OLD DOMINION
UNIVERSITY

Teaching Professional and Technical Writing

Course Syllabus

Course

Course Code: ENGL 775/875[1]
Meeting Time: W 7:10p-9:50p
Semester: Fall 2021
Meeting Spaces: BAL 2019/Zoom

Professor

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Catalog Description

This course introduces students to the field of technical communication by way of classroom practice with the goal of professionalizing students as teachers of technical communication (or technical and/or professional writing). Students are asked to design undergraduate course materials and projects, which will be informed by exploration of the extensive boundaries of the field and critical consideration of the most pressing questions facing technical communication scholars and the most common problems facing technical communication practitioners today.

Note About Meeting Spaces

There is a physical room available to us for this course, but my plan is to have us meet all on Zoom to at least begin the semester. The room is available to those enrolled in the course should the technology and network connectivity prove better on campus than your living or working spaces, but I will not physically be in the room to teach the course. I will have the door open at 7:00pm for those who wish to use BAL 2019. Please email me as soon as you can if you foresee issues.

What Is the Course About?

Professional and technical writing is a broad field of study at the intersection of rhetoric and workspaces. 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 professional and technical writers do depends more on the individual organizational context than a universal job description. This course surveys these extensive boundaries of the field, asking students to critically engage the most pressing questions facing technical writing scholars and the most common problems facing technical writing practitioners. It is only through this critical exploration and engagement that students can even begin to address the question driving the narrative of the course: *How do I teach it?*

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[1] As of Spring 2022, this course will have a new number: ENGL 717 Teaching Professional and Technical Writing.

Professional and technical writing is a continually-growing, interdisciplinary field in English that has roots in rhetoric. As the field grows, and as other disciplines continue to realize the importance of communication (e.g., business, engineering, health sciences), many institutions of higher education are looking for qualified people to teach the increasing number of sections being offered. These qualified people often come from English. Students will walk away from the course with not only with a comprehensive sense of the scholarly field but with a practical ability and qualification to teach courses in technical writing.

What Will I Learn?

My goals for you in this course are that you will:

i. Develop strategies for creating brief, focused exercises designed to help writers improve targeted aspects of technical writing style;
ii. Apply concepts learned in the course to improve and diversify your professional portfolios for the job market;
iii. Connect your pedagogy with the theory that undergirds it;
iv. Research and report on basic approaches to teaching technical writing in workplace and classroom settings;
v. Work with un/familiar technologies; and
vi. Demonstrate intellectual engagement by participating actively in class discussions, leading to a dynamic learning community.

How Will I Learn?

In this graduate course we will engage with professional and technical writing as a: (a) pedagogical practice, (b) theoretical locus/scholarly field, and (c) workplace practice. Students in this course will be expected to engage with professional and technical writing as a pedagogical practice and theoretical venue while exploring how to prepare students to write in a variety of workplace milieux. You'll achieve these goals by:

i. Developing syllabi, units, and assignments for undergraduate courses in technical writing;
ii. Contributing to a pool of assignments for these courses to share with the group and to integrate into a teaching portfolio for use on the job market;
iii. Completing weekly reading responses and participating in discussion of technical writing *praxis*; and
iv. Reading pivotal texts on teaching and professional and technical writing that will help construct a conceptual pedagogical framework, vision, or philosophy for practice.

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 graduate courses unless the necessary preparation is done.

What Resources Do I Need?

Students will need to purchase two books:

i. Dubinsky, J. M., Ed. (2004). *Teaching technical communication: Critical issues for the classroom*. Bedford/St. Martin's.
ii. Reep, D. C. (2011). *Technical Writing: Principles, Strategies, & Readings* (8th ed.). Longman/Pearson.

All other readings and resources will be provided as links or PDFs. It is expected that students have at hand each assigned text throughout the duration of class time.

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.

Attendance. Attendance is required. You can miss one class; missing a second class affects your final grade (1/3 letter grade for each unexcused absence). Two lates count as one absence.

Technology Requirements. Specific technology requirements are (i) an activated Old Dominion email account, (ii) working knowledge of an internet browser, (iii) working knowledge of a word processing program, and (iv) 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. 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 (odu.edu/educationalaccessibility).

