University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Spring 1-2016

WRIT 121.02: Introduction to Technical Writing

Jessica M. Dougherty-McMichael
University of Montana - Missoula, Jessica.Dougherty@mso.umt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Instructor: Jessica Dougherty-McMichael   Email: Jessica.Dougherty@mso.umt.edu
MWF 10:10-11:00   GrizHouse 9D
Office: GrizHouse 6   Office Hours: M 11:15-12:45, W 12:30-2:00 & by appointment

COURSE OBJECTIVES
➢ Introduction to constructed text that accurately communicates technical information using technical text, document design, graphic placement, and technical formats.

➢ An awareness of both academic and technical writing genres and how the writing situation shapes the document.

➢ Introduction to a writing process that includes revision and editing.

➢ Introduction to *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* as a tool to gain control of punctuation, grammar, syntax, and spelling.

WORKLOAD AND EXPECTATIONS OVERVIEW
This course focuses on the kind of writing that fills manuals –description, instruction, and analysis – as well as public science writing. We will read and discuss technical documents and materials. There is a special focus on audience as evidenced in the Society for Technical Communicator's Code of Ethics: Technical writers "satisfy the audience's need for information, not the writer's own need for self-expression." This kind of writing focuses on the reader.

All writing classes address **writing conventions** at some point. We will address punctuation problems through clauses and basic sentence structure that leads to a working knowledge of *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, a tool you take with you to use in other classes. It is appropriate to line edit technical documents, so this class also addresses editing skills.

All major papers will include a revision day where we can work the **writing process** as we revise these papers to better understand how we compose, and to learn once again that there is nothing neat and tidy about writing and revising. In technical writing with the audience so important, we need feedback and must adjust our documents continually.

After completing the technical/professional papers and assignments, students will be expected to-apply knowledge of strong technical text, graphic placement, and design features within all other assignments, especially the public science piece.

There are **readings** both in Moodle and a Pearson Publishing mode that will require your critical reading skills and are part of the daily assignments. Some designated readings will require you to **define what credible writing in cyberspace is** and how a reader determines what is credible.

The **in-class projects** are designed to help build a writing community. We never write alone and technical writing especially needs input from readers. We often use small groups to help each other think through writing problems and acquire ideas from each other.

The **public science paper** give you an opportunity to explore a subject and present information in a technical style. Lastly, there will be an opportunity to **synthesize your writing knowledge in a self-reflective final**, both the already acquired and the new, and to articulate a new understanding of writing that is broader and more inclusive. It is your opportunity to build bridges between all of your writing classes.

GRADING SCALE

94-100 A	87-89 B+	77-79 C+	67-69 D+	59 and below F
90-93 A-	83-86 B	73-76 C	63-66 D	
	80-82 B-	70-72 C-	60-62 D-	

ASSIGNMENTS

Mechanism Description	150 points
Credibility Readings/Presentation	200 points
Public Science Essay	220 points
Self-Reflective Final	75 points
Chapters 6-10 Short Assignments	100 points
Various Discussions/Small Group Work/Short Writing Assignments	100 points
	845 points

PARTICIPATION AND PREPAREDNESS

Throughout the course, you will be asked to complete assignments that serve as building blocks to the course assignments, either in clarifying the theories that guide our writing processes or in working through stages of the essays themselves. These assignments are designed to produce your best results, both in course performance and in overall learning. The more assignments you neglect, the poorer your performance will be. Make use of this experience by completing all assigned homework and drafts and by participating in class and with your peers. Writing makes use of an individual's knowledge. You have not had the same experiences I have, and vice versa. I am relying on your contributions to class discussions and to the work of your classmates. Treat this component of your course as another rhetorical situation. I am the grading audience, but your peers are an audience as well. We will be watching for intelligent and appropriate contributions to the class discussions, for engagement with the topics and the lessons, for preparedness for class, and for quality effort on your projects.

ATTENDANCE

Attendance is an expectation. Students who do not attend class do not perform as well as students who do attend class.

Why it matters: A writing course is unlike most of the classes you will take while at Missoula College. In other classes, there will be a specific amount of well-defined material to be covered, and lecturing is the most common mode for distributing that information. Although your instructor will give you information and guide you as you develop effective writing strategies and practices, becoming a better writer does not happen from listening to lectures. "Learning" in this course takes place mainly through engagement and inquiry – that means you will be participating in many class discussions and group-related activities. You will not find yourself sitting in class taking notes.

