English 341.02W
Technical Writing

“Reality Check: Writing Application Post Academia”

Spring 2013

Classroom: Online Course
Instructor: Dr. Connie Meyer
Office Location: 112
Office Hours: M/T/W/H 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.
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connie.meyer@tamu.edu
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Course Website: course ecollege site at myleo

Text:

- Pocket Guide to Technical Communication (5th Edition) [Paperback]
William S. Pfeiffer
ISBN-10: 0135063965

Course Description: Technical communication means presenting specialized knowledge to a non-expert audience. Technical communicators must either possess or gain specialized knowledge and then present that information in a way that a non-expert can understand.

This is an online course, meaning that the entirety of the work will be conducted via our eCollege virtual classroom. You will have assignments due on eCollege on Wednesday and Sunday midnights. If you have difficulty with any aspect of the course – in writing or technology – please schedule an in-person visit with me in HL 215 or contact me via email.

You need ready access to the Internet either at home or at one of the many computer labs on campus. If you are technology-averse, please don’t let the technology frighten you. We will do all we can to make your participation in the course go smoothly. Many of you have already taken a course online in eCollege and you are familiar with and proficient in its use. If you need assistance, ask.

From the catalog: “Techniques of objective reporting on scientific and technical material; principles of technical exposition; study of language uses; writing samples and principles of various technical reports, including abstracts, proposals, and manuals. Prerequisites: Eng 102.”

Course Objectives: Learners will
- Improve their ability and comfort with all levels of the writing process
- Be introduced to the writing cultures of their disciplines
- Be exposed to information technologies applicable to their disciplines
- Increase their ability and comfort with computer-mediated writing
- Observe the importance of collaborative work in the academy and the workplace
- Create a community of learners both among and across disciplines
- Apply rhetorical understanding of language to writing within a variety of situations to include audience, purpose and genre, especially as related to technical writing in the workplace and major coursework
- Apply objective and critical thought to inquiry-based research
- Observe, explain, analyze, and synthesize material
- Present a short, oral presentation using visual aids effectively

Course Assignments and Evaluation: This course is made up of a series of assignments and assessments to assist you in achieving the course learning objectives. Each week you will work on various combinations of assignments, which can be found in the eCollege navigation bar.

Each assessment/assignment will have a separate handout with detailed information on due dates, objectives, audience and purpose, format and structure, along with information on textbook and other models and lists of resources to use in preparing the assignment. But a general overview of the assignments follows.

If you are concerned about your grade or your participation in this course, see me. If I cannot assist you, I can help you find someone who can.

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<th>Course Assignments &amp; Grade Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>COLLABORATIVE FIELD PROJECT (BOLD CAPS on syllabus) 50 % OF COURSE GRADE</td>
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<td>GROUP CONTRACT 1-2 pages 5 %</td>
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<td>PROPOSAL MEMO 2-3 pages 10 %</td>
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<td>OBSERVATION REPORT 4-5 pages 20 %</td>
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<td>GROUP PRESENTATION 20 minutes 10 %</td>
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<td>GROUP-ASSIGNED GRADE Form provided by instructor 5 %</td>
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<td>Individual Writing Assignments (bold on syllabus) 30 % of course grade</td>
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<td>Resume &amp; Cover Letter 1 page each 10 %</td>
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<td>Analysis Report 3-4 pages 10 %</td>
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<td>Interview &amp; Summary 2-3 pages 5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thank You Letter 1 page 5 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daily &amp; Discussion (italicized on syllabus) 20 % of course grade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Each daily and discussion assignment will earn full credit only with full effort and substantive</td>
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content. These assignments may NOT be made up or revised – with the exception of Exercise 1, which *every student must complete satisfactorily* before continuing the course work. However, there will be more than enough daily and discussion assignments available to allow each student to earn 100 for this 20 % of the course grade.

