

## **Instructor and Course Information**

### **English 421 Y04, "Technical Writing Online"**

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## **Overview**

English 421 helps students become better technical communicators, whose work is characterized by the presentation of technical material in written and visual formats that are user centered and aware of audience and context. The course and its principles are grounded in rhetorical theory and informed by current research in technical communication.

Communication across multiple audiences and for multiple purposes continues to be a desired skill set in technical and professional fields. Beyond field-specific knowledge and experience, successful and ethical communication drives the professional world. This class, in content and form, models these successful communication practices. Working individually and in groups, students learn effective strategies for communicating about and with technology, particularly in networked workplaces and through usability testing. To achieve success in this course, students must display the ability to succeed in their future workplaces by developing a variety of informative and visually effective print and electronic documents.

This course attempts to find a middle space between the daily assignments, F2F discussion, and interaction of an onsite course and the self-pacing student may expect of distance education courses. Keep in mind that this course is not completely self-paced, but students can work ahead on a several assignments and, ultimately, can have more flexibility and responsibility within the course structure.

**One last important note:** This course is a condensed and accelerated version of 421 Online. We will squeeze projects that would normally take two weeks to complete into one densely-packed week. This means that you will need to complete readings, responses, major projects, and other exercises on a daily basis to stay on top of the work in order to succeed. To complicate matters further, because of the condensed nature of the course, extensions can rarely be given. That said, I will expect the same high-quality level of work that I receive in a standard section of 421.

**Please look through the calendar posted on Blackboard to get a sense of what will be due when. If you are concerned about your ability to produce quality work under these high-pressure circumstances, I would advise you to take a face-to-face or 16-week version of this course.**



## **Required Text**

Text: Technical Communication Today, **5th edition**, by Richard Johnson-Sheehan. 2014. ISBN [978-0321907981](https://www.pearson.com/us/higher-education/product/Technical-Communication-Today-5th-Edition-Richard-Johnson-Sheehan-9780321907981). Pearson

All other course readings will be provided on the course site or via links to sources off-site.

## **Course Goals**

### **Writing in Context**

- Analyze the invention, manufacture, and distribution of technologies in context and use writing to communicate these attributes in a variety of media and genres.
- Write to the different levels of technical expertise of a range of audiences and stakeholders to foster technical understanding.
- Understand the ethical implications of working within the nexus of technology and culture.

### **Project Management**

- Understand, develop and deploy various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents both individually and collaboratively.
- Select and use appropriate technologies that effectively and ethically address professional situations and audiences.
- Build professional ethos through documentation and accountability.

### **Document Design**

Make rhetorical design decisions about technical documents including

- understanding and adapting to genre conventions and expectations of a range of audiences including both technical and non-technical audiences
- understanding and implementing design principles of format and layout
- interpreting and arguing with design
- drafting, researching, testing, revising visual design and information architecture
- ensuring the technical accuracy of visual content

### **Teamwork**

Learn and apply strategies for successful teamwork, such as

- working online with colleagues to determine roles and responsibilities
- managing team conflicts constructively
- responding constructively to peers' work
- soliciting and using peer feedback effectively
- achieving team goals

### **Research**

Understand and use the research methods and strategies necessary to the production of professional documents, including

- working ethically with research participants, subject matter experts, and technical experts
- locating, evaluating, and using print and online information selectively for particular audiences and purposes
- triangulating sources of evidence
- selecting appropriate primary research methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and surveys to collect data
- applying concepts of usability research, such as user-centered design

### **Technology**

Use and evaluate the writing technologies frequently used in the workplace, such as emailing,

instant messaging, image editing, video editing, presentation design and delivery, HTML editing, Web browsing, content management, and desktop publishing technologies.

### **Project Modules and Self-Pacing**

This section of English 421 finds the half-way point between the course goals of improving your writing process and collaboration skills while also meeting your expectations as a distance education student. Each student should be responsible and flexible in completing each week's work since you have some, but not complete, freedom to pace yourself.

