

Virginia Tech ENGL 3764: Technical Writing (Virtual Classroom) Instructor Handbook

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Chapter

1

About This Handbook

Topics:

- [*Overview of Content*](#)
- [*Contacts and Roles*](#)
- [*Definitions*](#)

This handbook provides graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and other instructors who are new to teaching the online version (virtual campus) of ENGL 3764: Technical Writing guidelines for teaching the course. Experienced instructors might also find the content useful to help ensure they are meeting the English department's objectives for the course.

Overview of Content

This handbook provides guidelines for teaching the online version (virtual campus) of ENGL 3764: Technical Writing and includes specific examples you can use or modify to meet the needs of your specific classes.



Note: This handbook provides only **guidelines** to help teach your online classes. You are **not** required to use the lessons, tools, assignments, and other resources described in this handbook to teach your classes. While graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) and other instructors new to teaching this course might choose to use all components in their entirety, experienced instructors might decide their classes operate effectively in their current format without using components from this handbook.

This handbook provides the following information to assist in teaching your course:

- *Foundational course information* such as descriptions, learning objectives, and cornerstones of the course
- *Suggested tools and resources* for developing lectures and managing the course in an online environment
- *Course components* that comprise a complete virtual classroom for this course
- *Lesson descriptions* that cover appropriate technical writing topics for this course
- *Exercise descriptions* that support topics covered in lesson descriptions
- *Assignment descriptions* for graded papers and projects based on technical writing genres
- *Semester schedules* that explain the timing of courses for different semester types
- *Quick reference schedules* to help set the pace and timeframe for delivering lessons
- *Syllabus components* to help with creating a class syllabus
- *Syllabus example* that you can use as a starting template for a syllabus
- *Instructor checklists* that provide specific steps for setting up and managing a class in an online environment

Contacts and Roles

This table provides a list of contacts and their roles relevant to teaching this course.

Title	Contact
Department of English Chair	Dr. Bernice Hausman (540) 231-8466 bhausman@vt.edu
Director of Professional and Technical Writing	Dr. Carlos Evia (540) 200-8201 cevia@vt.edu

Definitions

This handbook uses terms that have specific meanings with regard to their use.

Canvas

The *learning management system (LMS)* in use at Virginia Tech.

class

A specific instance of a *course* section including all of its students.

course

The entire ENGL 3764: Technical Writing offering, which consists of scheduled *lessons* to be delivered in an online format over the duration of a *scheduled semester*.

ENGL 3764: Technical Writing

The official catalog number and name of this *course*. The virtual classroom offering uses the same course number and name as the traditional face-to-face offering of the course.

instructor

The professor, instructor, graduate teaching assistant (GTA), or any other person teaching a *class*. In this handbook, "instructor" does not refer to the instructor faculty rank at Virginia Tech.

learning management system (LMS)

The primary online platform for managing the entire virtual *class*. Currently, Virginia Tech uses and supports *Canvas* as an *LMS*.

lesson

The delivery of one or more *topics*, delivered in online postings over the entire semester. The number of *lessons* per semester depends on whether the semester is a *regular semester*, *summer session*, or *winter session*. For example, typically a regular semester has one lesson posted per week while the winter session has one lesson posted per weekday.

module

The online mechanism in *Canvas* that allows you to organize and deliver *lessons*.

Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies (TLOS)

A Virginia Tech organization that provides training and resources for faculty and students engaged in technology-based activities. They are a resource that can help in your online teaching efforts. You can obtain more information about TLOS at <https://tlos.vt.edu/>.

topic

A specific subject taught within the *course*. One or more topics could be covered in the same *lesson*. For example, proposals and recommendation reports are two separate topics; however, both could be presented in the same lesson depending on the class schedule.

Chapter 2

About This Course

Topics:

- [*Catalog Description*](#)
- [*Course Registration Description*](#)
- [*Learning Objectives*](#)
- [*Cornerstones of Curriculum*](#)

ENGL 3764: Technical Writing teaches the principles and processes of effective written communication of technical information to students in academic majors other than English and writing.

The online version of ENGL 3764, which is the focus of this handbook, is conducted asynchronously through a virtual classroom that is comprised of a learning management system and other [*online resources*](#).

Catalog Description

The catalog description is the official course description documented in the university's catalog.

The following description is the official catalog description:

Principles and processes of effective written communication of technical information. Attention to strategies for analyzing various communication situations, adapting to audiences, evaluating online content, and composing technical discourse including organizing visual and verbal information. Practice in instructions and procedures, proposals and reports, correspondence, and presentations. Pre: 1106 or H1204; junior standing. (3H, 3C)

Course Registration Description

The course registration description is the description students see when registering for a specific section of the course. Because it is unique to the section of the course being offered, it is typically provided by the instructor.

A good course registration description tells the student what the course encompasses, the types of projects they will work on, and the things they will learn. Some instructors provide a very brief description while other instructors provide a longer description, offering a glimpse at the instructor's personality.

Example Course Registration Description

Technical writing encompasses a wide range of writing genres including reports, proposals, correspondence (memos and letters), user documentation (instructions), and many others. The distribution media for these documents are equally vast including print, email, web (including different device types), and more.

This course will introduce you to these genres and distribution media and give you the opportunity to explore and write documents of different genres in a constructive environment. You will learn how to assess your audience, plan technical writing projects, research subject matter, structure and organize content, write document drafts, edit existing content, and prepare final documents.

Classes will include a mixture of lecture, examples, workshops, and exercises to help you understand the craft and allow you to practice your newly acquired technical writing skills. Smaller exercises will help you build specific skills that you can directly apply to your larger writing projects, which will include writing technical documents of different genres.

This is a writing-intensive course that will require you to write every day, but you will leave the course feeling confident in your writing skills and in your ability to write within technical and professional environments.

Learning Objectives

Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to perform the technical writing tasks defined by the learning objectives for the course.

In designing a course curriculum and writing a course syllabus, you are free to customize learning objectives as you deem necessary for your classes. However, your objectives should support the following learning objectives from the formal course description:

- Analyze the rhetorical situation and determine the appropriate audience or users of written communication, considering the needs of global audiences and people with disabilities.

- Conduct research appropriate to workplace problem solving, such as literature review, evaluation of online resources, interview, and site inspection.
- Interpret research findings with understanding of ethical and human implications.
- Use conventions of various workplace genres, such as proposals, instructions, correspondence, reports, and slide decks, with understanding of how the genre conventions can be used as heuristics and as principles of arrangement.
- Collaborate with classmates in planning, researching, writing, revising, and presenting information.
- Apply principles of effective visual design for print and electronic presentation, including hierarchical, chronological, and spatial arrangements.

Cornerstones of Curriculum

This handbook and the course it defines are based on three cornerstones: general writing mechanics, concepts of technical writing, and creation of technical documents.

General Writing Mechanics

As with any writing course, a core component of this course includes the general writing mechanics that make written work professional, intelligible, and structurally sound.

This course must ensure students can apply the following general writing mechanics to technical writing projects:

- Content organization
- Style and sentence flow
- Grammar and punctuation

Concepts of Technical Writing

Students must not only be able to write correctly but also understand general concepts about what technical writing means.

This course must ensure students can demonstrate knowledge of the following technical writing concepts:

- Technical writing genres
- Process, including audience assessment and research
- Tools and media for creating and delivering technical documents

Creation of Technical Documents

Students must be able to write technical documents that demonstrate their understanding of technical writing genres and how to write for those genres.

This course must ensure students can create technical documents that demonstrate the following traits:

- Practical knowledge of the genre type and its purpose
- Thorough and accurate research to support content that is based on the genre
- Correct content based on genre and audience
- Appropriate writing style based on genre and audience
- Appropriate page design and layout based on genre and audience

Chapter

3

Tools and Resources

Topics:

- *Learning Management System*
- *E-learning Development Programs*
- *Google Drive and Apps*
- *Chat*
- *Accessibility and Disabilities*

Because this course is conducted online, instructors must be comfortable with the online tools and resources that support virtual classroom activities.

Learning Management System

Virginia Tech uses and supports Canvas as its learning management system (LMS).

While traditional face-to-face classes also use an LMS to support class activities, an LMS is critical to the success of a virtual class. Without a well-structured and organized LMS, students would have a difficult time conducting studies and performing the required tasks for the course. The LMS functions as the repository and central access point for all of the *course components*. Students use the LMS to access all of the *lessons* and *assignments* that comprise the entire course.

All instructors have an account in Canvas, which is Virginia Tech's supported LMS ([contact](#) the Director of Professional and Technical Writing if you do not have an account). You can access Canvas at <https://canvas.vt.edu/>.

Canvas automatically adds classes (called "courses" in Canvas) for the registered instructor to edit and publish. This initial course setup includes all of the students registered in the class roster. It is up to you to further develop the course and then publish it for students to access. Once you have a course set up in Canvas, you can re-use it for future classes.

The Networked Learning Initiatives (NLI) at Virginia Tech offers classes on Canvas to help any instructor who is not familiar with the platform. You can view and register for these NLI classes at <https://app.nli.tlos.vt.edu/>.

E-learning Development Programs

E-learning development programs such as Adobe Captivate and Techsmith Camtasia allow instructors to build and deliver lesson modules in a multimedia format.

Although you will have textbooks, articles, and other reading material to assign as part of your class curriculum, students will expect a component that *delivers lessons to them much like a lecture* in a traditional face-to-face classroom. While you might share PDFs or links to online articles for students to read as part of a lesson, students will quickly become bored if all of their lessons consist of nothing but reading.

An e-learning development program allows you to create tutorials and short lectures in which you deliver lesson components to students in a multimedia platform. For example, you might create an audio/video clip in which you talk to the student about a report type while showing an example of the report in the video. Such a clip might also include interaction with the student that has them, for example, answer a few quiz questions before continuing with the lesson. At a minimum, you can use e-learning development programs to create a screencast in which you speak while showing corresponding slides on the screen.

 **Important:** When creating tutorial and lecture clips, be sure to account for students who have *disabilities or other accessibility concerns*.

Two common e-learning development programs are *Adobe Captivate* and *Techsmith Camtasia*. If you do not want to purchase your own copy of such a program, *TLOS* has these tools installed on computers that are available for instructors to use. TLOS will also help you get started working with the tools and creating lessons. You can obtain more information about TLOS classes at <https://tlos.vt.edu/>. You can also access tutorials for working with these tools at [Lynda.com](https://www.lynda.com) (available to Virginia Tech faculty and students for free).

Google Drive and Apps

Google apps allow students to work on projects online and to share or collaborate with others in a virtual environment.

All Virginia Tech students and faculty have a free academic account for storing files and collaborating on projects online through *Google Drive* and apps. Google apps are particularly useful for students to collaborate with one another and for instructors to work directly with students real time in an online environment. For example, students might have to work on a group project to write a report. They can store the report and supporting project files on Google Drive, and use *Google Docs* to write the document and collaborate on it real time in an online environment. Similarly, instructors can work directly on a document in Google Docs with a student.

Google Drive

Google Drive provides a place for students and faculty to save content in the cloud and then share that content (or collaborate on it) with others to whom they give permission.

Other Google apps (such as [Google Docs](#) and [Google Slides](#)) use Google Drive as the storage location for content developed with those apps (you can also save content to your local computer). Even if students do not want to use Google Drive to share or collaborate on content, it is a good (and free) tool for them to back up their work in the class. Since storage space is free for Virginia Tech students, you can reasonably require students to maintain backups of all their work so that students will not miss assignment deadlines because of data loss on their local computer.

Google Docs

Google Docs allows students to write and format documents, share content, and collaborate with instructors and other students real time in an online environment.

When a Google Docs document is completed, students can share them for review or save them as PDF files to post outside of the Google Docs environment. Google Docs is a useful app for students to collaborate on group exercises and projects. If students are available to collaborate synchronously, Google Docs allows for real-time collaboration for students in different locations. If students are working asynchronously, the app allows for shared edits and commenting for students to collaborate at their own time.



Note: Some students might prefer to use Microsoft Word for writing and editing their papers. The final decision should be with the student as long as they are able to provide the deliverable in the format that you specify (for example, as a PDF file).

Google Slides

Google Slides allows students to create supporting slides for presentations and to collaborate as needed real time in an online environment.

When Google Slides presentations are completed, students can share them as a primary presentation (for example, with embedded video) to submit as an oral presentation project.



Note: Some students might prefer to use Microsoft PowerPoint for creating slides and presentations. The final decision should be with the student as long as they are able to provide deliverables that meet your requirements.

Chat

Even though this course is asynchronous and conducted online, instructors can still hold virtual office hours or facilitate other meetings (with individual students or workgroups) through text, voice, or video chat.

With the plethora of free chat tools available today, you have many options for engaging in direct conversations with remote students. The only requirement is that you select a tool that supports multiple device types (laptop, tablet, and phone) so that students can engage in the meeting with whichever device type they use. This handbook discusses two preferred chat tools:

- [Skype](#) is free chat tool and is typically installed by default on most devices. It allows you to conduct [text](#), [voice](#), and [video](#) chat.
- WebEx is a conferencing tool that allows you to hold virtual meetings, teach classes, and hold office hours on the Web. Virginia Tech has a WebEx license that allows you to use the tool for free. [TLOS](#) provides more information about using WebEx at <https://webex.tlos.vt.edu/>.

Text Chat

A texting app such as Skype allows you to communicate with students by sending text messages to one another real-time.

A texting app allows you to start a text-based conversation with a student and then continue the conversation at a later time if necessary, unlike [voice](#) or [video](#) chats, which typically require a synchronous conversation throughout the entire meeting. Texting apps typically allow you to archive text conversations so that you can refer to it at a later

time. [Skype](#) is a useful texting app because it also facilitates voice and video chat should you decide to switch to that mode of conversation. Skype also allows you to interact with multiple people simultaneously if you need to meet with workgroups.

Voice Chat

Voice chat allows you to communicate directly with students real-time.

Engaging in voice chat with students can be as simple as allowing them to call you at your office phone during established hours. However, because using your office phone requires that you physically be at your phone, it would likely serve you better to use an app that supports voice chat. As discussed with [text chat](#), [Skype](#) offers a useful solution that allows you to be in any location when you engage in voice-based conversations. Skype also allows you to share your screen during voice or [video](#) chat so that you can display resources (for example, a website or a student's paper) while engaged in the chat session. [WebEx](#), despite being primarily for full conferencing, also facilitates voice chat and supports screen sharing.

