Photo Credit: Penny Ewles-Bergeron (flickr), "Tower Bridge tools"

TECHNICAL WRITING

ENGL 334W | Summer 2019

Delivery

This course runs via asynchronous delivery. Students can expect to spend about 4-5 hours per week on readings and video lectures and about 9 hours per week on assignments.

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.

Professor

Dr. Daniel P. Richards
Associate Professor
Department of English
Office: BAL 5032
Hours: WebEx only
Email: dprichar@odu.edu

Website

While Blackboard will be used to submit assignments, everything else is on the course website, accessible at techwriting334summer.wordpress.com. It is suggested students bookmark this site.

Texts

This course is part of an open educational resource (OER) initiative at Old Dominion. As such, there are no textbooks required for purchase; instead, readings and resources are available on the course website.

Office Hours

Students are free to set up individual meetings during office hours, listed above. Online meetings will be facilitated solely through WebEx at the following: odu.webex.com/meet/dprichar.

Course Objectives

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 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, namely 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; (iii) technical proficiency in technologies used commonly by technical writers; and (iv) research skills in and about technical writing.

Course Policies

Please review the following course policies and inform me immediately if you have any questions.

Plagiarism

Writers who use the words or ideas of others are obligated to give credit through proper acknowledgment and documentation. Failure to give credit is plagiarism and a violation of the ODU Honor Code that almost certainly will lead to failing the course and could lead to expulsion from ODU. If the quality of your in-class and out-of class writing varies dramatically, the instructor has the right to ask you to write under supervision. If you have questions about how and when to acknowledge sources, please refer to your resources or see the instructor for advice.

The ODU Catalog defines plagiarism as follows: "A student will have committed plagiarism if he or she reproduces someone else's work without acknowledging its source; or if a source is cited which the student has not cited or used. Examples of plagiarism include: submitting a research paper obtained from a commercial research service, the Internet, or from another student as if it were original work; making simple changes to borrowed materials while leaving the organization, content, or phraseology intact; or copying material from a source, supplying proper documentation, but leaving out quotation marks. Plagiarism also occurs in a group project if one or more of the members of the group does none of the group's work and participates in none of the group's activities, but attempts to take credit for the work of the group." Take heed.

Email Policy

Blackboard, WordPress, and email will be the main methods of communication in the course. In terms of email, Old Dominion University recognizes email as an official means of communication between faculty and students. All email messages sent during the semester must originate from your odu.edu address. All emails sent to the professor must have the following elements: pertinent title, appropriate greeting, clear sentences, concise paragraphs, and a signature indicating full name. It is expected that students check their Old Dominion email account daily.

Lateness & Revision Policy

Late work will receive a penalty of a third of a letter grade per day. If you would like to revise an assignment, you must meet with the professor to discuss your plan for completing the revisions. You should also submit an approximately 300-word summary of your revisions with the revised assignment explaining why you made the revision you did, being as specific as possible.

Educational Accessibility

Old Dominion University is committed to ensuring equal access to all qualified students with disabilities in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. 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 which will impact your ability to access any aspect of my class, please present me with an accommodation letter from OEA so that we can work together to ensure that appropriate accommodations are available to you. If you feel that you will experience barriers to your ability to learn and/or testing in my class but do not have an accommodation letter, please consider scheduling an appointment with OEA to determine if academic accommodations are necessary. The Office of Educational Accessibility is located at 1021 Student Success Center and their phone number is (757) 683-4655. Additional information is available at the OEA website (odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

Assessment & Grading

Student work will be assessed using grading rubrics in Blackboard. To view the criteria of each assignment and breakdown of grading, click on the assignment dropbox link and then on the rubric. Only work uploaded through Blackboard dropboxes will be graded using the rubric and receive qualitative feedback. Late assignments will receive neither. Categories of assessment include: quality of work, quantity of work, attention to detail in design and text, formatting, and audience.

> 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.

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.

Assignments

Students will complete a variety of assignments ranging in length and depth.

Topic	Main Deliverable	Text + Media	Weight	Allotment	Due Date
Ideology	Email	4 pgs.	20%	1 week	25 May
The User	Instructions	3 pgs. + 1 pg.	20%	1 week	1 June
Design	Visualizations	2 pgs. + 2 pg.	20%	1 week	8 June
Genre	Report	6 pgs. + 1 pg.	30%	2 weeks	22 June
Curatorship	Portfolio	2 pgs. + 1 site	10%	1 week	29 June

This course is organized around five broad topics relating to technical writing as a field of study and method of practice. The video lectures and assigned readings will go into more depth explaining the concepts underlying each topic and how they relate to technical writing. Students will be expected to engage with the larger ideas pertaining to each topic and apply them through the composition of a document, what are called "deliverables"—which is essentially a workplace term for a document or other item you submit resulting from an inquiry or project. Students will be given anywhere from one to two weeks to complete a topic segment and can work at their own pace within those loose confines. Below are brief statements about the nature of each topical segment; more details about deadlines, readings, and other activities can be found on the course website.

I. Ideology

In this segment, students will compose an email (1 pg.) to an audience of their own choosing and conduct an ideological analysis (3 pgs.) of the technological, power, and social relations at play in this mundane interaction.

II. The User

Attending to the needs of the users is a question of ethics, as documentation, such as instructions, can keep people safe and help them lead better, more productive lives. In this segment, students will compose a multimodal instructional set (1 pg.) and a rationale and reflection (3 pgs.) on the ethical nature of instructional documentation more broadly.

III. Design

Students will complete a brief case study of a workplace scenario in which they will offer suggestions on how to improve technical illustrations (1 pg.) and create an infographic on some aspect of public safety (1 pg.). Students will write a brief memo (2 pgs.) rationalizing their design choices, with specific attention to design and communication principles.

IV. Genre

Students will compose a report (6 pgs.) based upon secondary research into a hypothetical case study provided by the professor. The report will include two student-generated visualizations (1 pg.). Students will also be asked to explore theories pertaining to genre and document design.

V. Curatorship

Students will collect their materials produced this semester and curate a digital portfolio (1 site) to house them using WordPress. The site will be aimed at professionalization post-graduation. Students will also be asked to upload their resume and submit separately a reflection (2 pgs.) on their work over the semester.