

ENGL 501 - Professional Writing and Rhetoric

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Office Hours	M/T 6:00 – 7:00pm, and by appointment
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Class	Tuesdays, 7:20 – 10:00pm – IN 330
Course Wiki	http://pwr501f16.pbworks.com

Course Description

English 501 provides a historical and theoretical introduction to professional writing as a field of study. We'll inspect the rise of professional writing against the backdrop of rhetoric and composition as a scholarly field with a focus on key theoretical issues. We'll be examining "professional writing and rhetoric" both as local institution (the PWR program at GMU) and as the foundation for occupations that require the inter-related practices of writing and rhetoric. The course is conceptualized as both seminar and practicum, challenging students with writing tasks that probe the historical and theoretical issues being presented. These tasks will include: developing an annotated bibliography and literature review related to a research question of your choosing, writing short papers, and developing a journal review report.

Course Goals

This course is designed to:

- provide a rhetorical foundation for each student's future coursework in the program,
- provide practice in writing a variety of genre related to professional writing,
- provide experience in close reading of documents/texts,
- and provide the opportunity to apply effective principles of document design.

Texts and Materials

Johson-Eilola, Johndan, & Selber, Stuart, Eds. (2013). *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. ISBN 0-226-92407-6

Additional readings in the course will be available through the course wiki in PDF format.

Technology Responsibilities

Because the exchange of information and materials in this class will be almost entirely electronic, familiarity with certain technologies is crucial for participation and success in the course. In order to participate fully in the course, you should already be able to use the technology platform/s and applications listed below:

- Windows and/or Mac OS System
- Microsoft Office (Word)
- Firefox/Chrome/Safari
- Email programs (including attachments)

Class Activities/Structure

Each class will include some time devoted to each of the following activities:

1. Discussion of readings (and leading discussion during selected classes)
2. Brief in-class presentations
3. In-class writing assignments
4. Project work (which may include production, progress reports, team meetings, peer-review, etc.)

Assignments

Reading and discussion/participation: Students are expected to have completed the assigned readings and to contribute to class discussions. We will also be doing some shorter in-class writing and research assignments; these are considered part of the participation grade.

Participation counts for 25% of the final course grade.

There are three major projects: 1) Reading Responses – 2 short papers and one in-class presentation of a chapter from *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*, 2) an annotated bibliography and literature review, and 3) a collaborative journal review. Each of these projects is made up of several components – these components (which are generated as both part of the research and writing process and as evidence for your engagement with all aspects of said processes) will not be individually graded. Each of the major projects will be evaluated based on all of the written components, including the final product.

Each of these major projects will count for 25% of the final course grade.

Response Papers

Paper 1: On Professional Writing and *Rhetoric*

For your first response paper, provide a 1000-1500 word essay that examines the relationship between rhetoric and professional/technical writing. You should draw on the readings as well as making connections between your experience as a writer and the questions and arguments raised by the readings for the first four weeks of class.

Paper 2: On Professional Writing *Practice*

For your second response paper, provide a 1000-1500 word essay that focuses on professional/technical writing roles and/or contexts. You should draw on the readings as well as making connections between your experience as a writer and the questions and arguments raised by the readings.

Paper 3: On Professional Writing *Theory*

For your second response paper, provide a 1000-1500 word essay that focuses on professional/technical writing theory and its usefulness to working professionals. You should draw on the readings as well as making connections between your experience as a writer and the questions and arguments raised by the readings. I'm particularly interested in how you see the application (or non-application) of the theories you've been reading for class.

Annotated Bibliography and Literature Review

Your first task for this project is to generate a research question for which you need to develop the bibliography and literature review. At the outset, this can be fairly broad, but will be refined as you work on the review. Begin by finding a topic or area of scholarship that you find interesting and engaging, or that relates to work that you are currently doing or would like to do. Do a little initial research to help refine your topic to a manageable research question. Write up a brief proposal that outlines the topic or area you are interested in, your initial research question, and the methods you will use to discover the literature that addresses that question or related issues.

Annotated Bibliography

You should be looking at a variety of sources (books, journal articles, websites) that focus on your research topic. These should be primarily academic, secondary sources (as opposed to primary sources like specific records, documents, fiction, etc.). You should present a minimum of 25 sources; you don't need to use all of these sources in your literature review, but any source you use in the literature review (even if only obliquely connected to your research topic) should appear in the bibliography. For each entry, provide the bibliographic reference in APA format, followed by a short description. This description should concisely describe the resource and it should also note how you see it fitting into your research project. You may wish to identify which of the three elements you'll be presenting in the literature review (background, method, theoretical framework) is reflected in the resource.