Video Chat

Much like students in a traditional course can visit their instructor face-to-face during office hours, students in a virtual course can meet face-to-face with their instructor in a virtual environment.

Video chat is a good solution for instructors who like to emulate traditional classroom behaviors. [Skype](#) and [WebEx](#) allow you to hold face-to-face video conversations with students. As discussed with [voice](#) chat, these tools allow you to share your screen during voice or video chat so that you can display resources (for example, a website or a student's paper) while engaged in the chat session.

Accessibility and Disabilities

Instructors must ensure all content in their virtual class is accessible to any student with a disability or other accessibility concerns.

Screen Readers

All teaching materials that include visual content, must be accessible to students with visual disabilities.

Browser-based content, such as HTML and PDF files, must be developed in a manner that allows automated screen readers to read the content to students with visual disabilities. This applies both to content you create and to content you reuse from other resources. Modern screen readers can read standard content in an HTML file, which means [Canvas](#) functionality and content is already accessible. However, if you create your own web-based content, you must ensure the markup is readable by screen readers. This includes adding meaningful content to "alt" attributes in image tags and structuring HTML sections in a manner that provides a logical sequence for reading by an automated device. For example, if you were to include a lot of overhead content such as links and logos at the top of a web page, it is easy enough for students without visual disabilities to just scan past the content. However, an automated screen reader would read all of the content to the student, forcing the student to sit through it until getting to the main content.

In addition to ensuring markup is accessible in HTML files, you must also ensure PDF content is accessible. Automated screen readers can typically read documents created in Microsoft Word and then saved as PDF; however, you must ensure you are using Word's **Save as Adobe PDF** feature as opposed to printing to a PDF source. Word's **Save as Adobe PDF** feature generates PDFs in a manner that allows for automated screen reading.

Be sure your PDFs are not based on a scanned image or document because the content in the PDF will appear to the screen reader as an image. At a minimum, ensure your scanning software supports optical character recognition (OCR), and use the OCR feature when scanning documents so that the scanning process converts the scanned item to text. This will then allow screen readers to read the actual text in the PDF.

Screencasts and other videos may or may not need support for automated screen readers. If you create the video in a manner in which a narrator discusses the content the student would see on the screen, then your audio portion of the video would be functioning as the screen reader. Again, it is important that you ensure any videos you use from other sources meet these same audio requirements.

Closed Captions

All teaching materials that include sound, such as screencasts and other videos, must be closed captioned to ensure students with hearing disabilities have access to the audible content.

While videos and screencasts are effective modes for delivering lectures online, remember that students with hearing disabilities will only see the content and not be able to hear the corresponding audio. While adding text inside the video itself is useful in helping such students understand the video's content, you must provide closed captions in the video to allow students to read the words that are spoken in the video.

E-learning development programs such as *Adobe Captivate* and *Techsmith Camtasia* provide functionality that allows you to insert closed captioning into your videos. *TLOS* can help if you need more information and resources for closed captioning your lectures.

Scripts for Audio and Video Presentations

A recommended method for ensuring students with disabilities can understand the contents of lectures and other audio/video presentations is to provide the complete script used for creating those presentations.

While planning a lecture or other content for an audio/video presentation, you should write a script for all of the actions and words you intend to include in the presentation. Though somewhat time consuming to write, such scripts offer important benefits. First, they benefit you by reducing the time to record presentations and minimizing errors during recording. More importantly, scripts provide a resource for students with hearing or vision disabilities to understand the content of the audio/video presentation. Students with hearing disabilities will be able to read the script to understand the content being spoken in the presentation. Students with vision disabilities can use a screen reader to read the content to them, allowing them to know what actions are happening in a video presentation.

Other Considerations

Students with disabilities must provide instructors with documentation from the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. If a student provides documentation for a disability, and you are unsure how to manage it. Contact the SSD office for assistance.

You might have students who require additional time for *tests and quizzes*. If you limit the allowed time to complete a test or quiz, you will have to update the *learning management system* to allow for additional time for any students with a documented disability that requires the extra time. For example, if a test is set up to allow 30 minutes to complete after the student begins, you will have to update the disabled student's version to allow for 60 minutes.

Chapter

4

Course Components

Topics:

- *Lesson Modules*
- *Textbooks and References*
- *Course Calendar*
- *Announcements*
- *Tests and Quizzes*
- *Lectures*
- *Exercises*
- *Assignments*
- *Discussions*

Course components are the topic lectures, assignments, quizzes, and other resources that comprise the complete virtual classroom for this course.

Lesson Modules

A module provides a mechanism for you to organize and deliver lessons, including all of the lectures, assignments, and other components related to each lesson.

Canvas provides a modules feature that you can use for delivering your *lessons*. You can organize these modules to deliver one lesson per module (15 total for the course). Within each module you would arrange the lectures, quizzes, assignments, and other components that relate to the corresponding lesson.

If you build your course ahead of time in Canvas, you can set each module to become available on a specified date and time, allowing you to have each lesson become available to students on the scheduled date.

Textbooks and References

Because this course is conducted in a virtual environment, textbooks and related references are a particularly useful aid in teaching this course.

Technical Writing Textbooks

This course requires, at a minimum, a textbook that explains the concepts and genres of technical writing.

While you are free to select the textbook you believe best suits your classes, a survey of experienced ENGL 3764: Technical Writing instructors has yielded a list of popular textbooks for this course:

- *Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* by Mike Markel
 -  **Note:** This is a popular technical writing textbook and is the basis for the lessons and other materials described in this handbook.
- *The Essentials of Technical Communication* by Elizabeth Tebeaux and Sam Draggan
- *Technical Communication Strategies for Today* by Richard Johnson-Sheehan

Writing References

Instructors may want to suggest students use an optional online or print-based reference to help with basic concepts of writing, grammar, and punctuation.

In determining the requirements for a writing reference, you should remember that the students of this course are **not** English or writing majors and therefore have different needs than those of an English or writing major. This means using a book that is both inexpensive and easy to follow for a non-writer. You should consider making a published writing reference optional, and point students toward free websites with which you are familiar and comfortable.

Course Calendar

Because students work on their own schedule in an asynchronous, online course such as this one, it is important that they have an accurate calendar so they are constantly aware of upcoming deadlines.

Canvas includes a calendar that automatically tracks dates for students, so it is important that you keep all of your deadlines up to date for each assignment, quiz, or other deliverable in Canvas. You should also maintain an accurate calendar in your *syllabus* and *quick reference* (if you use one). Without having regular face-to-face classes where they can be reminded of upcoming deadlines, students will rely on these calendar tools to plan their work throughout the semester.

Announcements

Announcements allow you to remain in contact with your students and provide them with timely updates regarding class activities and issues.

[Canvas](#) includes an announcements feature that allows you to post messages for students. This feature is a particularly useful communication tool because students by default receive an email whenever an announcement is posted. This functionality allows you to use announcements as a way to send mass emails to your students.

In some cases, you might script announcements based on events you know will occur during the semester. For example, you might know that you want to remind students of upcoming deadlines or a holiday on which no lesson will be posted. If you script announcements like this ahead of time in Canvas, you can set the announcement to become available at a specified date and time.

While you will use announcements for almost anything you want to discuss with students, you should consider using announcements regularly for the following events:

Event	Purpose
Initial Welcome and Final Goodbye	<p>To formally kick off the course, you should post an announcement that becomes available a day or two before the semester begins. At the end of the semester, you should post one final announcement to bring the class to an official end. These announcements should be in addition to the first and last lesson summaries. Since an email is also sent with these announcements, you could use them as the welcome and completion emails discussed in the class setup and completion checklists.</p>
Lesson Summaries	<p>Although you will post your lessons as modules in Canvas, you should also post an announcement to introduce each lesson and the main concepts the lesson teaches. Since you know when your lessons will be available, you can script a specific announcement that corresponds with each lesson and schedule that announcement to become available (and send a corresponding email) when the lesson is available.</p> <p> Tip: When timing scripted announcements for lessons, be sure to schedule the announcement to post for no earlier than when the lesson module becomes available. A useful strategy is to time the announcement for 10 or 15 minutes after the corresponding lesson's scheduled posting.</p>
Deadline Reminders	<p>Although deadlines are available with each deliverable in Canvas, you should also post an announcement as a reminder several hours to a day (depending on the semester schedule) before a major deliverable is due. Since you know when your lessons will be available, you can script a specific announcement that corresponds with each lesson and schedule that announcement to become available (and send a corresponding email) when the lesson is available.</p> <p> Note: While it would be impractical to do so for every quiz or exercise, you should consider a reminder for tests, workshops, and graded assignments. Also, for the first few lessons, it is wise to post reminder announcements for all work (including quizzes and exercises) until students get used to the routine of your class schedule.</p>
Grades and Feedback Completed	<p>After posting grades for assignments, you should announce that grades and feedback are available. This is also an opportunity to communicate any general comments to the class. For example, if there was a common trend that you want to correct, you could address it in the announcement and ask students to go back and review the appropriate lesson.</p>

Example Announcement: Initial Welcome

This example provides a starting template instructors can use for posting an initial welcome announcement.

An Early Welcome to ENGL 3764: Technical Writing (Online)

Hello everyone. Welcome to ENGL 3764: Technical Writing. On **Tuesday 2/19 at 2:00 PM (ET)**, I will post the first lesson to kick off our course. But for now, I just wanted to touch base to make sure everyone will be prepared to start.

Canvas (VA Tech's learning management system) will be the main source for conducting our online lessons. Every **Tuesday at 2:00 PM (ET)** I will post new lessons. **2:00 PM (ET)** is the time I found to be fairest for all students, since the online format allows for students in different time zones to take the course. This is also the time any assigned work is due, so it hopefully should be easy to remember. It will be up to you to work through each lesson at your own time and pace. You will, of course, have to adhere to the deadlines provided in the syllabus and on the Canvas site. I also strongly recommend looking at new lessons as soon as possible because there are some group assignments for which you will have to reach out to other members of the class (I will provide more information with each assignment). The first lesson on Tuesday will include material that walks you through everything.

Be sure to get the textbook **as soon as possible**: Mike Markel—*Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* (ISBN-13: 978-1457609404). It should already be available through the bookstore. Reading assignments and quizzes **will start immediately**, and you must have the book for them. Quizzes will be in Canvas and are open book, but they will have deadlines with no make-ups.

For each lesson, we will use a mix of media such as texts and recorded screencasts. Work will include regular textbook readings, quizzes on the readings, grammar and punctuation tests, lesson-based exercises, written papers and projects, and virtual workshops. The syllabus provides a clear breakdown of our schedule and is available in Canvas.

Example Announcement: First Lesson

This example provides a starting template instructors can use for posting an announcement for the first lesson, which must include not only the lecture material for the current lesson but also important concepts for students to get started in an online class environment.

Lesson 1: Introduction, Correspondence, and Start Grammar Review

Welcome to **Lesson 1**. Before I start, let me remind you that it is important that you read and watch all material including emails and announcements. As a virtual class, the only way for you to get this information is to read all of it. Sometimes it might seem like a lot of reading (such as this first message), but this is part of the format for a virtual class like this one.

After reading this message (perhaps a couple times), you can go ahead to the **Modules** section in Canvas to access **Lesson 1: Introduction, Correspondence, and Grammar**. The first link in that lesson will get you started. This course is asynchronous, meaning you can access and work on the material at any time you want after it has been posted.

Dates and Deadlines

There is no actual scheduled time for a “class” other than that I post each lesson module on **Tuesdays at 2:00 PM (ET)**. Of course there are deadlines you must meet, so be sure to pay attention to those dates/times. To try to make the deadlines as easy as possible to follow, I make all deadlines on **Tuesdays at 2:00 PM (ET)** (when new lessons are posted). You will see these deadlines under your **Calendar** in Canvas. You will also have exercises throughout the semester. While those deadlines are also **Tuesdays at 2:00 PM (ET)**, some of them will require you to contact workgroup teammates much sooner.

Links to Lesson Material

Within each lesson module that I post in Canvas, there will be content and multiple links for any or all of the following lesson material:

- **Lecture content:** Lectures are usually in a screencast video or PDF document. Sometimes there will simply be text explaining how to access the lecture.
- **Exercises:** Most of our lessons have a corresponding exercise posted in the **Assignments** section.

- **Workshops:** For some of the graded writing assignments, there will be a virtual workshop in which groups help review one another's work. For lessons containing a workshop, a link is included to the corresponding workshop posting in the **Assignments** section.
- **Due next lesson (or soon):** This section helps you prepare for the next lesson (or upcoming lessons). It includes reading assignments, links to tests and quizzes, upcoming papers or projects, and any other relevant information.

All of these items in a lesson are ordered in the sequence I would use if we were in a face-to-face classroom.

Assignments

As you go through the Lesson 1 material, you will learn about the different assignments (such as papers, projects, and exercises). Papers, projects, and virtual workshops have specific posted deadlines. However, exercises are not posted until the corresponding class lesson and are thus not due until the start of the following class (unless I communicate otherwise). Keep in mind, though, that some exercises and all workshops are group-based, and your teammates will be relying on your timely input. Always be sure to read the details for all exercises, papers, projects, and workshops in the **Assignments** section (there will also be links to them in corresponding lessons).

Textbook Readings and Quizzes

Every textbook reading assignment has a corresponding quiz that is due before the lesson in which we cover the material. Though you will need to read the initial chapters for this week's lesson, the quizzes for the first few readings won't actually be due for a couple lessons to give you a chance to get situated.

Grammar and Punctuation Tests

There are two tests on punctuation and grammar early in the semester. However, there are no other tests, including no final exam.

Our First Technical Writing Genre—Correspondence

In addition to the introduction, Lesson 1 begins with a discussion on correspondence—which basically means business letters, memos, and emails. The textbook chapter assigned for this lecture does a great job covering this genre. However, don't take every example in the book literally. In my lecture, I discuss the preferred format for business letters. This is an important lesson, because we use letters for everything—cover letters for a résumé, letters for reports and proposals, and just everyday communication. In fact, many times we send an email as a business letter. Another form of correspondence is the memo. We use memos regularly in workplace correspondence, which is often times informal.