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<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise 1 – Plagiarism Memo</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2 %</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly discussion postings</td>
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<td>18 %</td>
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**COLLABORATIVE FIELD PROJECT (CFProject on course navigation bar)**

**50 %**

**GROUP CONTRACT (5 %)**
After you have been notified by your instructor of the members of your group, you will begin the process of group negotiation by drawing up a GROUP CONTRACT to specify the responsibilities of each group member and penalties for failure to perform. Together you will establish specific guidelines and deadlines for meeting virtually or in person to accomplish your goals for the course. This group contract will be submitted as part of the PROPOSAL MEMO, but a draft of it will be submitted earlier.

**PROPOSAL MEMO (10 %)**
This is the first group-based assignment submitted for evaluation. You will first study the “proposal” and “memo” as writing genres, exploring the audience, purpose and genre characteristics of these particular writing forms. The completed PROPOSAL MEMO will be a formal document organized into sections and professionally presented. The memo will include background on the company you plan to investigate, professional biographies of your contacts at the host company, individual group member biographies, the group contract, and your “action plan” for the semester.

**OBSERVATION REPORT (20 %)**
Your next collaborative assignment utilizes strategies from “ethnography,” particularly workplace observation, data collection, comparing interview responses, etc. In this report you will isolate one or two communications issues found at your company's workplace and substantiate your assertions with evidence from observation, interviews, writing samples, email samples and other workplace-based communications media.

**GROUP RESEARCH PRESENTATION (10 %)**
During the final week of class, each group will report their findings to other class members and the instructor in a 20-minute media-enhanced presentation, utilizing PowerPoint and/or some aspect of new media. The OBSERVATION REPORT and GROUP RESEARCH PRESENTATION substitute for a final exam in this course.

**GROUP-ASSIGNED GRADE (5 %)**
Each student in a work group assigns a numerical grade to every other student in that group based solely on the
students’ contributions to the semester-long workplace ethnography project. Such assessment decreases the possibility of procrastination and builds in semester-long accountability to the group. Additionally, it encourages good work habits.

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<th>Individual Writing Assignments</th>
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**Résumé and Cover Letter or Letter of Application (10 %)**
On this assignment, you have two options based on whether your profession requires only a Bachelor’s degree to begin working or whether further certification or an advanced degree is required: You will prepare a résumé and cover letter for an actual employer or you will prepare the materials to apply to graduate or professional school.

**Interview Transcript and Summary (5 %)**
Your next individual writing assignment asks you to interview a person working at your company site in the field (though not necessarily the job) you hope to enter. In this interview you will collect information about the workplace culture and writing demands, and about potential communications issues/problems at the company.

**Analysis Report (10 %)**
In this individual assignment you will analyze 25 ads in your area of expertise or major to investigate the current job market and employers’ expectations.

**Thank You Letter (5 %)**
You will write and send a follow-up Thank you Letter to your contact at the host site to complete this assignment series. You may also wish to leave an updated Resume with your host contact, for future networking purposes.

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<th>Daily Assignments &amp; Discussion Postings</th>
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**Discussion Postings:** You will complete weekly discussion postings in eCollege on most weeks. Your response should be substantive and generative, as well as polite. In other words, besides being nice, you must fully answer the prompt(s) and should invite your classmates' responses. Your posting should not be written in such a way as to close the conversation or have the final word on the topic. These are discussions—not right or wrong answers, though some will likely be right and some wrong. So do your best here. Sometimes the topics will cover the material you have read or worked on that week; other times the discussion topics will ask you to share your successes in group or individual work. You may not post a discussion response for credit after the weekly deadline (Sunday midnight), though I invite ongoing, courteous, enthusiastic conversation on a topic.

**Daily Assignments:** Additionally, you will complete a series of assignments, each relating to the reading or to a specific set of skills that I expect you to be able to utilize for your weightier graded assignments and for writing in your field. Each student must successfully complete Exercise 1. There will be enough daily assignments and discussion postings to earn the full 20% of your grade.
Acceptable behavior: All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment. (See Student’s Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct). Also see The Core Rules of Netiquette for expected online behavior.

Attendance policy: Obviously, attendance in an online class means something different than in a face-to-face one. Still, your presence is required. You will want to log into the course website at least every other day and maybe daily. Your attendance and participation are measured by your completion of assignments. Let me know if you have questions.

