Stephen Pastis, *Pearls Before Swine*, October 23, 2010, available, http://www.gocomics.com/pearlsbeforeswine/2010/10/23

English 238
Technical & Professional Writing I
Section 01 | CRN: 26428

Course Description & Learning Outcomes

It can be easy to think—as Rat and Goat do in the comic strip above—that technical writing is writing that no one reads. After all, who of us hasn't disregarded the legal terms of software packages or thrown aside the instructions to a new product we just bought? But of course we all rely on such writing almost every day. Consider the last time you had to refer to your car's user manual to interpret a warning light. Or think about when you had to put together some furniture for your apartment or dorm room. Or recall the instructions you have followed on various Shippensburg websites to register for classes, schedule visits for tutoring sessions, or attend an event. When Goat points out that "no one ever reads" software contracts, he's also inadvertently hitting upon one of the strengths of good technical writing: it disappears. That is, really good technical writing is so attuned to its audience's needs and so well-organized that the fact that it is a document someone produced evaporates into its utility for the reader. Reading good technical writing, in other words, doesn't feel like reading. It feels like absorption of information, the reception of clear directives, or the arriving at a commonsense solution.

Because technical writing is not one thing and takes a variety of forms, this class has two primary goals: the first is to provide you the skills to navigate a variety of professional problems and audiences; the second is to introduce you to a few genres of writing common in the professional world. Being a good technical writer is essentially being a good rhetorical thinker. Rhetoric is often thought of as persuasive writing or speaking, but the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle gives us a much more holistic definition. He says that rhetoric is "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion." Understood this way, rhetoric is less about adapting or acting to win others over than it is about seeing and knowing how to do

these things at any given moment. It's about listening, analyzing, and responding. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric is also a good one for technical writing, because technical writers develop particular solutions to particular problems within particular contexts or cultures. Often, technical writers must address many audiences in multiple contexts. Working with colleagues on a recommendation report, for instance, technical writers must adjust to the audience of their collaborators as they hope to persuade a client or a boss to take action on a specific request. Given that technical writing requires adaptive and responsive thinking, we'll be consistently moving from independent to collaborative work and back again. However, most of the time I'll be leaving it up to you to figure out how to organize, divide, and complete individual and group projects. Throughout the semester, you'll be introduced to the processes, procedures, and forms of technical writing. You'll practice using graphics, learn to document sources, and think critically about your audience. You will learn what it means to write well in a number of different contexts. By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- create documents that adhere to the eight measures of technical writing excellence
- be familiar with a variety of genres of writing common to professional settings, including memos, instructional documents, research reports, cover letters, and résumés
- integrate graphics effectively into your documents
- collaborate with others in large and small groups
- design basic web spaces using wikis
- present your research orally and visually in a professional manner

For you to achieve these goals, I expect you to come to class on time, be respectful of your peers and me, follow instructions, raise questions, and participate in class discussion. I expect that you will do all of the work.

Required Text
Markel, Mike. *Practical Strategies for Technical Communication*. 2nd ed., Bedford/St. Martin, 2017.
Online Resource: http://www.macmillanhighered.com/launchpad/ps2e/7323495

Assignments
Unless otherwise stated, all assignments are due at the start of class in both hard and electronic copy. I do not accept late work, and my policy on late work will be especially strict in this class. In the professional world, deadlines are rarely adjusted, so in this course I'm asking you to plan accordingly. Anticipate illnesses or other delays; establish protocols with your peers to ensure your work is handed in on time.

Readings: All readings should be completed by the day they are listed on the syllabus.

Exercises: I will be asking you to do a variety of small tasks and exercises throughout the semester to facilitate your learning of technical and professional writing skills. These exercises are low stakes, and are graded on completion and correctness. Do them well, and you'll do well.

Semester Task Schedule: Throughout the semester, you'll have to set task schedules and agendas in both formal and informal ways, especially when you work in groups. But for your first assignment, I want you to set a task schedule for yourself for completing your assignments this

semester. To do this, refer to Chapter 3, pp. 37-39 and Chapter 11, pp. 305-307. You can present your schedule however you would like, but I recommend using one of the three forms discussed in the book: a table, a bar chart, or a network diagram. It's important that you don't merely list the assignments of the course and the beginning and end dates. Rather, you must break down the assignment into requisite steps, and then apportion those steps to the semester timeline. Be specific but reasonable. I will grade your task schedules in terms of attention to detail and professionalization. Imagine you are handing such a schedule into your boss. Its presentation should reflect upon your care and attention to detail. Hand in a hard copy in class and an electronic copy in the appropriate D2L folder.
> **Deadline:** Monday, January 29

