English 210E  Introduction to Technical Writing
Instructor:  Mark Rowell Wallin
Time: Tuesdays, 10-11:30
Room:  DWE 3517
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Office Hours: Wednesday 1:00-2:00, or by appointment

Course Description

In this class we will explore various styles and genres of technical composition. We will begin
with the assumption that the best way to learn how to write is by practice and imitation.
Therefore, we will closely examine various instantiations of technical document design in order
to guide our writing experiments. Along with our regular readings we will practice by creating formal
(documents and presentations) and informal (journals) texts.

We will critique our readings and exercises through the lens of rhetoric, or the strategies of
persuasion that constitute all communication. We’ll consider various situations and genres of
technical writing to develop a sense of how rhetoric can assist our work so that by the end of the
term, we should be equipped with tools to continue growing and developing as writers.

We will also have the benefit of ‘outside consultants’ who will assist us in understanding the
professional writing milieu across the spectrum: from online documentation, to engineering specs,
and product help guides to the everyday discourse that constitutes most of business writing. We
will come to recognize that all documents, regardless of how ‘informal,’ convey messages about
the writer, and establish rhetorical relationships between communicators.

Required Texts


Assignments

3 Major Documents

Cover Letter (10%) – Using your resume, I want you to write a cover letter for your
application to my technical writing company, Kairos Communication Contractors. We do
‘out of house’ contract work for many of the tech firms in Ontario, including RIM, Nortel,
Descartes, NCR, and many hard/software, and service companies. I’m looking to expand
my pool of writers, particularly to create a functional, mutable, yet aesthetically pleasing
web page for the company.

Draft due: January 15
Final due: January 20

Process Document (15%) – For this ‘report’ you will describe in detail the step-by-step
process by which elements (i.e. backgrounds; buttons, images) may be imported into
Netscape Web Editor from external sources (say, for example http://www.graphics-
4free.com/buttons.html, or some other such source). Assume that your audience will be
those who come after you in the company who will need to follow this process to make
changes to your work.

Draft due: February 12
Final due: February 24

Web Design Project (45%) – As most technical communication is collaborative, this major
project is a group one. Your groups will be assigned in the third week of class.
Scenario: The Company has recognized that our website needs to change frequently as new services are developed, clients are added, and web fashion evolves. Your task is to 1) build a stylish, yet functional sample page, using the Netscape Web Editor, 2) compose a guide detailing exactly how you created the page (the steps you followed so that others can come behind you and modify your document), and 3) Using the rhetorical principles conveyed in the lectures, compose a 2,000 word rhetorical justification of your choices, using the terms and theories that we will discuss over the course of the term. (Mark breakdown: 8% for the sample page; 17% for the guide; 20% for the justification)

Web page/Guide due: April 1
Justification due: April 9

Other assignments

Project Presentation (10%): Consider this the unveiling of your new page and guide. You’ll make the pitch to the board (me), describing your texts using the rhetorical strategies discussed throughout the term. I expect each member of your team to play a notable, ‘evaluate-able’ role. So, the presentation should be one part demonstration (your page and manual), one part justification (dry run for your essay).

Due: April 1

Document Journal (10%): I want you to collect and comment on six documents of your own choice and assemble them in a ‘journal’ format of some kind (scrapbook, online blog, etc.). The acceptable spectrum for your choices are as broad as the category of technical writing: everything from brochures, corporate emails or memos, news releases, bank/investment statements, visa/phone/hydro bills, delinquent payment notices, instructions, to board games, invitations, directions or recipes to just about anything

You’ll receive a ‘75’ for completion of your document. Any mark above and beyond that will depend on the care and thoroughness of 1) your journal format, 2) your document choices, and 3) your critical responses. Minimum of 500 words per comment entry.

Due: March 11

Project Review (5%): throughout the term you will be part of a composition team. I want you to keep track of each member's input over the course of the term and write a review of his or her contribution and project participation. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of their contributions and assign a mark (out of 5). Your mark on this section will depend partly upon your peers' estimation of your contribution, but also upon the seriousness of your reviews. Minimum 50 words per entry.

Due: April 9

Participation and Editing (5%): Part of this mark is based on the in-class discussions that will come out of the intersections between the lectures and readings. You will all have something to say based upon your thoughts and I want to hear it. The other component of this category, peer editing, is extremely important to the smooth progression of the class and I want to make sure that you take it seriously. In large part, you will be responsible for each other’s marks, so you need to be very careful how you respond to your partner’s work. I will be examining your editing comments and assessing this mark based on the thoroughness and helpfulness of your criticism.

Schedule (Tentative)

January
6 – Welcome, syllabus, course requirements
8 – Email messages and resumes
13 – Rhetorical thinking in specific situations
   Text: Chapters 1 & 11
15- Correspondences
   Assignment: Cover letter Draft

20- Argumentation (appeals and logic)
   Text: Chapter 2 & 3
   Assignment: Final Cover letter
22- Ethics

27- Finding reasons to persuade
   Text: Chapter 4.
29 – Research

February
3- Rhetorical Authority
   Text: Chapter 5
5- Writing CORE documents

10- Argument structures
   Text: Chapter 13
12- Experimental Reports
   Assignment: Process draft due

16 – 20 Reading Week – No class

24- Creativity
   Text: Chapters 6, 7 & 9
   Assignment: Process Document due
26- Designing Documents & Style

March
9- Form as Strategy
   Text: Chapters 10 & 14
11- Editing and Polishing; Technical Proposals
   Assignment: Document Journal due

16- Rhetorical action
   Text: Chapter 15
18 – Technical Manuals

23- Importance of passion
   Text: Chapter 8
25 – Oral Presentations
30- Meaning in rhetoric

April -

1- Group Presentations

April 9: Web Design Justification paper, Editor's Review sheet, Due to the department Drop-box (near HH229) by 4:00PM.