

**Department of English, Foreign Languages and Journalism**  
**MWSU, Division of Liberal Arts & Sciences**  
**Fall 2009**

ETC 600: Introduction to Graduate Studies in Technical Communication  
4:30-7:30 Tuesday

[Schedule of Assignments](#)

Professor: Dr. Kaye Adkins

Office: 222J Eder

Office Hours:9:00-10:45 TR, 10:00-12:00 W, by appointment

Email (my preferred method of communication): [kadkins@missouriwestern.edu](mailto:kadkins@missouriwestern.edu)

**Required texts and materials:**

- Johnson-Eilola, Central Works in Technical Communication
- Hughes and Hayhoe, A Research Primer for Technical Communication
- Alred, Brusaw, and Oliu, Handbook of Technical Writing
- Jump drive for use in classroom and for transferring files

**Recommended:**

- Membership in Society for Technical Communication, MWSU chapter and KC chapter
- Membership in the TechWr-L listserv (lurking is welcome)

**Resources:**

- Kynell-Hunt, Teresa and Gerald J. Savage, eds. *Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication* Vol. I. Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2003 (on reserve)
- Kynell-Hunt, Teresa and Gerald J. Savage, eds. *Power and Legitimacy in Technical Communication* Vol. II. Amityville, NY: Baywood, 2003 (on reserve)
- Mirel, Barbara and Rachel Spilka, eds. *Reshaping Technical Communication: New Directions and Challenges for the 21st Century*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2002
- [Society for Technical Communication](#)
- Jones, Dan. *Technical Writing Style*. Allyn Bacon, 1998
- Koester, *Investigating Workplace Discourse*. Routledge, 2006
- Eserver [Technical Communication](#) library
- Dr. Adkins' [Guide to Technical Communications resources](#) on the Web

Welcome to graduate study in technical communication. This course will be both an introduction to and a questioning of “technical communication” as a field. While technical communication emerged as an identifiable practice after World War II, and has been treated as a discrete academic field of study for only about 25 years or so, job titles like “technical writer” are becoming increasingly common in industry, the field is still defining itself, and people trained as technical communicators are still struggling to establish themselves in the workplace as experts in their own right, rather than as engineering support technicians, for example. One reason for this difficulty is that workplace writing is ubiquitous—engineers do it, financial advisors do it, health care professionals do it—so the question arises, what makes technical communication distinct from all of these other kinds of professional workplace writing, if in fact it even is? We could also ask this question another way: are the kinds of writing that engineers, financial advisors, and health care professionals themselves do, actually “technical communication”? Just what is technical communication?

And the questions go on: as an academic field of study, is technical communication mostly an interdisciplinary borrowing of theories and methods from other fields, or is it developing theories and methods

of its own that make it a distinct discipline? What is the relationship between the academic study of technical communication and its practical manifestations in the field? How can a formal study of technical communication (as its own field of study, or academic discipline) improve the work that technical communication professionals do? And in turn, how can the work that they do improve the academic understanding of the field?

**Course Objectives:** This course will include an overview of issues in technical communication and an introduction to the research in technical writing. This course will

- Establish a foundation of knowledge of historical and interdisciplinary aspects of technical communication as a field of study and practice
- Apply that historical and interdisciplinary knowledge base by identifying key terms in technical communication and evaluating their multi-valence in rhetorical context
- Increase your understanding of the relationship between theory and practice in technical communication by identifying the premises underlying the decisions that technical communicators make
- Identify common genres of technical communication and describe the ways that the variations in those genres are rhetorically determined; Recognize and solve complex technical communication problems by applying appropriate rhetorical, ethical, and theoretical principles
- Conduct research on a focused technical communication problem using a variety of research methods and resources appropriate to that problem
- Work collaboratively using face-to-face and electronic strategies to identify important issues in the readings and effective revision strategies in written assignments
- Prepare documents that balance verbal and visual elements of communication, demonstrating a high level of proficiency in handling various written and design features of documents
- Develop a sense of professional identity and values by participating in the field's professional organizations and assembling a portfolio of written and visual communication from the course, including a self-assessment.

**Assignments:** You should come to class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Writing assignments will include a review of a key technical communication book, an essay reflecting on research methods in technical communication, and a review of literature about a technical communication project of your choice.

**Thesis project preparation:** Throughout the semester, you should begin thinking about your thesis project—what research question you might be interested in exploring and which research methods will help you answer your question. Next spring, you should take your research methods class, so you should know whether you will be pursuing qualitative or quantitative research.

**Grading:** As master's degree students, you are expected to "master" the material in all of your courses. Regular attendance and participation in class discussions is absolutely required, and a superior execution of all assignments is expected, in order to earn the A for this course. At the graduate level, the grade of B indicates substantive weakness in performance, and a grade of C is unacceptable. Classroom participation is evaluated based on your articulated contributions to class discussion; written assignments are evaluated based on the expectation of clear, thorough, and concise prose and the absence of excessive jargon.

In business, there is no tolerance for grammar and spelling errors. When you put something on paper, you have provided a concrete representation of yourself. Your professionalism is in black and white, in someone's file, for future reference. Therefore, I will expect all work that you turn in to me to meet the highest standards of professional writing. Grades will be weighted as follows:

Daily work and class participation	25%
Book Review	25%
Research methods essay	20%

**Communication:** I welcome the opportunity to talk to students about reading or writing assignments during my office hours. You don't need an appointment. If you can't drop by during my office hours, please make an appointment.

Email is the official medium for communication at Missouri Western. You should check your Missouri Western email account at least every other day. This is how professors will contact you if they need to, and it is how you will receive information about campus events, scholarship and financial aid opportunities, and other important campus information. Some departments have student listservs to announce special events (like speakers or conference opportunities), scholarship deadlines, and the like. When you send an email to a professor or office on campus, you should send it from your Western email account, so that we know it is campus business.

A note on email etiquette: When you write an email to a professor, approach it as correspondence in a professional setting. This means including an informative subject line (at the very least, the course number), complete sentences, correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling, a salutation, and a signature. If you are including an attachment, you should tell the recipient what it is.

**Civility and Cooperation:** Missouri Western requires all students to help us maintain good conditions for teaching and learning. All students will treat their classmates, teachers, and student assistants with civility and respect, both inside and outside the classroom. Students who violate this policy may, among other penalties, be counted absent and asked to leave. You should review your Missouri Western student handbook, specifically sections of Community Expectations and Code of Conduct and Procedures, available at <http://www.missouriwestern.edu/StudentDev/CommExpCodeofConduct.pdf>, for further information.

**Absences:** Much of the work in a graduate class takes place during classroom discussions. One week's absence can be excused with prior notice. Students missing two class periods will have their semester grade lowered one letter grade. I understand that many of you have work and family responsibilities, but you should make success in your college courses your priority. Your education is your most important job, so you should arrange your schedule accordingly.

**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.