I. Course Objectives

On completion of ENG 121, Technical Writing, the student will be able to:

1. Explain the nature of technical writing as an outgrowth of the scientific method.
2. Explain the origin and development of technical writing as a profession.
3. Demonstrate the basic techniques of technical writing and demonstrate them in writing: definition, extended definition, process.
4. Apply the basic techniques in writing of the more common forms of technical data: new-product release, step-by-step instructions, extended process description, proposal, external report, technical article.
5. Read and analyze exemplary forms of technical data and science writing.

6. Since technical writing is a problem-solving process, plan and write preliminary drafts of a series of papers pursuing typical technical writing purposes and formats. Prewriting processes involve information gathering, brainstorming, making lists, outlining, keeping a journal, and converting haphazard technical data into technical patterns that fulfill specific writing purposes.

7. Revise drafts so that they have clearly stated and fully developed main ideas. Development may take many patterns, including example, analytical description, process or instructions, comparison or argument presenting a proposal or making an informed recommendation, etc.

8. Edit all final drafts to produce papers that are relatively free of errors in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. In addition, the documents must use an effective blend of words, format, and graphics, according to purpose and intended audience.

9. Demonstrate the ability to use this writing process to produce a series of well-organized, fully-developed essays according to purpose and audience, as assigned — i.e., business letters and memos, technical descriptions, instructions, graphics, informal recommendations or proposals, oral reports, and formal proposal or recommendation reports.

10. Perform basic computer application functions typically associated with technical writing — e.g., generating wordprocessed text, formatting text, integrating text and graphics, and creating basic line drawings and charts. These activities are reinforced through computer lab activities and requirements of the writing assignments.

II. Methods for Accomplishing Objectives

1. Presentations give introductory material and overall ideas about purpose, forms of development, document design elements, use of graphics, specific document applications (letters, memoranda, analytical reports, instructions, proposals, recommendation reports), effective writing style, sentence structures, diction choice, etc.

2. Class discussion, related exercises, and examination of specific writing samples center on the forms and precision of good technical writing mentioned above. Discussion also centers on organization, development, and expression as they apply to the purpose and audience of all writing assignments. Assigned sample writings from handouts and The Elements of Technical Writing are used for analyzing document structures, techniques, and effectiveness.

Occasional peer evaluation during writing and rewriting phases and heavy instructor
commentary on returned papers is another important form of "discussion."

3. **Writing assignments** require different kinds of writing structures and the form, clarity, and precision of good technical writing. **Assigned writings include business letters and memos, technical descriptions, graphics, instructions, informal recommendations or proposals, oral reports, and formal proposal or recommendation reports.**

This variety of assigned types heavily exercises a wide range of skills in structuring, developing, and expressing ideas toward very specific purposes and audiences.

4. **Computer lab activities** help develop / reinforce basic skills in wordprocessing, formatting documents, line drawing, importing graphics, and editing.

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**III. Student Requirements for Completing the Course**

1. **Brief quizzes** on required readings may occur, at the instructor’s discretion.

2. **Required readings from the text** are assigned to illuminate effective organizing and developing of raw technical material into comprehensive documents for specific purposes. Since reading and writing are mutually reinforcing, these readings also include examination of specific samples of effective technical writing in practice.

3. **A comprehensive group of writing assignments is required.** These include business letters and memos, technical descriptions, graphics, instructions, analytic reports and proposals, oral reports, and full analytic, proposal, or recommendation report forms. **In all, the student must demonstrate form, clarity, and precision based on document purpose and enlightened by effective use of words, format, and graphics to carry out effective technical communication.**

4. **Students must satisfactorily participate in class discussion.** Certain topics may be pre-assigned to students; other participation will be impromptu, resulting from a solid study of course materials. Occasional peer evaluation provides student-to-student participation for mutual benefit.

5. Since technical writing always is practiced professionally with desktop publishing on a computer, **students must gain and reinforce competence in using computers for designing, generating, drafting, and editing documents.**

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**IV. Grading Practices**

90% of the student’s grade is based on performance on writing assignments; 10% is based on class discussion/participation and engagement in the writing process.

**Writing assignments are proportionally weighted as follows:** business letter / memo (10%), technical description (10%), graphics (10%), instructions (15%), analytic report or informal proposal (15%), oral technical report (10%), final formal report (30%).

For written work, general criteria are effective organization, development, and expression toward the central purpose and audience of the assignment. More detailed material is in the section Grade Levels/Symptoms and the Appendix: A Brief Technical Writer’s Checklist.

