What is Professional and Technical Communication?

Professional communication refers to specific types of writing, speaking, and design practices that are integral to the corporate and industrial sectors that many of Tech's graduates inevitably become a part of. Technical communication is a version of professional communication that conveys specialized technical and scientific information to wider audiences that include nonspecialists. Through writing, speech, and the use of media, professionals interact with each other on a regular basis and increasingly in live online spaces both domestically and across cultures and time zones.

While effective writing and communication skills are regularly listed on job descriptions for engineers, scientists, computer specialists, software developers, business managers, and a wide variety of professionals in the public and private sectors, technical communication is itself a productive and expanding profession. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, people with skills in professional and technical communication:

- "put technical information into easily understandable language" and be "detail oriented, curious, persistent in solving problems, self-motivated, and able to understand complex material and explain it clearly";
- "are expected to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter and establish their credibility with their colleagues";
- "commonly work in engineering, scientific, healthcare, and other areas in which highly specialized material needs to be explained to a diverse audience, often of laypersons";
- "must have excellent writing and communication skills and be able to express ideas clearly and logically in a variety of media";
- "must demonstrate good working relationships and sensitivity toward others, especially those from different backgrounds";
- "oversee the preparation of illustrations, photographs, diagrams, and charts... using a variety of multimedia formats to convey information in such a way that complex concepts can be understood easily by users of the information";

You will notice how a number of these skills require an understanding of communication that is not reduced to structural components, to templates or models. Traditionally, our educational institutions have been oriented toward developing the intellectual quotient, or IQ, of students. This kind of capacity is what is reflected in standardized examinations like the SAT. Less curricular support has been devoted to cultivating students' emotional quotient, or EQ. Numerous studies suggest that professional success if often determined by one's capacity to link content-specific information with larger social and cultural contexts. Effective communication is therefore not just about what we say but how say it.
Required Readings

The readings for this class will be in the form of pdfs on our Canvas course site and will include articles and sections of book chapters from publications in the professional, scientific, and technical fields. The assignments will also include links to numerous online resources that you will be expected to familiarize yourself with.

Course Structure and Protocol

Collegiality: Throughout the duration of this course, you must conduct yourself in a manner becoming of a professional. Please consider your instructor and your peers as colleagues to whom you are expected to be cordial and respectful at all times. Please do not sleep in class, whisper to or chat with classmates, text outside acquaintances, or yawn loudly while your instructor or peers are talking. Rude, immature behavior is prohibited. If you are unhappy with the instructor or others in class, please don’t convey your displeasure publicly; instead, share your feelings with the instructor after class. Cell phones, Blackberries, iPods, PDAs, and other electronic devices are not to be used in the classroom and should be set to vibrate. Laptop computers are allowed for course-related work only. When online, please do not engage in activities unrelated to this course.

Deadlines and Submission Standards: Please meet all deadlines and digitally submit pdf copies of all assignments unless otherwise specified. Late work will result in a lower grade.

Work Ethic: Your work in this class should mirror the work you do in a professional environment. Every document you produce must exhibit conscientiousness. That’s a key word for success in this class and in the professional world this class is preparing you for. Not meeting deadlines, a careless attitude, and shoddy work will have consequences.

Attendance: Please attend class regularly and on time. Because this class meets only once per week, a class missed equals a week missed. You are allowed one absence per semester. For each absence beyond that, your final grade will be lowered by 4 points. If you have four absences, say, and a final grade of 83 (B), that number will be reduced by twelve points to a 71 (C). Coming to class late regularly will also result in a reduction of your final grade.

Canvas Site and Listserv: Assignments, schedules, and course information will be posted on Blackboard. I will also periodically send out announcements and reminders using a course listserv. I know you get a lot of these and your tendency may be not to read most of them, but please do read the ones for this class. Thanks.

Collaborative Teams: On key projects this semester you will be working in teams of three to four of your colleagues. Your team will be assigned a task and you will divide up the work so that each individual contributes responsibly to the project’s outcome. The grade the project receives will be determined in two ways: (1) the extent to which it satisfies the criteria of the task, as determined by me using assessment rubrics; and (2) each individual’s anonymous evaluation of him/herself and of the other
members of their team. The grade for the project will be lowered for those who do not contribute meaningfully to the project at hand.

**Academic Integrity:** At Michigan Tech, plagiarism is a serious offense. It is defined by MTU’s policy as “knowingly copying another’s work or ideas and calling them one’s own or not giving proper credit or citations.” Plagiarism includes copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchased online or from unsavory campus characters. In this class you are to **avoid plagiarism at all costs**.

**Grades**

Your final letter grade will be based on a 100 point scale. Here are the numerical categories of each letter grade: A (100-93), AB (92-88), B (87-83), BC (82-78), C (77-73), CD (72-68), D (67-63), F (62-0).

**C-Track Option**

Students for whom this course is a low priority and who basically just want the three credits for graduation should consider taking the C-Track option. The C-Track excuses you from collaborative assignments and from attending some classes. In exchange for meeting the basic requirements of the course by completing the major assignments, you will receive no higher than a final grade of “C.” Your work must be, of course, your own and of satisfactory quality. If it is not, you can get a CD, D, or fail the course. The C-Track requires that you sign a contract agreeing to stipulations which ensure that you complete your coursework in a timely and acceptable manner.

**Your Graduate Teaching Instructor**

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**University Policies**

Academic regulations and procedures are governed by University policy. Academic dishonesty cases will be handled in accordance with the University’s policies. If you have a disability that could affect your performance in this class or that requires an accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please see me as soon as possible so that we can make appropriate arrangements. The Affirmative Action Office has asked that you be made aware that Michigan Tech complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990. If you have a disability and need a reasonable accommodation for equal access to education or services at Michigan Tech, please call the Dean of Students Office, at 487-2212. For other concerns about discrimination, you may contact your advisor, department head or the Affirmative Action Office, at 487-3310. More information on next page:
Academic Integrity: http://www.studentaffairs.mtu.edu/dean/judicial/policies/academic_integrity.html

Affirmative Action: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/aoa/

Disability Services: http://www.admin.mtu.edu/urel/studenthandbook/student_services.html