In this first lesson we have our first two exercises. The first exercise is to introduce ourselves by posting a memo in the **Discussions** section, and the second exercise is to write a business “claim” letter. These exercises will make more sense when you go through the lesson.

Grammar and Punctuation Review

Lesson 1 also begins with a grammar and punctuation review that spans a few lessons and culminates with the two tests mentioned above. The lectures posted under the **Grammar and Punctuation Review** lesson will help you with your review and with preparing for the forthcoming tests. Of course, the reading assignments in the textbook will help as well.

Let's Get Started

So that's about it. Go ahead to the **Modules** section, and let's get started with the semester!

Example Announcement: Standard Lesson

This example provides a starting template instructors can use for posting an announcement for standard lessons after the semester is underway.

Lesson 4: Graphical Aids, Instructions, and Safety Information

In Lesson 4, we're going to discuss using graphics. Graphics can include a wide range of items such as pictures, charts, line art, and software screen shots. We even consider tables when we think and plan for graphics. In this lesson, we will look at general concepts and best practices for integrating graphics with documentation. We will also look at strategies and purposes of illustrations—such as showing data in charts and helping a user work with software.

We will also continue exploring and writing more technical writing genres—this lesson we focus on instructions and safety information. In addition to the usual lesson content, we will also have some hands-on work with instructions. First, we have an exercise on writing instructions. As you will see, the exercise sounds pretty simple—write instructions on how to tie a shoelace. However, I think you will find when you start writing the steps, that it's not as easy as it sounds. Especially when you strive for no more than seven to nine concise steps (which is what most procedures should be) and must assume the audience has never tied a shoelace before. So give yourself time for this one, and be sure to follow the concepts in the lesson's lecture content (which includes the textbook content). As always, information for completing the exercise is posted with the exercise under **Assignments**.

Our second graded paper of the course also focuses on instructions. The final version of this paper is due Lesson 8, which means you must have your **workshop draft completed by Lesson 6**, when we have Workshop #2. Again, details are posted under **Assignments** for both the paper and the workshop (with links in the lesson).

While we're talking about final drafts of graded papers, let me also quickly remind you that your Paper 1 final draft is due Lesson 5.

Tests and Quizzes

While most work in this course will be through writing papers, tests and quizzes serve as useful supplements to ensure students are keeping up with conceptual material.

Canvas includes a feature for creating and administering tests and quizzes. Some types of tests/quizzes to consider for this course include:

- **Chapter quizzes:** Quizzes offer a way to ensure that students are reading the assigned textbook readings. Consider allowing students to take these as open book quizzes over a considerable time period (for example, make each quiz available several days to a week before the quiz is due). Offering up to one full point per quiz means the quizzes collectively can count for up to 15% of the final grade if you have a quiz for each of 15 textbook chapters.
- **Grammar tests:** While students are expected to have learned grammar in their prerequisite writing classes, they often times enter this course a bit "rusty" on their grammar skills. Having grammar tests forces students to quickly brush up on their grammar before they start writing their papers and projects. Consider requiring two tests: one low-stakes test that gives students a gauge to determine what they may or may not need to continue reviewing and one higher-stakes test that offers a final measure of students' performance.



Note: Because some students may add to the course late or might otherwise be delayed in obtaining the textbook, you should extend the deadlines for chapter quizzes that are assigned over the first few lessons. For example, you might assign introductory readings and corresponding quizzes that are due over the first two lessons. However, you should consider extending the quiz deadlines to the third lesson to give students a chance to obtain the textbook and get caught up on the readings.

Lectures

A lecture is the method through which instructors teach specific concepts of a given topic. When delivered through an online course, lectures are synonymous with tutorials.

While the medium through which you deliver a lecture will likely depend on the *resources* you have available to create the lecture, it is important to remember that the lecture should be dictated based on the needs of the concepts

being taught. For example, some elements of punctuation and grammar may be easily taught and learned through a written document (delivered as a PDF). However, such concepts as rhetorical situation may be better delivered as a *screencast or video*. Regardless of the medium, a lecture should be as short as possible (for example, a video should be no longer than six minutes) and thus should cover a specific concept within a given topic.



Note: Your lessons do **not** have to include only lectures that you create. You can integrate written work and videos from other sources if you believe they are effective for the material being taught. However, it is important to ensure all material (including material from external sources) is *accessible* to students with disabilities.

Exercises

Exercises are low-risk deliverables that allow students to learn the concepts and practice the craft of technical writing.

You can post *exercise descriptions* through the assignments feature in *Canvas*. However, there are different tools through which you can implement them. For example, you could have students work on exercises through *Google Docs* and then work with them either asynchronously or in real-time to help them hone in on specific areas for improvement. Such a process allows students to become more skillful before working on graded *assignments*.

Assignments

This handbook refers to papers, projects, and workshops that students submit for a grade as assignments .

You can post *assignment descriptions* through the assignments feature in *Canvas*. As with *exercises*, there are different tools through which you can implement them. For example, you could interact with students through *Google Docs* to help them improve their work. However, keep in mind that assignments should measure a student's success with the corresponding material and thus be performed independently by the student.

Discussions

Discussions provide a forum through which students can ask and answer questions, share information, and express thoughts and opinions.

Canvas includes a discussions feature where students can hold conversations. It's up to you to determine how much you want to integrate discussions in your class, but remember that this feature in a way mimics conversations you would otherwise have in a face-to-face classroom. So it's a good way to have students discuss their thoughts on example documents or share other information with the class. Some instructors make participation in discussions a required component for final grades.

Chapter

5

Lesson Descriptions

Topics:

- [Lesson 1: Introduction, Correspondence, and Grammar](#)
- [Lesson 2: Collaboration, Descriptions, and Editing](#)
- [Lesson 3: Ethics, Style, and Description Workshop](#)
- [Lesson 4: Graphics, Instructions, and Safety Information](#)
- [Lesson 5: Page Design and Layout](#)
- [Lesson 6: Proposals and Instructions Workshop](#)
- [Lesson 7: Recommendation Reports](#)
- [Lesson 8: Audience, Purpose, and Research](#)
- [Lesson 9 : Online Content](#)
- [Lesson 10: Job-Application Materials](#)
- [Lesson 11: White Papers](#)
- [Lesson 12: Oral Presentations and Localization](#)
- [Lesson 13: White Paper Workshop](#)
- [Lesson 14: Informational Reports](#)
- [Lesson 15: Wrap-up](#)

Lessons are sets of one or more course topics, delivered in online postings over the entire semester. While instructors are free to arrange lessons as they deem appropriate for their classes, the lessons provided here typically work well for this course and can serve as a starting point. At a minimum, you should ensure your lessons meet the lesson objectives specified here.

Each lesson includes a selected set of [course components](#) (objectives, topic lectures, assignments, quizzes, and other resources) that collectively teach one or more topics in the course.

The frequency at which lessons are posted depends on whether the semester is a [regular semester](#), [summer session](#), or [winter session](#). For example, typically a regular semester has one lesson posted per week while the winter session has one lesson posted per weekday. Because the regular semester is comprised of 15 academic weeks, this course is comprised of 15 lessons. Refer to the [quick reference schedules](#) for specific schedules and additional guidelines for scheduling lessons based on the semester type.



Note: The corresponding [textbook](#) readings and quizzes for lesson descriptions are from *Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* by Mike Markel. If you use a different textbook you will have to make the appropriate adjustments to the reading assignments.

Lesson 1: Introduction, Correspondence, and Grammar

Lesson 1 introduces students to the course, introduces basic concepts of technical writing, and teaches correspondence in professional environments.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize what the course is about, how it is structured, and what contents are contained in its syllabus. • Apply concepts of rhetorical situation. • Discuss technical writing process and related genres. • Examine the importance and shortcomings of writing skills of employees in the workplace. • Employ concepts and structure of business letters, memos, and email correspondence in professional settings. • Review grammar and punctuation as well as related self-study resources.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 1: Introduction to Technical Communication</p> <p>Chapter 9: Writing Correspondence</p> <p> Note: Because some students may add to the course late or might otherwise be delayed in obtaining the textbook, you should extend the deadlines for the chapter quizzes assigned with this lesson. For <i>regular semesters</i> and <i>summer sessions</i>, you should consider a deadline of Lesson 3 (one to two calendar weeks into the semester). For the <i>winter session</i>, you should consider a deadline of Lesson 6 (one calendar week into the semester).</p> <p>Appendix B: Editing and Proofreading Your Documents (no quiz since this appendix covers grammar and punctuation, for which there is an exam later in the semester)</p> <p>Website articles: Latest research and articles on the Internet that focus on writing in the workplace (no quiz since this is preliminary reading to help students understand the importance of workplace writing for non-writers)</p>
Topics	<p>Course introduction: An explanation of what the course is about, how the course is structured, and primary components of the syllabus</p> <p>Introduction to technical writing: Introductory concepts of technical writing concepts including rhetorical situation, technical writing process, and technical writing genres</p> <p>Writing in the workplace: Information on the importance and shortcomings of the writing skills of employees in the workplace</p> <p>Correspondence: Concepts and structure of business letters, memos, and email correspondence in professional settings</p> <p>Start grammar and punctuation review: Initial review of grammar and punctuation and introduction to self-study resources</p>
Related Exercises	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Memo with self-introduction</i></p> <p>Due next lesson: <i>Business “claim” letter</i></p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend the deadlines for these first two exercises by one lesson</p>

Components	Deliverables
	<p>during the winter session, giving students one additional day to finish the work.</p> <p>Due in 2-3 lessons: <i>Grammar and punctuation worksheet</i></p>
Related Assignments	Due in 3-4 lessons: <i>Grammar test(s)</i>

Lesson 2: Collaboration, Descriptions, and Editing

Lesson 2 has students start collaborating with workgroups, teaches definitions and descriptions, and introduces the copyedit and content review skills needed for forthcoming workshops.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with teammates in preparation for group work throughout the semester. Identify strategies and online tools for collaborating on writing projects with a team. Employ concepts and structure of parenthetical, definition, and extended definitions. Employ concepts and structure of object, process, and mechanism descriptions. Identify editorial roles in the editing process, strategies for editing documents, and standard proofreading symbols.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 3: Writing Collaboratively and Using Social Media</p> <p>Chapter 14: Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 358–374)</p> <p> Note: Because some students may add to the course late or might otherwise be delayed in obtaining the textbook, you should extend the deadlines for the chapter quizzes assigned with this lesson. For <i>regular semesters</i> and <i>summer sessions</i>, you should consider a deadline of Lesson 3 (one to two weeks into the semester). For the <i>winter session</i>, you should consider a deadline of Lesson 6 (one week into the semester).</p>
Topics	<p>Workgroups: Assignment of students into workgroups for group work throughout the semester (requires that you first assign students into groups, preferably by related majors)</p> <p>Collaboration and social media: Strategies and online tools for collaborating on writing projects with a team</p> <p>Definitions: Concepts and structure of parenthetical, definition, and extended definitions</p> <p>Descriptions: Concepts and structure of parenthetical, definition, and extended definitions</p> <p>Reviews and copyedits: Roles in the editing process, strategies for editing documents, and standard proofreading symbols.</p>
Related Exercises	Due next lesson: <i>Extended definition (group)</i>

Components	Deliverables
	 Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend this deadline by one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to finish the work.
Related Assignments	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Workshop</i> draft of <i>description document</i></p> <p>Due in 2 lessons: Group feedback to writers from description document workshop</p> <p>Due in 3 lessons: Final draft of description document</p>  Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend these deadlines one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to work on their papers and edits.

Lesson 3: Ethics, Style, and Description Workshop

Lesson 3 teaches ethics, legal considerations, and writing style and has students work with their assigned team on the description document workshop.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss ethics and legal considerations related to technical writing. Examine writing styles as they relate to technical documents. Analyze written work from assigned teammates' description document assignments.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 2: Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations</p> <p>Chapter 6: Writing for Your Readers</p>  Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend the deadline for the chapter quizzes assigned with this lesson until Lesson 6 (one calendar week into the semester). <p>Appendix A: Documenting Your Sources (no quiz)</p>
Topics	<p>Ethics and legal considerations: Plagiarism, copyright issues, citations, writer responsibilities and related issues in documentation</p> <p>Writing style: Concepts on writing style as they relate to technical documents</p> <p>Description document workshop: Students review and edit their assigned teammates' <i>description document assignments</i> (requires that you first assign students into workshop groups)</p>  Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should delay this workshop one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to work on their papers.
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 4: Graphics, Instructions, and Safety Information

Lesson 4 teaches graphical aids (including tables and figures), instructions, and safety information.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recognize types of tables and figures and their use as they apply to corresponding technical document narratives. Employ concepts and structure of written procedures. Define warnings, cautions, and notes as well as their use in technical documents.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 8: Creating Graphics</p> <p>Chapter 14: Writing Definitions and Descriptions (pp. 375–386)</p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend the deadline for the chapter quizzes assigned with this lesson until Lesson 6 (one calendar week into the semester).</p>
Topics	<p>Graphical aids: Definitions and examples of tables and figures (including charts and illustrations) and best practices for integrating them with a technical document narrative</p> <p>Instructions: Concepts and structure of procedures</p> <p>Safety information: Definitions and usage of warnings, cautions, and notes</p>
Related Exercises	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Instructions</i></p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend this deadline by one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to finish the work.</p>
Related Assignments	<p>Due in 2 lessons: <i>Workshop</i> draft of <i>instruction set</i></p> <p>Due in 3 lessons: Group feedback to writers from instruction set workshop</p> <p>Due in 4 lessons: Final draft of instruction set</p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend these deadlines one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to work on their papers and edits.</p>

Lesson 5: Page Design and Layout

Lesson 5 teaches concepts of visual design, page layout, and Web design.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze page design for technical documents. Analyze visual design as it applies to content organization. Design templates for technical documents based on good page design concepts. Analyze concepts of Web design for online documents and content.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 7: Designing Documents and Web Sites</p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should extend the deadline for the chapter quiz assigned with this lesson until Lesson 6 (one calendar week into the semester).</p>