Class Netiquette Guide and Email Policy: Professional communication increasingly occurs in digital and online spaces. For this assignment, I'd like you to work in groups of three to four to develop an email policy and netiquette guide for our class, which, while specific to our particular needs, should have principles generalizable to the university as a whole. To do this, complete Exercise 7 at the end of Chapter 9 (p. 264). You should design it as if it were a handout you would receive from the university. In addition to developing these guidelines, you should complete *an audience profile sheet*, available from our course's Launchpad website.
> **Deadline:** Monday, February 12

Job Portfolio: As a technical writer, you're always professionalizing and building your brand, but for this assignment, you'll take special care to persuade others of your value to an organization by developing a résumé and writing a cover letter for a specific job. Look for jobs on Shippensburg's Career Connection website or other career databases such as monster.com, linkedin.com, or careerbuilder.com. Then refer to Chapter 10 of our textbook to get started. Your cover letter should be one page, and your résumé should be 1-2 pages. While cover letters and résumés adhere to specific forms, their content should be customized to the job to which you are applying.
> **Deadline:** Monday, February 26

Description: For this assignment, you will have to write a description of the technical writing process. The final product should be a one page handout. It should be eminently readable and dynamic. It must include graphics. Don't fool yourself. This may seem like an easier task, but it will demand your best writing. Refer to Chapter 14 (pp. 394ff) as well as Chapter 1, Chapter 4, and Chapter 8. Your audience is a beginning technical writing student: imagine you in this class on the first day. In addition to handing in your description of the writing process, I would like you to perform an audience analysis profile and write a two-page memo that details how you imagine your audience, what they should reasonably know and need to know, and how this information motivated you to create your description document.
> **Deadline:** Wednesday, March 21

Researched Recommendation Report: This will be your final, capstone project for the course. You must research and report on an **actionable** problem at Shippensburg University or the surrounding community. An example might be the need for computer labs in dormitories, or a community garden to be maintained by environmental science students. Whatever you choose, you cannot pick something hypothetical. The goal is to create a recommendation report that you

could actually provide to the appropriate people. You will have to write several documents for this report: a proposal, a status or progress report, and the final recommendation report. Refer to Chapters 11, 12, and 13 for the nature and style of each. The body of the report should be 2000-3000 words. You should include at least two graphics, one of which you have to create yourself. The report should have **Front Matter** (title page, table of contents, list of figures, and informational abstract), a **Body,** and **Back Matter** (references, appendices, and indexes or glossaries as needed). You should paginate the front matter differently than the body (i.e. roman numerals and Arabic numerals, with the Introduction beginning on page 1). The **Body** must include the following sections, though you may need additional section or subsections depending on your topic: Introduction, Research Methods, Results, Conclusion, Recommendations.

> *Deadlines*:
> > **Proposal:** Monday, March 26
> > **Status Report:** Wednesday, April 11
> > **Drafts of Recommendation Report:** Wednesday, April 18; Monday, April 23
> > **Final Recommendation Report:** Monday, April 30

Oral Presentation: During our final week, you will have to present your researched recommendation report to the class. Dress professionally and treat this presentation as if you were giving it to the persons to whom you are seeking to persuade or to gain as a client. This should not be a mere summary of the report, but a translation of its key points into a new visual and oral document. It should be 5-6 minutes. You will have to practice delivering it. Many times.

Course Wiki and Progress Reports: Throughout the semester, you will be working in groups to create and update our course wiki (http://shiptpws18.wikidot.com/). Each group will rotate throughout the semester to four designated topics on the wiki:
> 1) Home Page, complete with Course Description and Graphics
> 2) Forums
> 3) Assignments, including grading criteria
> 4) Course Texts & Resources, including Wiki How-To Guides

Wikis are by design open and collaborative, meaning anyone can change and edit nearly anything. The goal of this assignment isn't to build an excellent website, but to practice learning about writing online, navigating obstacles and challenges to learning how to do this, and applying technical communication skills in a public forum. This will often be frustrating and confusing work. That's OK. There will be no set plan or tasks for the content you generate or update. You can and should adapt content from this syllabus, but **you should not plagiarize**. You will have to plan with your group and respond to what is in front of you. However, you will have to hand in periodic progress reports at set deadlines throughout the semester. After each progress report, your group will be rotated to a new content area, which you will then develop, revise, or otherwise improve. You will refer to Chapter 12 for the general form and content of progress reports. These Wiki Progress Reports should be 2-4 pages. They should include a purpose statement, a summary, an introduction, results, recommendation for the next group, and references (if you used any). These progress reports should be responsive, which means that excepting the very first one, they should acknowledge and respond to what was included in previous progress reports. These should be handed in in hard copy and submitted to D2L in the appropriate folder.

