RHETORICS OF BLACK MIRROR

ENGL 334W

COURSE INFORMATION
ENGL 334W Technical Writing
Fall 2019
CRN 19035
Batten Arts & Letters Building 1013B
Tuesdays and Thursdays 11:00am—12:15pm
Course Site: engl334w.wordpress.com

PROFESSOR
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Office Location: Batten Arts & Letters 5032
Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 12:45pm—2:15pm
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OVERVIEW
Technical writing (or technical communication) refers to both a field of academic study as well as a mode of writing. To learn about technical writing therefore means to think critically about the ways writing takes place in technical contexts as well as to become more astute and proficient with writing in a technical fashion. We will cover both branches by working with relevant and preparatory projects, genres, and technologies through the lens of guiding rhetorical theories, the industry-based principles developed in the field, and, more uniquely, the future realities posited by the writers and producers of the science fiction television program Black Mirror.

CATALOG DESCRIPTION
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.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
Over the duration of the semester students will:
- Understand and apply the theories driving effective technical writing;
- Connect themes in science fiction programs to contemporary writing practice;
- Analyze and critique effective technical writing techniques and practices;
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing technical documentation and applications;
- Create texts and visuals within various genres and types of technical writing; and
- Conduct meaningful primary and secondary research.

CRITERIA FOR WRITING INTENSIVE COURSE
This is a writing-intensive course, which means that:
- Students will demonstrate, in a series of individual (not group) assignments, their mastery of the subject in a discipline, through the writing of formal documents.
- For each writing assignment, the instructor will provide feedback to the student, evaluating content and writing style (organization, development, logic, coherence, and mechanics).
- Types of documents for writing assignments include essays, laboratory reports, project reports, critiques of performances, research proposals, case studies, journal article reviews, book reviews, creative writing, written interviews, and other forms appropriate to a particular discipline.
- A maximum of 10% total of identified graded writing in the form of essays for tests, quizzes, and/or a mid-term examination (not a final exam) may be included. It is to be evaluated for both content and writing style as indicated above.
- Graded writing requirements comprise at least 51% of the overall course grade.

ACADEMIC HONESTY
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 nor can they lift ideas or content from an online source without proper citation. If you have a question about integrating the ideas of others into your own work, please consult the professor or a formatting handbook.

ACCOMMODATIONS
Students are encouraged to self-disclose disabilities that have been verified by the Office of Educational Accessibility (OEA) by providing Accommodation Letters to their instructors early in the semester in order to start receiving accommodations. Accommodations will not be made until the Accommodation Letters are provided to instructors each semester. The OEA can be reached by visiting odu.edu/educationalaccessibility or by calling (757) 683-4655.

EXPECTATIONS OF STUDENTS

I expect all students to show up on time, and for every class. I expect cell phone usage to be relegated to emergencies or for use as instructed by me. I expect all computer screens in the classroom to have open only relevant documents and websites. I expect emails to be written in professional tones. I expect students to work 6 hours per week outside of class time on the course material. And, lastly, given the sensitive nature of some of the course content, I expect all students to converse and contribute in kind, respectful, and mature ways, which also means not belittling other students' opinions and not making any rude or insensitive comment about class, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, or ability. I reserve the right to ask any student who does not follow these expectations to leave.

REQUIRED TEXTS, MATERIALS, & ACCOUNTS

The following items are required for each student to possess:
- An active Netflix subscription to access Black Mirror and The Twilight Zone episodes.
- A WordPress.com user account for publishing posts on the course website.
- Debord, Guy. The Society of the Spectacle. Any edition.
- Wells, H. G. The Time Machine. Any edition.
- Wells, H. G. The War of the Worlds. Any edition.

GRADING & SUBMISSION POLICY

Assignments are due by 11:59pm EST of the due date specified in the syllabus, unless otherwise stated in class. If there are issues with Blackboard submissions, it is the student's responsibility to send the work via email to the professor as backup. Late assignments will receive a full letter grade penalty per day late, including weekends, and will not receive feedback from the instructor. Extensions will not be given except for serious circumstances accompanied with documentation. Letter grades will be assigned for each submission and are enumerated as such:

A (92.5-100)	B+ (87.5-89.9)	C+ (77.5-79.9)	D+ (67.5-69.9)	F (<59.9)
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)	

Each major assignment submitted through Blackboard will be graded in accordance with a specific rubric. The rubrics for all assignments are typically categorized into style, formatting, rhetorical awareness, research acumen, and content accuracy. Students can expect qualitative feedback on the major projects both prior to and following submission.