Religious Observances. If you anticipate being absent from class due to religious observances, please inform me 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). These standards are embodied within a set of core values that include *integrity, fairness, respect, community,* and *responsibility*. When student members of the community fail to exemplify these values, student conduct proceedings are used to assert and uphold the Code. All students are expected to assume responsibility for their conduct, and to assume reasonable responsibility for the behavior of others. The student conduct process exists to protect the interests of the community, and to educate and respond to those students whose behavior is not in accordance with our standards.

What Are My Assignments?

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class. The corresponding Greek terminology is meant to encourage students to see parallels between contemporary writing pedagogy, technology, and ancient rhetorical practice. There are different expectations for MA/certificate students and PhD students in terms of what is submitted and their weighting.

PhD Students		**MA/Certificate Students**		**Due**
Institutional Research (*Paideia*)	10%	Institutional Research (*Paideia*)	10%	Sept. 15
Weekly Packets (*Praxis*)	40%	Weekly Packets (*Praxis*)	40%	Weekly
Teaching Activity (*Techne*)	15%	Teaching Activity (*Techne*)	15%	Oct. 13
Course Portfolio (*Phronesis*)	25%	Course Portfolio (*Phronesis*)	35%	Dec. 9
Final Exam (*Episteme*)	10%			Dec. 13

Institutional Research. The first assignment of the course asks students to conduct thorough research on how technical writing gets taught at a variety of institutions and, further, how it fits in other schools' curricular maps and local job markets. Research on curricula should include sample syllabi, catalog descriptions, website content, and learning objectives where attainable. The assignment will be submitted as a table with the following sections:

- –Local Institutional: Old Dominion curriculum descriptions, syllabi, and objectives [2]
- –Local Workplace: Off-campus stakeholders and local businesses (e.g., job ads, etc.) [4]
- –Regional Institutional: Virginia/DC curriculum descriptions, syllabi, and objectives [4]
- –Regional Workplace: Virginia/DC stakeholders, industries, and businesses [4]
- –National Institutional: U.S. curriculum descriptions, syllabi, and objectives [5]
- –National Workplace: U.S. stakeholders, industries, and businesses [5]

A sample table ("course grid," we'll call it) will be provided to students to guide their research. The objective of this assignment is to have students gain a better understanding of the teaching of technical writing by surveying how it currently gets taught by faculty members across the country and evaluating the connection between curriculum and industry opportunities. Students will be evaluated by evidence of research ability and acumen, the amount of content (amount of table row entries indicated in square brackets above), and the clear presentation of

content in a readable fashion. The course grids will be submitted as a Word document via Google Drive prior to class beginning (7:10pm EST) on September 15th.

Weekly Packets. As past, current, and/or future teachers of technical writing, I expect that you are always looking for current events, fun stories, incidents, thought experiments, podcasts, current challenges, or interesting news stories to serve as inspiration–seedlings, perhaps–for an in-class activity or major writing assignment. Given our framework of *praxis* in this course, it is expected that students complete all assigned readings reflectively and critically with two lenses: how does this text help me better understand the field and how do the ideas presented therein inform my teaching? To facilitate reflection and *praxis*, students will submit on a weekly basis a "packet" that includes the following elements:

–meaningful title to capture the spirit of your reading that week
–informal 250-word preamble on the highs and lows of your reading and work that week
–250-word summaries (2 for MA; 3 for PhD) of the readings assigned
–three questions you are grappling with or inquisitive about, in list form
–list of three links, images, stories, articles, books, media, or other resources that you think might work as seedlings for a writing project or lecture, with a few sentences describing how each might be used in a technical writing course

In all, the weekly packets are attempts to capture what you've been thinking during the week and how the teaching ideas you might be developing connect to scholarship. It is expected that these packets will be shared with the class. Packets will be evaluated in terms of their level of reflection (preamble), criticality (questions), and cogency (summaries). Students will submit a total of 10 weekly packets, starting on September 8th and ending after the 10th submission.