The course is broken down into three modules centered around the course's three major projects. Here are some guidelines to help you understand how self-pacing, peer review, and collaboration will work:

- Students may work ahead on reading responses.
- Students or groups may work ahead within each project, but only within that project, and they must submit peer reviews in a timely manner, when due.
- Students or groups cannot work ahead on peer reviews. Begin reviewing and responding on the day that drafts are due.
- In-group work, each student must maintain contact with other group members. Check your email daily, and use your course group space effectively.
- Reading responses, comments, and give-and take in the blogs must be submitted weekly. The requirement is that you submit two reading response per week and that you write only five (5) follow-up responses per week to blog posts submitted by your peers.
- In Projects 2 and 3, project logs must be submitted weekly. You'll create a blog post, tag it appropriately (e.g., "Project 2 Log, Group 3") and post it by the end of the day on Fridays. You'll be given specific instructions for what your project logs should include.

### **Course Projects and Activities**

\*\*\*Please **do not email** me any assignments. My inbox is hovering at around 95% full, and any emails with attachments will have to be deleted immediately. Submit all work through Blackboard\*\*\*

#### **1. Employment Project (15 points for Resume; 27 points for Cover Letter; 25% of grade)**

You will be asked to locate a job for which you are qualified and apply for it. Step 1 of the project asks you to learn about and use various web-based resources for job seekers and ultimately to select one job to pursue. Step 2 asks you to prepare the all-important "Job Application Letter." Step 3 asks you to prepare a resume suitable for such a position. In the process of completing each step, you will work closely with your peers and me to shape your writing so that it represents you and your experience fully and effectively, given the rhetorical circumstances. You will also study and respond to examples from the textbook. (Individual; 25% of course grade).

#### **2. White Paper Project (100 points; 25% of grade)**

The focus of Project 2 is the white paper, a common report genre in the professional world. White papers are used in business, industrial, and governmental contexts to sum up the gist of

what's known about a subject. During this project you will learn about

- the white paper genre through collaborative creation of a white paper.
- new writing and communication technologies that support technical writing in college and industry, with attention to open source and other freely available software or writing spaces (online networks, blogging, etc.)
- collaboration, project management, and strategies for writing and revising.
- producing a text for the web in HTML that integrates visual content, such as screenshots, tables, and flowcharts

All group members will keep a project log and submit Collaborative Project Evaluation forms. (Collaborative: 25% of course grade.)

### **3. Instructables.com Instructions (100 points; 25% of grade)**

More than likely, you have used instructions in a variety of circumstances during your lifetime. Often, these types of documents are the least noticed; however, they are one of the most important documents in the technical workplace because they help to guide workers' actions when completing simple and complex tasks.

During this group project, either individually or in groups (your choice), you will create a set of instructions for <http://www.instructables.com/>. Your group will create a usable (a robot, mini hot air balloon, a sled, etc.) product that will cost under \$50 to make. The sky is the limit here, but remember your and your group's ethos here, because these instructions--and potentially your pictures--will be posted on the Internet.

As the final part of this project, you will be introduced to principles of usability testing. Specifically, you will develop a series of questions to ask a user who will use your instructions, and then you will revise your instructions based on your usability testing findings. (Collaborative or Individual; 25% of course grade.)

### **Responses and Assignments (Points will vary; 25% of grade)**

#### **Reading Responses (12 Responses@8points each [96 points])**

Although we will have many readings each week, you are responsible for writing **two**, 300-word forum post as a reading response. The reading responses will function to synthesize the readings and your reactions to them, much like class discussion. Please refer to guidelines on how to post a reading response. **[Note: because these posts serve as class discussion, missing more than one Reading Response (or posting it late for no credit) will result in a drop of a letter grade.]**

#### **Comments and Replies (Approximately 30@2points each [60 points])**

You are required to submit five (5) comments and replies (e.g., follow-up responses) **each week** to the blog posts (reading and other responses posted by others) appearing on our course's front page. Your comments and replies should be spaced out over at least three days. Each should be, at minimum, 100 words each.

