

English 491 001: Technical Writing

Fall 2003

M/W 1:30-2:45

SL 1225

Course Information

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Office Hours: M/W 11:15-11:45 & 3:00-3:30 & happily by appointment

Course Description and Objective

English 491 offers students practical experience with the kind of reader-centered technical writing and communication strategies they will have to accomplish on the job. Most professionals can expect to spend at least 20% of their time writing on the job; therefore, the ability to communicate accurately, clearly, and effectively will be an asset to your career. We will examine the importance of rhetorical strategies such as writing to specific audiences, attending to stated purposes, choosing appropriate language, and varying and style and tone as called for by situational demands. Students will gain experience writing professional documents including resumes, correspondence, memos, instructions, as well as a formal report. In addition, students will present an oral report using presentation software. Students will also participate in reading assignments, daily in-class activities, occasional quizzes (some unannounced), group discussions, and peer workshops. This course emphasizes *excellence over adequacy*.

Required Materials

Textbooks

- Rental Text: *Technical Communication*, 6th edition, by Mike Markel.
- Purchase Text: *100 Writing Remedies: Practical Exercises for Technical Writing* by Edmond Weiss
- A good college dictionary, if you don't already own one

Supplies

- **At least** two computer disks or a zip disk for storing and saving work (**Please write name on disk.**)
- Plastic protective covering for disks (they are easily ruined in backpacks)
- Several manila file folders for keeping and submitting work

E-mail account

Each student must obtain an SIUE email account by the beginning of next week in order to have access to the WEBCT materials that will be posted.

Attendance Policy

In the workforce, you will be held accountable for your attendance and punctuality, and the same tenet holds true in this class. I expect regular and punctual attendance, and you cannot expect me to reconstruct either the material covered or the entire classroom experience (which cannot be reconstructed) that you missed later during office hours. Since you will be doing a great deal of

in-class work—both individually and in groups--you need to be in class in order to achieve the most out of this course. Unlike a lecture class, this writing workshop style class necessitates attendance. I do not reward you with points for attending class—that is part of your “job” as a student; rather, *absences* have a negative influence on your grade. Any student who misses more than **one** class puts his/her grade in serious jeopardy. *Arriving more than 15 minutes late for class or leaving before the end of class constitutes an absence (unless you notify me in advance).* Should class be dismissed in order to attend student-teacher conferences and you fail to show up for your conference without informing me in advance, you will be counted absent.

Writing Assignments

Papers are due at the beginning of class on the due date. Meeting deadlines is an essential discipline in the workplace, and I expect you to practice it here.

You must complete **all** of the out-of-class written assignments *as well as* the oral presentation in order to pass this class. It is vitally important that you keep up with the work in the class. Therefore, **late assignments, in general, will not be accepted** and will receive no credit. (Nevertheless, you must still submit the assignment before the semester ends in order to pass the course.)

However, I do remember what it is like to be a student and that sometimes several difficult assignments in several classes come due at the same time. If this should happen this term, you may see me **in advance** of the paper’s due date and arrange an alternate date. I will only agree to an alternate date once and only on one assignment. Papers not turned on by the alternate date receive no credit. **EXCEPTION: The report project and the final paper cannot be turned in late.**

Documents that do not meet the minimum requirements will be returned to the author ungraded. Failing papers may be re-submitted once, but the scores will be averaged.

Drafts

For all projects in this course, class time has been set aside for you and your classmates to share drafts with one another. In these workshops you will receive advice that will help you improve your writing, and you will see how others are approaching the same writing problem that you are addressing. Because workshops are critical to both you and your classmates, it is essential that you bring drafts to class on the days they are assigned. **If you bring no draft, if you bring less than a complete draft, or if you are absent on the day when drafts are due, your grade on the project will be lowered one letter grade.** If you expect to be absent from a workshop (for instance, for a job interview), see me in advance to arrange an alternative method of obtaining a review of your draft.

Writing and revising

Writing is a skill that is developed over time and with practice; this is particularly true when working in new genres. Although the general principles of technical writing that you learn this semester apply to all types of technical writing, each genre (or type) of document is different, with different deliverables. Therefore, as much as possible this semester, you will be able to revise some documents this semester in order to improve both your understanding of and competency in each new genre as well as your grade. Some documents cannot be revised, and I will inform you about those.

Revision policy

You may revise and resubmit work for a higher grade on certain assignments only if you adhere to the following requirements. Requirements for revising your work include

1. meeting with **me (in person or via email) before you revise** to discuss your plan for revision,
2. making substantial revisions to the work that go beyond correcting the text,
3. producing a memo that details the revisions you made and how these changes improve the communication from the viewpoint of the targeted audience, and
4. submitting the revision **as well as** the original version with my comments in a folder.

Please note that a revision does not automatically receive a better grade because you may create new problems in the document or I may notice problem areas that I didn't notice the first time.

A word about late work

Absence is not a permissible excuse for late work. If you must be absent the day a paper is due, you may send it to me on Web CT no later than 1:30 on the due date to avoid penalty. (Web CT places a time/date stamp on the document to let me know when you sent it Please **do not** slide work under my office door or place it on my desk.

Back-up copies of your work

Please keep back-up copies of your work (both on disk and paper). Things beyond our control may happen to your paper, and if you didn't have a second copy of your work, you'd have to re-do the assignment, so work smart! I am not responsible for work that is lost, stolen, or otherwise not around.