Deadlines: Wednesday, February 14; Wednesday, March 7; Wednesday, April 4; Wednesday, April 25

Course Policies and Grading
Your course grade will breakdown as follows:
  Exercises (5 x 10) = **50 points**
  Semester Task Schedule = **25 points**
  Netiquette Policy = **50 points**
  Job Portfolio = **50 points**
        Résumé (25)
        Cover Letter (25)
  Description = **100 points**
        Analysis Memo (25)
        Description (75)
  Researched Recommendation Report = **200 points**
        Proposal (30)
        Status Report (30)
        Rough Draft 1 (20)
        Rough Draft 2 (20)
        Final Report (100)
  Oral Presentation = **25 points**
  Wiki Progress Reports (4 x 25) = **100 points**
TOTAL POINTS = 600 points

The standard numbers then apply:
558-600 = A	540-558 = A-
528-539 = B+	498-527 = B
480-497 = B-	462-479 = C+
438-461 = C	420-437 = C-
390-419 = D	0-389 = F.

Grading Criteria: My grading criteria are as follows. You may revise these measures on the course wiki, though I reserve the right to edit them as well.

A work is exemplary. It not only follows the guidelines of the assignment; it goes above and beyond them. There are no grammatical, stylistic, or structural mistakes.

B work is above average. It follows the guidelines of the assignment. There are minimal grammatical, stylistic, or structural mistakes.

C work is average work. It will follow the guidelines of the assignment, but with noticeable grammatical, stylistic, or structural mistakes.

D work does not exist in my class. I see no logical case to give Ds on individual assignments, though by the law of averages, you may end up with a D in my course.

F work fails to meet the requirements of the assignment, and/or has significant grammatical, stylistic, or structural errors. Failure to hand in an assignment earns a zero, not an F, which is to say, a zero is an F, but not all Fs are zeros. This is an important and significant distinction.

I do not accept late work.

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory. This is a discussion course; everyone's presence is a necessity. Unexcused absences, lateness (tardy), and failure to prepare will adversely affect your grade.

       Three unexcused absences will lower your final grade by a half-letter grade (or 5% points). Four unexcused absences will drop it another half (or another 5%). For every subsequent absence, you will lose a letter grade (or 10%). If you are absent more than six times (the equivalent of three weeks of class), you automatically fail the course. Three tardies will result in an absence. The only exceptions to these rules are sudden illnesses, religious holidays, and family emergencies—for these cases I need written documentation. The written documentation will allow you to turn in the homework for the day(s) that you have missed.

       If you must miss class, please call or e-mail me beforehand (I prefer e-mail, as I check it more often than my voice mail). Also, please give me an explanation in hardcopy either before (for a planned absence) or soon after (for an emergency) the class you miss.

   An excused absence (religious holiday, serious illness, death in your immediate family, or absence for official University trips to conferences, intercollegiate athletic events, musical performances, and other event authorized in advance by the University) **is still an absence**. You simply have the opportunity to make other arrangements for submitting the assignments:

- If you must miss a class, inform me in writing and turn in any work in advance.
- If you are sick, try to arrange having your work (and a note) delivered for you.
- **Contact classmates** about any work assigned on days you miss so you can turn your work in on time.

You are responsible for learning from classmates about assignments and classwork.

Shippensburg University Title IX:
Shippensburg University and its faculty are committed to assuring a safe and productive educational environment for all students. In order to meet this commitment and to comply with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 and guidance from the Office for Civil Rights, the University requires faculty members to report incidents of sexual violence shared by students to the University's Title IX Coordinator.

The only exceptions to faculty members' reporting obligations are when incidents of sexual violence are communicated by students during classroom discussions, in writing assignments for class, or as part of University-approved research projects.

Faculty members are obligated to report allegations of sexual violence or any other abuse of a student who was, or is, a child (a person under 18 years of age) when the abuse allegedly occurred. Such reporting must be made to the Shippensburg University Police (717-477-1444), the Department of Human Services (DHS) at 800-932-0313, and the University's Office of the Vice President of Student Affairs (717-477-1308).

Information regarding the reporting of sexual violence and the resources that are available to victims of sexual violence are set forth at:
http://www.ship.edu/No_More/Sexual_Misconduct/Sexual_Misconduct_Information/

Accommodation Services
Shippensburg is committed to an environment of inclusivity and access. If you require accommodations, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located in Suite 324 Horton Hall. You may visit the website at www.ship.edu/ods, or contact the office (717) 477-1326 (if on campus, x1326).