Literature Review

For the literature review, you will be providing an overview of your research topic. Because we are not constructing the research project to any great degree of specificity, you can be fairly broad in your approach. Your main task is to show that you have sufficiently researched your topic (defined as narrowly as feasible -- that is, be more specific than "I want to investigate online writing practices"); you'll show this by providing a solid overview of the work that has thus far been done on your topic. The literature review should also address three elements that are critical to successful research:

- Basic background research/history of the topic (and what has been done before)
- The research methods that have been used to address your research question (or, if you can't find any direct connections to the project you want to do, then you should be figuring out what the best research methods options are and covering that in this section of the literature review).
- The theoretical framework that you plan to use to make sense of the data you collect. Again, you can look at the frameworks that have been applied by scholars who do work on your topic or area of interest. Your theoretical framework will have implications for your research methods.

You may (but need not) present your literature review divided into 3 sections (background, methods, theoretical framework). In some cases, it may make more sense to cover these areas within the context of particular issues raised by your research question.

Journal Reviews

Our first task is to find out which journals publish research and scholarship in technical communication and professional writing. We'll work up a list in our second class.

Working in teams of 3, your task will be to review several years worth of the journal.

You should look at the most current available issue and the most recent full year of publication (based on the volume numbers); you'll also want to look at the history of the journal (look for changes in editorship and design of the journal) and select a few issues from the earliest available to the present so you can see what changes happen over time. Use the following list of questions to help guide your review of the journal:

- How long has the journal been publishing?
- How is it available? (in terms of media and accessibility to GMU students?)
- Who is the audience for the journal?
- What can you find out about the journal (e.g. circulation, editorial board, editorial policies, etc.)
- How often do issues come out?
- What kinds of articles does the journal publish?

- What research methods appear in articles?
- What are the main research or scholarly topics?
- What recent books have been reviewed?

You'll be drafting a short report on the journal that you will share with your colleagues, as well as presenting an oral report about the journal. Feel free to approach the presentation creatively.

Course and Institutional Policies

Attendance: Because this is a class that requires collaboration and discussion, you are expected to attend class and be prepared. We will often work on projects and other exercises during class time, and there is no substitute for your presence in class. Unless you have made prior arrangements with me, each missed class beyond the first will lower the final course grade by 5%.

Late Work: Late assignments will lose 5% of their points for each calendar day that they are late. Late-work penalties cannot be changed through revision.

All institutional policies (including those that address issues of academic honesty, ethical conduct, and collegiality) are in force and should be adhered to.

English Department Statement on Plagiarism: Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or end notes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient. Plagiarism is the equivalent of intellectual robbery and cannot be tolerated in an academic setting.

Student writers are often confused as to what should be cited. Some think that only direct quotations need to be credited. While direct quotations do need citations, so do paraphrases and summaries of opinions or factual information formerly unknown to the writers or which the writers did not discover themselves. Exceptions to this include factual information that can be obtained from a variety of sources, the writers' own insights or findings from their own field research, and what has been called common knowledge. What constitutes common knowledge can sometimes be precarious; what is common knowledge for one audience may not be so for another. In such situations, it is helpful to keep the reader in mind and to think of citations as being "reader friendly."

In other words, writers provide a citation for any piece of information that they think their readers might want to investigate further. Not only is this attitude considerate of readers, it will almost certainly ensure that writers will not be guilty of plagiarism. Consult the George Mason Honor Code for more information.

Students with Disabilities: Students with documented disabilities are legally entitled to certain accommodations in the classroom. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC. I will be happy to work with students and the DRC to arrange fair access and support.

The instructor reserves the right to make changes to this syllabus and schedule if warranted by pedagogical or logistical exigency.

Schedule

Week	Date	Readings/Assignments Due
1	8/30	1 st Class: Introductions
2	9/6	Definitions SPTC: Intro, Ch 2, 3, 7
3	9/13	Rhetoric CW: Kinney (skim), Crowley, Bitzer, Vatz
4	9/20	Rhetoric SPTC: Ch 5; CW: Luzon, Lin, Buchanan
5	9/27	Ethics CW: Katz, Ornatowski, Dombrowski <i>1st Short Paper Due</i>
6	10/4	Roles SPTC Ch 13; CW: Slack, Miller, Doak; Killingsworth & Jones
7	10/18	Contexts SPTC Ch 11; CW: Driskill, Winsor
8	11/1	Contexts CW: Blythe et al., Doheny-Farina <i>2nd Short Paper Due</i>
9	11/8	Products SPTC Ch 10, 12; CW: Johnson, Paradis
10	11/15	Products – SPTC Presentations
11	11/22	Tools & Tech SPTC: Ch 6; CW: Flammia, Giamonna, Slattery
12	11/29	Research CW: Rude, Sullivan & Porter, Carter & Little
14	12/6	Reflections and Wrap-up
16	12/13	Final Exam Date – (all work due) <i>Bibliography and Literature Review Due</i>