Formatting documents

Approach assignments with the goal of making them presentable documents for professional situations. Word processing capability is an important part of this course, and you are **required** to use computerized word processing tools. **Formal assignments may not be handwritten.** Supporting illustrations/graphics should be computer-generated rather than hand-drawn (although a few exceptions will be considered if necessary). Laser printed output is strongly encouraged. Unless otherwise noted in class or the textbook, follow these guidelines for submitting work:

- Use plain white 8½" x 11" paper;
- Single-space text and double-space between paragraphs throughout *unless otherwise noted*;
- Do not format margins over 1.25"
- Use a **standard 12 point serif font for text.** (Sans serif font may be used for headings.)
- Proofread carefully: documents with misspellings or typographical errors are not acceptable.
- Staple the upper left-hand corner.

- Please use “manila” file folders for submitting work rather than plastic binders. All work must be submitted in a folder unless otherwise indicated.

Printing

You need to print out your assignments before class begins. Do not print once class begins.

Informal & Homework Assignments

Informal and homework assignments are important because they provide you with an opportunity to practice the rhetorical principles and writing strategies that you’re learning. Further, you must complete these assignments **on time**.

Homework and informal assignments will be graded on a Pass/No Pass basis:

Pass=the assignment is done reasonably well, is done completely, **and** is submitted on time.

No Pass=the assignment is not done, is done incompletely or poorly, **or** is not submitted on time.

You will be assigned a homework grade based on the following scale:

A (50 points)= All or all but one assignment completed as Pass

B (40 points)= All or all but two assignments completed as Pass

C (35 points)= All or all but three assignments completed as Pass

D (30 points)= All or all but four assignments completed as Pass

F (25 points)= More than four assignments late or missing.

Homework is due at the **beginning** of the class period for which it is assigned (unless otherwise noted), and this applies to days when you are absent for job interviews, etc. Homework may be accepted late on in the case of illness or emergency—but only once.

Tests and Quizzes

There will not be a final exam in this course. You can, however, expect occasional quizzes, some unannounced. Missed pop quizzes **cannot** be made up.

Participation

You are expected to participate cooperatively, constructively, and to the best of your ability in all classroom and conference activities. Please be prepared and willing to contribute to discussions in a spirit of interest and enthusiasm. You will get more from your education if you are an active participant rather than a passive listener.

Conferences

You will meet with me several times during the semester to discuss your work, particularly on the report assignment. You **MUST** bring the appropriate assignment or materials to our conferences. I will let you know ahead of time what to bring.

Working in the computer classroom

Our class will be meeting in a computer classroom. You are not to use classtime to check e-mail, surf the Internet, play computer games, work on assignments from other classes, or any other

such distraction. Your focus during class time should be on this course only. Students who violate the spirit of this participation covenant will be penalized.

Keeping Up with Assignments

It is **your** responsibility to follow the syllabus and prepare assignments as noted. Be aware, however, the syllabus may change from time to time. Therefore, if you miss class, it is always a good idea to check with a classmate to see if changes to the syllabus have been made.

Grading Proportions

Homework & informal assignments	50 points
Definition*	50 points
Memo report*	50 points
Brochure	50 points
Summary/abstract*	50 points
Power Point oral presentation	75 points
Resume & application letter*	100 points
Recommendation/feasibility report	150 points
Quizzes	75 points
TOTAL	650 points

**Assignments with a (*) may be revised for a higher grade. See my “Revision Policy.”*

A=585-650	D=390-454
B=520-584	F= 389 or below (note you can also fail for absences
C=455-519	or for not completing all assignments)

Grading Criteria

Major assignments will be graded on a standard letter scale with plusses and minuses. For a 100 point assignment, for example, an A+=100 points, A=95 points; A-=90 points; B+=88 points, etc.

As I evaluate your documents, I will expect “A” work to approach the distinguished writing of your colleagues entering a profession that demands excellent writing ability. Specific criteria for each project will be presented at appropriate time throughout the semester. Generally, however, each project will be grade on these criteria:

- Audience: Your communication should be directed to a specific audience and should reflect a concern with the needs and potential responses of all who may read it.
- Purpose: Projects should persuasively present a viable concept throughout—that is, your argument should be clear and well-supported.
- Organization: Your document should be appropriately organized in terms of its purpose. Your writing should make your organization clear to your readers so that

they will know what point you're making and how that point relates to the rest of your message.

- **Completeness:** Your communication should contain all of the information necessary for your audience to act or make a decision but no irrelevant information.
- **Format:** The information in the project should be presented in a professional, appropriate format—including headings, margins, spacing, page numbers, etc. Whether it is a letter, memo, or report, your work should have all of the appropriate formal elements. Your work should also be free of grammatical and mechanical errors.
- **Collaboration:** When working on any group project, your work will be evaluated by the other members of the group, by you, and by me. You should do the work required by your group.

Students with Disabilities

Students with a physical or learning disability who need assistance in this course must notify both Disability Support Services (Peck Hall 1311) and the instructor before any academic accommodations may be made for you.

Academic Honesty

Do not turn in any work that is not your own. This is plagiarism (and cheating). Be sure to accurately paraphrase and quote material as well as properly acknowledge and cite the work of others. If you have any questions about accurately paraphrasing, quoting, or acknowledging sources, do not hesitate to schedule an appointment with me. Improper citation practices are also plagiarism. *Plagiarism and cheating are serious offenses and may be punished by failure on the exam, paper, or project; failure in the course; and/or notification of university administrators.*

Cell Phones and Pagers

Cell phones and pagers are distractions during class. If you must have a cell phone with you for babysitters, etc. to be able to reach you, turn the ringer volume low and leave the room quickly and quietly to answer the call. Please set your pager to vibrate rather than buzz.

Come See Me!

I encourage you to either drop by during office hours, email me, or arrange a time (should my office hours not fit into your schedule) to discuss your work during the semester. If you have problems, questions, concerns, I'll only know if you let me know!

A Caveat

Any updates to the syllabus or course policies, any announcements about class meeting times, or any other general news will be posted on the Web CT site for this course. Check the site regularly.