PARTICIPATION & ATTENDANCE

Attendance will not be taken during this course. However, 10% of the final grade is dedicated to activities that can only be submitted in class and cannot be made-up.

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 this course does not meet your needs, do withdraw by the add/drop deadline.

ASSIGNMENTS

The course consists of the following assignments, with associated weights and lengths. The due dates will remain in place unless our time together is disrupted by emergencies or acts of God. Episode listings that begin with "BM" refer to Black Mirror and those with"TZ" refer to the original <u>The Twilight Zone</u> series (1959-1964) by Rod Serling.

Assignment	%	Length	Tech	Topic	Key Shows	Theme	Due
Critical Written Responses	10	250 words	WordPress	Scholarly Discourse	BM: Various TZ: Various	Critical Analysis	20x, varied
Project 1: Memoranda	10	2 pgs.	Microsoft Word	Formatting	BM: S3E5 TZ: S1E8+22	War & Invasion	9/13
Project 2: User Manual	40	4-6 pgs.	Microsoft Publisher	Procedural Discourse	BM: S4E2 BM: S1E3	Surveillance	10/28
Project 3: Viewing Guide	40	10-12 pgs.	Microsoft Publisher	Research & Concision	BM: All TZ: As req.	Spectacle	12/07
Bonus: PSA Poster*	+5	1+3 pgs.	Design Software**	Visual Messaging	BM: S3E4 BM: S3E1	Media & Reality	12/01

*Not required
**Of the student's choosing

Critical Written Responses

Throughout the semester, students will be asked to compose written responses to a variety of prompts pertaining to particularly episodes, themes, personal experiences, and technical writing questions. All of these responses will be delivered on the WordPress course website as "Comments" to the post at hand. (Note: Each class will have a corresponding blog post written by the professor.) There will be a total of 20 responses throughout the semester and will either be done in class or at home. Each response must be at least 250 words. Each post is weighted equally, so, each post is worth 0.5% of the student's final grade. In order to submit, students must create a WordPress.com user account and use the same one throughout the entirety of the course. Appropriate avatars and user names are expected.

In terms of assessment, each response will be evaluated by its:

Relevance: Does the response pertain directly to the question at hand or a question posed by another student?

Depth: Is it evident that the student put critical thought into the response?

Informativeness: Is it evident that the student watched the relevant episode, read the appropriate text, or attended pertinent class discussion?

Continuity: Does the response seek to generate discussion or end it?

Tone: Is the response professional and scholarly in nature (i.e., does it avoid ad hominem attacks, unprofessional language, and/or myopic perspectives)?

Project 1: Memoranda

This first project intersects the mundane with the fantastical by asking students to compose two memoranda (memos) from the point of view of characters and settings within science fiction settings. Each memo will reflect the formatting, nomenclature, and tone expected of business and political settings at the time. Research and careful analysis of television programs and texts will help students achieve this goal. The two memoranda are as follows:

I) Bank Memo. Setting: TZ S1E8: "Time Enough At Last." Imagine you are the bank president overseeing the branch at which Henry Bemis works. You are becoming increasingly frustrated that Mr. Bemis is always prioritizing reading above customer service and even accuracy. You notice that Mr. Bemis's behavior is starting to influence the other bank tellers, and customers are starting to notice. As bank president, you decide to compose a memo directed at all employees reminded them of a policy banning leisure activities during working hours. The year is 1959.

II) Presidential Memo. Setting: H.G. Wells's The War of the Worlds. Imagine you are President Grover Cleveland, reading about the extraterrestrial events unfolding in England. You are in the midst of your second term as president and decide given the increasing public concern stateside that a presidential memorandum is necessary to help direct policy and procedure on how the public ought to respond to the events overseas. Your intent is to not lose public goodwill, so you wish the presidential memorandum to be scientific, reasoned, but direct. The year is 1895.

