COM 421: Technical Communication

Course Information
Tuesday and Thursday 1:50-3:05
SH 237
Instructor: Andrew Roback
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Office: SH 231
Office Hours: Thursday 3:15-4:30 (except university holidays and finals week)

Welcome
Welcome to COM 421: Technical Communication. Technical communication is more than just writing instruction manuals and software documentation, and we will try to cover the wide range of activities technical communication practitioners engage in with the goal of giving you the skills to effectively communicate in your career.

Course objectives
- Learn and be able to write effectively in the genres used in business and technical writing;
- Develop the ability to confidently use the tools of technical writers;
- Apply the tools of technical writing to projects in your discipline;
- Gain the ability to coherently discuss matters of writing style, genre, and presentation.

Required Texts
- Tebaux, E. & Dragga, S. (2014). The Essentials of Technical Communication, 4th ed. New York: Oxford UP. [Link to Amazon]
- All other texts will be provided or linked to on the course website (Blackboard).

Required Technology
- If you do not have an account already, you must sign up for Dropbox. The student version is free and has enough storage for our purposes.
- You must use a browser other than Microsoft Edge. Take your pick of any quality browsers available for free (we will primarily use Chrome in class).
- 4GB (minimum) flash drive, dedicated solely to this course, and in good working order (not on its last leg).

Proprietary Software Notice
Most of the software we use will be open-source and free, but we will be using Microsoft Word and Excel at times. These are industry standards and knowing how to use them effectively and efficiently will benefit you in the future; however, you are welcome to use open-source alternatives to those apps. Please note the following:
- In-class demonstrations and work will require you to use these applications;
- Some assignments will require submissions in .docx or .xlsx format. If I specify these formats, it's not optional;

- All IIT students can receive a [free copy of this software](#) from Microsoft;
- If you elect to use an open-source alternative, you may not be able to see comments from me or they may be displayed incorrectly in the application you are using;
- You are responsible for ensuring that your work displays correctly when it is submitted to me. I don't give leeway to students for broken files and screwed up formatting.

Assignments and Evaluation

Assignments are due on the day listed on the course schedule. You are responsible for managing your time and ensuring that you have the capacity (internet access, correct software, etc.) to submit assignment by that deadline. Poor planning is not grounds for an extension.

Problems in Technical Communication (20%)

I'll present you with a problem book containing twelve exercises. Typical problems will either ask you to write something or to improve an existing document. I will also give you scenarios common in technical communication and ask you to describe what course of action you would take based on our readings and discussions.

You may work at your own pace on these problems, but I have set deadlines on the course schedule to ensure that you stay on pace. Complete the problems in order.

Follow these rules for all problems:
1. Work independently. No collaboration or outside assistance is allowed.
2. Solutions to problems are due by the date listed on the course schedule.
3. If you fail to submit solutions by the deadline in [2], I'll issue a grade of zero. No exceptions.
4. If you cannot open a file or you don't understand the instructions for a problem, you need to ask well in advance of the deadline. I won't issue an extension for the sole reason that you don't know how to do the assignment and waited until the last minute to ask;
5. I will give you specific format instructions (including acceptable file extensions) that I expect you to follow. If you fail to do so, I will reduce your grade by 10% for that problem;
6. If you submit solutions to all problems, I'll drop your lowest grade by percentage when calculating your final score.
7. See the problem book for submission instructions and Blackboard for supplemental files needed to finish the problems.

Professional website (20%)

You'll be developing a properly formatted, standards-compliant website that showcases your skills, interests, and abilities to potential employers/clients. We're going to have time in class to learn HTML/CSS and how to write for the web, and I'll show you plenty of resources to help you learn. You'll also give peer reviews to your classmates and share what you've learned with them.

Final project (30%)

I will present you with a project that requires you to utilize all the skills you have learned this semester to create a series of documents. You'll be evaluated on your writing skills, your ability to create well-designed, usable documents (both print and web), and your knowledge of the core competencies of technical communication. More later in the semester.

Quizzes (15%)

There will be four quizzes that test your comprehension of the readings and course discussions. If you do the readings, come to class, take notes, and ask questions when you don't understand something, you'll be fully prepared for these. Questions will be of the multiple choice and short answer variety. I will not accept late submissions.

