



Monday/Wednesday, 1:00-2:30pm
Room 145, [McGaw Hall](#), Lincoln Park
Campus

Course wiki/website on PB Works
<<http://wrđ204autumn2009.pbworks.com/>>

"Designing Complex Information for Maximal Usefulness"

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Course Overview & Goals

In this course, students learn to communicate and interpret specialized information for readers' practical use. The course highlights the action-oriented goals of technical writing and the importance of accurately communicating information to users. The course provides an overview of key issues related to technical writing such as usability, audience analysis, designing pages and screens, effective collaboration with peers, interpreting and presenting data, and writing clearly and persuasively. Students learn to write, revise, and present common technical writing genres such as instructions, tutorials, manuals, reports, product/process descriptions, proposals, and oral presentations.

This course will teach you specific techniques for designing clear communication despite the complexity of the information. It will be helpful to think of this class on two levels. First, in some way, your career will involve the design of information products (such as software or marketing reports) and it will be important to design that information product carefully so that it is useful to others. Next, you will need to communicate to others about that product (e.g. coordinating with co-workers about that project or explaining the product to customers). In both cases, your ability to communicate clearly and appropriately will determine your personal success in the workplace.

The course readings, lectures, assignments, and in-class exercises have been carefully designed to teach you techniques of technical writing and help you to practice these techniques.

Required Materials

We will make extensive use of the course wiki/website. Assigned readings and all other course materials will be available online.

Strongly Recommended Text

Either

Handbook of Technical Writing by Alred, Brusaw and Oliu, St. Martin's Press. <[Amazon](#)>

OR

The Business Writer's Handbook by Alred, Brusaw and Oliu, Bedford St. Martin's Press. <[Amazon](#)>

OR

Another handbook or style guide appropriate to your major.

Assignments: Overview, Grading, and Policies

Assignment Overview

- **Project Proposal:** Introduces Instruction topic, task, audience, and context of use and reviews existing, model instructions. Identifies opportunity for creating new or improved instructions for a complex task. Persuades me of the viability of this idea for a successful final assignment.
- **Usability Test/Progress Report:** Explains Usability Test design and goals, summarizes the results of watching a reader use your instructions to complete the task and makes recommendations for improving Instructions. Informs

me of work completed and work remaining on Instructions assignment as well as plan for completing remaining work.

- **Oral Report of Usability Test/Progress:** Briefly describes your instructions (task, audience, context of use), summarizes your Usability Test and findings, and describes your revision plan.
- **Technical Instructions** (Revised based on Usability Test): A set of instructions for completing a complex task related to your major. Includes transmittal memo stating task, audience, and context of use.

Grading

Minor Assignments & Participation		30%
activities (homework, reading responses, in-class writing – lowest 2 will be dropped)	20%	
participation	10%	
Assignments		70%
Project Proposal	20%	
Usability Test/Progress Report	20%	
Oral Report	10%	
Technical Instructions	20%	

Assignment Policies

Major assignments are an opportunity for you to learn or practice the concepts of the course and are a necessary part of the learning process. Graded assignments will be evaluated based upon clearly-stated criteria. Assignments not turned in will receive a grade of 0. Minor homework and in-class assignments will be evaluated holistically on a 4-point scale ($\sqrt{+}$, $\sqrt{}$, $\sqrt{-}$, 0).

Assignment Format

All work that you submit should be prepared as though it would be shared with your boss and co-workers. This means:

- Prepare all work in a standard professional genre such as a memo or report (we'll discuss these in class).
- Proofread all work for grammar and spelling.
- Avoid an overly casual or unnecessarily formal tone and wordiness.
- All work will be submitted and graded electronically, so save all files as lastname_document-title_version# (e.g. slattery_proposal_v1.doc).
- You should save all work so that you are able to retrieve it in our computer classroom.

Due Dates

Due dates enable me to coordinate the work of 50 students. Late assignments interrupt this flow and make extra work for me and possibly your peers. **Late work will only be accepted under extenuating circumstances and you must extend me the professional courtesy of emailing me in advance of the due date to request an extension and explain why it is needed.** All assignments are due at the beginning of class and will very often be discussed in class.

Course Policies

The majority of my course policies are based upon **professional courtesy**. By treating each other like professionals, you develop good communication practices that will serve you well in the workplace.

Attendance & Participation Policy

Attendance, punctuality, and participation in this class are very important and both are mandatory. By enrolling in this class, you have agreed you can be here on these days and at these times.