In terms of assessment, this project will be evaluated by its attention to formatting techniques, appropriateness of language use given the historical timeline, and level of detail connected to the relevant program or text. The memoranda will be submitted as two separate PDF files to Blackboard. The word count for each memo is 250-400 words.

Project 2: User Manual

This second project encompasses a common genre in the field of technical writing: user manuals, or instructional manuals. There are a variety of ways to format and write user manuals, with the main criteria for success across all types being awareness of audience and usefulness for the intended—and even unintended—user.

Setting: BM S4E2 "Arkangel." Imagine you just got hired by Arkangel, an up-and-coming tech company focusing primarily on developing assistive technologies for the modern parent. Their latest tool allows parents the ability to monitor their children's behavior by allowing the parent access to the child's geographic location, real-time medical vitals, and, most progressively, the child's vision. The parental tablet allows parents many customizable options to meet the needs of a wide variety of parenting styles. In fact, the tool is so complex, that many parents are requesting the tablet come equipped with a user manual. Your task as the newly-minted technical writer is to provide a comprehensive, clear, and morally-neutral manual for parents.

In terms of assessment, this project will be evaluated by its attention to formatting techniques for manuals, accuracy of design in relation to tablet interface on episode, attention to audience, and grasp of procedural discourse. The manual will be submitted as one PDF file to Blackboard.

Project 3: Viewing Guide

This third and final project accumulates much of what we will have learned—writing clearly and concisely, identifying themes in SF programs, attending to audience, and designing effective documents—into one large document: A Black Mirror Viewing Guide. This guide introduces interested viewers to the scope and nature of the show; provides expository descriptions of each episode; identifies key connecting themes (and/or alternative viewing clusters); references research when applicable; and incorporates relevant visuals. The guide will run approximately 10-12 pages, single-spaced, and will take the form of an easily-navigable PDF document. The audience of this guide is anyone who wants to learn more about the show but has yet to watch an episode. The required contents of the guide are as follows:

> —title page: full page, all visual and text, with the aim of engaging the audience
> —table of contents: full page, comprehensive and straightforward
> —description of program: half page, giving history, scope, and purpose
> —theoretical influences guide: one page, integrating readings from throughout course
> —episode summaries: 250 words each, succinct and intertextual
> —thematic viewing options: one page, creative affordances here in organization
> —references page: separate page, 8 minimum, can all be from syllabus

In terms of assessment, this project will be evaluated by its attention to formatting, clarity of descriptions for a non-expert audience, integration of textual and visual elements, brevity and accuracy of episode descriptions, document readability, and overall usefulness. The guide will be submitted as one PDF file to Blackboard.

Bonus Project: Public Service Announcement (PSA) Poster

This bonus project asks students to think about the power of visuals to communicate messages, particularly when it comes to the public's well-being. Public service announcements (PSAs) have played pivotal roles in pop culture and in our everyday lives, from preventing forest fires, to increasing military enlistment, to increasing seat belt use, to raising drug awareness. PSAs, as government messaging, take a decidedly ethical stance in advocating for the public's well-being. The most successful campaigns have been those with simple but memorable visuals and slogans.

> Task: Rather than situate the student in a particular universe, this project allows students the opportunity to decide the Black Mirror episode from which to draw inspiration and guidance. The parameters are that the PSA must pertain to the influence of technology on our lives and well-being, and as such must be based on scientific literature. The PSA must be aimed at high school students with the goal of raising awareness on the effects of social media and technology on our perceptions of what is "good," beneficial, and real.

In terms of assessment, this bonus project will be evaluated by its relevance of messaging to a Black Mirror episode, application of theory, fitness of design for audience, and alignment with the PSA genre. The poster will be submitted as two PDF files to Blackboard. The first file will be a one-page poster; the second file will be a three-page (approximately 750 words) rationale of design and messaging decisions.