Participation (15%)

I expect you to come to class ready to discuss readings and participate in activities. We'll also have time in class to work on some of the projects, and I expect you to use that time appropriately. Working on outside work during class is not allowed. Please also keep phone use, email checking, and chatting to the absolute minimum. We'll have independent and group activities in class to practice concepts. You'll upload some of them so I can verify that you're grasping core concepts and skills. I'll also occasionally ask you to share what you have done with the class. Please note that if you sit silently the entire semester and never participate in discussion, your grade for this component will suffer significantly. Points go to people who actively participate in class discussion and activities.

Grading Scale

All grades on assignments are weighted to their corresponding values on the syllabus. To calculate your grade, take the percentage grade I give you on an assignment, multiply by the value on the syllabus, and add the resulting figures. That is your final grade in the course.

Grade	Percent
A	90-100
B	80-89
C	70-79
D	60-69
E	<60

Attendance policy

I have a zero tolerance attendance policy. You can miss up to three class meetings without penalty. After that, I'll reduce your final course grade by ten percent for each additional absence. If you miss more than six class meetings, your final grade in the course will be an "E" (provided

they are not excusable absences such as illness, family emergency, etc.). If you are more than 15 minutes late for class, it counts as an absence.

Family and health emergencies happen and are excused absences; however, you must notify me as soon as reasonably possible if such a situation arises. If you stop attending class without a notification, I will assume you are not coming back and issue a grade of "E" for the semester. If you receive an email from me regarding absences and you do not reply, I will make the same assumption.

Finally, having a lot of work in your other classes is not an excuse for missing this class, nor are extracurricular activities unrelated to official university events or professional development (e.g. academic conferences, athletic events, etc.). Seek permission for excused absences from me in advance whenever possible.

FAQ and tips for a successful semester
- If I give you an extension due to extenuating circumstances and you fail to meet the agreed upon deadline, you will receive a zero on that assignment.
- There is no extra credit in this course.
- Take notes. They will help you remember the main points of our discussion and help you to use tools outside of class.
- Make friends with a classmate so you can borrow notes if you are absent.
- Please refer to the syllabus/course schedule/assignment guide before emailing me with questions. Questions about submission method, dates, or requirements that can be answered by the above documents will result in a friendly reminder to reread the documents.
- If you are having trouble with the coursework or understanding the material, come talk to me. I have office hours after class and I have no problem staying afterwards (unless I have a meeting). If you have a conflict and can't make it to office hours, send me an email to set up an appointment to meet online.

Plagiarism and academic dishonesty
You are expected to adhere to all IIT rules regarding academic honesty and conduct. Please familiarize yourself with the Student Handbook policies. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas without appropriate attribution of those ideas to the original author. Reordering words or sentences but conveying the same ideas as another author and representing those ideas as your own still constitutes plagiarism. The same goes for computer code, graphs, and illustrations: unless you wrote/made it, proper citations are required. I expect you to write everything you submit for this class. Unless I tell you to work in teams, your work should be solely your own.

If I detect any plagiarized content in your work, you will automatically fail the assignment and, depending on the severity of the infraction, the course. Additional penalties may be imposed by

the University, such as academic sanctions and/or expulsion. If you are concerned that your work might constitute a breach of academic integrity, contact me via email before turning in your assignment and I will advise you. I will report plagiarism to the appropriate university authorities without exception and issue failing grades as necessary to prevent academic dishonesty.

The Writing Center (SH 232-233)

The Writing Center is a tutoring service that helps students develop writing skills critical to success in academic and professional pursuits. I strongly encourage any student to visit the Writing Center if you are having difficulty with any part of the writing process or if you simply want some feedback on your writing from another writer. Since you will be writing a great deal in this class (and, presumably, your entire life), it is to your benefit to take advantage of this free service to help you become a better writer.

Special Needs

Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with documented disabilities. In order to receive accommodations, students must obtain a letter of accommodation from the Center for Disability Resources and contact me in the first week of the course. The Center for Disability Resources (CDR) is located in Life Sciences Room 218, telephone 312-567-5744 or disabilities@iit.edu.