HU2600: Introduction to Scientific and Technical Communication

Instructor: Jingfang Ren  
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Location: Walker 134  
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Office hours: T TH 9.30-11.30am & 2.00-3.00pm or by appointment  
Class mailing list: HU2600FA09-L@MTU.EDU

Course Information

Course Description  
The general purpose of this course is to broaden your understanding of  
scientific and technical communication. Grounded in rhetorical theories,  
the course not only prepares you to write effectively in a variety of  
professional contexts but also to be aware of the social and ethical  
responsibilities you must consider 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 communicator in the many  
genres that comprise the field, you need to be rhetorically informed  
and able to assess your audience and identify your own purposes. The  
course thus has two main goals:

- It introduces you to the field of scientific and technical  
  communication. Through analysis of texts, contexts, and concepts  
  important to the practice of technical communication, it  
  demonstrates how technical communication differs from the  
  conventional writing that is typically taught in high school and  
  college.

- It teaches you how to think and act rhetorically; that is, it is  
  organized with an eye towards action. While we will be reading  
  and analyzing what professional technical communicators have  
  done, we will also produce our own transactional documents—  
  documents that are designed to get things done.

Course Materials

Required: A Strategic Guide to Technical Communication (Graves and Graves), Broadview Press,  
Supplemental readings and handouts (print or PDF) provided by instructor.

MTU Policies

Academic Integrity  
Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. MTU’s Academic  
Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as “knowingly copying another’s work or  
ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citation,” and the  
policy covers copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources  
as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchasing  
academic papers. Plagiarism and cheating are not only dishonest but they cheat  
you out of learning. For more information, see  
http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html
Discrimination

MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at MTU, please call Dr. Gloria Melton, Dean of Students, 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head, or the Affirmative Action Office at 487-3310. For more information, see

http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aao/
http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html#disability

Class Policies and Requirements

Attendance

You are expected to attend all class meetings and to be in class and ready to contribute to the discussion at the beginning of class. You may have two (2) absences for any reason during the semester. Documented, excused absences will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis and require written explanation of the circumstances with supporting documents when applicable (e.g., letter from your coach, doctor’s note, conference itinerary). For each unexcused absence after the first two (2), you will lose 50 points of your final grade. Even when absent, you are responsible for completing and turning in assignments when they are due. You may contact another student about in-class work missed when you are absent or come to see me during my office hours.

Late Work

All assignments are due at the beginning of class on the dates indicated on the course calendar. Late papers and assignments are generally NOT accepted; however, personal emergencies will be taken into consideration as long as you discuss your situation with me in person, by phone, or via email at least 24 hours ahead of time. In addition, you may use up to one (1) “computer excuse”, regardless of the situation, to turn in late work.

The late work policy does apply even if you lose your work due to technological failures. You are responsible for keeping complete copies of your work for the semester. In team writing situations, make sure that all team members always have the most current version of the document that the team is working on at any stage of the project cycle.

Collaboration

Collaborative work is a required component of the course. You and your project team members are responsible for updating one another and me about assignment development and progress. In addition, you are also responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and record-keeping. At the end of the team project cycle, I will ask individual members to complete a Peer Collaboration Evaluation Form, which will be used to help determine your collaboration score for a particular team document.

Revision

You are encouraged to revise and resubmit your work for further evaluation or grade change. I may also revise the syllabus and course calendar throughout the semester to better serve your needs.
Conferences

See me in my office—325 Walker—when you have questions about an assignment or when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due. You should also see me to get help with particular writing problems, to resolve differences about grades, or to suggest ways to improve the course. If you can’t make my regularly scheduled office hours (T TH 9.30-11.30am & 2.00-3.00pm), just email me to set up an appointment, and I’ll try my best to accommodate your schedule.

Summary of Major Projects and Assignments

**Major Projects**

I. STC career track (team; 150 pts)
   - Investigate a particular niche in the profession
   - Prepare an oral report on the professional area and explain its applications, responsibilities and employment outlook
   - Prepare a handout that accompanies your oral presentation

II. Interview with a workplace professional (individual; 200 pts)
   - Identify and interview a professional in the workplace who communicates in order to get things done
   - Summarize your findings and report them in a memo

III. Science writing (individual; 150 pts)
   - Find a piece of science writing on a topic of your choice
   - Conduct and write a rhetorical analysis with attention to audience and purpose

IV. Client project (team; 300 pts)
   - Redesign the STC brochure to support the STC recruitment and visibility project
   - Conduct a usability test of a working draft of your brochure and use test findings to help you revise and prepare final draft for delivery to client
   - Conduct video interviews of students featured on the new “I’m STC” posters
   - Prepare clips of interviews for presentation on the STC website

**Other Assignments**

In addition to the major document cycles, you will also complete some smaller assignments throughout the semester, including the following:

- A one-page assessment and reflection memo on your growth as a technical communicator throughout the semester (50 pts)
- Participation and in-class writing (holistic and cumulative; 75 pts)
- Peer reviews (75 pts)

Extra credit assignment (50 pts each; up to two): Attend one of the “STC speaker series” presentations and write a trip report detailing your experience. These events will be announced in class and via email.

**Evaluation Criteria**

Generally speaking, audience, purpose, communication context, design, clarity, and professional ethos are some of the major factors that I take into consideration.
when grading your documents. For each assignment, I’ll use a specific set of criteria that highlight the objectives or goals of that particular assignment, which can be found in the assignment description/prompt.

**Grade Conversion**

The assignments are “worth” the above indicated amounts. In addition, **you must complete all assignments to receive a passing grade in this course.** Late assignments (except the one for which you used your “computer excuse”) lose 50pts for each day (anytime past 5:00pm) of the due day. Use the table below to convert points to letter grades.

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
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