Personal situations and required university events may arise that, on a rare occasion, make it impossible for you to be in class. Remember, however, that's why three (3) absences are allowed; please reserve those for *exceptional circumstances*. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts for assignments for the class. Make sure you talk with you instructor in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

You are allotted **3** "free" absences: you do not need permission, and I don't need an explanation. Use these three wisely. More than three absences will compromise your grade.

> 4th absence: final grade drops one letter grade
> 5th absence: final grade drops one letter grade
> 6th absence: final grade drops one letter grade
> 7th absence: final grade drops one letter grade – at this stage an A has dropped to an F

Why the policy? Without attending class, you cannot participate as a member of a learning community, and you cannot be a writer and collaborator with your peers. Participation includes taking part in class discussions, asking questions, and contributing to the classroom experience. Of course, this includes doing the required reading and writing assignments.

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY: CAMPUS E-MAIL ACCOUNTS AND MOODLE
Please activate your campus e-mail account right away. Every student is issued a university e-mail account, and there is no cost. Go to any technology help desk on campus for assistance on either campus.

This course requires essential computer skills so that you can access email and negotiate Moodle. *Early in the semester, UM offers a number of Moodle workshops. If you are unfamiliar with Moodle or if you have limited computer experience, please attend these workshops.* You will be expected to work with computers for appropriate class assignments, and most correspondences will be conducted via email/Moodle. Most class materials and instructions will be posted in Moodle. *With the exception of some initial explanations during our first classes, please do not expect extra time in class for any learning curve you might face with technology.* Likewise, please do not expect any extensions on due dates for an assignment because of any technical difficulties you have not conquered. Backup all work.

USB DRIVE AND/OR ONLINE STORAGE
You will be working with multiple drafts throughout the semester and will need to save each draft. While it is important to save these drafts to your personal computer/laptop/tablet it is not always possible to access these drafts, therefore you will need either a USB storage device (flash drive, jump drive, USB drive, thumb drive, memory stick) and/or online storage (while most online storage services are sufficient, the university offers UM box for free).

ACADEMIC SUPPORT SERVICES
We believe that all students can succeed if they put their minds to it. The Academic Support Center offers a variety of services to help students reach this goal. ASC staff tutor in many subject areas, provide academic counseling, and assist students in the transition to college. The best news is that all of these services are
free and available to all students. For more information, please call 406.243.7826.
- Tutoring
- Retention Support
- COMPASS Testing (free of charge)

The Mansfield Library and the Writing Center are also both excellent resources for researchers and writers. You may be asked to participate in a session on library research and take a draft of a paper to the Writing Center for feedback. Experienced writers do not hesitate to seek out second readers of a draft, and the WC is a great resource.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY
The most clear and concise definition of plagiarism I have found comes from Neil Baird. I quote it at length below:

> "Plagiarism is defined as representing another person's words, ideas, data, or work as one's own. Plagiarism includes, but is not limited to, the exact duplication of another's work and the incorporation of a substantial or essential portion thereof. Other examples of plagiarism include the acts of appropriating the artistic or musical composition of another and Internet documents, or portions thereof, presenting them as your own.
>
> The key to avoiding plagiarism is to give proper credit whenever the following are used:
>
> ➢ Another person's ideas, opinions, or theories
> ➢ Facts, statistics, graphs or other drawings or any pieces of information that are not common knowledge
> ➢ Quotations of another's actual spoken or written words
> ➢ Paraphrases of another's spoken or written words
> ➢ Organization patterns or structures of another's spoken or written work
>
> *Worth noting is the fact that ignorance does not excuse plagiarism.* Intentional plagiarism consists of knowingly copying or using another's work without giving proper credit. Unintentional plagiarism, on the other hand, may result from a lack of familiarity with citation standards, poor research methods, or careless "cutting and pasting" of Internet and other electronic sources. In either case, both intentional and unintentional plagiarism constitute violations of the policy on Academic Dishonesty. Please see me if you have *any* questions or concerns, for plagiarism results in a failing grade on a particular paper to failure of the course." (Baird, Course Syllabus)

Plagiarism of any sort will result in a course grade of F. Please look over the University/College's Student Code of Conduct. The Mansfield Library's "Plagiarism and Academic Honesty" page is also quite useful.

STUDENT DECORUM

Missoula College is designed as a space to share ideas and learn from one another. It is not a space for disrespectful behavior including antagonistic or bigoted language, consistent late arrivals to class, or disruptive behavior in class, including the use of cell phones. We will discuss issues that may result in disagreement and dialogue, but that dialogue should be conducted in a professional and respectful manner, one that respects the dignity of all participants.

DISABILITY SERVICES

In keeping with University policy please remember –

> The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommasson 154. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate accommodation.

> Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. For more information, please consult [the DSS homepage](#).