Teaching Technical Communication

Dr. Daniel P. Richards
dprichar@odu.edu
Office: BAL 5032
Hours: T 9-11a; W 6-7p
Skype: drdprichards

Department of English

ENGL 775/875
Fall 2015
W 7:10p-9:50p
engl775f15.wordpress.com
BAL 2019 / WebEx

What Is the Course About?

Technical communication 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 technical communicators 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 communication scholars and the most common problems facing technical communication 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?*

Why Should I Take This Course?

Technical communication 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 course with not only with a comprehensive sense of the scholarly field but with a practical ability and qualification to teach courses in the technical communication.

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 communication 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 communication in workplace and classroom settings;
v.   Work with un/familiar technologies; and
vi. Demonstrate intellectual engagement by participating actively class discussions, leading to a dynamic learning community

How Will I Learn?

In this graduate seminar we will engage with technical communication as a: (a) pedagogical practice, (b) theoretical locus/scholarly field, and (c) workplace practice. Students in this course will be expected to engage with technical communication 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, calendars, and assignments for undergraduate courses in technical communication;
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 communication praxis; and
iv. Visualizing how the field of technical communication relates to other disciplines and areas.

How Will the Course Be Delivered?

This course will be held in Batten Arts and Letters room 2019 and simulcast via WebEx. Students enrolled in the MA program, regardless of emphasis, must attend in person. Students enrolled in the PhD program as on campus (or others taking the course at the 800-level) and living within 50 miles of campus are **strongly encouraged** to attend class in person. Students enrolled in the PhD program but with residence outside 50 miles from campus will attend class via WebEx. The link to access weekly classes will be posted as a Blackboard announcement at 7:00pm on the day of class. Distance students are responsible for using high quality microphones and cameras and for maintaining consistent internet connections to avoid lapses or distraction in discussion.

What Resources Do I Need?

Students will need to **purchase** two books:

- Dubinsky, J.M. (2004). *Teaching technical communication: Critical issues for the classroom.* Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Longo, B. (2000). *Spurious coin: A history of science, management, and technical writing.* Series: Studies in Scientific and Technical Communication. New York: SUNY Press.

Students will need to **order free copies** of two textbooks:

- Markel, M. (2015). *Technical communication.* 11e. Bedford/St. Martin's.
- Bovée, C. & Thill, J. (2014). *Business communication essentials: A skills-based approach.* 6e. Pearson.

All other readings and resources will be provided as links or PDFs on the course website.

What Is Expected of Me in Class?

Whether you are sitting in the classroom or joining us via WebEx, you 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 you 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 beforehand. Read closely, take diligent notes, anticipate possible points of discussion—this is your responsibility as a graduate student and I will expect this of *all* of you (MA and PhD students) throughout the semester.

What Are the Policies of This Course?

Glad you asked. Here are the policies governing the course—some policies are from the university, some are from me, and some are a mix:

Academic Honesty and Plagiarism

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.

Attendance

As one might expect for a graduate course, attendance is required. You can miss one class; missing a second class affects your final grade (1/3 letter grade for each unexcused absence). Consistent lateness can also count towards an absence. Intellectual absences are also a thing: If you go through an entire class period without participating in discussion at least once you will be marked as absent.

Technology Requirements

Using technology requires a certain degree of patience and professionalism—we are all in this together. Specific technology requirements are (i) an activated Old Dominion email account (to be used for all official communication), (ii) the ability to attach files to said email messages, (iii) working knowledge of an internet browser, (iv) working knowledge of a word processing program, and (v) the ability to convert files to PDF.

Cell Phones, Laptops, and Computer Lab Etiquette

Phones can be used for emergencies only, and ringers must be turned off upon entering class. During class time, your full attention is expected. Browsing the internet for personal purposes during class time is strongly discouraged and will affect your participation grade. Please use the allotted break times for personal use of technology.

Email Policy

Being a student in a graduate English course only heightens your responsibility to communicate with your peers and professor with utmost professionalism. All emails sent to the instructor must have the following characteristics: pertinent title, appropriate greeting, clear sentences, concise paragraphs, and a signature indicating your full name. I reserve the right to not respond to any email that does not fulfill the above characteristics or that asks questions about the timeliness of grading and/or information presented in the syllabus or website (you can ask for further clarification). Here are some nifty emails tips:

Do	Do Not
Check your email every weekday	Check it once a week
Expect response within 48 hours	Expect a response outside of the 8am-5pm block
Think of your teacher as an academic	Think of your teacher as a customer service agent
Write about concerns of learning	Write about grading timelines

Accommodations

In accordance with university policy, a student who wishes to receive some instructional accommodation, because of a documented sensory and/or learning disability, should meet with the instructor to discuss this accommodation. Any student who has a concern or needs to make special arrangements for meeting the requirements of the course is encouraged to speak with the instructor. The instructor must be notified in the first two weeks of the course of any students requiring accommodations. If you have questions about assistance, please contact the Office of Educational Accessibility at 757-683-4655 or visit odu.edu/educationalaccessibility.

Religious Observances

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

What Are My Assignments?

All assignments must be completed in order to pass the class. Be sure to note the differences in work between MA and PhD students.