**Lateness Policy.** Papers are expected on time. Technical writing deals with real-world situations. On a job, the boss’s deadline is just that — employees who are tardy on deadlines often get terminated as employees. For paper due dates, absence does not excuse failure to deliver a paper on time.

During the semester, the student may have one paper up to one week late without penalty. This does not apply to the final project, which must be on-time. **No papers more than a week late will be accepted.**

Beyond one paper late by one week, lateness diminishes by one grade level the final grade that any paper may get.

For paper due dates, absence does not excuse failure to deliver a paper on time. **The same rules apply to all, and it is absolutely unfair to all other students that someone absent be allowed an automatic extension.**

**What If...**

... you are absent on the due date but want to get the paper in on time? Submit the paper early. Or if you know you will be absent on that date, tell your instructor in advance and, before the due date, make approved arrangements for delivery. Otherwise, your late paper is — late.
... your computer has problems? Use another computer, either a free-access computer at the college or at a public library. Keep backups on disk of all your work.

... your printer doesn’t work? Bring in your paper on disk and print it at the college on the due date.

... you want to e-mail submissions? This can be done only in extraordinary circumstances and with prior permission, since providing printed copy is the student’s responsibility.

Rewrite Policy. In technical writing, many document projects do not give second chances — researching, collaborating, troubleshooting, and editing have to be done before the deadline. Yet the student sometimes can learn a good deal by being given a second chance — especially early in the course. To compromise between real-world conditions and the gain of a second chance, the following assignments may be rewritten and resubmitted within one week of receiving the paper back — technical description, instructions, informal proposal or recommendation.

To qualify for a rewrite, the paper must be:

Delivered on time (no late papers may be rewritten).

A good faith effort (careless, hasty, tossed off efforts with great problems in development or expression simply to qualify as on time submissions will be denied a rewrite).

Rewrites must be rewritten and resubmitted within a week of being received back, and may be rewritten and resubmitted only once.

To be accepted, all revisions must have the previous markup attached.

All writing assignments must be completed for the student to receive a passing grade in the course.

Any instance of plagiarism results in a failing grade in the course. See Section IX.

1. Attendance is mandatory. If a student finds it absolutely necessary to be absent, he/she has a maximum of four absences. When absences exceed four, the student is removed from the class roster with a final grade of W or F.

2. Students must commit themselves to be in class on time. Late students must assume personal responsibility to see that the record is altered at the end of the class. Depending on duration, two or three latenesses count as one full absence.


I expect you to:

Attend every class, to arrive at class on time, and to work until the class period has ended.

Bring in, and have with you, all needed in-class items — e.g., books, paper, pens.

Turn off all cell phones or messaging devices, etc. People playing with personal electronic devices during class will be dismissed from that class.

Prepare reading and writing assignments on time.

Complete all the daily assignments and be prepared to respond in class.

Follow assignments in terms of content and format.

Refrain from wearing headphones Students who wear headphones in class are considered absent.

For absences beyond one single class, notify me if an emergency prevents your attendance.

Spend at least six hours a week out of class for writing and class preparation.

Help your classmates learn by your responses to the text and assignments.

Be competent in basic matters of proper English sentence structure and usage. Lack of these skills will bring devastating results in a writing course such as this one.

Out of respect for your classmates, your instructor, and the educational process, behave in class as a mature and responsible student. Behavior detrimental to education can result in expulsion from the class.

V. Student Absence, Lateness, General Behavior
session; in repeated cases, it can result in expulsion from the course itself.

You may expect me to:

Be in class every day (or provide qualified substitute and assignment in case of emergency).

Have no headphones, beepers, or cellphones.

Prepare each topic thoroughly.

Help you set goals in writing by analyzing your strengths and needs.

Keep established office hours.

Read your written work promptly, thoughtfully, and objectively.

Be courteous and considerate.

VI. Texts


Also useful and helpful are: a solid dictionary (150,000 words or more), a thesaurus, a spelling lookup, technical references.

VII. Manuscript Format For Submitted Papers

Since technical writing is always professionally done with a wordprocessor or computer, all submitted papers should be prepared likewise (with an appropriately dark printer ribbon or ink or laser cartridge). Of course, this does not apply to oral reports.

Use double space or space-and-a-half spacing. In all cases, write only on one side of the paper.

Proofread and make manual corrections if necessary. All submitted papers are assumed to be proofread and correct according to the student’s judgment.