Components	Deliverables
Topics	<p>Visual design: Concepts of good page design such as goals of good design, proximity, alignment, repetition, and contrast</p> <p>Content and visual design: Applying visual design to content organization such as chunking, queuing, filtering, and accessing aids</p> <p>Page layout: Applying white space, typography, columns, and alignment to the layout/template of a document</p> <p>Web design: Basic concepts of web design for online documents and content</p>
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 6: Proposals and Instructions Workshop

Lesson 6 teaches proposals and has students work with their assigned team on the instruction set workshop.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ concepts and structure of proposals. Analyze written work from assigned teammates' instruction set assignments.
Reading/Quizzes	Chapter 7: Writing Proposals
Topics	<p>Proposals: Researching and writing proposals, including the structure of standard proposals and proposals based on a request for proposal (RFP)</p> <p>Instruction set workshop: Students review and edit their assigned teammates' <i>instruction set assignments</i> (requires that you first assign students into workshop groups)</p> <p> Note: Because of the winter session's accelerated schedule, you should delay this workshop one lesson during the winter session, giving students one additional day to work on their papers.</p>
Related Exercises	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Proposal summary</i></p> <p>Due in 2 lessons: <i>Letter of understanding for formal report (group)</i></p> <p> Note: The letter of understanding is the same exercise specified in <i>Lesson 7</i>. If you give students the option to select either report type (proposal or recommendation report), you should wait until Lesson 7 to assign it.</p>
Related Assignments	<p>Due in 5 lessons: Final draft of group project to research and write a <i>formal report</i> (proposal and/or a recommendation report)</p> <p> Note: This is the same assignment specified in <i>Lesson 7</i>. If you give students the option to select either report type (proposal or recommendation report), you should wait until Lesson 7 to assign it.</p>

Lesson 7: Recommendation Reports

Lesson 7 teaches recommendation reports and has project groups start brainstorming ideas for their formal report group project.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ concepts and structure of recommendation reports. Differentiate recommendation reports from proposals. Plan with project groups a report type (proposal or recommendation report) and a topic for a formal report group project.
Reading/Quizzes	Chapter 13: Writing Recommendation Reports
Topics	<p>Recommendation reports: Researching and writing recommendation reports, including the structure of recommendation reports and how the recommendation report differs from a proposal</p> <p>Project brainstorming: Discussions within project groups to decide on a report type (proposal or recommendation report) and/or a topic for their <i>formal report group assignment</i>.</p>
Related Exercises	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Letter of understanding for formal report (group)</i></p> <p> Note: This is the same exercise specified in <i>Lesson 6</i>.</p>
Related Assignments	<p>Due in 4 lessons: Final draft of group project to research and write a <i>formal report</i> (proposal and/or a recommendation report)</p> <p> Note: This is the same assignment specified in <i>Lesson 6</i>.</p>

Lesson 8: Audience, Purpose, and Research

Lesson 7 teaches audience, purpose, and research and has project groups perform an audience assessment and brainstorm research resources for their formal report group project.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess audiences for technical documents. Discuss how primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences use documents. Use primary and secondary resources to research content for technical documents. Work with project groups to write content for formal reports.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Chapter 4: Analyzing Your Audience and Purpose</p> <p>Chapter 5: Researching Your Subject</p>
Topics	<p>Audience and purpose: Assessing audiences for technical documents and understanding how primary, secondary, and tertiary audiences use documents</p> <p>Research: Using primary and secondary resources to research content for technical documents</p>
Related Exercises	<p>Due next lesson: <i>Audience assessment (group)</i></p> <p>Due next lesson: <i>Research sources (group)</i></p>
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 9 : Online Content

Lesson 9 teaches concepts of online content such as HTML, CSS, and XML and allows students time to work in project groups toward their formal report project.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the technologies for writing and delivering content online. • Examine the design of technical documents through online media.
Reading/Quizzes	<p>Online content articles and/or tutorials: Material you believe to be appropriate for learning about online content concepts such as HTML, CSS, and XML</p> <p> Tip: Many related tutorials are available at Lynda.com (available to Virginia Tech faculty and students for free).</p>
Topics	<p>Online content: Concepts on the technology and design of online content such as HTML, CSS, and XML</p> <p>Group project work: Allocated time for project groups to work on their <i>formal report</i> (proposal and/or a recommendation report)</p>
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 10: Job-Application Materials

Lesson 10 teaches cover letters, resumes, and related job-application materials and allows students time to work in project groups toward their formal report project.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employ concepts and structure of resumes in the job-application process. • Employ concepts and structure of cover letters for supporting resumes in the job-application process. • Employ concepts and structure of supporting job-application materials such as thank-you letters, list of references, and portfolios in the job-application process.
Reading/Quizzes	Chapter 10: Writing Job-Application Materials
Topics	<p>Resumes: Concepts and strategies for designing and writing resumes for the job-application process</p> <p>Cover letters: Concepts and strategies for writing cover letters to support resumes</p> <p>Other job-application materials: Concepts and strategies for supporting job-application materials such as thank-you letters, list of references, and portfolios</p> <p>Group project work: Allocated time for project groups to work on their <i>formal report</i> (proposal and/or a recommendation report)</p>
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	Due in 2 lessons: Final draft of job-application <i>cover letter</i>

Lesson 11: White Papers

Lesson 7 teaches concepts and strategies for writing white papers.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ concepts and structure of white papers. Use educational information and professional design to make white papers persuasive.
Reading/Quizzes	White paper articles: Material you believe to be appropriate for learning about white papers such as documents about white papers and example white papers i Tip: Purdue OWL has useful starter documents on white papers at https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/546/1/ .
Topics	White papers: Concepts and strategies for writing white papers such as making them informative, persuasive, and professionally designed
Related Exercises	Due next lesson: Letter of understanding for white paper
Related Assignments	Due in 2 lessons: Workshop draft of white paper Due in 3 lessons: Group feedback to writers from white paper workshop Due in 4 lessons: Final draft of white paper

Lesson 12: Oral Presentations and Localization

Lesson 12 explains how to rehearse and create supplements for oral presentations and teaches concepts of globalization, localization, and translation of technical documents.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employ concepts and strategies for delivering oral presentations. Design supporting supplements for presentations. Use tools to record and deliver oral presentations online. Discuss concepts on globalization, localization, and translation of technical documents.
Reading/Quizzes	Chapter 15: Making Oral Presentations Localization articles: Material you believe to be appropriate for explaining concepts of globalization, localization, and translation of technical documents
Topics	Oral presentations: Concepts and strategies for delivering oral presentations and for designing and writing supporting supplements for presentations Recorded presentations: Tools and strategies for recording oral presentations and delivering them online Localization: Concepts on globalization, localization, and translation of technical documents
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	Due in 3 lessons: Final recording of oral presentation

Lesson 13: White Paper Workshop

Lesson 13 has students work with their assigned team on the white paper workshop.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze written work from assigned teammates' white paper assignments.
Reading/Quizzes	N/A
Topics	<p>White paper workshop: Students review and edit their assigned teammates' <i>white paper projects</i> (requires that you first assign students into workshop groups)</p> <p> Tip: Because of the length of the white papers and corresponding effort required for students to review them, this workshop is delivered best with no other lectures or topics for the lesson.</p>
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 14: Informational Reports

Lesson 14 teaches informational reports such as progress, status, and incident reports and allows students time to work on their final white paper draft and oral presentation.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compare forms used for writing informational reports. Apply concepts learned through entirety of course to design and write a white paper and create an oral presentation.
Reading/Quizzes	Chapter 12: Writing Informational Reports
Topics	<p>Informational reports: Concepts, strategies, and forms used for writing informational reports such as progress, status, and incident reports</p> <p>Final project work: Allocated time for students to work on their <i>white paper</i> and <i>oral presentation</i></p>
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Lesson 15: Wrap-up

Lesson 15 provides a period for you to have an open discussion about any remaining technical writing concepts, field class-specific questions and answers before the semester ends, and collect final projects and presentations.

Components	Deliverables
Lesson Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discuss questions and issues related to technical writing.
Reading/Quizzes	N/A
Topics	Wrap-up: Wrap-up for any remaining issues

Components	Deliverables
	Final questions and answers: Question and answer period for you to answer any class-specific questions (requires that you first ask students to post open questions for you to answer)
Related Exercises	N/A
Related Assignments	N/A

Chapter

6

Exercise Descriptions

Topics:

- [*Memo with Self-Introduction*](#)
- [*Business Claim Letter*](#)
- [*Extended Definition*](#)
- [*Grammar and Punctuation Worksheet*](#)
- [*Instructions*](#)
- [*Proposal Summary*](#)
- [*Letter of Understanding for Formal Report*](#)
- [*Audience Assessment*](#)
- [*Research Sources*](#)
- [*Letter of Understanding for White Paper*](#)

Exercises are low-risk deliverables that help students get comfortable with new concepts and, in some cases, give students a starting point to build up to the larger assignments they must submit for grades in the course.

The exercises discussed in this section support the suggested [*lessons*](#) for this course. While there is not a matching exercise for every lesson described in this handbook, the exercises discussed here provide a balance of student work across most of the course lessons.

Because this course is delivered online, it is critical to provide detailed instructions for students to complete each exercise. The exercises provided here include suggested descriptions that you can use as is or modify as needed.

Exercises should be lower risk than [*assignments*](#) and thus typically do not receive an individual grade other than "completed" or "not completed." To have their exercise marked as "completed," students must demonstrate that they put forth an effort toward accomplishing the goals of the exercise (regardless of whether or not they did so correctly).

Instead of assigning grades for each exercise, you could assign one grade to all exercises collectively, basing the grade on the percentage of exercises a student completes at the end of the semester. Following this model, the grade weight for all exercises could be equivalent to the grade weight of one major [*project*](#). For example, if major projects are each worth 15% of the final grade, then the collection of exercises would also be worth 15% of the final grade. If a student were to complete 80% of assigned exercises, they would receive an 80 as their exercises grade, which would be worth 15% of their final grade.

Memo with Self-Introduction

This exercise has students introduce themselves by writing a memo.

Purpose: Provide students a way to introduce themselves while at the same time get comfortable writing within the constraints of a specific technical writing genre.

Summary: Students must write a brief memo in a format described in the textbook to introduce themselves to the class. Before posting this exercise, you must post your own memo with self-introduction as the instructor.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Course introduction; correspondence (specifically memos).

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written their introduction as a real memo in correct memo format (with a memo identifier and document identification information) as opposed to just writing the body text. Also make sure the content is written completely and correctly as opposed to, for example, a few brief sentence fragments.

Description for Students

Before You Begin: Be sure to read this lesson's reading assignments. This introduction must be posted in memo format, as described in the textbook reading, to receive credit for the exercise. If you do not yet have the textbook, at least look at the memo format in my own posting to help you get started.

In the **Introduce Yourself** discussion (under **Discussions** in Canvas), write a memo to the class that provides a brief introduction about yourself. Consider the following guidelines:

- Be sure to structure the posting as a memo. Memos are discussed in chapter 9 of the textbook. Remember, memos are not formal the way business letters are.
- Post your introduction (your memo with your background information) in the discussion titled **Introduce Yourself**. To post your introduction, you simply "reply" to my initial posting. Your name will automatically appear with your posting.
- If you are new to discussions (or Canvas in general), use this exercise as a chance to play around with the text editing feature.
- Browse through and read what others have posted. Click the **Reply** link in someone's introduction and welcome them.
- The entire class will be able to read your document, so be professional and write as correctly as you can.
- Consider your audience—not just me, but also all of the students. What are we interested in? I would think at least your name, academic year and major, where you're from, and any interests you have. Try to add something interesting about yourself that makes you unique.
- You will soon learn that technical writers love to bulletize information. It makes it easy for the audience to scan and process. Maybe try a brief sentence or two to introduce yourself in a paragraph, followed by a bullet list of relevant information.

I went first and created a posting in the forum. Feel free to use it as an example. However, remember that memos can be formatted a variety of ways, as illustrated in chapter 9 of the textbook.

Example of Instructor Posting

CLASS MEMO

To: Students of ENGL3764

From: John Doe

Subject: Introduction

Date: May 23, 2016

Hello. My name is John Doe, and I am the instructor of this course. My master's degree is in technical and professional writing, and I have been in the technical writing industry for around 20 years. While my expertise is in software documentation, I have worked on many other projects such as consumer electronics and business services. The following factoids will tell you a little more about myself:

- I was born and raised in Massachusetts (go Sox!).
- Though I'm a technical writer by profession, I have also taken an interest in screenwriting and wrote a couple of unproduced screenplays while receiving a certificate in feature film writing at UCLA Extension.
- A little known fact about me is that, before my writing career, I considered a career in aviation and earned a pilot's license with instrument rating (yes, I've landed a small airplane through the clouds).

Business Claim Letter

This exercise has students write a claim letter to a vendor to recover losses from an event.

Purpose: Give students practice writing a formal business letter based on a practical situation.

Summary: Students must write a formal business letter, in correct business letter format, to seek reimbursement for faulty equipment. To make reviewing the exercise submissions more manageable, you should have an example prepared to give students after they complete the exercise so they can compare their results. The example below includes corresponding letters you could use as the solution.

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Correspondence (specifically letters).

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written their letter as a real business letter in correct letter format. Also make sure the content is clear, concise, persuasive, and grammatically correct. Students can self-correct this exercise against a model that you post.

Description for Students

Write a business claim letter for the following scenario:

As the head of research for a biological research organization, you recently purchased a \$2,000 commercial refrigerator for storing research samples. Recently, you suffered a loss of more than \$600 in samples when the thermostat failed and the temperature in the refrigerator rose to more than 48 degrees over the weekend. Inventing any reasonable details, write a claim letter to the manufacturer of the refrigerator.



Note: This is exercise #1 on page 239 of the following textbook: Markel, Mike. *Practical Strategies for Technical Communication*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's. 2013.

Consider the following guidelines:

- Keep the letter to one page, just as you would for the same situation in the "real world."
- Identify your audience based on the scenario, and write the letter with a tone and level of sophistication that is appropriate for that audience.
- Use an official business-letter format, as shown in the textbook.

After you finish, upload your letter as a **PDF**.