Teaching Activity. At around the midway point in the semester, we will spend some class time having each student deliver an in-class activity as a way to practice teaching technical writing. Students will perform the identity of an instructor while their peers will perform the identity of undergraduate students in an introductory technical writing course. The activity will last around 30 minutes and must help accomplish a stated learning objective that is suitable for an undergraduate course in the field (perhaps borrowing from the course grid you will have already created). The activity should be interactive (minimal slides) and have concrete deliverables. It is expected that students use Reep's *Technical Writing: Principles, Strategies, & Readings* (8th ed.) to guide this work. In terms of the submission, each student will submit a single lesson plan document that includes:

–assignment title
–stated learning objective
–stated learning outcome
–overview of the activity, including its rationale
–suggested or required readings or viewing
–engaging method of introduction
–outline of meaningful activity
–aspect of reflection

Students will sign up through our shared Drive for a selected week based upon their own preference. Only one teaching activity will be delivered per class. Sign up times begin on Sept. 22 and end on Dec. 1. Students will be evaluated by the quality of the lesson plan, the level of engagement of the activity, and its connection to a stated learning objective relevant to the teaching of technical writing.

Course Portfolio. In lieu of an academic paper, this course encourages you to think of the "Teaching Portfolio for Technical Writing Course" (or, course portfolio) as the final deliverable artifact. Professionalizing as a teacher is an important part of being a successful academic, regardless of your level of passion or interest towards traditional academic research. The documents below will be shared via an electronic portfolio of your choosing as just such a way to professionalize. In all, the portfolio will consist of the following three parts, in this order:

Teaching Philosophy. Teaching philosophies not only help make sense of your own practice but also serve as important framing documents for applications for teaching positions. For those who have taught before, this is a useful reflective document to help refine your own thinking. For those who have not, this will prove a useful academic thought exercise to get you thinking about what theory-informed effective teaching means in the context of technical writing and English generally. The final version of the teaching philosophy will be one page, single spaced, and will make mention of at least three theories, texts, or case studies covered this semester. Students will be evaluated on their ability to create a comprehensive educational vision or approach based in the field's principles of practice and also on their ability to apply practical illustrations of theory.

Annotated Syllabus. All students will create their own unique syllabus for ENGL 231C Introduction to Technical and Scientific Writing (a general education course offered here at Old Dominion University) or a course of their own choosing after seeking professor approval. Each syllabus will be informed by institutional and field-based research and will have the following components:

–Course Description: What is the course about?
–Course Objectives: What are your goals as an instructor?
–Learning Outcomes: What skills/knowledge will students walk away with?
–Readings: Which books, articles, and other readings will need to be purchased?
–Assignments: What are the major projects? (overview)
–Assessment: How will you be grading student work?
–Policies: What are the rules, regulations, and culture of the course?
–Calendar: What will be covered and when? The calendar should reflect a 15-week semester, accounting for 3 hours of class time per week. Students will follow the twice-a-week model. Each class period in your calendar should include the following components:

–Agenda: What work is being done today?
–Readings: What readings should students have done by this day?
–Due Dates: What are the students submitting this day?

Like all effective syllabi, yours should be informed by the scholarship we are reading this semester. Proper terminology, concepts, readings, and agenda items should reflect the best practices of the field as discussed during class. Overall, the syllabus should be ready to go when submitted at the end of the semester. It should be polished as if the course were being taught next week. Syllabi will be evaluated in terms of the completeness, quality of detailed annotations,[2] and consistency all the way from course description through objectives through daily work.

Detailed Project Descriptions. To supplement your syllabus, each student will create projects that meet the learning objectives outlined in the syllabus. It is imperative that the objectives outlined in the syllabus line up with the projects being created. Projects are meant to reinforce key ideas and prepare students for writing practice. MA students will need to create two (2) projects, while PhD students will create three (3). All students will share their project descriptions at the end of the semester so we will have a solid repository of theory-informed projects that could be used in an undergraduate technical writing course. Each project description should include:

–Context: What's being asked of the student and why? What's the situation?
–Connection to Objectives: How does this contribute to class goals?
–List of Deliverables: What needs to be turned in?
–Assessment: How will you be grading student work?
–Teacher's Notes: How will you be teaching this project?

All parts of the course portfolio must be submitted by 11:59pm EST on December 10th.