VIII. Weekly Outline of Topics:


14, 16: Writing for Your Readers, Achieving a Readable Style. Elements, 2 – 46. “Style in Technical Writing”. C-Lab on line drawing functions, inserting photos, etc.

21, 23: Sept. 21: No class — All college day. Technical Description. Letter / Memo Assignment Due (23). C-Lab on line drawing.

28, 30: Readable Style. Technical Description Assignment Given. C-Lab on line drawing.


26, 28: Instructions Assignment Due (10/28). Design Elements of Reports, Longer Reports. Elements, Chapter 8, 102 – 122. C-Lab for tables, graphs.

November 2, 4: Assignment of Analytical
Reports — Informal / Formal
Recommendations or Proposals. Elements
Chapter 9, 123 – 143. Tentative Topics for
Long Reports. Recommendations, Proposals,
and Progress Reports. Elements, Appendices.
C-Lab for graphics assignment.
9, 11: Recommendations, Proposals, and
Progress Reports. Samples. C-Lab for graphics
assignment.
16, 18: Analytical Reports. Oral Reports. C-
Lab for graphics assignment. Graphics
Assignment Due (11/18). Informal Report
Due (11/18).
23, 25: Oral Report Presentations. No class
Nov 25: Thanksgiving.
Résumé formats, job seeking strategies. Long
Reports: Workshop.
checkout. Final report due (12/21).

IX. Plagiarism:
SCCC catalog: “Students should realize that
presenting the words and ideas of others as
their own is dishonest. In writing, students
must fully acknowledge the source of any
paraphrased passages and any ideas which
they have borrowed. Failure to conform to
these academic standards is plagiarism and
may result in a failing grade and/or serious
disciplinary sanctions as outlined in the Code
of Conduct...” Plagiarism, p. 69.

Reminder: Any instance of
plagiarism results in failure of the
student in the whole course.

Grade Levels / Symptoms
Breadth of Writing Concerns:
Technical writing has broader concerns than
general writing. For the most effective
presentation, the writer has to go beyond
normal concerns about organization,
development, and clear, focused, and
appropriate language. The technical writer
also must consider how format (layout,
headers, etc.) can help make organization
clearer and when graphics (charts, graphs,
tables, line drawings, etc.) might help develop
and deliver contents effectively and
efficiently.

The Threshold Principle:
All submitted papers are graded on a
composite of organization, development, and
expression, as they fulfill the purpose of a
specific assignment and also meet the needs,
concerns, and understanding of the intended
audience. In successfully carrying out any
purpose, a competent paper needs a basic
threshold strength, a critical mass of strength,
in all three areas.

For this reason, a paper is not graded simply as
an average of three grades, one for
organization, one for development, and one for
expression. It is a grade for the paper as it
really is — a whole.

The following descriptions are based on
English Department standards.

A Paper: The A paper demonstrates originality,
clearly, and complexity of thought. The author
has developed a distinctive voice and has
satisfied all the requirements of the
assignment. The author’s intentions are clearly
stated. Treatment of material is thorough,
while the essay remains a unified, cohesive
whole.

The thesis statement is supported throughout
with concrete detail, specific examples, and
lively language. Paragraphs have clearly stated
topic sentences, all of which establish a clear
pattern of development and maintain the
essay’s focus. Transitions throughout are
natural, strong, effective, and fluid, without
the hint of contrivance or artificiality.

Diction is fresh, economical, and vigorous.
Sentences clearly establish their main ideas
and employ a refreshing variety of structures.
There are few, if any, mechanical lapses.

B Paper: The thesis or topic is clear and
generally well-developed or supported, with
clear competence in presenting and organizing
details, framing an argument, developing an
idea.

The writer may be attempting something
unique or original in terms of style and
presentation; this attempt may not be wholly
successful, but the paper reflects both the
writer’s vision and willingness to take risk.
The writer is developing a distinctive voice, although this voice may not be as strong, consistent, or original as in the A paper.

The paper demonstrates overall mechanical and syntactical skill.

C Paper: This paper contains a clear topic sentence / thesis statement supported by some examples. The central idea may require more support, examples, or other means of development than the writer provides. The paper shows basic understanding of organization, but transitions sometimes may be abrupt or mechanical. It may show clarity in thinking while lacking complexity in its presentation of those thoughts; it may use clichés combined with simplistic reasoning. Sentences are reasonably clear, with some variation in structure. The paper contains few errors in language and mechanics. It shows some originality or variation in syntax.

The C paper may show greater strength in the areas cited above while containing more mechanical lapses. Likewise, it may be stronger in the areas cited above while being significantly shorter than the length requested.

