Old Dominion University

Technical Writing

Course Syllabus

Course

Course Code: ENGL 334W

Meeting Time: T/R 9:30am-10:45am

Semester: Fall 2022 (CRN 16906)

Meeting Space: Batten Arts & Letters 1013C

Professor

Dr. Daniel P. Richards

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Office: Batten Arts & Letters 5032

Office Hours: T/R 10:50am-12:20pm

"Good technical writing becomes, rather than the revelation of absolute reality, a persuasive version of experience."

–Carolyn R. Miller (1979)

What Is This Course About?

This course provides the student with a working knowledge of various types of technical communication, including the writing of proposals, instructions, and reports for both the specialist and the nonspecialist. This is a writing intensive course.

What and How Will I Learn?

Technical writing–also known as technical communication or professional writing–is a broad field of study with many avenues of research and practice in a variety of workplace and academic settings. From the more traditional writing of user manuals and research reports, to the more contemporary applications in public relations, visual rhetoric, and social media, the type of work technical writers do depends more on the individual organizational context than a universal job description.

In asking students to think deeper about workplace, professional, and scientific communication, this course explores the patterns and boundaries of technical writing as a field within English but more importantly aims to help students cultivate the skills required to be an effective and marketable technical writer–specifically: critical thinking; collaboration; clear written, visual, and oral communication; argumentation; reading comprehension, technological proficiency; and problem solving. These objectives will be facilitated through inquiry and practice. By the end of course, students will walk away with: (i) knowledge of theories of technical writing; (ii) the ability to apply these theories through technical writing projects; and (iii) research skills in technical writing.

What Resources Do I Need?

Students will be using open textbooks and online accounts this semester.

Textbooks	McMurrey, D. (2022). *Online technical writing*. mcmassociates.io/textbook/
	Tijerina, T., Powell, T., Arnett, J., Logan, M., & Race, C. (2022). *Open technical communication*. (4th ed.). OpenALG. open-tc.com
Accounts	Adobe Express. adobe.com/express
	Sketch. sketch.com

What Is Expected of Me in Class?

Students are expected to be attentive, thoughtful, and civil contributors to class discourse. The nature of this course will be in large part driven by how much effort the students put into our time together. I expect that each student will have read the assigned reading before class time and thoughtfully prepared a series of points, questions, or challenges related to the course material. It is difficult to get the full experience of college courses unless the necessary preparation is done.

What Are the Policies of This Course?

Here are the policies governing the course.

Academic Integrity. Old Dominion University is committed to students' personal and academic success. In order to achieve this vision, students, faculty, and staff work together to create an environment that provides the best opportunity for academic inquiry and learning. All students must be honest in their academic studies. The following behaviors violate this policy:

Cheating: Using unauthorized assistance, study aids, or other information.

Plagiarism: Using someone else's language, ideas, or other original material without acknowledging its source in any academic exercise. Plagiarism will result in the failure of the assignment and possibly the failure of the course. Students cannot use work completed for credit in previous courses to count towards this course.

Fabrication: Inventing, altering, or falsifying any data, citation, or information.

Facilitation: Helping another student commit, or attempt to commit, any Academic Integrity violation, or failure to report suspected Academic Integrity violations to a faculty member.

Academic dishonesty will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct & Academic Integrity.

Technology Requirements. Specific technology requirements are: (i) an Old Dominion email account; (ii) working knowledge of an internet browser; (iii) working knowledge of a word processing program; (iv) a Sketch account (digital design platform); (v) an Adobe Express account; (vi) access to a printer; and (vii) working knowledge of Google Drive.

Accommodations. Old Dominion University is committed to ensuring equal access to all qualified students with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The Office of Educational Accessibility (OEA) is the campus office that works with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations. If you experience a disability that will impact your ability to access any aspect of the class, please present the instructor with an accommodation letter from OEA so that you can work together to ensure that appropriate accommodations are available to you (odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

Religious Observances. If you anticipate being absent from class due to religious observances, please inform the instructor by the second class meeting.

Student Conduct. Old Dominion University is committed to fostering an environment that is: safe and secure; inclusive; and conducive to academic inquiry, student engagement and student success. A community exists on the basis of shared values and principles. At Old Dominion University, student members of the community are expected to uphold and abide by standards of conduct that form the basis of the Code of Student Conduct (odu.edu/oscai).

What Are My Assignments?

Each assignment consists of several components. Read the project descriptions carefully to ensure all components of the project are completed.