In this course, course concepts will be presented and practiced in class. We will make maximum use of being in a computer classroom and do many in-class exercises which will make up a significant part of your final grade. **Three missed classes will result in a one-letter-grade reduction of your final course grade (e.g. B+ -> C+); four or more missed classes will result in a failing grade.** If you know you will miss a class, please extend me the professional courtesy of emailing me ahead of time with an explanation of the absence and a statement of how you will make up

missed work or when you will turn in any assignments.

In order to benefit from each others' research and experience, I expect all students to **come to class prepared to contribute**. Extensive class discussion will require that you complete all reading and writing assignments for class. Each day will be clearly outlined in the course schedule, so check there regularly so that you are prepared for class on any given day.

Finally, nonverbal communication is a key component of professionalism. Professional courtesy requires regular attendance, punctuality and your full attention during class periods. **Absences, lateness, and distracted behavior will affect your participation grade.**

Academic Integrity

The DePaul Student Handbook <<http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/homehandbook.html>> defines your responsibilities as a student. You are responsible for familiarizing yourself with these policies. Of particular concern in any writing course is the issue of plagiarism. We will discuss plagiarism explicitly: what it is and when, how, and why to cite others' work. The student handbook defines plagiarism here (section B.2): <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/handbook/code16.html>

For this class, the penalty for plagiarism will be a failing grade. Academic Integrity Disciplinary Procedures are outlined here: <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/handbook/code17.html>

Other Policies

Working with Peers

A great deal of your work will be shared with your classmates in order to generate the best ideas possible through collaboration and hold you to a high standard of performance because others will see your work.

You will also be allowed to work collaboratively with peers if you wish. Team projects are encouraged, but teams will be expected to submit longer, more thorough reports as a result of collaboration.

Be respectful of your peers in all communication.

Learning Disabilities

Students with a documented learning disability should notify me so I may make academic accommodations.

Completing the Course

This course is structured to enable successful completion of assignments in the time allotted. I will not consider issuing an "Incomplete" for this class except in the most extreme circumstances.

#	Date	Subject	Due
1	W Sept 09	course overview in class: revise syllabus intro to course wiki	
2	M Sept 14	academic vs. workplace writing; audience, purpose, context in class: redesigning for different audiences/purposes designing instructions and procedures	homework: create you wiki profile page reading response: Chapter 2: "A World of People & Purposes" from Laura Gurak & John Lannon. A Concise Guide to Technical Communication. Pearson Longman. 2004. (.PDF available on wiki)
3	W Sept 16	intro to instructions in class: instructions activity	homework: post 2 ideas for the Instructions assignment to wiki
4	M Sept 21	intro to proposal memo assignment intro to memos (a common workplace genre)	reading response: Chapter 22: "Instructions and Procedures" from John Lannon. Technical Communication. 10th Ed. Pearson Longman. 2006. p. 532-562. (.PDF available on wiki)
5	W Sept 23	persuasion & audience-centered writing in class: brainstorm answers to Analysis Checklists from "A world of people and purposes"	(begin working on Proposal Memo!) homework: Identify models for your instructions and bring them to class (or post to wiki for access in class)
6	M Sept 28	drafting documents in-class Peer Review	Proposal Memo v1: post to wiki before class
7	W Sept 30	document design Proposal Memo Reviews	Proposal Memo v2: post to wiki before class
8	M Oct 05	no class meeting, Shaun @ SIGDOC	after your review, begin drafting instructions

		Proposal Memo Reviews	
9	W Oct 07	no class meeting, Shaun @ SIGDOC Proposal Memo Reviews	after your review, begin drafting instructions
10	M Oct 12	usability testing, in-class test design	begin drafting instructions Proposal Memo v3: post to wiki before class reading response: Usability Testing Readings
11	W Oct 14	intro to progress report assignment	Instructions draft: post to wiki before class
12	M Oct 19	communication ethics	reading response: Chapter 5 "Weighing the Ethical Issues" from John Lannon, Technical Communication, 10th ed. Pearson Longman. 2006. (.PDF available from Blackboard)
13	W Oct 21	professional voice, grammatical correctness, editing	reading response: grammar and editing homework: submit exercise at end of reading
14	M Oct 26	professional voice, grammatical correctness, editing	homework: conduct usability test and begin writing report
15	W Oct 28	making presentations	homework: conduct usability test and begin writing report
16	M Nov 02	making presentations, in-class work on presentations, instructions	revising your instructions
17	W Nov 04	in-class work on presentations, instructions	Usability Test/Progress Report
18	M Nov 09	Oral Reports	Oral Report

19	W Nov 11	Oral Reports	Oral Report
20	M Nov 16	in-class work on presentations, instructions	
	exam day	no class meeting	Final Instructions