Group work: Group work in an online technical communication class may be challenging. But collaborative work in the professional world is a reality, and so we will practice it here. No one likes to work with slackers or bossy people, so you will each need to monitor your individual behavior as well as your group’s behavior. In fact, you notice that each of you will evaluate your group members’ contributions, and that assessment becomes part of the course grade.

Late work: Late work will not be accepted. Please note that I distinguish between late work and requested extensions. Late work means that something was due and you did not have it ready. If you see a couple of days in advance that you will not have the assignment ready to assignment specification, you may notify me to request an extension by using the following process. Send an email which contains several specific pieces of information: (1) professional explanation of what you will not be able to accomplish by deadline and why not; (2) suggested extension timeframe; (3) courteously worded request. I will respond within 24 hours to accept or deny your request either altogether or by suggesting another new deadline. The extension is not considered confirmed until you accept my extension and I reply to your email. (I call that “round-tripping.”) Also, please note that this is a one-time per student opportunity. Absolutely NO EXTENSIONS on group assignments.

Literature and Languages Policy on Plagiarism: Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty such as collusion. Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b [1, 2, 3])

Plagiarism or collusion will result in an automatic failing grade (0) on the assignment. A second instance of plagiarism or collusion will result in an automatic F for the class. If you have declared a major, I will notify your Department Head and the Dean of your college of your plagiarism. A report of the incident will also be filed with the Office of the Dean of Students. This report may stay on your permanent collegiate record and you may also be subject to further disciplinary action being taken by the university.

The Department of Literature and Languages defines plagiarism as occurring when a writer deliberately uses someone else’s language, ideas, or other original (not common-knowledge) material without acknowledging its source. Simply having a list of sources at the end of the project does not sufficiently meet the academic standards for acknowledging sources. The
Department defines collusion as selling academic products (any written or recorded or pictorial material intended to be submitted to satisfy an academic requirement). You must acknowledge and document all sources (quoted and paraphrased) in your formal report. Documentation requires clear identification within the text (embedded in your sentences or in parentheses, endnotes, or footnotes) of the source for material that has been summarized, paraphrased in your own words, or quoted directly. Page numbers must be given for direct quotes. Pfeiffer’s Pocket Guide to Technical Communication notes: "Most errors in documentation result from sloppy work, not from intentional cheating. But whether an error in using borrowed information is intentional or unintentional, it may be considered plagiarism . . ." (10). See Chapter 3 in Tebeaux and Dragga.

**Students with Disabilities:** The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you have a disability requiring an accommodation, please contact:

**Office of Student Disability Resources and Services**  
Texas A&M University-Commerce  
Gee Library, Room 132  
Phone (903) 886-5150 or (903) 886-5835; Fax (903) 468-8148  
StudentDisabilityServices@tamuccommerce.edu

**Technical Assistance** – I urge you to complete the .NEXT Student Orientation Tutorial in eCollege before contacting me or the helpdesk. You will likely find the answer to your questions. If you still have questions, however, contact eCollege tech support or me, using the following contact information.

**Contacting eCollege for Technical Support:**

The following support options are available 24 hours a day / 7 days a week:

- **Help:** Click on the 'Help' button on the toolbar for information regarding working with eCollege (i.e. How to submit to dropbox, How to post to discussions etc.)
- **Chat Support:** Click on 'Live Support' on the tool bar within your course to chat with an eCollege Representative.
- **Phone:** 1-866-656-5511 (Toll Free) to speak with eCollege Technical Support Representative.
- **Email:** helpdesk@online.tamucc.org to initiate a support request with eCollege Technical Support Representative.

**Contacting Your Instructor:**

If you have questions pertaining to the content of this course (e.g., questions about an exam, course due dates, grades, etc.), please contact your instructor via email or through the "Virtual Office."
**TExES/TOPT Statement:** Students who plan to teach English, Spanish, or English as a Second Language in Texas public schools must pass the appropriate state certification tests. The Department of Literature and Languages grants approval to take the content-area tests, subject to the policies described at this URL: &lt;http://faculty.tamu-commerce.edu/bolin/texes.html&gt;.

**Writing Assistance** – If you already know that you have difficulty with writing, you may wish to schedule regular meetings with a Writing Center tutor with daytime hours in the Hall of Languages Writing Center (WC) or Converging Literacies Center (CLiC) or evening hours in Gee Library’s WC. You may also drop in to either center as needed.