Possible Solution (from Author of the Above Textbook)

United Lab Services

220 Central Avenue

Abilene, TX 79601

December 12, 2014

Mr. Wylie Flores

Dillard Refrigeration and Supply

17 Main Street

Abilene, TX 79603

Subject: Request for reimbursement

Dear Mr. Flores:

In August of this year, my organization purchased an ExcelTemp 340 commercial refrigerator from your company. We selected the ExcelTemp 340 because of its excellent warranty and your company's commitment to service after the sale.

Before we closed our lab on Friday, December 5, we completed our standard close-down checklist, which includes visually inspecting the thermometer inside the refrigerator and locking the handle latch. Although the refrigerator was functioning normally when we locked the door, it malfunctioned after that. When we unlocked the refrigerator Monday, December 8, the temperature had risen to 48 degrees.

We then called your company, and you promptly sent over a technician to fix the temperature control problem. Although we appreciate the quick service, we ask that you reimburse us \$624 for the lab samples in the refrigerator that were damaged due to the refrigerator malfunction. The \$624 is based on eight lost samples, which cost \$78 each in labor and materials to replace. Because we were using the ExcelTemp 340 for its stated purpose and we can be certain that the door was properly closed, we believe this is a valid claim under our one-year warranty.

Please send your check to my attention at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Boyd Jackson

Lab Services Director

Alternate Solution

United Lab Services

220 Central Avenue

Abilene, TX 79601

December 12, 2014

Mr. Wylie Flores

Dillard Refrigeration and Supply

17 Main Street

Abilene, TX 79603

Subject: Request for Reimbursement

Dear Mr. Flores:

While using the ExcelTemp 340 commercial refrigerator we purchased from your company, my organization lost critical lab samples when the refrigerator malfunctioned. I am requesting that you reimburse us \$624 for losses from this incident, as the refrigerator is still under warranty.

My organization purchased the ExcelTemp 340 refrigerator primarily because of its excellent warranty and your company's commitment to service after the sale. I was surprised such a quality refrigerator malfunctioned and therefore investigated the incident myself. I can confirm the following details:

- Before closing our lab on Friday, December 5, we visually inspected the thermometer inside the refrigerator and locked the handle latch.
- The refrigerator was functioning normally when we locked the door.
- When we unlocked the refrigerator Monday, December 8, the temperature had risen to 48 degrees.
- The elevated temperature destroyed eight samples, each costing \$78 in labor and materials to replace—the total loss from the malfunction was \$624.

We are grateful your company sent over a technician to fix the temperature control problem. However, because we were using the ExcelTemp 340 refrigerator for its stated purpose and are certain the door was properly closed, we believe this is a valid claim under the unit's warranty. Please send your check to my attention at your earliest convenience.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Boyd Jackson

Lab Services Director

Extended Definition

This exercise has students work together in a small group to write an extended definition of a topic with which the entire group is already familiar.

Purpose: Give students practice writing a longer narrative in which they describe an object while at the same time exposing them to working on writing projects in a group setting.

Summary: Students must write an extended definition for a term assigned to them. The term should be something with which the students are already familiar. Therefore, using terms related to academia works well for this exercise. Before posting this exercise, you must place students into groups. The example below assumes you use **Collaborations** in Canvas to group students. The example also has students simply upload a PDF for you to post in Canvas **Files** for other students to review. An alternative to this would be to simply allow all students to access each of the other group documents through [Google Drive](#). Academic terms you could assign to groups might include: Financial Aid, Tuition, Syllabus, Academic Major, Grade Point Average, Academic Minor, Canvas.

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Definitions and descriptions.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the students were able to collaborate in a cooperative manner. The deliverable should have a professional extended definition that reflects concepts from the textbook. Also make sure the content is clear, concise, and grammatically correct.

Description for Students

With your assigned group, write an **extended definition** of the word assigned to you (listed below). Extended definitions are covered in the assigned textbook reading and in our class lesson. The word your group is assigned is one from a group of terms related to academia (terms you are probably already familiar with). For this exercise, pretend you are working on an information booklet for junior high and high school students who know nothing about college life or Virginia Tech. Your goal is to write a definition that will make them understand this new terminology.

Use these steps to work with your group:

1. Use the **Collaborations** menu to identify the members in your assigned group, and put a plan together to work with each other. We are all working at our own time and pace in this online course, so be courteous with one another so one person isn't doing all the work. You should reach out to your team **immediately**. If you are unable to reach a person on your team, or if anyone on your team is not participating, let me know as soon as possible so that I can help remedy the situation.
2. Share documents with your group using whatever means you agree to. Canvas works best with Google Drive, through which you can author your document in Google Docs.
3. When your group is finished, save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment.
4. I will post the documents to Canvas under **Files** and then post an announcement when they are available. Browse through the documents to see what other groups came up with for their extended definitions (each group has their own definition).

Consider the following guidelines:

- It's not a large project, but typically extended definitions of the terms in this specific exercise take about a half page. Each group has one term to define (one half page). I have seen some groups go as far as one whole page, usually with outstanding results. Remember that this is an extended definition, so it is not as simple as writing one sentence that says, "A course is a class on a specific subject."
- Your audience is junior high and high school students who know nothing about college life or Virginia Tech but who need to learn. Use the appropriate style and clarity for this type of audience.
- Though it's a short writing exercise, think of your content as having a beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning, you introduce your content—in this case, the term you are going to define. In the middle, you provide the relevant details for your content. Finally, in the end, you conclude the content with a summary or other conclusions you want to draw about your content.
- The intent is for the entire class to read your final document, so be professional and remember that the whole class "is watching."

Grammar and Punctuation Worksheet

This exercise has students fix punctuation and grammar errors in sentences.

Purpose: Give students an opportunity to determine how prepared they are for the grammar and punctuation exams. If you are not administering grammar and punctuation exams in your classes, this exercise still helps students think about grammatical accuracy in technical writing.

Summary: With a worksheet containing sentences with multiple grammatical and punctuation errors, students must fix the errors and explain what the errors are. This exercise requires you to create a worksheet you would like to use along with an answer key to share with students after they perform the exercise (students can self-correct their worksheets).

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Grammar and punctuation review.

Grading Guidelines: Verify that students were able to identify the errors and that they understand why the errors are in fact errors. Students should answer, for example, "a comma is required before a coordinating conjunction that separates two independent clauses" instead of simply "a comma is required." Students can self-correct this exercise against an answer key that you post.

Description for Students

The document attached to this assignment has several sentences with grammar and punctuation issues (which could mean more than one error per sentence). For each sentence, rewrite the sentence correctly. Also explain why each error in the original is grammatically incorrect (which again could mean more than one explanation per sentence).

After you finish, upload your finished document to this assignment as a **PDF** file. The model answers will be available to you after the exercise deadline so that you can self-correct your worksheet.

Instructions

This exercise has students write steps for the audience to perform a specific task.

Purpose: Give students an opportunity to practice writing instructions prior to the [graded instruction set assignment](#).

Summary: Give students a very specific task that they would be very familiar with, and have them write instructions for an audience who has never performed the task. The example below has students write instructions for tying a shoelace. Any task could work for this exercise; however, it should be a common task that students know how to perform well.

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Instructions.

Grading Guidelines: Verify that students wrote clear, direct, numbered steps in imperative mood. There should be no more than 7 +/- 2 steps, and each step should have no more than one specific action. For the tying a shoelace example below, this is extremely challenging for students, who will often try to add multiple actions into one step to avoid going over 7 +/- 2 steps. The steps should work correctly and not make any assumption that the audience has ever tied a shoelace before.

Description for Students

Using only words (no illustrations), write instructions on how to tie shoelaces. Though this may sound like a silly exercise, it is actually quite challenging to do because you must adhere to the guidelines discussed in the lecture about writing instructions and you cannot assume any knowledge about the audience. This will make it more difficult than it initially seems because you likely take these steps for granted every day and never even think about them when tying shoelaces.

Consider the following guidelines:

- While it's true that pictures can be "worth 1,000 words" and are typically desirable in technical documentation, this exercise is about practicing how to write steps. Therefore, you cannot use illustrations--you must use only words to explain how to perform the task.
- You must assume the audience knows nothing about tying a shoelace and has never seen the task performed prior to receiving your instructions.
- You only have to focus on the steps and not a formal document as a whole.
- While the writing will be shorter in nature (7 steps +/- 2), the planning should be extensive to make sure clear, concise steps result in the desired outcome.
- Do not use sub-steps to make it easier to meet the seven-step rule.
- Remember that steps are numbered, not bulleted.
- Write with clear instructions in the imperative mood (in the form of a command or request).
- When finished writing, test the instructions (better yet, have someone else test them).

Save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload a copy here.

Proposal Summary

This exercise has students take the details from a complete proposal, and condense them into one short summary that could appear on the proposal's title page.

Purpose: Have students think about the components of a proposal and practice condensing content down to a bare minimum.

Summary: Based on details from a proposal, students must write a short summary that highlights all aspects of the proposal. Before posting this exercise, you must have an example prepared to give students after they complete the exercise so that they can compare their results. The example below includes a corresponding summary that could be used as the solution.

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Proposals.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure students did not write more than 250 words and that they covered all aspects of the proposal. Students can self-correct this exercise against a model that instructors post.

Description for Students

Write a summary for a proposal based on the following key points from a request for proposal (RFP):

- You are proposing to manufacture a computer microprocessor that can save a laptop manufacturer \$250,000/year in expenses.
- The total cost you would have to charge to manufacturer is \$500,000.
- Your proposed duration for the project is one year.
- Feel free to invent any other relevant facts.
- This exercise should really be one short paragraph.
- Do not be concerned with visual design, only the quality of the written content.

After you finish, upload your brief summary as a **PDF**. A model example will be available to you after the exercise deadline so that you can compare to your own work.

Possible Solution

In response to your RFP, Ace Industries is offering our 20 years of digital manufacturing experience to supply ABC Electronics with a new computer microprocessor that will save you \$250,000 per year in laptop manufacturing costs. We are prepared to begin the project as soon as March 1, 2017 and can have the microprocessor ready for distribution by March 1, 2018. The total cost for fulfillment would be \$500,000, which you would recognize in savings in only two years.

Letter of Understanding for Formal Report

This exercise has students work together in their project group to write a business letter that explains their decisions for their formal report project.

Purpose: Have students explain their plans for the *formal report group project*, providing an opportunity for you to approve projects and work with students if necessary to refine their project plans. This exercise also gives students practice writing a formal business letter while giving them a chance to work together in their project group.

Summary: Students must write a formal business letter, in correct business letter format, explaining their group's decision for the formal report project, including the report type and topic. Before posting this exercise, you must place students into project groups. The groups should be organized based on academic discipline so that students can write

on a subject related to their discipline (depending on the variety of majors in the class, this might not be possible for all students). The example below assumes you used **Collaborations** in Canvas to group students.

-  **Tip:** As discussed with the formal report project, students often select topics that can be common and overused. You should include a list of "banned topics" with the formal report project description to force students to find topics that are more original. The example below refers to such banned topics to remind students to be mindful of them.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Recommendation reports; proposals; correspondence (specifically letters).

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the students were able to collaborate in a cooperative manner. Verify the students have written their letter as a real business letter in correct letter format. Also make sure the content is clear, concise, persuasive, and grammatically correct. Separately, verify that the selected report type and topic is acceptable for the project. If you have "banned topics" for the formal report project, ensure the proposed topic is allowed.

Description for Students

With your assigned project group, write a **business letter** explaining your group's decision for your **formal report project**. This letter must be in **standard business letter format**, as covered in our correspondence lesson. Be sure to first read the assignment description of the formal report project so you know the requirements and banned topics before working on this letter.

Use these steps to work with your group:

1. Use the **Collaborations** menu to identify the members in your assigned group, and put a plan together to work with each other. We are all working at our own time and pace in this online course, so be courteous with one another so one person isn't doing all the work. You should reach out to your team **immediately**. If you are unable to reach a person on your team, or if anyone on your team is not participating, let me know as soon as possible so that I can help remedy the situation.
2. Share documents with your group using whatever means you agree to. Canvas works best with Google Drive, through which you can author your document in Google Docs.
3. When your group is finished, save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment.
4. If I have any issues with or questions about your project, I will message your team to resolve them.

Include the following information in the business letter:

- Whether your group is going to write a proposal or recommendation report and why you believe it is the appropriate document type for your purpose
- The subject matter of your proposal or recommendation report (what you are proposing or recommending)
- Why this document type and topic is appropriate for your group (for example, maybe it relates to your major or is a subject that interests your group)

Audience Assessment

This exercise has students work together in their project group to perform a complete assessment of the audience(s) of their formal report project.

Purpose: Have students think about who they are writing for and demonstrate that they know how to plan for their audience. This exercise will provide insight into the level of work students are putting into their *formal report group project* and if they are thinking about what they must plan for both project and content.

Summary: Students must think through all audiences, including primary, secondary, and tertiary (if relevant) for their formal report project and identify as many characteristics for those audiences as possible. Before posting this exercise, you must place students into project groups (these are the same groups as for the formal report project and *letter of project understanding exercise*). The groups should be organized based on academic discipline so that students can write on a subject related to their discipline (depending on the variety of majors in the class, this might not be possible

for all students). The example below assumes you used **Collaborations** in Canvas to group students. This exercise could be paired with the [research sources exercise](#), having students work on both exercises simultaneously.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Audience and purpose; recommendation reports; proposals.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the students were able to collaborate in a cooperative manner. Verify the students have truly thought through the audiences for their project and that they are able to make decisions based on the audience characteristics they determined.

Description for Students

Based on your current knowledge of the audience(s) for your **formal report project**, work with your assigned group to identify your audience types (primary, secondary, and tertiary) and assess them. Your audience will be a true audience—the people to whom you would actually give your report. While I will be reviewing your project to grade it, keep in mind that I am not the primary audience. I may be the tertiary audience, but not primary.

For each of the three audience types:

- Identify their characteristics.
- Identify their purpose(s) for the document.
- List at least two ways you can find more information about them.

Basically, just brainstorm everything you can about your audience. No fact is insignificant. Refer back to the textbook to help think through some of the considerations for assessing your audience.

Be thorough and assess all three audience types (primary, secondary, and tertiary). When finished, this will probably be between one and two solid pages. I care primarily about the assessment itself—that you know your audience before you start writing your document. However, also use the exercise as an opportunity to practice communicating information. For example, think about how to convey your information in a manner that is easy to read. Bullet lists? Table structure? Sections with headings? The decision is yours.