Assignment Packet	Weight	Purpose
1. Instructional Documentation	20%	Practicing procedural discourse across media
2. UX Recommendation Report	30%	Conceptualizing a product from start to finish
3. Technical Report	30%	Refining language and simplifying complexity
4. Participation	20%	Cultivating collaborative ethos and percipience
5. Bonus: Research Pool	+5%	Engage in humanities and social science research

All major assignments (1–3) must be submitted to pass the class. All final major assignment packets (1–3) must be submitted as hard copy. Individual components of each assignment packet will be submitted electronically.

1. Instructional Documentation. The first assignment packet assignment asks students to engage in the most historically consistent part of a technical writer's work: instructions. To compose effective procedural discourse is to be able to understand the needs of the user or reader and get them from a point of confusion or need to a point of clarity or completion. The instructional document assignment packet must include:

–Copy of existing paper instructions (length varies)
–Analysis of existing instructions (2 pgs., double spaced)
–Revised instructions (~3 pgs., varied spacing)

Consider the following as you analyze and compose instructions: clarity of title; indication of audience; introduction; technical requirements or materials list; visuals aids; logical sequencing of tasks, use of plain language; frequently asked questions; any necessary cautions or warnings; troubleshooting guidance; and conclusion.

What is imperative to understand here is that this revised set of instructions should look like a manual and not an academic essay. Do not double space your text or rely on any of the default settings in your word processor. Do not use any templates. Imagine the page as a canvas with images that can float wherever you need them to. Imagine yourself a document designer. This assignment packet will be *submitted in hard copy* on the date noted in the schedule. The instructional documentation packet will be graded in terms of its cogency, clarity, accuracy, and proper use of visual aids.

2. UX Recommendation Report. The second assignment packet asks students to cultivate skills in the broad field of user experience (UX), specifically the technologies and philosophies therein. The goal of this project is to mimic the UX lifecycle of a revised product and expose students to a wide array of technologies used during the lifecycle. UX, generally speaking, can be defined as a person's perceptions and responses resulting from the use and/or anticipated use of a product, system, or service.

This assignment asked students to explore the use and anticipated use of the Department of English's website, as experienced by a broad set of users. Students will conduct modest UX research with the goal of composing a recommendation report for either (a) a revised version of the webpage or (b) a new mobile app for the department. In doing so, students will learn the

basics of user research, persona development, prototyping, wireframing, user testing, and web design principles by engaging in various platforms such as Adobe Express, Sketch, and UsabilityHub. The UX recommendation report packet must include:

–User research overview (1-2 pgs.)

–Persona cards (1 pg.)

–Wireframe/prototype (1-2 pgs.)

–Recommendation report (8-10 single spaced pages, including images and appendices)

This assignment packet will be *submitted in hard copy* on the date noted in the schedule. The UX recommendation report packet will be graded in terms of its quality of research, attention to technical editing, application of design principles, and attention to audience.

3. Technical Report. This third and final major assignment will explain to an emerging, professional audience how to develop effective job materials (e.g, cover letter, print résumés, media profiles). Typically, technical reports share research conducted on the current state of a problem or research question.

The research question driving this assignment packet is: *How do students graduating from university in 2022 obtain gainful employment in their field?* By extension: What are the technologies, documents, rhetorical strategies, and resources professionals must consider and use when seeking employment in their field? Students will need to conduct research on said technologies, documents, rhetorical strategies, and resources and present them clearly for a recently-graduated audience in the form of a well-formatted, clearly edited technical report. The technical report assignment packet must include:

–Employment research spreadsheet (8-10 entries)

–Progress report (1-2 single-spaced pages)

–Technical report (8-10 single spaced pages, including images and appendices)

–Sample job advertisement, cover letter, and résumé (likely your own), to be included as an appendix to the technical report (3 pgs.)

This assignment packet will be *submitted in hard copy* on the date noted in the schedule. The technical report will be graded in terms of its cogency, clarity, definitions, descriptions, plain language, technical editing, and attention to audience.

4. Participation. This includes all low-stakes activities completed in class, including those covering technical editing, document design, group work, and writing lab time. Students will receive a mid-term grade halfway through the semester to indicate their standing in the category.