The C paper may be an otherwise excellent essay that demonstrates one of the following weaknesses — fails to explore the assigned issue sufficiently, uses a different rhetorical strategy from the one assigned, lacks a thesis and / or enough supporting detail, has been inadequately proofread by the writer.

Overall, the C paper does not show the degree of careful judgment, development of ideas, and attention to editing / proofreading that is evident in the B paper.

D Paper: This paper may contain a thesis statement but little or no supporting concrete detail, or it may not have a clear thesis statement at all. The essay may be on the topic but is not organized in any logical pattern; it also may neglect to follow the assigned strategy (i.e., narrative, contrast, etc.) or topic.

This paper contains many serious errors in punctuation and / or spelling. Language is flawed by weak word choice (poor diction) and sentences that are almost identical in structure and length (no syntactic variation). The D essay may be shorter than the length assigned and / or give the impression of begin a hurried draft with little or no revision.

Commentary on Papers

All submitted papers receive extensive commentary aimed to identify strengths and weaknesses and to help direct effective rewriting of the paper. Marginal and end commentary deals with issues of organization and development as they occur.

Specifics of sentence structure, punctuation, style, documentation, and usage generally are handled by a numbered code keyed to an attached sheet, which either explains the problem briefly or refers to a source that explains it.

Remember that the competent student must become responsible as his or her own editor, and papers submitted are assumed to have been proofread and are assumed correct in the student’s eyes. It is my role to evaluate your paper, but it is not my role to be your copy editor.

Additional text markups are as follow:
- problem in spelling
- W word selection problem
- eliminate item crossed out
- wordy wordy as written – revise
- move (according to arrow)
- reverse order
- start new paragraph here
- join together (e.g., take over)
- awkward expression – revise
- unclear meaning or reference

Appendix: Brief Technical Writer's Checklist

Organization:

4 Main Purpose or Idea. Does the paper have a clear intention or main point? Is the purpose made clear early in the paper? Are all ideas, examples, or details in the paper directly relevant to its main purpose, its sequence of development, and the concerns of its audience?

4 Sequencing of Development. Do you arrange your material in a clear and logical way to develop your topic? Do you get right to the
point of what each section is trying to do? Is there a better, more effective order for presenting your material? If you suspect so, probably there is a better order. Try outlining and then rewriting. Make a second approach with fresh eyes.

4 Redundancy, Repetition. Is there unnecessary repetition of ideas, examples, or illustrations? Does the paper ramble or wander too much? An essay should develop its purpose clearly and straightforwardly, crisply enough to be understood fully when first read.

4 Document Design: Do you use headers and other design elements effectively to make the scope and plan of your document clear on a quick glimpse? Does your lead make your purpose clear or act as an effective “hook”? Does the ending effectively close your document?

Development:

4 Restriction of Subject. Is the topic or subject restricted enough to be well-developed within the length of the paper?

4 Development through Specifics. Are there enough supporting ideas, examples, or specific detail to carry out your overall purpose and the specific points that support it? Is the subject treated at the appropriate level of understanding and detail for your intended audience? Do you define terms or concepts your audience may not know?

4 Sufficiency of Detail. Are the supporting ideas or illustrations developed as much as they need to be to carry out your purpose to your audience? Does anything need further explanation? Are examples or analogies needed to clarify very abstract of unfamiliar concepts?

4 Use of Graphics. Are tables, graphs, or line drawings, etc., used when these can deliver your content with greater clarity and efficiency than mere words? Is the role of each graphic you use make clear by references or discussion in your text? Are all graphics properly captioned and labeled?

Expression:

4 Clarity. Are ideas expressed simply and straightforwardly, with a good density of meaning to words? Are all ideas clearly expressed, or do sentences and phrases labor hard to express their meaning? Clear, straightforward prose is no small achievement!

4 Sentence Order, Emphasis. Are sentences choppy or clogged with too much material? Are they awkwardly strung together? Do they lend the right amount of emphasis to your ideas? Is there sentence variety, or are sentences strung out at length in the same monotonous form?

4 Diction. Is the line-by-line writing burdened by wordiness, clichés, or excessive passive voice? Is selection of diction appropriate, purposeful, and effective?

Some routinely lose one or two grade levels by not working on these last two —

4 Editing. Have you checked the following thoroughly: usage, grammar, sentence structure, spelling? Poor writing mechanics can devastate an otherwise good paper and, unfortunately, probably the writer as well. Spare yourself from this!

4 Proofreading. Has the paper been proofread? And proofread again?