

Technical Writing 1

English 1013-01

Instructor: Gabe Morrison

Email: gabriel.morrison@uconn.edu

Time: M/W/F 10:10–11:00 a.m.

Location: Austin 164

Office hours: M 1:30–2:30; Th 12:30–1:30 (virtual office hours via Google Hangouts)

Course Objectives

By the end of this course you should be able to

- Shape texts to meet the needs of specific audiences and rhetorical situations
- Identify, analyze, and produce technical writing genres
- Use technologies, technical style, and visual design principles to enhance the readability and effectiveness of technical documents
- Evaluate technical writing for usability and accessibility
- Understand the ethical dimensions of technical communication
- Effectively deliver technical presentations

Course Description

Lab reports, policy proposals, business presentations, user manuals—these are just some of the wide variety of texts that might be classified as technical writing. Although few people enter technical fields because they think of themselves primarily as writers, writing and communication tasks nevertheless comprise from 50–75% of most technical professionals' time [\[1\]](#).

Writing for technical environments is different than writing for other settings, such as school. This course will introduce you to the field of technical writing and will help prepare you for the diverse writing demands that technical writers and professionals encounter across their careers. Through readings, brief lectures, activities, and online and in-class discussions, we will address big questions about context, audience, purpose, and ethics that should be asked in every writing situation. We'll practice workplace and scientific genres (reports, proposals, digital communications) and cover key topics in technical communication, including visual and document design, accessibility, usability testing, technical style, and the function and politics of writing technologies.

Required Materials

- *The Non-Designer's Design Book* by Robin Williams (ISBN 9780133966152) — available digitally through UConn's Babbidge Library
- Materials hosted on Google Classroom (class code **aytat3u**)

Resource Links

[Writing Center](#)
[Center for Students with Disabilities](#)

[Student Health and Wellness](#)
[Student Care Team](#)

[Community Standards](#)
[Dean of Students](#)



Collaborative Project

20% | December 6

One substantial collaborative project will be due at the end of the course. I will assign you to groups and find a client for you to work for. As part of this project, you will also conduct a *needs assessment* beforehand and a *report* after completing it (see below).



Needs Assessment

15% | October 21

In preparation for the *collaborative project* (above), you will identify key genres, audiences, and needs for your client. You will write up your findings in the *needs assessment*, which will include an outline for your collaborative project.



Project Report

10% | December 12

After completing the *collaborative project* (above), you will produce a brief report that introduces the project, describes the project's purpose and the context, and accounts for your labor and choices as you worked on the project.



Genre Analysis

15% | September 20

Early in the semester, you will undertake a *genre analysis* to help you understand how the concept of genre can aid technical writers produce and evaluate texts. This analysis will help prepare you for the *content audit* you'll produce for the *collaborative project*.



Genre Analysis Presentation

10% | September 30–October 4

After writing up your *genre analysis* (above), you'll turn that analysis into a brief presentation that you'll deliver for the class. This will strengthen our collective knowledge of technical genres and allow you to sharpen your presentation skills.



Participation

10%

Participation in activities, discussions, and peer review is crucial to the success of this course. Collaboration is one of the central themes in this course, and it is everyone's responsibility to contribute to cultivating an interactive learning environment.



Short Homework Assignments

15%

You'll complete various short homework assignments that are designed to help you develop the larger assignments for this course. These include things like reflections on readings, usability tests, and interviews. These will be graded on a done/not done basis.



Quizzes

5% | TBD

There will be five quizzes throughout the semester on course readings or concepts. Each quiz that you pass counts for one point toward your course grade. Each quiz will consist of three questions; two correct answers means you successfully pass the quiz.

Unit 1 Schedule

Date	Due
Week 1: What is technical writing?	
M - 8/26	Read "What Is Technical Writing?"; "Rhetorical Situation"; "A Guide to Technical Communications"
W - 8/28	Watch Retro Report documentary; read <i>Challenger</i> case study documents
F - 8/30	Short Homework 1
Week 2: Genre	
M - 9/2	No Class – Labor Day
W - 9/4	Read Henze chapter; Short Homework 2
F - 9/6	Read Northrop; read Driscoll; Short Homework 3
Week 3: Genre, cont.	
M - 9/9	Read genre case studies
W - 9/11	Short Homework 4
F - 9/13	Conduct/transcribe interview for Short Homework 5
Week 4: Technical style	
M - 9/16	Short Homework 5
W - 9/18	
F - 9/20	Genre Analysis draft due
Week 5: Technical presentations and data visualization	
M - 9/23	Revised Genre Analysis due; Read Tufte analysis
W - 9/25	Watch Phillips TED Talk; Read Williams chapter 3; Short Homework 6
F - 9/27	Watch McCandless TED Talk; Short Homework 7
Week 6: Technical presentations and data visualization, cont.	
M - 9/30	Presentations
W - 10/2	Presentations
F - 10/4	Presentations