Use these steps to work with your group:

1. Use the **Collaborations** menu to identify the members in your assigned group, and put a plan together to work with each other. We are all working at our own time and pace in this online course, so be courteous with one another so one person isn't doing all the work. You should reach out to your team **immediately**. If you are unable to reach a person on your team, or if anyone on your team is not participating, let me know as soon as possible so that I can help remedy the situation.
2. Share documents with your group using whatever means you agree to. Canvas works best with Google Drive, through which you can author your document in Google Docs.
3. When your group is finished, save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment.

Research Sources

This exercise has students work together in their project group to perform a complete assessment of research they must perform for their project.

Purpose: Have students put together a plan for the research they must conduct for their [formal report group project](#), allowing them to distribute work across the team. This exercise will provide insight into the level of work students are putting into their group project and if they are thinking about what they must plan for both project and content.

Summary: Students must think through both primary and secondary research for their formal report project and identify as many details about each piece of research. Before posting this exercise, you must place students into project groups (these are the same groups as for the formal report project and [letter of project understanding exercise](#)). The groups should be organized based on academic discipline so that students can write on a subject related to their discipline (depending on the variety of majors in the class, this might not be possible for all students). The example

below assumes you used **Collaborations** in Canvas to group students. This exercise could be paired with the [audience assessment exercise](#), having students work on both exercises simultaneously.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Research; recommendation reports; proposals.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the students were able to collaborate in a cooperative manner. Verify the students have truly thought through real research and that their project must be based on research as opposed to fabricated information.

Description for Students

Based on your current knowledge of the audience(s) for your **formal report project**, work with your assigned group to identify at least five sources you can use as research for your document. Consider as many sources as possible, including:

- Journal articles
- Surveys
- Interviews
- Direct observation (for example, observing traffic for volume at an intersection)

Basically, just brainstorm everything you can about your research. But be as thorough as you can. Describe how you think you can approach the research and what data you think you can use. For example, if you brainstorm "student surveys," also brainstorm which academic majors, which class years, how many you need to include, and anything you think will help your case.

When finished, this will probably be one solid page. I care primarily that you have a solid idea as to how you will approach your research. However, also use the exercise as an opportunity to practice communicating information. For example, think about how to convey your information in a manner that is easy to read. Bullet lists? Table structure? Sections with headings? The decision is yours.

Use these steps to work with your group:

1. Use the **Collaborations** menu to identify the members in your assigned group, and put a plan together to work with each other. We are all working at our own time and pace in this online course, so be courteous with one another so one person isn't doing all the work. You should reach out to your team **immediately**. If you are unable to reach a person on your team, or if anyone on your team is not participating, let me know as soon as possible so that I can help remedy the situation.
2. Share documents with your group using whatever means you agree to. Canvas works best with Google Drive, through which you can author your document in Google Docs.
3. When your group is finished, save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment.

Letter of Understanding for White Paper

This exercise has students write a business letter that explains their decisions for their white paper project.

Purpose: Have students explain their plans for the [white paper project](#), providing an opportunity for you to approve projects and work with students if necessary to refine their project plans. This exercise also gives students practice writing a formal business letter.

Summary: Students must write a formal business letter, in correct business letter format, explaining their decision for the white paper project, including the topic and thoughts about how they might present the project in an [oral presentation](#).

Corresponding Lesson Topics: White papers; making oral presentations; correspondence (specifically letters).

Grading Guidelines: Verify the students have written their letter as a real business letter in correct letter format. Also make sure the content is clear, concise, persuasive, and grammatically correct. Separately, verify that the selected topic is acceptable for the project and that the students have thought about the corresponding oral presentation.

Description for Students

Write a **business letter** explaining your decision for your **white paper project**. This letter must be in **standard business letter format**, as covered in our correspondence lesson. Be sure to first read the assignment description of the white paper project so you know the requirements and banned topics before working on this letter.

Save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment. If I have any issues with or questions about your project, I will message you to resolve them.

Include the following information in the business letter:

- The subject matter of your white paper (what you will be informing or teaching your audience about)
- The intended audience
- What you will be trying to persuade your audience toward and how you will go about doing it
- How you will deliver the corresponding oral presentation (for example, as slides with a voice over or maybe a YouTube video presentation)

Chapter

7

Assignment Descriptions

Topics:

- [*Papers*](#)
- [*Projects*](#)
- [*Workshops*](#)
- [*Oral Presentations*](#)

While instructors are free to administer assignments they deem appropriate for their classes, there are different categories of assignments that typically work well for this course.

The assignments discussed in this section support the suggested [*lessons*](#) for this course. While there is not a matching assignment for every lesson described in this handbook, the assignments discussed here provide a balance of student work across most of the course lessons.

Because this course is delivered online, it is critical to provide detailed instructions for students to complete each assignment. The assignments provided here include suggested descriptions that you can use as is or modify as needed.

Papers

Papers are short technical documents that students write to demonstrate their understanding of a specific genre and its corresponding concepts.

Papers are graded *assignments*, but they do not carry as much weight as the larger *projects*. As such, the grade weight for all papers could be equivalent to the grade weight of one major project, which means allocating a smaller percentage to each paper. For example, if major projects are each worth 15% of the final grade, you could assign three papers that are collectively worth 15% of the final grade (5% for each paper).

Description Document

This paper has students write an object, mechanism, or process description document that covers a topic from the student's academic discipline.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about the technical writing process, technical writing style and grammar, and the description genre by writing a graded paper based on the description genre. Suggested as the first graded paper of the course, this assignment also gives students a chance to get comfortable with your style of grading and feedback.

Summary: Students must write an object, mechanism, or process description document on a topic that is directly related to their academic discipline (major or minor). Students should also include a cover page (technically not part of the description document itself) to clarify their academic discipline, explain why their chosen topic is related to their discipline, and demonstrate that they are thinking about audience and purpose. If your course includes *workshops*, this paper is also a good assignment to use as the students' *first workshop* (the example assignment description below assumes this paper is used in a workshop). To help students understand the assignment's expectations, you should have one or more examples of a description document posted with the assignment page (the example assignment description below assumes you have posted examples).

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Definitions and descriptions.

Grading Guidelines: The paper should have a professional description document that reflects concepts from the textbook as well as lectures you have provided so far. The content should be clear, concise, and grammatically correct and should be understandable for the intended audience. The cover page should explain the students major, demonstrate their consideration of audience and purpose, and show that the description document does in fact relate to their academic discipline.

Description for Students

Remember: This assignment page is for your final paper submission. You must also have a workshop draft completed sooner, in time for the corresponding workshop. Refer to the separate assignment page for **Workshop: Description Document**.

Write a description of an object, mechanism, or process. The specific subject matter of the description is up to you; however, it must be **directly related to your academic discipline**.

Note: When conducting research on the Internet, it's easy to be tempted to copy material as it exists on websites. Resist any such temptation to copy content from the Internet. Researching material on the Internet is completely acceptable (and encouraged); however, content you submit for assignments must be completely original.

Requirements

- Post the final document here as a **PDF** file. Employers and clients will typically expect deliverables to be submitted in a format that they prefer. So it's good to get used to submitting to a defined standard. If you submit the document as a Word file or any format other than PDF, I will deduct points and ask you to resubmit.
- Include a **cover page** before the description document. The cover page can be any format, but see the related section below for specific details.

- As mentioned above, the topic must be directly related to your academic discipline. If your topic is not directly related to your academic discipline, I will ask you to rewrite a new paper, reduce your grade for not following the assignment requirements, or both.
- Focus on the grammar, writing style, and consistency like we covered in the initial classes. This will be part of your grade.
- Though illustrations are not required for this paper, a picture is worth a thousand words. Include a graphic if you think it will support your description. But, if the illustration is not your own, be sure you have permission to reuse it and that you cite the source.
- This list does not include an explanation of the content you should include or how you should include it in the document. That's what our reading assignments and class lessons are for. The objective here is to apply what you have learned about the genre.

Cover Page

- Include a cover page before the description document. There is no prescribed format for the cover page. However, it must be well written like any other content you submit in this course.
- The cover page must include the following information:
 - Your name
 - Your academic major (or minor, if your description document is related to your minor instead of major)
 - The type of description document you're writing (object, mechanism, or process)
 - One or two brief sentences that explain how your selected topic relates to your academic discipline and why you chose this specific topic
 - One or two brief sentences explaining who your audience is (who do you picture reading this) and your goal for the audience (what you're hoping the audience will get from it)
- Don't think of the cover page as part of the description document (even though you will include it as the first page in your file). If your description document has page numbers, do not include the cover page as page 1 (the first page of your description document would be page 1). As mentioned above, there is no format requirement for the cover page. However, as described below, the description document itself should be formatted like a professional document.

Description Document Guidelines

- The description document should be approximately 400 to 700 efficient words (**excluding the cover page**), depending on how illustrative you make it. I say "efficient" words because technical writing should be as concise as possible. The goal is great content, not number of words. Page count is not really a good measure because formatting, white space, illustrations, and other factors influence page count as much as words do.
- After you write the document, be sure to revise it, edit it, re-edit it, and re-edit it again. If I see a simple typo, it probably means you didn't spend much time editing the document. **Here's a great tip:** Read the finished document out loud as if you were reading it to an audience; any typos or errors will become very obvious to you.
- Look at the content and examples in the textbook. Also look at the sample PDFs of previous description documents that are attached to this assignment. Keep in mind that the intent with providing examples is not for you to simply copy and replace your own text. It's to give you a feel for how other people approach writing this genre. **DO NOT** use the attached samples as an exact format for your own document. What these samples do not show is any specific feedback I might have provided for errors in format, design, or writing. If you simply copy the format of these samples, you may be copying an error that I suggested the author fix. Again, the samples are strictly to provide an idea for how others approached the paper.
- Remember your audience. If you are writing about something very technical, you will have to find a way to simplify it so your audience understands the content.

- Make it inviting and interesting to look at. This should be something that invites readers in and holds their attention. Notice that the examples in the textbook are not written like a college essay. They are designed to engage the reader and hold their interest.

Instruction Set

This paper has students write an instruction set that contains a conceptual topic and several related task topics.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about the technical writing process, technical writing style and grammar, and the instructions genre by writing a graded paper based on the instructions genre.

Summary: Students must write an instruction set that includes a conceptual overview and several procedures for related tasks. Preferably, the topic would be directly related to their academic discipline (major or minor); however, any topic would work as long as students are forced to think about the audience as a layperson and the structure of corresponding instructions. For example, students could write product instructions or a standard operating procedure (SOP). If your course includes *workshops*, this paper is also a good assignment to use as *one of the workshops* (the example assignment description below assumes this paper is used in a workshop). To help students understand the assignment's expectations, you should have one or more examples of an instruction set posted with the assignment page (the example assignment description below assumes you have posted examples).

Corresponding Lesson Topic: Instructions.

Grading Guidelines: The paper should have a professional set of instructions that reflects concepts from the textbook and lectures on the genre. The content should be clear, concise, and grammatically correct and should be understandable for the intended audience. The conceptual topic should be written as a concept (like a description), and the task topics should include steps that are clear, direct, numbered, and in the imperative mood. There should be no more than 7 +/- 2 steps per task, and each step should have no more than one specific action. The steps should work correctly and not make any assumption that the audience has ever tied a shoelace before.

Description for Students

Remember: This assignment page is for your final paper submission. You must also have a workshop draft completed sooner, in time for the corresponding workshop. Refer to the separate assignment page for **Workshop: Instruction Set**.

Write an instruction set on how to perform a specific set of tasks. The instruction set will include one conceptual topic (“about” the tasks being documented, much like a description) and three or four tasks (“step-by-step procedures” the audience would perform). The subject matter of the instruction set is up to you (preferably from your academic discipline), but the entire set (conceptual information and procedures) must be related.

Try to keep the document focused so that you are not all over the place with information. For example, if you were writing an instruction set for cleaning a pool, you would not want to write conceptual information about the cost of installing a pool because it would not be related to the procedures. Similarly, you would not want one of your procedures to be about how to fix the diving board because it would not be related to cleaning the pool. Instead, you might write conceptual information about why pools are cleaned, how geographic location may affect pool cleaning practices, or about the equipment used in the pool-cleaning procedures. Then the step-by-step procedures might explain how to vacuum to pool, clean the pool walls, and clean the slide. (You cannot use pool cleaning as your topic.)

Note: When conducting research on the Internet, it's easy to be tempted to copy material as it exists on websites. Resist any such temptation to copy content from the Internet. Researching material on the Internet is completely acceptable (and encouraged); however, content you submit for assignments must be completely original.

Requirements

- Post the final document here as a **PDF** file. Employers and clients will typically expect deliverables to be submitted in a format that they prefer. So it's good to get used to submitting

to a defined standard. If you submit the document as a Word file or any format other than PDF, I will deduct points and ask you to resubmit.

- Your document must have one conceptual topic and three or four procedural topics.
- Focus on the grammar, writing style, and consistency like we covered in the initial classes. Also, use the correct format, style, and grammar for writing instructions as covered in the lesson on instructions. This will all be part of your grade.
- Though illustrations are not required for this paper, a picture is worth a thousand words. Include a graphic if you think it will support your description. But, if the illustration is not your own, be sure you have permission to reuse it and that you cite the source. Most importantly, be sure the illustrations are relevant to the instructions. In our pool-cleaning example, you would not have a picture of a pool simply to decorate the document because this would be meaningless to the audience. Instead, you might have an illustration in the vacuuming section that shows an actual pool vacuum in action.
- This list does not include an explanation of the content you should include or how you should include it in the document. That's what our reading assignments and class lessons are for. The objective here is to apply what you have learned about the genre.