5. Bonus. Students are able to sign up with the Research Participant Pool over the course of the semester. Students can earn up to an extra 5% (maximum) onto their final grade (e.g., 78% to an 83%) by serving as research participants for an array of research studies in the College of Arts and Letters and the College of Education. Roughly one study or 30 mins. of participation in a research study will earn 1%. The Research Participant Pool is accessible at odu-earps.sona-systems.com. Students will use their MIDAS ID to log in. Participation will be automatically tracked. A bonus point can also be earned by finding a grammatical or editing error in this syllabus and sharing it with the professor by the end of week two.

How Will I Be Graded?

Letter grades will be assigned for each component of the course. They are enumerated as:

A	92.5-100	B+	87.5-89.9	C+	77.5-79.9	D+	67.5-69.9
A-	90-92.4	B	82.5-87.4	C	72.5-77.4	D	62.5-67.4
		B-	80-82.4	C-	70-72.4	D-	60-62.4

Student grades will be posted in Canvas. Only work uploaded on time will receive qualitative feedback. Categories of assessment include: quality of work, quantity of work, attention to detail in design and text, formatting, and audience awareness. The grade breakdown is as such:

90–100%: A, A- (*Excellent*). You have met all of the requirements, and exceeded requirements in many areas. You have accomplished top-tier work for the expected level.

80–89%: B+, B, B- (*Good*). You have met all the requirements, and have exceeded a few. You have accomplished stronger than average work for the expected level.

70–79%: C+, C, C- (*Average*). You have met all the requirements, but have exceeded none. You have accomplished average work for expected level.

69% or below: D (*Inadequate*). You have fulfilled some requirements, but other requirements remain unfulfilled. You should consult the professor as soon as possible.

59% or below: F (*Failing*). You have fulfilled few, if any, requirements of the assignment. You should consult the professor as soon as possible.

Late assignments will receive a third of a letter grade penalty per day late, including weekends. Extensions will be negotiated on a situational basis, but permission must be sought in advance.

The Writing Center

The Old Dominion University Writing Center (WC) offers free appointments to all ODU students to help them develop and improve as writers. They offer writing consulting sessions that assist students throughout the writing process from early brainstorming changes and getting projects started, to developing the argument, to the organization of a paper. Consultants can also help students learn to proofread and edit their own work and format papers according to citation guidelines. Appointments are approximately 45 minutes; WC graduate student consultants work with individual students or groups. The WC will offer in-person, real time online appointments, and asynchronous video feedback appointments. Appointments should be made online (odu.edu/al/centers/writing-center). If any questions arise, please email them at writingcenter@odu.edu.

Withdrawal

A syllabus constitutes a contract between the student and the course instructor. Participation in this course indicates your acceptance of its content, requirements, and policies. If you believe that the nature of this course does not meet your interests, needs, or expectations (amount of work involved, class meetings, assignment deadlines, course policies, etc.), you should drop the class by the drop/add deadline, which is indicated in the ODU Schedule of Classes.

What Is the Schedule?

Topics and due dates are subject to change. Asterisks (*) note hard copy submissions; all other submissions are electronic and to be uploaded to the shared Google Drive folder.

Week	Date	Topic	Due
1	Aug. 30	Instructional Documentation	
	Sept. 1	Instructional Documentation	
2	Sept. 6	Instructional Documentation	
	Sept. 8	Instructional Documentation	Analysis of existing instructions
3	Sept. 13	Instructional Documentation	
	Sept. 15	Instructional Documentation	
4	Sept. 20	Instructional Documentation	
	Sept. 22	Instructional Documentation	Instructional Documentation Packet*
5	Sept. 27	UX Recommendation Report	
	Sept. 29	UX Recommendation Report	
6	Oct. 4	UX Recommendation Report	User research overview
	Oct. 6	UX Recommendation Report	
7	*Oct. 11*	*No class*	
	Oct. 13	UX Recommendation Report	Persona cards
8	Oct. 18	UX Recommendation Report	
	Oct. 20	UX Recommendation Report	
9	Oct. 25	UX Recommendation Report	
	Oct. 27	UX Recommendation Report	Wireframe/prototype
10	Nov. 1	UX Recommendation Report	
	Nov. 3	UX Recommendation Report	UX Recommendation Report Packet*
11	*Nov. 8*	*No class*	
	Nov. 10	Technical Report	
12	Nov. 15	Technical Report	Employment research spreadsheet
	Nov. 17	Technical Report	
13	Nov. 22	Technical Report	
	Nov. 24	*No class*	
14	Nov. 29	Technical Report	Progress report
	Dec. 1	Technical Report	
15	Dec. 6	Technical Report	
	Dec. 8	Technical Report	Technical Report Packet*