New Jersey Institute of Technology

Digital Commons @ NJIT

Fall 2024

COM 313-009-011-013: Technical Writing

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Recommended Citation

COM 313 009 Technical Writing
Tuesday, Friday, 10:00 am - 11:20 am
Central King Building 313

Professor: Mr. Ben Apatoff (He/him/his)   **Term**: Fall 2024
Office Phone: 973-596-3266   **Office**: Central King Building G17
Email: Apatoff@njit.edu   **Office Hours**: Scheduled by appointment

Course Format and Objectives

Catalog Description: An advanced writing course combining theory with practice to prepare students as technical writers. Analyze complex communication situations and design appropriate responses through tasks that involve problem solving, rhetorical theory, document design, oral presentations, writing teams, audience awareness, ethical considerations and gender equity issues.

Course Description: In COM 313, you will learn to create, adapt and revise technical documents for both expert and non-expert audiences. Since many of you have different professional goals and interests, this course will focus on rhetorical awareness rather than addressing every convention and genre that you might encounter in your professional lives. This means that we will spend much of our time investigating the social context surrounding pieces of writing, and consider how authors use deliberate rhetorical strategies to communicate meaning within these texts. The course will also focus on the writing process, asking you to brainstorm topics, write drafts, and revise based on instructor or peer feedback. Keep this in mind, because we don't have a lot of time to cover this material.

Course Goals: Upon completion of this course students will be able to:
• Recognize and analyze the rhetorical dimensions in written documents by producing written and critical responses to course readings.
• Use writing as a tool for critical thinking, reflection and communication.
• Understand writing choices and how to make ethical writing decisions.
• Practice the writing process by using brainstorming, invention, and revision strategies.
• Construct clear, grammatical sentences and produce well-organized texts that exhibit an attention to audience, genre, and purpose.
• Learn how to apply basic principles of document design to clarify writing.
• Find, select, assess, and analyze information sources, both print and electronic, and to credit, integrate and synthesize these sources in your own work.

Required Texts: Articles and links will be available on Canvas. These materials will generally be posted by the beginning of the week (Monday). If you have any questions about these materials, feel free to reach out to me via email.

Participation: Your participation grade reflects your overall performance in the course. Students with strong participation might 1) engage with all the readings; 2) ask useful questions in class; 3) arrive on time for class, prepared to work; 4) submit assignments on time; 5) contribute in discussions and classwork.

Students with low participation might 1) ignore the readings; 2) text or surf the web during class; 3) miss deadlines; 4) get off track during class activities; 5) miss classes and expect me to reteach what you missed.

You may miss up to one week of class (2 classes) without penalty. Every subsequent unexcused absence will result in a deduction of participation points. **More than six unexcused absences (three weeks of the course) will result in the automatic failure of the course.** If you are going to be absent for any reason, let me know why as soon as possible.

Your classwork and homework assignments are designed to prepare you for the course's major assignments. Remember that classwork, homework, and class participation combine for 30% of your final grade, so do not ignore the importance of this work. Each assignment will be graded according to the following scale:

Satisfactory: This work is thoughtful, reasonably complete given time allowed, and it was turned in on time (full credit, usually 5/5 points).

Marginal: This work was turned in on time, but it is completed in a careless manner or is substantially incomplete given time allowed (half credit, usually 2.5/5 points).

Unacceptable: This work ignores written/verbal instructions and/or missed its deadline (no credit, usually 0/5 points).

Formal Projects: You will have three formal projects. These assignments will be evaluated according to project rubrics, which will also be posted on Canvas, and will be given a letter grade. Full details on these projects will be uploaded to Canvas within the next two weeks.

Grade Breakdown: Each assignment will be evaluated on criteria that are specific to the genre you are producing. You will find these criteria with the appropriate assignment sheet.

A/A- Superior. Your deliverable is professional and exceeds expectations. It meets (and exceeds) all of the grading criteria for the assignment. You demonstrate excellence in audience awareness, organization, and document design. I would use your work as an example for future classes, and I recommend you use it in your professional portfolio.