Final Exam. The final "take home" exam for this course will be one single question (you will be given two to choose from). Students will have 72 hours to complete the exam question, and responses will be 1500 words in length. Students will be granted access to the question on December 10th at 9:00am EST and will submit their response before December 13th at 9:00am EST. The question will ask students to make a supportable argument about a broad issue related to technical writing pedagogy. In doing so, students will find value in the work put into the weekly packets when being asked to synthesize ideas, concepts, and texts from all weeks of the semester. The intention behind this exam question is to prepare PhD students for the structure of the comprehensive examination. This exam is meant to simulate the experience of composing field-based responses to critical questions within a limited time-frame.

What Is the University's Weighting Scale?

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

Late assignments will receive a penalty of 1/3 of a letter grade per day, including weekends.

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[2] Annotations will take the form of footnotes, like this one, and will provide the reader insight into your decisions. Each footnote must have a reference to a course reading. There should be at least 2-3 footnotes per page in the syllabus.

How Do I Submit My Work? (And What If it is Late?)

All assignments will be submitted via email or through Google Drive, as directed. Students will get back an email noting that the assignment was "received." 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.

What Is the Reading Schedule?

Readings and due dates are subject to change. Bibliographic information is included below for any texts not included in the Dubinsky edited collection. Full PDFs are available for download in the course's shared Drive folder, accessible through Blackboard.

Week	Date	Texts
1	Sept. 1	Dubinsky, "Introduction"; Sullivan & Porter; Zoetewey & Staggers
2	Sept. 8	Dubinsky, Ch. 1; Selfe & Selfe; Moses & Katz
3	Sept 15	Dubinsky, Ch. 2 (pp. 63-98); Kynell-Hunt; Longo
4	Sept. 22	Dubinsky, Ch. 2 (pp. 99-140); Moore; Lakoff & Johnson
5	Sept. 29	Dubinsky, Ch. 3 (pp. 141-64); Savage; Slack, Miller, & Doak
6	Oct. 6	Dubinsky, Ch. 4 (pp. 209-217, 240-277); Chisnell
7	Oct. 13	Dubinsky, Ch. 4 (pp. 218-239); Johnson (pp. 43-68); Van Ittersum *or* Edenfield
8	Oct. 20	Johnson (pp. 115-70); Farkas; Morain & Swarts
9	Oct. 27	Smyser-Fauble; Elmore; Palmieri
10	Nov. 3	Dubinsky, Ch. 5 (pp. 310-336); Bazerman (pp. 3-17, 257-277)
11	Nov. 10	Moeller; Kolodziejski; Zerbe
12	Nov. 17	Dubinsky, Ch. 6 (pp. 428-445); Jones & Walton; Lippincott
13	Nov. 24	Readings (*No class meeting*)
14	Dec. 1	Dubinsky, Ch. 6 (pp. 458-474); Gonzalez & Turner; Getto & St.Amant
15	Dec. 8	Dubinsky, Ch. 5 (pp. 348-371); Ch. 8 (pp. 571-594)

Bibliography

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Elmore, K. (2013). Embracing interdependence: Technology developers, autistic users, and technical communicators. In L. Meloncon (Ed.), *Rhetorical accessibility: At the intersection of technical communication and disability studies*, 15-38. Baywood.

Farkas, D. K. (1999). The logical and rhetorical construction of procedural discourse. *Technical Communication, 46*(1), 42-54.

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Jones, N. N., & Walton, R. (2018). Using narratives to foster critical thinking about diversity and social justice. In A. M. Haas & M. F. Eble (Eds.), *Key theoretical frameworks: Teaching technical communication in the twenty-first century,* 241-267. Utah State UP.

Kolodziejski, L. R. (2014). Harms of hedging in scientific discourse: Andrew Wakefield and the origins of the autism vaccine controversy. *Technical Communication Quarterly 23*(3), 165-183.

Kynell-Hunt, T. (2004). Technical communication from 1850-1950: Where have we been? In T. Kynell-Hunt & G. J. Savage (Eds.), *Power and legitimacy in technical communication, volume II: Strategies for professional practice*, 11-20. Baywood.

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