PWR 313: Technical Writing: *Syllabus, Spring, 2011*

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"A detached symbol, whatever its roots in the psyche of the poet is helpless against the facts of tunnels, cinemas, and elevators. If it is to redeem its culture—if it is to project a meaningful Utopia—it must be grounded in actuality. To bring the symbol back to earth requires simultaneous grasp of the desirable and the possible. John Roebling possessed such a grasp. In his mind the bridge was both fact and ideal; a roadway for traffic below and a structure for poets above. Each required the other; each was incomplete without the other. Thus acknowledged as a fact in all its dimensions, Brooklyn Bridge might still incite dreams of possibility, might yet become a symbol of what ought to be." ***--Alan Trachtenberg, Brooklyn Bridge***

"Too rigidly scientific a point of view defeats the aim of life and alienates the sympathies of friends and associates. A man who tries to be unduly practical is likely to end up by not being practical at all. The student who studies only those subjects for which he can foresee a useful application after graduation will come out of college badly educated and unfitted for leading a full, normal life. Perhaps the most appropriate name for the variety [of reading] best suited to his problem is the history of civilization. [He] should be conscious of a common background of culture and humanism, which would not only weld together the various groups of technical specialists but would bridge the gap between them and the world at large
--Philip McDonald, English and Science

What is Technical Writing?

Technical writing is the **practical application of all your previous writing skills—** planning, researching, drafting, collaboration, and editing— to situations you may encounter in your job or career. We will supplement these skills with intensive work on situational and audience analysis; writing as **cognitive problem solving**; project management and group collaboration; page design and the use of **effectively integrated visuals**; and the job search. We will also study the diverse roles the technical writer/communicator plays business and industry—roles that must adapt to the on-going, rapid changes in communications technologies. To do so we will study the historical and cultural influences that defined the development of American technical writing.

As Trachtenberg's analysis suggests about the Brooklyn Bridge and John Roebling, its architect and engineer, technical writing is much more than technical language; it is also necessarily visual, creative, and its effects over time are deeply ingrained in American

culture. And, as McDonald recognized in his 1929 technical writing textbook, the complexities of our current workplaces—efficient use of space, visual design, engineering, utilization of resources and personnel, the technological demands of international economics—reveal the very similar qualities and skills contemporary technical writers must have.

We will seek this balance between humanism, history, and the practical realities of technical writing through analysis of Bernadette Longo's *Spurious Coin*—her history of the scientific, management, and linguistic tensions that created modern American technical education and communication. Her work will introduce us to the genus and genius of our field, from Sir Francis Bacon and John Locke to Fredrick Winslow Taylor. As Locke tells us, technical and scientific communication in the 18th. century had already become a "frivolous use of uncouth, affected, or unintelligible terms introduced into the sciences and there made an art. Vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language have so long passed for mysteries of science; and hard, misapplied words . . . have [been] mistaken for deep learning [but they are] the covers of ignorance" (51). And, as Taylor's influential 1911 essay "Shop Management" teaches us, without this balance between the practical and the humanistic, technical writing can be terribly misapplied. The skilled manager "would not for an instant advocate the use of a high-priced tradesman to do the work which could be done by a trained laborer or a lower-priced man. No one would think of using a trotter to draw a grocery wagon nor a Percheron to do the work of a little mule" (103).

Americans face many problems that can only be solved through the work of professional technical writers. This complex, variable, ever-changing synthesis of the technical and humanistic demands of the contemporary American workplace will provide the foundation for our reports, proposals, letters, collaborative and pre-publication projects.

What are the Specific Goals of Technical Writing 393?

- To prepare you to be a better communicator in your profession by helping you to ***improve your report and professional article writing.***
- To teach you skills for ***planning, writing, and revising documents*** that you can flexible apply to future writing situations and tasks.
- To improve your understanding of ***how reports function within an organization*** (how technical readers read, where they look for the information they need, and what purposes various documents serve).
- To give you practice in ***collaborating with other technical writers*** in pre-professional and professional situations
- To give you practice ***analyzing problems*** and responding to them through technical writing.

- To design ***efficient and effective graphics and visuals*** to enhance technical reports
- To write ***ethically and responsibly*** within the workplace and society

What are the Groundrules for Writing 313?

- ***You must attend class regularly.*** Much of the work in a technical writing course happens in the classroom, and whatever you miss cannot be made up. ***Four (4) unexcused absences will cost you a full letter grade.*** After **eight (8) unexcused absences you will be dropped from the class**
- ***Your written work must be presentable and professional.*** Rushed or poorly proofread documents ***will be returned for correction/reformatting before grading.***
- ***You must complete all assignments.*** If you do not submit the group report or the final report, ***you will automatically fail the course.***
- ***You must submit work on time.*** Late work may be downgraded. Late work may also mean you will not have the time/opportunity to revise your work.
- ***Turn-off all personal electronic devices during class***
- Technical writing is demanding work, so will be easier if we ***treat each other with mutual respect.***

What Textbooks and Materials are Needed for Writing 313?