Instruction Set Guidelines

- The description document should be approximately 500 to 700 efficient words. I say “efficient” words because technical writing should be as concise as possible. The goal is great content, not number of words. Page count is not really a good measure because formatting, white space, illustrations, and other factors influence page count as much as words do.
- Remember what we covered in the lesson. One set of procedures should have no more than 7-9 steps, and those steps should be in the imperative mood.
- Use clear and consistent headings to identify each section of your document.
- After you write the document, be sure to revise it, edit it, re-edit it, and re-edit it again. If I see a simple typo, it probably means you didn't spend much time editing the document. **Here's a great tip:** Read the finished document out loud as if you were reading it to an audience; any typos or errors will become very obvious to you.
- Look at the content and discussion of examples in the textbook. Also look at the sample PDFs of previous instruction sets that are attached to this assignment. Keep in mind that the intent with providing examples is not for you to simply copy and replace your own text. It's to give you a feel for how other people approach writing this genre. **DO NOT** use the attached samples as an exact format for your own document. What these samples do not show is any specific feedback I might have provided for errors in format, design, or writing. If you simply copy the format of these samples, you may be copying an error that I suggested the author fix. Again, the samples are strictly to provide an idea for how others approached the paper.
- Remember your audience (the intended person who would follow the procedures). If you are writing about something very technical, you will have to find a way to simplify it so your audience understands the content.
- Make it inviting and interesting to look at. This should be something that invites readers in and holds their attention. Notice that the examples in the textbook are not written like a college essay. They are designed to engage the reader and hold their interest.

Cover Letter to Support Job Application

This paper has students write a cover letter that supports a résumé in applying for a job based on a specific job posting.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about correspondence (specifically business letters) and job-application materials (specifically cover letters) by writing a graded cover letter that supports a résumé in applying for a job.

Summary: Students must write a cover letter to support a résumé submission to apply for a posted job opening (the résumé is not required for this assignment). The cover letter must be customized toward one specific job or internship

posting that the student finds on their own. Students should thus include a copy of the job posting with the cover letter assignment. The example assignment below is not paired with a *workshop*; however, you could integrate this cover letter with an assignment that integrates a mock interview based on the cover letter.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Job-application materials; correspondence (specifically letters).

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written their letter as a real business letter in correct letter format, preferably one that matches their résumé such that they are able to "brand" themselves. It should be addressed to the organization that posted the job, preferably to a specific person based on the student's research into the company (for example, it could be addressed to the hiring manager). The content in the letter must be clear, concise, and grammatically correct and it should not use cover-letter clichés and buzzwords. It should quickly state why the student is writing without starting with a superfluous introduction. The letter should persuade the reader by demonstrating how the student's skillset is a good match for the specific requirements in the job posting.

Description for Students

Write a cover letter (business letter format) that you would include with a résumé to support a request for a job interview (do **not** include the résumé). This must be based on a real-world job posting in your chosen field, whether it is a full-time job or an internship. Even if you are not planning to apply for the job, you must still base your letter on a real posting. The posting is what will dictate the specific content in your letter. You must include a copy of the job posting with the letter.

This letter is a good place to consider beginning, middle, and end. In other words, **begin** the letter by telling the reader why you are writing (hook them so that they want to know more about why you are the perfect candidate). In the **middle**, explain such things as your professional and academic background. **End** the letter with a quick summary and action item (for example, try to get them to contact you for an interview). But don't be literal with "beginning, middle, and end." It does not necessarily mean there is exactly one paragraph for each. Of course, include anything else you believe is pertinent. Again, make it specific to your selected job posting.

Requirements

- Post the final document here as a **PDF** file. Employers and clients will typically expect deliverables to be submitted in a format that they prefer. So it's good to get used to submitting to a defined standard. If you submit the document as a Word file or any format other than PDF, I will deduct points and ask you to resubmit.
- Do **not** include your résumé. This assignment is for your cover letter only.
- Include a copy of your selected job posting (scanned copy, screenshot, or copied and pasted from original). The easiest way to do this is to just add it as an additional page to the PDF you are uploading. I will use the information in the posting to gauge how well you framed the content in your letter.
- Be sure to use complete and correct business letter formatting, as covered in our lesson and textbook. Similarly, be sure to use real information in your address sections. This might mean you have to conduct some research to find the recipient's address (just like you would have to do for a real-world cover letter). If you are uncomfortable including your own home contact information in the letter, you can use the address for your academic department. If your résumé uses a letterhead, you are welcome (and encouraged) to do so for this paper.
- Focus on the grammar, writing style, and consistency like we covered in the initial classes. Avoid job-application clichés and buzzwords. This will all be part of your grade.
- This list does not include an explanation of the content you should include or how you should include it in the document. That's what our reading assignments and class lessons are for. The objective here is to apply what you have learned about the genre.

Cover Letter Guidelines

- Using the example formats from the book and class lesson, the letter should be one page (not a half page, not two pages).

- Use your selected job posting as a guide for the content in your cover letter. Each cover letter you will ever write should be specific to a specific job posting you are pursuing. Make sure you sell yourself based on the specific job posting requirements.
- Look at the content and examples in the textbook for formatting your cover letter like a business letter. Consider using the same letterhead from your résumé to "brand" yourself.
- After you write the document, be sure to revise it, edit it, re-edit it, and re-edit it again. If I see a simple typo, it probably means you didn't spend much time editing the document. **Here's a great tip:** Read the finished document out loud as if you were reading it to an audience; any typos or errors will become very obvious to you.
- Remember your audience (the prospective employer). You need to sell them on why you are the perfect candidate for the job.

Projects

Projects are long, formal documents that require students not only to write a substantial document that demonstrates their understanding of a specific genre, but also to perform thorough research that supports their document.

Because of the large amount of research and writing required, projects carry the most weight in terms of *assignment* grades. Having only a couple major projects over the duration of the semester, you could make each project worth 15% of the final grade.

Formal Report

This project has students work in a group to research and write a proposal and/or a recommendation report.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about audience assessment, research, and the proposal and recommendation report genres by working in a group to research and write a graded proposal and/or recommendation report genres. This project also gives students practice working on writing projects as part of a project group.

Summary: Students must work in a project group to research and write a formal proposal or recommendation report that is related to their academic disciplines. Before posting this exercise, you must place students into project groups (these are the same groups as for the *letter of project understanding*, *audience assessment*, and *research sources* exercises). The groups should be organized based on academic discipline so that students can write on a subject related to their discipline (depending on the variety of majors in the class, this might not be possible for all students). The example below assumes you used **Collaborations** in Canvas to group students. An alternative to this project could be to have the groups write **both** documents (proposal **and** recommendation report), for which you could divide the grade between the two deliverables. Using this model, you could have the students first write a proposal to propose the creation of their recommendation reports. Once the proposal is approved, students could then continue with the corresponding recommendation report. The example below has students choose one document **or** the other. To help students understand the assignment's expectations, you should have one or more examples of both a proposal and a recommendation report posted with the assignment page (the example assignment description below assumes you have posted examples).

 **Tip:** Historically, students often select topics that can be common and overused. You should include a list of "banned topics" to force students to find topics that are more original. The example below includes a list of common topics that should be banned. Forcing students to select a topic from their academic discipline will also help in forcing them to remain original.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Proposals; recommendation reports; graphical aids; page layout and visual design.

Grading Guidelines: The paper should be formal in both document format and content tone and should contain the appropriate sections for their genre. Research for the paper must be thorough and accurate. For a proposal, the document should be persuasive and must demonstrate that the proposed action or deliverable is worth the investment being sought. For a recommendation report, the document should clearly recommend either solutions to solve a problem or actions to capitalize on an opportunity. Content for either genre should be clear, concise, and grammatically correct and should be understandable for the intended audience. In addition to grading the paper itself,

you should ensure the students were able to collaborate in a cooperative manner and contributed to the project equally. Assuming all students in a project group contributed equally, they all receive the same grade. However, deductions are appropriate for students who are known to contribute less.

Description for Students

With your assigned group, research and write a professional-grade proposal or recommendation report. The subject matter of the proposal or recommendation report is up to you, preferably something related to your discipline.

Use these steps to work with your group:

1. Use the **Collaborations** menu to identify the members in your assigned group (these should be the same members from the group exercises related to this project), and put a plan together to work with each other. We are all working at our own time and pace in this online course, so be courteous with one another so one person isn't doing all the work. You should reach out to your team **immediately** and respond to questions and requests quickly throughout the project. If you are unable to reach a person on your team, or if anyone on your team is not participating, let me know as soon as possible so that I can help remedy the situation.
2. Share documents with your group using whatever means you agree to. Canvas works best with Google Drive, through which you can author your document in Google Docs.
3. When your group is finished, save the document as a **PDF** file, and upload it to this assignment.
4. If I have any issues with or questions about your project, I will message your team to resolve them.

Note: When conducting research on the Internet, it's easy to be tempted to copy material as it exists on websites. Resist any such temptation to copy content from the Internet. Researching material on the Internet is completely acceptable (and encouraged); however, content you submit for assignments must be completely original.

Topics You Cannot Use

You **cannot** use the same topics that are provided in the examples attached to this assignment. Additionally, there are a few other topics that you cannot use for your report because they either have been overused or are not issues that can be solved through a report:

- Traffic and parking issues at VT (overused topic)
- Issues related to Blacksburg Transit (overused topic)
- Dining services or facilities issues at VT (overused topic and likely too large for a report of this size)
- Converting from dirty to clean energy (too large for a report of this size)
- Topics defending illegal activities (inappropriate for this project)
- Political, social, or legal topics such as healthcare or legalization of drugs (not solvable through this type of report)

Teamwork

This project is about not only demonstrating your knowledge of the genre but also learning how to collaborate on writing projects as a team, which is a common practice in many professional settings. With teamwork being the theme, keep in mind the following points:

- Unless I find issues with teammate participation or related problems, the entire group receives the same grade for the project.
- If a teammate is not contributing, it is up to the rest of the group to communicate with the person about their lack of participation. If your attempt to fix the situation does not help, then it is up to you to contact me to help correct the situation.

Requirements

- Determine the correct report type for your chosen subject matter (proposal or recommendation report). Part of this project is to show that you understand the formal report genres by selecting

the correct report type for your project. If you are unclear about this after we finish our lessons on formal reports, then let me know. I will not flat out tell you which one to write based on your topic (again figuring it out is part of the project), but I can help you to make sure you understand how to differentiate between the report types.

- Post the final document here as a **PDF** file. Employers and clients will typically expect deliverables to be submitted in a format that they prefer. So it's good to get used to submitting to a defined standard. If you submit the document as a Word file or any format other than PDF, I will deduct points and ask you to resubmit.
- Include at least one original, quality illustration that supports and supplements your narrative. **This is an illustration you create, not something you copy from another source.** Base it on a critical piece of information from your report. If you conducted an important survey that the outcome of your report depends on, create a chart to show the data to the reader. In your report, you would describe the critical information so that the narrative supports it. For example, if you were showing a pie chart of a company's quarterly revenues, you would write a narrative that explains the revenues: what about their revenues is important, why are you showing the chart, is there something specific the reader should focus on? Be sure to refer to the figure (for example, the figure number) in the report narrative. You never want an illustration that has no reference to it in the document's narrative (otherwise, why would you be including the illustration?).
- Your report will be based on real research. You must have multiple sources of research, including at least one source of primary research.
- Focus on the grammar, writing style, and consistency like we covered in the initial classes. Also, use the correct format, style, and grammar for writing instructions as covered in the lesson on instructions. This will all be part of your grade.
- In our lecture and textbook reading, we talk about a request for proposal (RFP). You are free to write a proposal that is based on an RFP. This means that your proposal will have to follow the requirements of the corresponding RFP. If you use an RFP, I will need a copy of it to help me as I review your project.
- These requirements do not include an inventory of the sections you should include in your report. That's what our reading assignments and class lessons are for. The objective here is to apply what you have learned about the genre.

Formal Report Guidelines

- The report will probably need to be around 2,000 to 3,000 efficient words. I say "efficient" words because technical writing should be as concise as possible. The goal is great content, not number of words. Page count is not really a good measure because formatting, white space, illustrations, and other factors influence page count as much as words do. Also, you might have research and supplemental data to include in appendixes, which can take up pages (and which you should not consider as part of your word count).
- After you write the document, be sure to revise it, edit it, re-edit it, and re-edit it again. If I see a simple typo, it probably means you didn't spend much time editing the document. I recommend leaving time for each teammate to have a round of proofreading and edits.
- This is not an academic essay, so do not format your document like one. Look at the content and examples in the textbook to see how they format a professional-grade report. Also look at the sample PDFs of previous formal report projects that are attached to this assignment. Keep in mind that the intent with providing examples is not for you to simply copy and replace your own text. It's to give you a feel for how other people approach writing this genre. **DO NOT** use the attached samples as an exact format for your own document. What these samples do not show is any specific feedback I might have provided for errors in format, design, or writing. If you simply copy the format of these samples, you may be copying an error that I suggested the author fix. Again, the samples are strictly to provide an idea for how others approached the paper.
- Remember your audience (**not** me as the reviewer and grader, but the real audience based on your assessment).

- Make it inviting and interesting to look at. This should be something that invites readers in and holds their attention. Use the page design concepts we cover in that corresponding lesson.

White Paper

This project has students research and write a professional-grade white paper that reflects all major concepts covered in the course.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about the major concepts covered in the course by researching a selected topic and writing a graded white paper.

Summary: Students must research a selected topic and write a professional grade white paper that teaches the audience about the topic and persuades them toward an action related to the topic. This is the same topic that students identified in their *letter of project understanding exercise*. Depending on the content available in the *textbook* (for example, the Mike Markel textbook does not cover white papers), you may have to provide a more detailed assignment description for students. The example below reminds students about the concepts they should consider while writing the white paper. This project could be paired with an *oral presentation assignment*, in which students create a video (or similar presentation) of them presenting the concepts from the white paper and attempting to persuade the audience toward an action related to the topic. If your course includes *workshops*, this project is also a good assignment to use as *one of the workshops* (the example assignment description below assumes this project is used in a workshop). To help students understand the assignment's expectations, you should have one or more examples of a white paper posted with the assignment page (the example assignment description below assumes you have posted examples).

 **Tip:** Historically, students often select topics that can be common and overused. You should include a list of "banned topics" to force students to find topics that are more original. The example below includes a list of common topics that should be banned.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: White papers; graphical aids; page layout and visual design. However, this project is the culmination of the course and thus draws on most of the lessons.

Grading Guidelines: The paper should be professional in both document format and content tone and should both teach the audience about the topic and persuade them toward some action related to the topic. Research for the paper must be thorough and accurate. Content should be clear, concise, and grammatically correct and should be understandable for the intended audience.

