

MWSU Division of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Department of English, Foreign Languages, & Journalism
Spring 2006

ETC 421: Worlds of Technical Communication

Professor: Dr. Kaye Adkins

Office: 222J Eder

Email (my preferred method of communication): kadkins@missouriwestern.edu; if you email me about class, include "ETC 421" in the subject heading

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

Recommended for your professional library:

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, and Stuart A. Selber, eds. *Central Works in Technical Communication*. New York: Oxford UP, 2004. [Buy this. Ask for it as a graduation present. Read it during slow times on the job. It's a great overview of the important issues in the field.]

Useful on line resources:

[TC Eserver](#) is a comprehensive database of articles, web sites, and more

[Academic Superstore](#) is a good source for software and equipment like scanners and digital cameras. You will need to email them proof of your student status

[Alibris](#) is an excellent source for used books, including out of print and rare books. Since you are buying from independent used-book sellers, you should check the information about how long it will take for the book to arrive. Some booksellers use "book rate" to mail your purchases, which can be very slow.

My page of useful links has many examples and resources.

About the Course:

In this class, we will examine the rhetorical expectations of technical communication communities. During the semester, you will prepare to enter the discourse communities of professional technical communicators, of the international marketplace, and of business and industry. 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:

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. Other readings in journals may be accessed through MWSU's library. Use the alphabetical list of periodicals to find the appropriate journal issue. Articles from the *Proceedings* are available through TC Eserver, <<http://tc.eserver.org/>>. I will give you copies of the other readings.

There will be three major assignments. The first will be a **research project that will result in a research paper formatted for submission to [Technical Communication](#)**. Early in the semester, I will ask you to choose a technical

communication issue or topic that you would like to learn more about.. Browse past issues of STC publications and past issues of *Technical Communication Quarterly* to find topics that will interest you. I will also be able to make suggestions. This paper will take the form as a “review of the literature,” and can serve as the theoretical background for your second major assignment. The second assignment will be a ***rhetorical and textual analysis of a technical document***. You will be able to check out a document from the STC library or choose one of your own, with my approval. The results of this analysis will be turned in to me as a paper and submitted as a poster for Missouri Western’s Multi-Disciplinary Research Day. For example, you may wish to research usability, and apply that to a user’s guide, or you may wish to research visual rhetoric and apply that to a handbook or report. Finally, you will be asked to submit ***a group of documents designed for international audiences***, possibly including correspondence, a set of instructions, and illustrations.

In addition, because this is an independent study and we won’t have class discussion, you will submit several short essays in response to sets of readings.

English majors with an emphasis in Technical Communication, Journalism, or Public Relations Writing are required to complete a graduation portfolio (EPR/ETC/JOU 401). I recommend that you consider the following assignment from this class for your portfolio:

- Formal research report

Grades will be weighted as follows:

Short essays in response to readings	35%
Poster session presentation	5%
Close reading and analysis of a single technical document	20%
Collection of documents for international audiences	15%
Research paper on tech. com. subject (formatted for <i>Technical Communication</i>)	25%

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.