SCHEDULE

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Proj.	**Date**			
1	**Aug. 27**	**Why This Class?**	**Brooker**	**TZ: S1E8: Time Enough At Last**
	Aug. 29	**What Is SF?**	**Asimov**	**BM: S4E4: Hang the DJ**
1	**Sept. 3**	**Invading Lit?**	**War of the Worlds**	**TZ S1E22: The Monsters Are Due...**
	Sept. 5	**What of the Other?**	**War of the Worlds**	**BM S3E5: Men Against Fire**
1	**Sept. 10**	**No class meeting**	**War of the Worlds**	**—**
	Sept. 12	**No class meeting**	**Bloom**	**—**

—————————————————————Project 1 Due, Sept. 13—————————————————————

2	**Sept. 17**	**Who Are Users?**	**—**	**BM: S4E2: Arkangel**
	Sept. 19	**Making Interfaces**	**—**	**BM: S4E5: Metalhead**
2	**Sept. 24**	**Procedural Writing**	**Time Machine**	**BM: S1E3: The Entire History of You**
	Sept. 26	**Procedural Writing**	**Time Machine**	**BM: SPEC: White Christmas**
2	**Oct. 1**	**The Message**	**McLuhan**	**BM: S5E3: Rachel, Jack & Ashley Too**
	Oct. 3	**No class meeting**	**—**	**TZ S2E6: The Eye of the Beholder**
2	**Oct. 8**	**Utopias**	**Nozick**	**BM: S3E4: San Junipero**
	Oct. 10	**Anarchy**	**Nozick**	**—**
2	**Oct. 15**	**No class meeting**	**—**	**—**
	Oct. 17	**Ease of Use**	**Bloom & Jordan**	**BM: S4E6: Black Museum**
2	**Oct. 22**	**Who Is Watching?**	**Foucault**	**BM: S2E2: White Bear**
	Oct. 24	**...And Why?**	**Foucault**	**BM: S5E2: Smithereens/S4E3: Crocodile**

—————————————————————Project 2 Due, Oct. 28—————————————————————

3	**Oct. 29**	**Forms**	**Plato**	**TZ S2E26: Shadow Play**
	Oct. 31	**Shadow Puppets**	**Nussbaum**	**BM: S3E1: Nosedive/TZ S3E14: Five...**
3	**Nov. 5**	**Theory A**	**Baudrillard, Mirror**	**BM: S1E2: Fifteen Million Merits**
	Nov. 7	**Theory B**	**Debord**	**BM: S1E2: Fifteen Million Merits**
3	**Nov. 12**	**Seeing Spectacle**	**Debord**	**BM: S2E3: The Waldo Moment**
	Nov. 14	**How to Describe...?**	**Debord**	**BM: S1E1: The National Anthem**
3	**Nov. 19**	**UX**	**Baudrillard, S&S**	**BM: S3E2: Playtest**
	Nov. 21	**Is Elon Musk Right?**	**Baudrillard, S&S**	**BM: S4E1: USS Callister**
3	**Nov. 26**	**Doing Things**	**Austin**	**BM: S3E6: Hated in the Nation**
	Nov. 28	**No class meeting**	**—**	**BM: S2E4: Be Right Back**
3	**Dec. 3**	**Was It Worth It?**	**VanArendok**	**—**
	Dec. 5	**Wiping the Screen**	**Murray**	**—**

—————————————————————Project 3 Due, Dec. 7—————————————————————

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Below are the entries for each text used in the course. All the sources below not required for purchase will be available as PDFs or links on the course website.

Asimov, Isaac. "Introduction: The Contributions of H.G. Wells." In The Time Machine/The War of the Worlds, H. G. Wells. New York: Random House, 1968.

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Brooker, Charlie. "The Dark Side of Our Gadget Addiction." The Guardian, December 1, 2011.

Bloom, Paul. "The Root of All Cruelty?" The New Yorker Magazine, Nov. 27, 2017.

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Foucault, Michel. Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Pantheon, 1977. Excerpts.

McLuhan, Marshall. The Medium Is the Massage. New York: Bantam Books, 1967. Excerpts.

Murray, Terry. "Black Mirror Reflections." Philosophy Now: A Magazine of Ideas, 2013.

Nozick, Robert. Anarchy, State, and Utopia. New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1968. Excerpts.

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VanArendok, Kathryn. "The Case Against Black Mirror." Vulture, October 21, 2016.

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