Michigan Technological University

HU 2600

Introduction to Scientific & Technical Communication

Fall Semester 2005

Instructor: Ann Brady, Ph.D.
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Course Hours: T Th: 11:05-12:35, 320 Dillman Hall

Required Texts: The Practice of Technical & Scientific Communication
Technical Report Writing Today
Selected Readings

Class List 2600-1

Course Description: HU 2600 is designed to broaden your understanding of scientific and technical communication. Grounded in the knowledge that the best rhetorical theories have to offer, the course not only prepares you to write effectively in a variety of contexts, but also to be aware of the social and ethical responsibilities you must assume in the workplace.

Course Goals: Scientific and technical documents include a wide range of subjects, goals, information sources, readers, and circumstances that lead to their preparation. To be successful as a writer in the many genres that comprise the field, you need to be rhetorically informed and thus able to assess your audience and identify your own purposes. The course thus has two goals. First, it teaches you what science and technical communication is and how it differs from the conventional writing that is typically taught in high school and college. Secondly it teaches you how to think rhetorically and to produce transactional documents—that is documents that are designed to get things done.

Course Requirements:

1. Readings: I expect you to read the texts assigned in the syllabus before the class session and to actively and thoughtfully discuss in class the topics for a given session. Additional readings may be assigned during the semester for which you will be responsible.

2. Written assignments: Although I may modify the assignment topics and due dates during the semester, I plan for four different types of written assignments.
First, there’ll be a suite of brief memos and reports. More specifically, I’ll ask you to (1) interview someone who writes or designs as a professional communicator or as part of their the job and report your findings in a memo; (2) write proposals at the start of document cycles and self-assessments at the end, both as memos; (3) write an introductory and analytic memo to introduce a portfolio sample that you’ll hand in at semester’s end; (4) write a trip report.

Second, I’ll ask you to identify an organization to which you belong and do an assessment report of its communication functions.

Third, I’ll ask you to review or produce a piece of science writing.

Fourth, I’ll ask you to write a proposal.

The last three types of assignments are longer than the first and typically go through a cycle that includes pre-writing or a proposal, a peer-reviewed rough draft, comments from me, and a final draft accompanied by a self-assessment memo. Proposals will indicate your audience, purpose, goals, and concerns. Peer reviews are essential since they prepare you for the collaborative and critically demanding work of document production, both in the classroom and the workplace. Since the reviews are a privilege and a responsibility, use them well. Come prepared, be clear, specific, and complete in your assessment of your peers’ work, and demand the same for your own. Self-assessments will indicate what you like about what you produced, what you’d change about it, and what you’ve learned.

Keep a digital copy of each assignment you complete.

Submit your assignments in hard-copy using 12-point font and with 1.5-line spacing.

3. Teamed oral reports and individual abstracts: You’ll be assigned to a team to investigate a particular area in the profession that is described in the required text by Lutz and Storms. Your investigation and report should begin with this text but should go beyond it using the additional resources at the end of each chapter to reinforce or amplify what you have to say. In your oral report, you should introduce the professional area, explaining its applications, responsibilities and employment outlook. The presentation should not exceed 10 minutes; you should plan to devote 2 minutes of this time to audience questions. You should include one visual, although not necessarily PowerPoint. Finally, you should plan to submit a summary of your presentation on the day of your talk.

4. Conference Speakers: The Humanities Department is hosting the international Feminist(s) Rhetoric(s) Conference October 6, 7, and 8. Four hundred participants will be coming to Michigan Tech to hear presentations about social, economic, political, and literary issues. Keynote speeches are free and open to the public. I am requiring that you attend one of these keynotes and write a short trip report about it.
5. **Portfolios:** Throughout the semester, you should keep a running file of your work, which will serve as the basis for two portfolio pieces you will turn in at the end of the semester. In November, I’ll ask you to choose one document you’ve produced in this class, revise it, and write an accompanying introduction in which you reflect on the piece and what you’ve learned as a result of working on it.

Professional writers use their portfolios to showcase their best work for possible employers and for professional awards. You’ll begin yours in this class, watch it grow as you advance through the program, and present it as part of your capstone before you graduate.

6. **Academic honesty:** Unless the assignment calls for a collaborative effort, I expect that the work you submit to me will be yours. If you are referring to or using other sources, acknowledge them, using proper form. Evidence of copied or plagiarized work is cause for serious disciplinary action by the University.

7. **Attendance:** I expect you to attend every class meeting and every conference, ready to participate fully and thoughtfully. If you miss more than three of our classes/individual meetings, I will drop your final grade. If you must be absent, please contact me via e-mail or speak with me in person.

8. **Grading:** You can earn an A or B in this class if you complete all assignments and reach deadlines, do quality work, and show some genuine commitment. You’ll earn a C if you meet deadlines with satisfactory effort or if some of your assignments are incomplete. You’ll receive a D or F if your assignments are poorly executed or overdue, or if your attendance, participation, or effort is unsatisfactory.

Note that while there is no formal category for participation and attendance, they will both influence how I evaluate your performance at the end of this semester. This is a class in professional communication; I expect you to behave professionally.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teamed oral reports</td>
<td>05%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio self-assessment letter &amp; revision</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Informal memos, reports, abstracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Science writing piece</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assessment report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposal</td>
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If you have questions about your grade at any time during the semester, let me know so that we can discuss your progress.

9. **Grading standards:**

A (truly excellent). A work is an example of highly effective professional writing. It makes its purposes clear, reflects concern for its audience’s
needs and responses, and is detailed, persuasive, effectively organized, exhibits appropriate format and tone, and is grammatically correct.

B (very good). B work is effective and would succeed in most professional communication circumstances. It may lack the polish or effectiveness of an A.

C (satisfactory). C work is effective though it lacks features necessary to succeed completely with a professional audience. Its purpose may not be entirely clear, it may not be effectively organized, it may not exhibit an appropriate tone or format, or it entails grammatical errors that make it difficult to read or understand than necessary.

D (poor). D work does not communicate effectively for several reasons. It may display an inadequate understanding of purpose or audience. It may lack information or be unpersuasive. Its organization may be confusing or misleading, and its tone or format may be inappropriate. It may be difficult to understand or contain serious errors in grammar.

F (unacceptable). F work does not satisfy the requirements of the assignment.