Academic Dishonesty: Academic dishonesty or plagiarism is a serious offense. As a writer, you are responsible for using sources to **support, not replace,** independent thought, observing the conventions of citing sources, and coming to me if you are unsure whether your work is too close to your sources.

I will not tolerate fraud in any form, especially downloading or copying sections (full or partial) of a written source passed off as your own work. When I suspect plagiarism—in any assignment—**I will give the assignment a zero** and report the incident to the Dean of Students. A second offense will result in an **F for the course**, and the University may take further disciplinary action, including expulsion from the University. Refer to the *Shippensburg University Student Handbook* (*SWATANEY*) for full details. Available here: http://www.ship.edu/Student_Conduct/ (p. 124 of *SWATANEY*) A full description of what constitutes academic dishonesty can also be found in your undergraduate catalog, pp. 38-40. Available here: http://www.ship.edu/catalog/

Writing Studio: You have two venues that can help you with your writing. The first is The English Department Lab in DHC002, which has several Writing Tutors who can help you to work on overall clarity of expression, focus, and general writing issues. Here's the website: https://www.ship.edu/English/First_Year_Writing/DHC_Computer_Lab/. You can make appointments by emailing the tutors dhcwritingtutor@ship.edu. The second is the Shippensburg University Writing Studio, which offers one-hour tutoring sessions in the Learning Center of the Lehman Library. Trained writing tutors work with students, one-on-one, across all disciplines and at any stage in the writing process. The Writing Studio seeks to empower writers to effectively articulate their ideas by engaging in collaborative dialogue and by providing supportive feedback. The Writing Studio encourages students to take advantage of these services. To schedule an appointment, stop by the Learning Center reception desk or schedule a visit through the online portal at http://learning.ship.edu/writing_tutoring/undergraduate

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Schedule of Classes
(this schedule is subject to change at my discretion and in response to the needs of the class)

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Week 1: January 22 & 24
Monday: Introduction to the Course, the wiki, and to technical and professional writing.
Wednesday: Chapter 1

Week 2: January 29 & 31
Monday: Chapter 3; Semester Task Schedule Due

Wednesday: Chapter 9; Exercise 1 Due (Ch. 1, ex. 3)

Unit 1: Writing Professionally Online

Week 3: February 5 & 7
Monday: Chapter 2; Exercise 2 Due (Ch. 2, ex. 3)
Wednesday: Chapter 4

Week 4: February 12 & 14
Monday: Chapter 12; Netiquette Guide & Email Policy Due
Wednesday: Wiki Progress Report 1 Due

Unit 2: Creating Professional Documents

Week 5: February 19 & 21
Monday: Chapter 10; Exercise 3 Due (Ch. 10, ex. 4)
Wednesday: Chapter 6; Exercise 4 Due (Ch. 6, ex. 9-18, 20, 22, 24-26, 28-29)

Week 6: February 26 & 28
Monday: Chapter 7; Job Portfolio Due
Wednesday: Chapter 8; Exercise 5 Due (Ch. 8, ex. 3)

Unit 3: Producing Instructions, Descriptions, and Definitions

Week 7: March 5 & 7
Monday: Chapter 14
Wednesday: Wiki Progress Report 2 Due online / PROFESSOR OUT OF TOWN FOR A CONFERENCE

Week 8: March 12 & 14
Monday: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS
Wednesday: SPRING BREAK, NO CLASS

Week 9: March 19 & 21
Monday: Chapter 11
Wednesday: Description Document Due

Week 10: March 26 & 28
Monday: RRR Proposal Due
Wednesday: Chapter 12; PROFESSSOR OUT OF TOWN FOR A CONFERENCE

Unit 4: Developing Researched Recommendation Reports

Week 11: April 2 & 4
Monday: Chapter 13

Wednesday: Wiki Progress Report 3 Due

Week 12: April 9 & 11
Monday: Topic Discussion
Wednesday: RRR Status Report Due

Week 13: April 16 & 18
Monday: Topic Discussion
Wednesday: RRR Rough Draft 1 Due

Week 14: April 23 & 25
Monday: RRR Rough Draft 2 Due
Wednesday: Wiki Progress Report 4 Due

Week 15: April 30 & May 2
Monday: Chapter 15; RRR Due
Wednesday: Topic Discussion

Week 16: May 7 – 11
FINAL EXAM: TBD, Researched Report Oral Presentations