

Engl 392: Business and Technical Writing - Fall 2010

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Course Description

This writing course is designed to introduce you to the principles of professional communication. But more than that, it is intended to help you develop the knowledge and skills necessary to act powerfully and ethically in all types of professional communication situations. The projects in this course are designed to help you develop skills in planning, producing, and revising documents to meet a variety of business communication needs. Throughout the semester we will address some of the most common errors and stylistic choices that detract from a writers' credibility or ethos. However, good writing is about more than correctness and style. It's about assessing your audience's needs and expectations and crafting the most effective appeal within the situation at hand. This is the kind of approach to writing we'll be taking throughout the semester.

Textbook and Materials

Textbook: Johnson-Sheehan, Richard. *Technical Communication Today*, 3rd Ed. Required
Note: The required textbook is costly, but provides clear explanations of the skills we are developing as well as excellent examples of the types of documents we will be producing. The second edition of the book is much cheaper and available at Amazon and elsewhere. If you use the 2nd edition, be aware that the page numbers are different. Make sure you are reading the correct sections.

Additional Texts: I may also assign readings from online texts, including the Online Writing Lab hosted by Purdue University. The OWL provides resources on all aspects of the writing process, including punctuation and grammar. <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource>

Communication Projects

The course is broken up into four projects, including a mix of both individually and group authored projects. Collaborative work can be challenging, especially without the benefit of regularly scheduled face-to-face meetings. However, the online format gives us an opportunity to practice using communication tools you might encounter in the workplace. Business and technology professionals are increasingly being called upon to use new technologies to communicate long distance. Chat programs, online conferencing tools, collaborative word processors, and videochat services are a few of the technologies we will experiment with this semester.

Employment Project

During the Employment Project, you will learn strategies for seeking and securing employment or an internship, with particular attention to the documents people normally use to represent

themselves and their prospects to potential employers. This project asks you to work individually, but there will also be chances for you to work with your peers to exchange ideas and feedback. The Employment Project includes the following components:

- Resume
- Cover Letter
- Self-Assessment

White Paper

Also called "backgrounders," white papers are commonly used to summarize the accepted thinking on a process, product, or solution to a common problem. White papers function in a number of disparate settings:

- If used internally, the white paper is intended to update long-term professionals on current trends and developments. It is often written by newly graduated professionals who bring new research and processes from their university training.
- If prepared for governmental projects, white papers often help bring legislators and others up to speed on a topic that is vital to making good policy decisions.
- If prepared by professional organizations, white papers function to identify positions on solving problems and to advertise the expertise of a particular organization.

In this project, 4-member teams will conduct primary, web-based, and library research in order to produce an informative white paper that helps campus decision-makers decide whether or not to implement a sustainability initiative proposed by a campus sustainability committee. Your research will result in a visually sophisticated (well-designed) document of 1700-2000 words that presents findings to an appropriate audience(s) and rhetorical situation(s).

Proposal Project

Working with your white paper group, you propose a solution to the sustainability problem you investigated in the previous assignment. Your audience will be the decision makers on campus or elsewhere who might actually have the power to solve the problem. This project includes the following components: (unless otherwise indicated each of the following are group authored)

- Technology Presentation using PowerPoint and other relevant audiovisual aids
- Email requesting a personal interview and thank-you email (individual)
- Proposal (1,700 – 2,000 words)
- Progress Report (individual)
- Activity Report (individual)

Course Grade Breakdown

Employment Project 25%

White Paper Project 30%

Proposal Project 30%

In-class work, Reading Responses, and Class participation 15%