All comments and replies to another's blog post should follow effective rhetorical strategies for networking with others on the Web. (Readings from the course text provide

guidelines to follow.)

- Keep threads alive and relevant.
- Follow-up comments with further discussion.
- Think of your comments and replies as part of a lively class discussion in which everyone participates.

Our activity online substitutes for in-person discussion in interesting (and sometimes deeper) ways. Of course, you are always welcome, and encouraged, to post beyond these minimum requirements. The course calendar includes reminders about meeting this ongoing obligation for participating in class discussion.

The format and focus of your forum comments and replies is described fully in these Guidelines for Posting Comments and Replies. Please bear in mind that your online interaction is the glue that holds the course together, makes collaboration possible, and helps you achieve the course goals. For these reasons--and because we are not meeting F2F--your engagement in these online discussions will require serious and consistent attention throughout the course. It won't be possible to make up missed postings later since the discussion will have already moved on.

**Students must participate in all of the three major projects and complete a majority of the required weekly assignments and forum post assignments in order to pass this class. Students with questions about final grades should review university policies regarding grade appeals, which are outlined by the Dean of Students here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/gradeappeal.pdf>. The University regulations are here: [http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu\\_conduct/stu\\_regulations.html](http://www.purdue.edu/univregs/pages/stu_conduct/stu_regulations.html).**

#### **Other work and weekly assignments**

Each project will have a number of different assignments that you must complete in order to complete the project. Expect these different assignments to be worth varying amount of points. However, the total number of points will be added to the Reading Responses and Replies. Taken together, the total number of points will be worth 25% of the total grade.

#### **Grading**

Employment Project 25%

White Paper Project (collaborative) 25%

Instructions 25%

Reading Responses, Project Logs, Weekly Assignments, etc. 25%

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Total 100%

All major assignments will be graded on the standard plus-minus letter-grade scale: A=100-94, A-=93-90, B+==89-87, B=86-84, B-=83-80, C+=79-77, C=76-74, C-=73-70, D+=69-67, D=66-64, D-=63-60, F=59 or below. Each assignment will include a rubric with more information on how the instructor will score the projects.

## **Class Participation, Reading Responses, Peer Reviews**

This portion of your grade will be based on

- How well you implement the guidelines and best practices for posting comments and creating reading responses, as presented on our course site and discussed in the textbook.
- The degree to which your peer reviews and responses offer insightful feedback and suggestions on your classmates' drafts.
- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts demonstrate learning of the course content.
- The degree to which your reading responses and comment posts engage with and contribute to the learning of others in the course.
- A class participation and reading response self-evaluation which you will complete at the middle and end of the semester.

## **Technology Requirements**

- Mac OS X or Windows XP, Vista, Windows 7
- Microsoft Office for the PC or Mac (Word, PowerPoint, Excel) or Apple counterparts (Pages, Keynote, Numbers)
- Web Browser (e.g., Firefox, Safari, or Internet Explorer 8)
- Email Program (e.g., Purdue Webmail, Thunderbird, Gmail, etc.)
- Adobe Acrobat and Reader (for PDF documents, collaborative review)

## **Technology Responsibilities**

Because the exchange of information and documents in this class will be entirely electronic, familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for participation and success in the course. If you need any assistance now or at any point during the semester, please do not hesitate to ask.

During the semester, you'll need regular access to the Internet and email. Because the course home page is the main locus of the class community, you are responsible for reading and keeping current with all content posted there, including what has been submitted by both the instructor and your fellow students. You'll be responsible for configuring your system to access course materials, to read course email and participate in online discussions, and to submit your work.

Very early in the semester, you will be asked to demonstrate that you can meet these responsibilities:

- Post a message about yourself and your interests
- Read the course description and calendar, then ask questions when you are uncertain about requirements or activities.
- Set up your @purdue.edu email or an alternative that you can access regularly and reliably
- Become proficient sending and receiving email attachments, resolving file compatibility issues, and following email decorum.
- Check the course calendar before each class meeting.
- Become proficient participating in the class Drupal space.
- Become more proficient with unfamiliar computer technologies and applications, including Web editing software, document cycling systems, desktop publishing applications, and graphics

programs.

