

**TCOM 2010-900 Technical Writing  
Online Course Syllabus  
Fall Semester 2009**

**INSTRUCTOR**

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**COMMUNICATIONS**

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**COURSE LOCATION AND TIME**

Online (WebCT); Asynchronous.

**OFFICE HOURS (Fall 09):**

M: 10-12, T: 11-12 and 1-3, W: 11-12, and by appointment

**REQUIRED TEXT**

**Dobrin, Sidney I. et al.**, *Technical Communication in the Twenty-First Century*  
Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, First ed.

**COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES**

This course provides an introduction and application of the fundamentals of technical writing. After successfully completing this course, the student will:

- Be able to analyze audiences and purposes for various technical documents
- Be able to write and edit effective technical documents, such as descriptions, instructions, progress reports, and formal reports

- Demonstrate how audience needs affect the organization, design, and style of documents
- Be able to insert eye-catching graphics, charts, and tables that illustrate key points

## **INTRODUCTION**

This course syllabus provides a general outline or plan for the course. Changes may be necessary, and you will be notified by email before these changes are in effect. It is my desire to create a course to best meet your personal and professional goals as these relate to your current competencies in the general area of technical writing.

This course will prepare you to complete the kinds of practical writing projects often required in professions such as those you will enter. Emphasis will be placed on:

- The process of completing any on-the-job writing assignment
- The specific formats most often used
- Related communication tasks such as oral presentations and graphics

I have been teaching technical writing for 28 years and know that effective communication between us will help us improve the quality of the experience. Your feedback is encouraged and valued. We will be learning together. Your workplace experience, if you have some, and what you learn as we progress will contribute to the course experience.

## **INSTRUCTOR'S DESCRIPTION**

The course's primary purpose is to provide you with fundamental knowledge, expert guidance, and peer interaction designed to help you learn to produce well organized, stylistically appropriate, grammatically correct documents of the sort that technical and business professionals depend on to communicate. The principal topics covered include:

- Nature and importance of technical communication
- Audience-centered information design
- Elements of organization, style, graphics design, persuasion, and document design
- Information gathering and report planning
- Drafting, revising, and editing
- Characteristics of memo reports, descriptions, effective instructions, proposals, formal reports, and oral reports

This course is delivered entirely online. To do well in this class, you must take responsibility for your own learning by actively engaging in discussions, reflecting

critically on the assignments, and dedicating sufficient time to revising and editing your work. I am a learning facilitator, writing coach, and technical communication consultant, not a lecturer/tester.

My expert feedback on writing assignments is perhaps the most important instructional resource. In evaluating student documents submitted for a grade, I provide specific, directive feedback, both within the assignment and as summary comments.

## **STUDENT EXPECTATIONS**

Successful students in this course will:

1. Become familiar with the tools in WebCT Vista and use them as needed.
2. Complete assignments on time and participate actively in online discussions.
3. Plan, draft, revise, and edit the short formal reports assigned as major deliverables.
4. Analyze, plan, draft, revise, and edit the long formal report that is the capstone assignment.
5. Ask for assistance or clarification on assignments well before the work is due.

**Note:** As a courtesy to me and the other students in the class, students who withdraw from the course should notify me by email.

## **DELIVERABLES**

The main assignments include three short papers (reports, memos, and letters), a manual (a group project), a scripted power point presentation, and one long formal proposal. Additionally, there are homework assignments, participatory exercises, and collaborative editing tasks

**All six of your graded assignments (except your oral presentation) must be word-processed and submitted in Word 2003. If you are using Vista and Office 2007, please save your word files in Word 2003. While I have Vista at home, I do not have it at work. Exercises and workshops must also be done in Word. If your assignments are not done in Word, I will return them ungraded. Late papers will be graded down one grade step per calendar day late (for example, a "B" paper which is two calendar days late becomes a "C+").**

For each of your graded assignments, you must define clearly your audience and purpose for that paper. You must also submit the planning form (see the content

files for Weeks 2 and 3) for each of the six graded assignments. In the past, I have found the more specific and thoughtful the audience and purpose statements the better the paper.