**A Message from the Writing Center:**
The Writing Center (Communication Skills Center) is dedicated to helping writers take advantage of all opportunities for learning inherent in the writing process; to that end, we can assist writers at any stage of the writing process. This is your place for assistance with your reading and writing projects here at TAMU-Commerce. We can help you with your papers and digital texts in any of your classes. We have two locations: (1) on the ground floor of the Hall of Languages (room 103), and (2) beside the circulation desk in Gee Library. Our hours of operation for Fall 2009 are:

Hall of Languages: Monday through Thursday 9:00 A.M until 4:00 P.M.; Friday 9:00 A.M. until 1:00 P.M.
Gee Library: Sunday through Thursday 6:00 P.M. until 9:00 P.M.
To make an appointment, come to HL 103 or call 903.886.5280.
(Please note that we’re not open during the first week of the semester or during finals week.)

The online writing center is still available to students. Information about the OWL can be found here: [http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/litlang/WritingCenter/owl.asp](http://www.tamu-commerce.edu/litlang/WritingCenter/owl.asp)

**Grading Criteria:** These criteria apply to all writing assigned in class.

**A+/A/A- [90-100] (Superior):** The draft is written to the assignment requirements and contains no grammatical, spelling, or typographical errors. The format, design, and organization of the document follow the textbook or modeled guidelines. The writing style is outstanding in terms of clarity and simplicity of syntax. The depth and accuracy of the information covered are appropriate for the audience and assignment. Required research, if any, is clearly attributed and documented.

**B+/B/B- [80-89] (Good):** The draft is written to the assignment requirements and may contain a few minor grammatical errors, but should contain few or no typographical or spelling errors. For the most part, the format, design, and organization of the document follow the textbook or modeled guidelines. The writing style is strong in terms of clarity and simplicity of sentence structure. The depth and accuracy of the information covered are appropriate for the audience and assignment. Required research, if any, is attributed and documented.

**C+/C/C- [70-79] (Acceptable):** The draft is written to the assignment requirements and may contain some minor grammatical, typographical, or spelling errors. For the most part, the format, design, and organization of the document follow the textbook or modeled guidelines. For the most part, the writing style is clear in terms of syntax. The depth and accuracy of the information
covered are appropriate for the audience and assignment. Required research, if any, is attributed and documented.

**D+/D/D- [60-69] (Unacceptable):** An unacceptable grade will be assigned for any *one* of the following reasons:

- The writing assignment is not written to the assignment requirements.
- The assignment contains significant or serious grammatical, typographical, or spelling errors.
- The assignment does not follow the textbook guidelines for format, design, or organization.
- The assignment is not clearly written or logically organized. Incoherent paragraphs (where one sentence does not relate to the next) or confusing syntax make the writing difficult to follow.
- The depth of coverage of the topic is not adequate.
- The information presented is inaccurate.
- Required research was not done, or is unclearly attributed.

**F [0-59] (Failing):** The writing assignment will receive an F if plagiarism occurs (whether intentional or unintentional) as defined by the Department of Literature and Languages policy.

The writing assignment will receive an F if it is only half as long as the assigned minimum length.

The writing assignment will also receive an F if *two or more* of the following conditions occur:

- The writing assignment is not written to the assignment requirements.
- The assignment contains significant or serious grammatical, typographical, or spelling errors.
- The assignment does not follow the textbook guidelines for format, design, or organization.
- The assignment is not clearly written or logically organized. Incoherent paragraphs (where one sentence does not relate to the next) or confusing syntax make the writing difficult to follow.
- The depth of coverage of the topic is not adequate.
- The information presented is inaccurate.
- Required research was not done, or is unclearly attributed.
Tentative Schedule

This schedule offers only a brief overview and is subject to change. **Check each week's list on eCollege at least every other day.** It is the key to knowing where we are. If there are modifications or additions to the schedule or to any assignment, I will post an announcement, and you will see an updated version, which then supersedes the previous one.

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<td>Week 16 FINALS WEEK</td>
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