- Maintain back-up copies of all assignments via your home directory, disks, USB drives, or CDs.

**If at any time you have problems accessing the Internet from home, you'll need to find a public lab or connection point. Problems with computers will not be an excuse for falling behind or failing to complete required assignments. If your Internet service goes down, find another connection point. If your computer breaks, use another one. In other words, find a way to complete the assignments on time. Because computer problems are a fact of life, always work to complete your assignments early and make frequent backups to multiple media.**

### **Course Technologies**

- Course Website (running on Drupal)
- Power Point, Word, Keynote, Google Docs (for collaboration)
- Acrobat and Acrobat Reader

### **Collaborative Work**

Teamwork 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 also are responsible for negotiating together all aspects of your work, including planning, drafting, revising, file managing, and scheduling of assignments. When a collaborative project is assigned, you will receive explicit guidelines for successful collaboration. Individual group members will complete Collaborative Evaluation Forms. For more information about good principles of collaboration, see the brochure, Group Work and Collaborative Writing.

### **Attendance**

Since this is an online course, your attendance at a physical location is not required. However, you will need to demonstrate active involvement in the course activities by keeping up with reading responses, project logs, and other coursework. You will also need to respond to course email promptly to ensure that good communication flows in all directions. More than one continuous week of absence from course activities is grounds for failure of the class. If you disappear for a few days here, another few days there, and some more later, then your final grade may be lowered, and you will likely see your class participation suffer and your collaboration fail. In addition, if you are frequently "absent" from the online discussions (i.e., you fail to post for several days at a time), your final grade may be lowered.

### **Academic Integrity**

Purdue students and their instructors are expected to adhere to guidelines set forth by the Dean of Students in "Academic Integrity: A Guide for Students," which students are encouraged to read here: <http://www.purdue.edu/odos/osrr/academicintegritybrochure.php>

The preamble of this guide states the following: "Purdue University values intellectual integrity and the highest standards of academic conduct. To be prepared to meet societal needs as leaders and role models, students must be educated in an ethical learning environment that promotes a high standard of honor in scholastic work. Academic dishonesty undermines institutional

integrity and threatens the academic fabric of Purdue University. Dishonesty is not an acceptable avenue to success. It diminishes the quality of a Purdue education, which is valued because of Purdue's high academic standards."

Academic dishonesty is defined as follows: "Purdue prohibits "dishonesty in connection with any University activity. Cheating, plagiarism, or knowingly furnishing false information to the University are examples of dishonesty." [University Regulations, Part V, Section III, B, 2, a] Furthermore, the University Senate has stipulated that "the commitment of acts of cheating, lying, and deceit in any of their diverse forms (such as the use of substitutes for taking examinations, the use of illegal cribs, plagiarism, and copying during examinations) is dishonest and must not be tolerated. Moreover, knowingly to aid and abet, directly or indirectly, other parties in committing dishonest acts is in itself dishonest." [University Senate Document 72-18, December 15, 1972]"

If you have any questions about this policy, please ask.

### **In Case of a Campus Emergency**

In the event of a major campus emergency, course requirements, deadlines and grading percentages are subject to changes that may be necessitated by a revised semester calendar or other circumstances. You can acquire updated information from the course website, by emailing me.

### **Late Work**

The instructor will stick closely to the course calendar. It is important that you keep up. When possible, you may certainly complete assignments early, but you must complete them on time. Much of what you do for this class quickly leads to another assignment. And, often, your postings and comments are part of a larger discussion that will not wait for you. It will also be difficult for you to do your part in group projects if you miss assigned deadlines. Thus, the majority of missed class assignments cannot be made up. If a serious and unavoidable problem arises, however, you should contact your instructor by email prior to the deadline to determine whether or not an extension for the work will or will not be granted. Late work will rarely, if ever, be accepted without prior approval.