B+/B/B- Proficient. Your deliverable is professional in writing and design, and it meets all of the grading criteria for the assignment. The difference between an A and a B is your attention to detail and/or the sophistication of your writing or design.

C+C/C- Average. Your deliverable meets the basic criteria for the assignment but does no more. It may be reasonably organized, have a few grammar or usage errors, but it needs another revision to improve usability and/or audience awareness.

D+/D/D- Deficient. Your deliverable needs significant revision of rhetorical approach, content development, writing, and/or document design/visuals.

F- Unacceptable. Your deliverable fails to accomplish its designated task, adapt to its audience, or develop key ideas.

Writing Assignments (Individual/Group 70%)

You will have three major assignments—Website Analysis, Instruction Set Project and Recommendation Report—which will make up the majority of your grade.

In-Class/Homework Assignments (Individual/Group, 20%) Your in-class and homework assignments prepare you for major assignments. They also develop your writing and critical thinking abilities. You will receive more information about these assignments in class, and you cannot make up any in-class or homework assignment you miss when absent or late to class.

Participation (Individual, 10%) Participation credit includes your active, ongoing participation in class discussions, asking pertinent or clarifying questions, etc. It is difficult to do well in the rest of the course without participating extensively.

Course Etiquette:
- Come to class in a timely manner. Tardy students need to enter quietly and not interrupt the class. Do not share the reason you are late with the class. Disruptive classmates will have to leave.
- Silence all phones and other electronic devices upon entering the classroom. Should you forget to silence your cell phone and it rings, do not answer your phone in class.
- Laptops should only be open when we are drafting. For discussions and presentations, they should remain closed. You will retain more information in your notes if you hand write them. Don't just snap a photo of the board with your phone—studies show that there is a connection between you physically writing and remembering.
- You may not audio or videotape any part of any class without prior written permission from your instructor.
- Come to class prepared to participate.
- Do not bring food into the classroom. If you need to bring in something to eat for health reasons, see me.

Respect your peers. You're entitled to your opinions, and it's fine to disagree. Be polite about it. You're reviewing peers' writing, not their opinions. Ad hominems, bigotry, etc. are not opinions.

Note: I do not give extra credit, particularly for those who have failed to fulfill the participation aspect of this course. Writing courses are designed to be process-oriented, which makes regular participation essential to academic growth. I also do not accept revisions of already graded final work.

Canvas is NJIT's learning management system. In First-Year Writing (FYW), instructors and students use this system for all activities including submitting essays, sharing course materials,

creating discussions, and grading assignments. Participation on discussion boards or other short essays or responses are regularly completed on Canvas and will count toward students' participation grade.

NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity

The New Jersey Institute of Technology is an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge through teaching and research. We expect our graduates to assume positions of leadership within their professions and communities. Honesty in your academic work will develop into professional integrity.
The NJIT Code of Academic Integrity embodies a spirit of mutual trust and intellectual honesty that is central to the very nature of the university and represents the highest possible expression of shared values among the members of the university community.

All assignments submitted shall be considered "graded work" and all aspects of your coursework are covered by the Code on Academic Integrity. All projects and homework assignments are to be completed individually unless otherwise specified.

The full text of the NJIT University Code on Academic Integrity can be found at www.njit.edu/education/pdf/academic-integrity-code-pdf.

Note: "Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu."

Also note: "Artificial intelligence usage is not permitted in this course. The expectation of this course is for students to work through the course without assistance from any type of artificial intelligence to better develop their own skills in this content area. As such, artificial intelligence usage is not permitted throughout this course."

Plagiarized work, missing work, and work that fails two AI tests will result in a "0" F grade, not a "60" F. Canvas tracks plagiarism and AI in your papers, and more than two instances of plagiarism or AI in your work will result in your failure of the course.

Accommodations
Every attempt will be made to accommodate qualified students. See me as early in the semester as possible to discuss the necessary accommodations, and/or contact Student Disability Services at 973-596-3420.