Reading Responses

20% | Due: Weekly in class, hard copy / via email before class for distance students

Each week students will type up responses to the assigned week's readings. These responses will cover all assigned readings and will: thoughtfully engage the ideas covered; synthesize said ideas into meaningful commentary; and offer forth how one might translate these ideas into teaching practice. MA students will write a 3-page, double-spaced response to the week's readings. PhD students will write a 4-page, double-spaced response and integrate an article researched on own time into the response. All responses will use Microsoft Word and be in 12 point, Times New Roman font with 1" document margins. All responses will include a references page and will be in APA format. Students will complete 13 reading responses, with the top 12 counting towards the whole grade.

Discussion and In-Class Activities

20% | Due: Weekly

Each class will contain substantial discussion and a collaborative activity aimed at the application of the topic covered. Students will be assessed in terms of their level of participation and their completion of assigned tasks. There are higher expectations for PhD students in terms of leading and facilitating discussion.

Field Visualization

10% | Due: November 18

A significant part about professionalizing in the field of technical communication is understanding where it fits within the larger landscape of English departments and scholarship within English and associated programs and departments (e.g., writing programs, interdisciplinary studies). A useful way to critically understand relationships—those material and those less so—is through the process of visualization, where the nature of relationships can be revealed and argued in more nuanced and perhaps more clear ways. Students can use any technology to compose the visualization, and are encouraged to use tools that challenge their comfort level with technology. Encountering new technologies is a necessary part of being a successful educator in the field of technical communication. The visualization will be accompanied by a 5-page rationale (same format as reading notes), explaining compositional choices and how they connect to the scholarship we have read during the semester.

Teaching Portfolio for Technical Writing Course

In lieu of an academic paper, this course encourages you to think of the teaching 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 created below will be shared on your **academia.edu** account as just such a way to professionalize.

Syllabus and Calendar
15% | Due: December 2

All students will create their own unique syllabus for ENGL 334 Technical Writing, a course offered here at Old Dominion University. Since institutional context is so important in the art of teaching, students are not able to craft a syllabus for a course at another institution or for a course they have previously taught or will teach. 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 and knowledge will students walk away with?
—Readings: Which books, articles, and other readings will be used?
—Assignments: What are the major projects?
—Grading: How will you be assessing 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: Including large and small assignments, 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 written as if the course were being taught next week.

Project Description

10% | Due: December 2

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 one (1) project, 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:

- —Project Context: What is being asked of the student and why? What is the rhetorical situation?
- —Connection to Learning Objectives: How does this contribute to the goals of the class?
- —List of Deliverables: What needs to be turned in?
- —Assessment: How will students be graded?
- —Teacher's Notes: How will you be teaching this project? What will be covered in lecture? What activities will facilitate understanding?

Lesson Plan and Guest Teaching

5% | Due: December 2

All students will craft lesson plans for their course on a single topic. PhD students will need to teach the class as a guest lecturer or create an online learning assignment that takes approximately 30-45 minutes. The lesson plan will outline a day in class of one of the projects you have created but should be general enough to be integrated into the course I am teaching.

Teaching Philosophy

10% | Due: December 2

Teaching philosophies are recursive documents that require principles to drive practice but also experiential practice to drive philosophies. Teaching philosophies not only help make sense of practice but also serve as important framing documents for applications for teaching positions. For those who have taught before, this is a useful framing document to help refine your 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. Keep citations to a minimum.

Final Exam

10% | Due: December 9

The final "take home" exam for this course will be one single question (you will be given two to choose from). Students will have 24 hours to complete the exam question, and responses will be 1500 words in length. Students will be granted access to the question on December 8 at 9:00a via Blackboard. The question will ask students to make a supportable argument about a broad issue related to technical communication. In doing so, students will find value in the work put into the reading responses when being asked to synthesize ideas, concepts, and texts from all weeks of the semester.

How Do I Submit My Work?

All assignments will be submitted to Blackboard with the exception of the reading responses (on campus students will bring hard copies to class, while distance students with submit via email). 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.

How Will My Work Be Assessed?

All deliverables will be assessed in accordance with the following criteria:

- **Concept**: Purpose, audience, effective research, knowledge of a topic
- **Structure**: Strong thesis, logical and detailed argument, exploration or explanation, effective paragraph organization
- **Design**: Document design, professional pages, accurate visuals, usable for readers, technically sound
- **Style, Grammar, and Mechanics**: Sentence-level organization, prose, grammar, punctuation, mechanics, citation

Students wishing to receive instructor feedback before set due dates must send their work as an attachment to an email at least 72 hours before the due date. The email must include in the body text three specific questions you would like addressed. The emphasis here is on *specific*: "Is this good?" or "Am I on the right path?" are not specific questions. Specific questions reveal that the student has thought critically about their own work before sending for feedback.

What Is the University's Weighting Scale?

Letter grades will be assigned for each component of the course. They 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		

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

What Is Happening and When Will All These Things Happen?

The course schedule, available on the course website, is subject to change. The changes will be made to the schedule on the course website (**engl775f15.wordpress.com**). Follow course site and check email for any updates. Entries from our text, *Teaching Technical Communication (TTC)*, are noted with the chapter number. Key due dates are noted both on the website schedule and in the assignment descriptions above.

What Is the Withdrawal Policy?

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.