hours (reserve a timeslot)
Week 10 Spring Vacation	Spring Vacation		
Week 11 March 18, 20, 22	Unit III Teams Announced Group Organizing Draft Team code of conduct and timetable or schedule	Read: TCT Ch 14: Researching Technical Workplaces Literature reviews and Executive summaries	Due: Unit II Deliverables Due: Memo #10 Discuss Reports and White Papers
Week 12 March 25, 27, 29	Read: TCT Ch 18: Creating and Using Graphics Data visualization and sample white papers	Read: TCT Ch 9: Proposals	Due: Memo #11 Requests for Proposals (RFPs) Strategizing responses to RFPs
Week 13 April 1, 3, 5	Read: TCT Ch 15: Organizing and Drafting	Studio Day Due: Literature Reviews	Due: Memo #12 Case Study: Boundary Objects Read: Star, "Types of Boundary Objects"
Week 14 April 8, 10, 12	Read: TCT Ch 19: Revising and Editing for Usability Discussion: Strategies for collaborative composition	Studio Day	Due: Memo #13 Read: Ratcliffe, "Rhetorical Listening" Discussion: Listening in Technical Communication

Week 15 April 15, 17, 19	Group Conferences & Studio Day	Group Conferences & Studio Day	Due: Memo #14 Read: Plato, *Phaedrus* (on writing) Discuss: Writing as technology; writing and technology
Week 16 April 22, 24, 26	Class discussion with group leads	Class discussion with group leads	Final Class Meeting Class discussion with group leads Due: Memo #15
Finals Week	Class does not meet. Unit III deliverables due on Wednesday, May 1.		