Unit 2 Schedule

Week 7: Content strategy and collaboration	
M - 10/7	Read Rockley and Cooper, chapters 1, 2, and 7
W - 10/9	Short Homework 8; meet with client
F - 10/11	Read Markel and Selber chapter 3; Short Homework 9
Week 8: Writing procedures	
M - 10/14	Wilde et al., chapter 3
W - 10/16	Short Homework 10
F - 10/18	Content Audit draft due before class on Google Classroom
Week 9: Visual design	
M - 10/21	Content Audit revision due before class on Google Classroom
W - 10/23	Read Williams chapters 1-5
F - 10/25	Short Homework 11
Week 10: Introduction to usability testing; planning your test	
M - 10/28	Read Barnum chapters 1 and 6
W - 10/30	
F - 11/1	Short Homework 12
Week 11: Conducting a usability test	
M - 11/4	Read Barnum chapter 7 and 8
W - 11/6	Collaborative project prototype due
F - 11/8	Conduct usability test
Week 12: Accessibility; analyzing test data	
M - 11/11	Read Eyman et al., "Best Practices"; Hendren; Jarrett et al.; Microsoft "Inclusive Design"
W - 11/13	
F - 11/15	Short Homework 13
Week 13: Intercultural rhetoric and localization	
M - 11/18	Read St. Amant
W - 11/20	
F - 11/22	Short Homework 14
M - 11/25	No Class – Fall Break
W - 11/27	
F - 11/29	
Week 14: Report writing	
M - 12/2	Short Homework 15
W - 12/4	Read report writing case studies; Markel and Selber chapter 12 excerpts
F - 12/6	Collaborative Project due on Google Classroom by 11:59 PM
F - 12/13	Project Report due by 11:59 PM on Google Classroom

Policies

Grading

Your final grade will depend on two things: your successful completion of the day-to-day work of the course (including drafts of all major assignments) and the quality of that work.

You will be awarded credit for your contributions to class, your submissions of work that is satisfactory, on time, and complete, as well as your regular engagement with others' work. **If you submit satisfactory and on-time work throughout the semester and demonstrate engaged participation within the class, you will receive at least a B for your final course grade.** If there is missing or insufficient work, or if you do not participate in a satisfactory way (such as by failing to complete the task assigned or missing a component in an assignment), you may receive a grade below that of B. Substantial amounts of missing work will result in a failure of the course. To earn a grade above a B, you must produce consistently excellent work in addition to submitting satisfactory and on-time work.

As this is a W course, many assignments will require revision after the initial submission. You cannot receive a passing grade on an assignment with a required revision component if you fail to submit an initial draft, fail to participate in peer review, or fail to submit a revised version.

Disabilities and Commitment to Universal Design for Learning

I am committed to making this class accessible to everyone. If you have a documented disability (or think you may have a disability) and, as a result, need a reasonable accommodation to participate in this class, complete course requirements, or benefit from the College's programs or services, contact the Center for Students with Disabilities (Wilbur Cross 2013, 860-486-2020) as soon as possible. To receive academic accommodations, you should register with CSD. All information and documentation is confidential. Please speak with me if you have any concerns.

I assume that all of us learn in different ways and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the written materials I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please talk to me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If you do not have a documented disability, remember that other support services like the Writing Center are available to all students.

Academic Conduct

We will conduct ourselves as a community of scholars, recognizing that academic study is both an intellectual and ethical enterprise. You are encouraged to build on the ideas and texts of others—that's a vital part of academic life. But you are obligated to document every occasion when you use another's ideas, language, or syntax. Please note that ignorance of that or of UConn's policies never excuses a violation. I encourage you to study together, discuss the readings outside of class, share your drafts freely with each other, and go to the Writing Center with your drafts. However, when you use another's ideas or language, you must formally signal that to your readers (that is, cite it). Even one occasion of academic dishonesty, large or small, on any assignment, large or small, will result in failure for the entire course. For an articulation of UConn's policy on academic honesty, see *Responsibilities of Community Life: The Student Code*. If you have further questions, please contact me.