

MWSC Division of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Department of English, Foreign Languages, & Journalism

Spring 2003

ETC 421: Worlds of Technical Communication

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Office Hours: 9:00-10:50 a.m. MWF

By appointment TTh

Required texts and materials:

Alred, Gerald J. et. al. *Handbook of Technical Communication*.

Savage, Gerald J. and Dale L. Sullivan. *Writing A Professional Life: Stories of Technical Communicators On and Off the Job*.

Membership in MWSC chapter of Society for Technical Communication

About the Course:

My working title for this course is "Worlds of Technical Communication." In this class, we will examine the rhetorical expectations of technical communication communities. During the semester, students will prepare to enter the discourse communities of professional technical communicators, of the international marketplace, and of specific technical fields. We will answer the following key questions:

- How do discourse communities define themselves? How can we identify and define them?
- How does rhetorical situation influence the stylistic choices made by writers in professional settings?
- To what extent are a writer's choices defined by audience (including an international audience)? By purpose?
- How much freedom does a writer have to be "creative" when using restricted forms like technical descriptions or reports?
- How do writers become accepted as members of "foreign" discourse communities (e.g. engineering, pharmacology)?
- How can an understanding of rhetorical situation help solve the problems writers encounter when preparing a single text for multiple purposes or audiences?

Assignments:

The schedule of assigned readings will probably be updated regularly, as I discover interesting and pertinent articles, and I invite you to contribute readings or documents that you think would interest the class. Many of the readings (from *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*) will be available to members of STC on line. That is why STC membership is required for this course.

There will be three major assignments. The first will be a **research paper written in formal report form** on a technical communication topic. Browse past issues of STC publications (including conference papers-available on the Web) and

past issues of *Technical Communication Quarterly* to find topics that will interest you. The second will be an **informal report and in class presentation** about technical communications in a particular field. These fields can be drawn from Lutz and Storms, *The Practice of Technical and Scientific Communication*, on reserve in the library. If you are interested in reporting on a different field, talk to me about it. These reports will be presented during the first ten minutes of class throughout the semester. The final major assignment will be an **analysis to a set of texts from a particular discourse community** of your choice. With my approval, you may choose any set of professional texts you wish—a series of articles in a professional journal, memos and correspondence from your work place, even textbooks about a particular subject. The analysis should be a study of "how to write for this discourse community." We will read examples of the kinds of analysis I am asking for. In addition to writing a report for me, students will present the results of this research to the rest of the class during the final exam period.

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Preparedness and participation in class/ Daily work	30%
Formal research report on tech. com. subject	25%
Informal report and presentation on technical field	20%
Final discourse community paper	25%

Absences: Students with four unexcused absences will have their grade lowered one letter grade. If you miss class on a day you were scheduled to discuss another student's writing, return a copy of the student's text to him or her with marks and comments. If you must miss class and know in advance please contact me.

Academic honesty: "Since honesty in the classroom is required, cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the college constitutes a violation." Policy Guide II, B, C. In other words, the work you turn in should be your own. During the semester, we will discuss problems of intellectual property, proper credit, and professional settings.

Disabilities: Please let me know during the first week of class about any physical handicap or learning disability if you need special help or accommodation in order to do your best work.

Schedule: I try to adapt each of my classes to the needs and interests of the students. This means that the [Schedule of Assignments](#) may change.