Table 1 notes the graded assignments and how much each is worth in terms of your grade.

**Table 1: Assignments and Percentage of Grade**

|                            |      |
|----------------------------|------|
| Technical memo report      | 10%  |
| Criteria-based memo report | 10%  |
| Technical description      | 20%  |
| Manual (group project)     | 15%  |
| Proposal                   | 25%  |
| Power Point (on proposal)  | 10%  |
| Discussions and exercises  | 10%  |
| Total                      | 100% |

Workshops that are missed but are completed late will receive  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit. Late homework is also worth  $\frac{1}{2}$  credit.

1. Participation and contributions to online discussions are important. These elements will be graded objectively and subjectively by the instructor. Both the extent and quality of participation in class dialogue will determine the score at the end of the course (10 points)

**Caution:** This is not to encourage excessive discussion and/or online entries. Score in this area is primarily determined by the quality of contributions. It is not possible to provide a formula for optimal participation. The best advice is that no student should either dominate or abstain. It is expected that keeping abreast of reading assignments will be evident in participation of online discussion.

## **PLAGIARISM**

Plagiarism is the act of representing someone else's work as your own, either intentionally or unintentionally. In this course, plagiarism will result in a zero for the assignment and, possibly, a failing grade in the course. Be aware that current Internet search engines can quickly identify almost any previously published document.

## **EXAMINATIONS**

This course is performance based. There will be no examinations.

## **GRADING SYSTEM**

The grading system is based upon regular and active participation in course activities and the completion, on time, of all assignments. Any assignment turned in late will be subject to a 5 point grade reduction for each late day, or portion.

A 90 – 100

B 80 – 89

C 70 – 79

D 60 – 69

F < 60

## **COURSE SCHEDULE**

See our Vista weekly activities for key benchmarks.

**Note:** Online assignments are posted in the WebCT drop box, and most are due 11:55pm, Thursday of the week the assignment is due (unless directed otherwise).

## **TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS**

This is an Internet-conducted course. At a minimum, the student must have:

- Regular access to the World Wide Web, via either home computer connection or institutional equipment.
- A viable email address and regular access to an email provider. Email is available to all Southern Polytechnic State University students. Free email accounts are also available at a number of online services, including Netscape and Yahoo.
- Regular access to a computer with processing speed, local storage, graphics capability, word processing software, and other hardware, software, and performance elements appropriate for undergraduate students using current Internet browsers.

## **TECHNICAL SKILLS**

Successful participation in this course assumes that the student arrives with a basic set of computer-related technical skills, including but not limited to the following:

- Keyboarding and mousing
- Connecting to the World Wide Web (WWW)
- File management (opening, saving, sharing files such as word processing files and PDF files)
- Email application (receiving, reading, printing, composing, sending, managing email messages and attachments)
- Working familiarity with the WWW and an Internet browser (such as Netscape Navigator or Microsoft Internet Explorer), including navigating, searching, bookmarking, downloading files, and uploading files.

These skills will not be addressed in this course, except incidentally, and the student must assume responsibility for mastering them. Southern Polytechnic University, various tutorials and technical resources on the WWW, and major bookstores are suggested as resources for self-directed learning. Fellow students are often an excellent resource for help with technical matters.

### **ADOBE ACROBAT READER**

Some course elements are provided in Adobe PDF (Portable Document Format) files, which require Adobe Acrobat Reader. This is a FREE plug-in available for download on the Internet. It allows you to open, read, search, and print documents saved in this file format. PDF is a file type that allows information to be presented over the web while maintaining its exact look and feel, regardless of the fonts the user has installed on his/her local PC. PDF files can be viewed on any computer that has the Adobe Acrobat Reader software.

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