



## Syllabus

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**Course Description.** In this course students will be introduced to the definition of *technical writing* developed by the *Society of Technical Communication* and the *US Department of Labor*:

Technical writers, also called *technical communicators*, prepare instruction manuals, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information among customers, designers, and manufacturers. (*US Department of Labor*).

A central principle that informs this definition of technical writing is a concept known as *User-Centered Design*. User-centered design is a process in which the needs, wants, and limitations of end users of a product, service, or process are given extensive attention at each stage of the design process. The testing of User-Centered design informs everything we use from the app on your phone to the design of traffic intersections.

**Learning Outcomes:** This course addresses the University of Idaho learning outcomes as follows:

- **Learn and Integrate:** learn the importance of UCD to technical writing and develop and apply the ability to leverage discipline-specific discourse to meet organizational and disciplinary user needs.
- **Think and Create:** learn and practice how to think about technical writing as a problem-solving activity. Develop skills to generate creative approaches to solving problems using techniques such as serious play and metaphors to generate new ideas and approaches to solving problems.
- **Communicate:** develop skills in assessing and articulating the affordances and constraints of technologies to a wide range of stakeholders and audiences. Gain an advanced understanding and application of key rhetorical constructs--specifically toward the visual and verbal design of documents.
- **Clarify Purpose and Perspective:** foster skills in effective time management by learning to work incrementally to produce project deliverables.
- **Practice Citizenship:** study how successful technical writers apply ethical tradeoffs to navigate complex social/cultural workplace situations in way that reflects socially responsible behavior, respect for diversity in an interdependent world, and a commitment to advance and sustain local and global communities.

**Required Text:** *Technical Communication in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. by Dobrin

**Grades.** Final grades will be based on intro assignment and five project deliverables, weighted as follows:

- Introductory Assignment: Bio with Photo (5%)
  1. Technical Prose Style (20%)
  2. Technical Definitions and Descriptions (20%)
  3. Data Visualization Data (20%)
  4. Usability Test (25%)
  5. Professional Identity (10%)

*See the next page for descriptions of the projects.*

## Project Descriptions and Deliverables<sup>1</sup>

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**Project 1: Technical Prose Style.** For this this project, you will learn technical prose style concepts and apply these to analyze some of your prior writing. This project is designed to help you evaluate the readability of prose style and develop goals for improving your style.

- Deliverable: Short report write-up of findings from the analysis, about 3-4 pages.<sup>2</sup>

**Project 2: Technical Definitions and Descriptions.** An important writing skill technical writers draw upon frequently is the ability to define and describe technical information within a variety of genres and for specific audiences and rhetorical purposes. For this project, you will write an extended technical definition and a developed technical description for an audience, purpose, and placement of your choice.

- Deliverables: Document specifications explained in a cover memo plus Extended Technical definition and a developed technical description, about 3 pages.

**Project 3: Data Visualization.** In this project, you will build important data visualization skills by creating a data infographic based on analyzing one or more statistical data sets to extract the story you will tell about this data. Your story may be simple or complex, and you are not expected to have prior graphic design experience.

- Deliverables: Document specifications explained in a cover memo plus Infographic.

**Project 4: Usability Test.** For this project, you will conduct a usability test known as a *cognitive walkthrough* to test the ease-of-use of two digital tools or apps useful for technical writers or for communication tools used in your field of study such as 3-D modeling tools.

- Deliverable: Technical White paper. Length will vary greatly depending on the size and number of screenshots you incorporate to support the narrative of your findings.

**Project 5: Professional Identity.** You may apply this project toward an entry level job or internship in your field of study or as part of materials sent in application to a graduate program. For this project, you will compose a letter of application and a resume that target a specific audience. In addition, you will create an online portfolio that supports these application materials and populate this portfolio with artifacts from this course and/or others with the aim of showcasing your work to potential employers or graduate programs.

- Deliverables:
  - Cover Letter and Resume, about 1 page for the letter and 1-2 pages for the resume. Length will vary depending on your skills, experience and the choice of application.
  - Online portfolio using a web authoring tool of your choice.

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<sup>1</sup> **Deliverables** are simply the writing you produce in various workplace genres that I will evaluate, and this word better describes how writing is referred to in workplace environments.

<sup>2</sup> **Note:** all page lengths are based on single-spaced text using a font size for the body of the text between 10 and 12 point type with a line of white space between paragraphs and include using headings to help readers navigate through and revisit information in technical documents. In addition, these are given only as approximations only. In technical writing, you never write more or less than is necessary to meet the needs of a specific writing situation.