- Anderson, Paul V. *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach,* ***7th*** **Ed.,** Wadsworth, 2011
- Longo, Bernadette. *Spurious Coin: A History of Science, management, and Technical Writing.* SUNY Press, 2000.
- A *two-pocket file folder/portfolio for notes, drafts, revisions, and graded assignments.* (File/portfolio will be reviewed at the end of the semester before final grading.)

What is the Workload for Technical Writing 393?

- Technical Instructions 5%
- Informational Page/Brochure/
  Unsolicited Recommendation. 5%
- Technical Article w/Inquiry Letter. 15%

Report Cycle 1: Collaborative Group Report/Publication

- Problem Analysis (Individual Memo) 5%
- Progress Report (Individual Memo) 5%
- Final Report (Full Group Collaboration) 20%

- Resume and Application Letter 10%

Report Cycle 2: Formal Technical Report

- Project Analysis/Proposal Memo 10%
- Transmittal Document 5%
- Formal Technical Report ***with Visuals*** 20%

How Will Written Work in Technical Writing 393 be Evaluated?

- Each assignment grade can be calculated using the point values in Table 1 with the following equation: AG = LG X A%. For example, as A- on the Resume and Application Letter Assignment would be AG = 10 X .10 = 1.00.

PWR Grade Point Values

A+ = 12	B+ = 9	C+ = 6	D+ = 3
A = 11	B = 8	C = 5	D = 2
A- = 10	B- = 7	C- = 4	D- = 1

- To keep track of your semester grade, add all point totals together, and then compare that total to the table above. 8.00 = B; 8.50 = B; 8.75 = B+, and so on in the other grade ranges.

Can Technical Writing 393 Assignments be Revised for a Better Grade?

Each student is entitled to ***open/full revision of all 393 assignments.*** Revision involves replanning, redrafting, and reediting. The ***grade for the revision will replace the original*** and will become the grade of record. Revisions should be submitted before the next assignment is due. The revision process may include ***a planning conference and/or work in The Writing Center.***

What is the Semester Plan for Technical Writing 393?

- **Weeks 1 and 2:** Orientation to technical communication and technical writing as "problem solving"; includes *diagnostic writing* that reviews standards, specifications, and instructions; lecture and reading about "thinking like a technical writer." Technical descriptions; researching, preparing, editing, and submitting professional technical documents; audience analysis and adaptation; "reader-based" communication; "top-down" editing strategies/applications in peer editing.
  Reading: Anderson, 1, 4, and 27; Longo, Introduction, C. 1.
  Writing: Diagnostic Sample and Technical Instructions.

- **Weeks 3 and 4:** Publication of "short but significant" technical documents from "reader-based" viewpoint; "persuasive principles"—the genuinely creative voice needed to present technical information; preliminaries on visual/verbal integration in basic technical documents; page designs and visual communication.
  Reading: Anderson, 3, 5, and 15; Longo, C.'s 2 and 3.
  Writing: Informational Page/Unsolicited Recommendation/Brochure

- **Weeks 5 and 6:** Publication of professional/technical articles and research reports; "review of full-text" literature and professional/academic journals; interpreting "notes to contributors" as instructions; electronic and "traditional" primary and secondary

research; documenting verbal and visual sources; **revising reports** to satisfy audience expectations/demands for accuracy; review MLA/APA documentation systems.
Reading: Anderson, 7, 8, 14 and 22; Longo, C 4.
Writing: Technical Article w/Inquiry Letter

- **Weeks 7-10:** Problem Solving Report Cycle that has *management as its primary audience*; includes problem representation, problem analysis, prewriting, group work, primary and secondary research, documentation of information sources, peer editing, preliminaries on *page design and visuals*; the submission of formal technical reports.
  Reading: Anderson, 10, 11, 17, and 18; Longo, C's. 5-8.
  Writing: Problem Analysis Memo
  Progress Report
  Final Group Report

- **Week 11:** *The Job Search*; includes researching openings, company report reading/summary, creating a *personal job search/career planning file*, arranging professional references, preparing a *personal inventory* of skills, professional goals, and self-analysis; drafting and completing a "ready to mail" application package.
  Reading: Anderson, 2 and 9.
  Writing: Resumes and Application Letters

- **Weeks 12-14:** Problem Solving Report Cycle that addresses *a primary audience in your program/professional field*; includes project analysis/proposal memo, review of formal report components, the *two-level technical report;* the *introductory elements* of the technical report--abstracts, transmittals, *executive summaries*; oral reports, and the final formal report.
  Reading: Anderson, 12, 13, 23, 24, and 25.
  Writing: Project Analysis/Proposal Memo
  Transmittal Document
  Formal Report **with Visuals**