The Writing Center at NJIT, Central King Building—Room G-17
Tentative Fall 2024 hours: M-Th 10-7, F 11:30-4; https://www.njit.edu/writingcenter/

The Writing Center (G17 Central King) is available for 45-minute individual and group appointments with professional writing tutors both onsite and online. This resource is intended to help you improve your communication and writing skills. Tutors can help with planning assignments, improving your writing, refining an essay or multimedia project, or other communication-based needs. To make an appointment, visit https://njit.mywconline.com

Writing Assignments: Since this is a composition course, you must revise papers in this course, so hand in completed drafts on time and revise them later. If you are absent, contact me and arrange to have someone hand in your work on time and post your work on Canvas.

Out of class assignments must be word processed. Make sure you save your work on at least 2 places (hard drive/cloud/flash drive) so you always have a copy. Make a print out of your paper before you turn off your system so if something goes wrong you only have to retype what you've written rather than going through the entire writing process again. Email a copy of your paper to yourself so you can access it from the writing center and other computer labs. Update your computer virus protection weekly and do weekly virus scans of your computer.

Conferences: If you have questions about your assignments, ask me. If office hours are not convenient, we can reschedule. During Writing Days, I will have short conferences with you individually.

PEER GROUP WORKSHOPS: You will be placed into small groups (3-4 students) for peer response. You will meet with your peer groups during class to discuss the drafts of the papers you will write for this course. Good writers can benefit from some honest feedback from readers, and often writers form support groups to read and react to one another's work. Hearing reactions to your writing from more than one reader will help you judge the effectiveness of your work. Additionally, responding to the work of other writers will help develop your ability to read and revise your own writing. Your drafts must be complete drafts in order for you to get credit for the peer group exercise. Peer workshop days are not the time to brainstorm; rather, it is the time to have peers reflect on what you have already written and to help you progress to the next stage of writing—revision. This stage cannot be done if your paper is incomplete. If your paper is not finished on a peer group day, you will receive one absence for the class period. **It is critical that everyone be present and ready to participate on peer group days.**

PEER GROUP ETIQUETTE: If you've made it to NJIT, you should have a decent sense of peer etiquette, but if you have any questions you can ask me. You will be asked to find at least 3 items you liked about the paper and 3 items where the author needs improvement (with some suggestions from the group).

1.   **Be timely.** That is, make sure that everyone's writing is given equal time. You know how to divide the number of people in your group by the amount of time we will be spending on a particular day in our peer groups. If you manage not to respond to everyone's paper, it is the group's responsibility to arrange time outside of class to meet to finish the workshop. If you think you've finished early, use the extra time to go back and look at the drafts again.

2.   **Listen when your work is being discussed.** If time permits, ask questions of your

peers after everyone's work has been discussed.

3.   **Be honest but polite and tactful**. There is no value in demeaning a peer's work or personally insulting a peer. "This sucks" is not a review.

4.   **Do not tell a peer that his/her paper is "fine" and s/he does not need to change anything.** All writing can be improved upon. Every bestselling author or Nobel Prize winner has an editor. Notice how many of your textbooks have had multiple editions. Most published textbooks go through many revisions. If you can write, you can revise.

Tentative Course Schedule

Readings and writing assignments will be posted to Canvas.

Week	Topic
9/3	Introductions
9/10	The Writing Process **Website Analysis Project Introduced**
9/17	The Rhetorical Situation
9/24	How Situation Defines Objectives
10/1	Communicating Across Different Contexts **Website Analysis Project Due**
10/8	Writing Choices and Ethics **Instruction Set Project Introduced**
10/15	Instruction Sets
10/22	Clarity and Style **Recommendation Report Project Introduced**
10/29	Document Arrangement **Instruction Set Project Due**
11/5	Recommendation Reports
11/12	Recommendation Reports **Recommendation Report Project Description Due**
11/19	Research Practices
11/26	Discourse Communities
12/3	Communicating Across Cultures
12/10	Final Projects **Final Recommendation Report Project Due**