Description for Students

Remember: This assignment page is for your final project submission. You must also have a workshop draft completed sooner, in time for the corresponding workshop. Refer to the separate assignment page for **Workshop: White Paper**.

Research and write a professional-grade white paper. In it, follow the standard formula of teaching the audience about the underlying subject matter and then subtly integrating the action you are trying to persuade the audience to take. The subject matter of the white paper is up to you, preferably something about which you are passionate or otherwise have a lot of knowledge.

For example, perhaps you are interested in persuading prospective pet owners to adopt instead of buy (do not actually use this as the topic). You would start by teaching the audience about the differences between adopting and buying, the pros and cons of each, how one buys a pet, and how one adopts a pet. You would probably introduce statistics on sheltered animals and adoption success stories. Finally, you would explain to them that the local shelter has some wonderful pets ready for adoption today (in an informative and educational tone).

Sometimes the white paper is not this obvious. It might, for example, teach the audience about a specific subject matter and then include a subtle section about the author or company who wrote the white paper. This "about" section will show the audience that the author is an expert in the subject matter, and thus persuade the audience to consider purchasing the author's product or solution. Note that, while some white papers have an "About the Author" section, this is not a requirement. For this assignment, you would probably only use it for persuasive purposes.

Note: When conducting research on the Internet, it's easy to be tempted to copy material as it exists on websites. Resist any such temptation to copy content from the Internet. Researching material on the Internet is completely acceptable (and encouraged); however, content you submit for assignments must be completely original.

Topics You Cannot Use

You **cannot** use the same topics that are described in or attached to this assignment. Additionally, there are a few other topics that you cannot use for your white paper because they either have been overused or are not issues that can be solved through a white paper:

- Traffic and parking issues at VT (this is not a white paper, but I mention it because it is a popular topic when students write persuasive papers)
- Dining services or facilities issues at VT (overused topic)
- Converting a town from dirty to clean energy (too large for a paper of this size); however, you could write a related paper for households (for example, converting a home to solar power)
- Topics defending illegal activities (inappropriate for this project)
- Political or social topics (these topics are typically essays)

Requirements

- Post the final document here as a **PDF** file. Employers and clients will typically expect deliverables to be submitted in a format that they prefer. So it's good to get used to submitting to a defined standard. If you submit the document as a Word file or any format other than PDF, I will deduct points and ask you to resubmit.
- Focus on the grammar, writing style, and consistency like we covered in the initial classes. Also, use the correct format, style, and grammar for writing instructions as covered in the lesson on instructions. This will all be part of your grade.
- Integrate tables, images, illustrations, or other figures (**at least two**, but as many as it takes) that support your narrative. But don't just use them as decoration. Use them to help inform the reader about the topic or to help with persuasion. Remember, if an illustration is not your own, be sure you have permission to reuse it and that you cite the source.
- This list does not include an inventory of the sections you should include in the white paper. That's what our reading assignments and class lessons are for. The objective here is to apply what you have learned about the genre.

White Paper Guidelines

- The white paper will probably need to be around 1,000 to 1,500 efficient words. I say "efficient" words because technical writing should be as concise as possible. The goal is great content, not number of words. Page count is not really a good measure because formatting, white space, illustrations, and other factors influence page count as much as words do. Also, you might have research and supplemental data to include in appendixes, which can take up pages (and which you should not consider as part of your word count).
- After you write the document, be sure to revise it, edit it, re-edit it, and re-edit it again. If I see a simple typo, it probably means you didn't spend much time editing the document.
- This is not an academic essay, so do not format your document like one. Make it inviting and interesting to look at. This should be something that invites readers in and holds their attention. Use the page design concepts we cover in that corresponding lesson.
- Look at the sample PDFs from the lesson and those that are attached to this assignment. Some of them may be larger than your project, but they will give you ideas about how to proceed. Keep in mind that the intent with providing examples is not for you to simply copy and replace your own text. It's to give you a feel for how other people approach writing this genre.
- Remember your audience (**not** me as the reviewer and grader, but the real audience based on your assessment).

Workshops

Workshops (peer reviews) require students to review, edit, and provide feedback on written work from fellow students.

Workshops are graded *assignments*, but they do not carry as much weight as *papers* and *projects*. As such, the grade weight for all workshops could be less than these other assignments. For example, if major projects are collectively worth 30% of the final grade and papers are collectively worth 15% of the final grade, workshops could be collectively worth 10% of the final grade.

Description Document Workshop

This workshop has students review, edit, and provide feedback on fellow students' description document assignment.

Purpose: Have students review an assigned paper and offer feedback to one another to help the writer in the editing process. This workshop also provides students with an additional method to apply what they have been learning in the class.

Summary: Students exchange a solid draft (near final draft) of their assigned *description document paper* with two other students who review, edit, and provide feedback on the work. Each student reviews two papers and has their paper reviewed by two students. You can provide students with the checklist and guidelines below to help them as they review one another's description documents.

-  **Tip:** *Canvas* provides an automated system for assigning papers to students for review. The system automatically manages the process of sharing the papers with assigned reviewers and then collecting their edits/feedback.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Reviews and copyedits; grammar and punctuation; writing style; definitions and descriptions.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written a solid draft of their paper. Also verify the quality of the edits and feedback the student provided for their review. The review should be thoughtful and reflect an application of their knowledge of writing style, grammar and punctuation, and the description genre.

Editing Checklist for Description Document

Use the bullet points below as guidelines to help in editing each description document for this workshop (these are guidelines, so feel free to add other feedback not covered here). As you edit the document, don't simply say (for example) "Double check if this punctuation is correct." Instead, look up the answer yourself so you can tell the writer with authority. Remember, the workshop is not just about editing another writer's paper. It is also about reinforcing what you are learning about technical writing.

Writing

- Document has a clear title that briefly and accurately describes the topic.
- Content is an object description, mechanism description, or process description.
- Writer sticks to the one topic and does not meander.
- Writing is free of grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors.
- Content is easy to understand and informational.
- Wording is not extraneous but is instead concise.
- Writing is free of passive voice (unless used in an appropriate situation).

Design

- Document looks professional (not like an academic essay).
- Page design invites reader in and holds the reader's attention.
- Document has consistent use of headings (if any), text alignment, fonts, and any other elements.

Instruction Set Workshop

This workshop has students review, edit, and provide feedback on fellow students' instruction set assignment.

Purpose: Have students review an assigned paper and offer feedback to one another to help the writer in the editing process. This workshop also provides students with an additional method to apply what they have been learning in the class.

Summary: Students exchange a solid draft (near final draft) of their assigned *instruction set paper* with two other students who review, edit, and provide feedback on the work. Each student reviews two papers and has their paper reviewed by two students. You can provide students with the checklist and guidelines below to help them as they review one another's instruction sets.

-  **Tip:** *Canvas* provides an automated system for assigning papers to students for review. The system automatically manages the process of sharing the papers with assigned reviewers and then collecting their edits/feedback.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Reviews and copyedits; grammar and punctuation; writing style; instructions.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written a solid draft of their paper. Also verify the quality of the edits and feedback the student provided for their review. The review should be thoughtful and reflect an application of their knowledge of writing style, grammar and punctuation, and the instructions genre.

Editing Checklist for Instruction Set

Use the bullet points below as guidelines to help in editing each instruction set for this workshop (these are guidelines, so feel free to add other feedback not covered here). As you edit the document, don't simply say (for example) "Double check if this punctuation is correct." Instead, look up the answer yourself so you can tell the writer with authority. Remember, the workshop is not just about editing another writer's paper. It is also about reinforcing what you are learning about technical writing.

Writing

- Document has a clear title that briefly and accurately describes the topic.
- Document contains at least one conceptual topic (informational section) that is clearly separate from the procedures and provides a clear background of the topic the procedures address.
- Document contains three or four procedural topics (sections with steps) with headings that clearly identify the procedure.
- Writing is free of grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors.
- Content is easy to understand and informational.
- Wording is not extraneous but is instead concise.
- Writing is free of passive voice (unless used in an appropriate situation).

Procedures

- Steps are introduced with clear stem sentences. A brief introductory sentence or two are also acceptable, but they should be followed by a stem sentence that introduces the steps.
- Steps are ordered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3), and each set of steps (each procedural section) starts with the number 1.
- Sub-steps are ordered with lowercase letters (a, b, c), and each set of sub-steps starts with the letter a.
- Steps use the imperative mood (direct, specific commands that typically begin with a verb).
- One procedure contains no more than 7 (± 2) steps.
- If needed, the procedure tells the reader how they will know if they are successful.

Design

- Document looks professional (not like an academic essay).
- Page design invites reader in and holds the reader's attention.

- Document has consistent use of headings (if any), text alignment, fonts, and any other elements.

White Paper Workshop

This workshop has students review, edit, and provide feedback on fellow students' white paper assignment.

Purpose: Have students review an assigned paper and offer feedback to one another to help the writer in the editing process. This workshop also provides students with an additional method to apply what they have been learning in the class.

Summary: Students exchange a solid draft (near final draft) of their assigned *white paper project* with two other students who review, edit, and provide feedback on the work. Each student reviews two papers and has their paper reviewed by two students. You can provide students with the checklist and guidelines below to help them as they review one another's white papers.

- **Tip:** *Canvas* provides an automated system for assigning papers to students for review. The system automatically manages the process of sharing the papers with assigned reviewers and then collecting their edits/feedback.

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Reviews and copy edits; grammar and punctuation; writing style; white papers.

Grading Guidelines: Ensure the student has written a solid draft of their paper. Also verify the quality of the edits and feedback the student provided for their review. The review should be thoughtful and reflect an application of their knowledge of writing style, grammar and punctuation, and the white paper genre.

Editing Checklist for White Paper

Use the bullet points below as guidelines to help in editing each white paper for this workshop (these are guidelines, so feel free to add other feedback not covered here). As you edit the document, don't simply say (for example) "Double check if this punctuation is correct." Instead, look up the answer yourself so you can tell the writer with authority. Remember, the workshop is not just about editing another writer's paper. It is also about reinforcing what you are learning about technical writing.

Writing

- Document has a clear title that briefly and accurately describes the topic.
- Writing is free of grammatical, punctuation, spelling, and typographical errors.
- Content is easy to understand.
- Wording is not extraneous but is instead concise.
- Writing is free of passive voice (unless used in an appropriate situation).

White Paper Characteristics

- Beginning sets up the topic the white paper discusses.
- Main content is informative and/or educational.
- Narrative subtly persuades you toward an action (even if that action is simply to consider an idea).

Design

- Document looks professional (not like an academic essay).
- Page design invites reader in and holds the reader's attention.
- Document has consistent use of headings (if any), text alignment, fonts, and any other elements.
- Document contains professional illustrations, charts, and/or tables that support the narrative.

Oral Presentations

Oral presentations require students to present the highlights of their work from select projects. Because this course is online, oral presentations are usually in video or a similar digital format.

Presentations are graded *assignments*, but they do not carry as much weight as *papers* and *projects*. As such, the grade weight for presentations could be less than these other assignments. For example, if major projects are collectively worth 30% of the final grade and papers are collectively worth 15% of the final grade, you could require one oral presentation that is worth 10% of the final grade.

White Paper Presentation

This oral presentation has students prepare a video or other digital medium to deliver a presentation on the central topic of their white paper project.

Purpose: Have students demonstrate what they have learned about presenting information orally by digitally recording and posting a video or similar digital presentation for all students to view.

Summary: Students must create and post a digitally recorded presentation in which they discuss the concepts from their *white paper project* and attempt to persuade the audience toward an action related to the topic. Depending on the content available in the *textbook* (for example, the Mike Markel textbook does not cover how to generate digital media in his content on oral presentations), you may have to provide a more detailed assignment description for students. To help students understand the assignment's expectations, you should have one or more examples of a recorded presentation posted with the assignment page (the example assignment description below assumes you have posted examples).

Corresponding Lesson Topics: Oral presentations, white papers; online content.

Grading Guidelines: The presentation should be professional in both format and tone and should both teach the audience about the subject matter in the student's white paper project. The digital recording must be functional and available on the Internet for other students to view.

Description for Students

Create a digitally recorded presentation in which you discuss the concepts from your white paper project, and post it to YouTube, Vimeo, or similar website to share with the class (where you host it is up to you as long as the rest of the class can access it).

Requirements

- Post the final presentation here, as you do for all assignments.
- As mentioned above, you must also post the presentation to YouTube, Vimeo, or similar website to share with the class. Where you host it is up to you as long as the rest of the class can access it.
- The topic will be the same topic from your white paper project.

Presentation Guidelines

- The presentation should be approximately 3 to 5 minutes.
- Explain the main concepts from your white paper, and attempt to persuade the audience toward an action related to the topic. This is the same information from your white paper project.
- The presentation can be a combination of desktop slides with shots of you as the presenter, just the slides with your narration, or just you showing the slides on a background or other forms of visuals. How you present the content is really up to you.
- You should not just read directly from the slides. Instead, be engaging and provide additional information. Your objective is to teach your audience about the topic and persuade them toward your idea, so you need to sound and look interested and interesting.
- Speak clearly and confidently, as if you were speaking to a live audience.
- Have a healthy balance of text and visuals (images and video).

- Don't forget standard writing concepts when writing text to include in the presentation. Your presentation must use correct grammar and be free of typographical errors.

Technical Considerations

- **For Mac users:** You can use QuickTime, which comes with your computer. Most mobile phones contain appropriate software as well.
- **For Windows users:** There is a camera app for Windows 8. You can also use your phone.
- If you use your phone to record video, use a tripod to avoid shaky videos, and test the sound to be sure the audience can hear you.
- You can edit your video in a tool like iMovie or Windows Movie Maker. For PC users, Blueberry FlashBack Express is a free demo/tutorial software that you can download at http://www.bbsoftware.co.uk/BBFlashBack_FreePlayer.aspx.
- Camtasia is not free; however, students can get it at a discount price at Software Distribution. You can also use Camtasia in InnovationSpace (1140 Torgersen) for free.
- If you want to use screen captures, Jing is a free option. You can download it at <http://www.techsmith.com/jing.html>.
- Upload your video to YouTube or Vimeo and post your link in the appropriate discussions topic in Canvas.

Chapter

8

Semester Schedules

Topics:

- *Regular Semester*
- *Summer Session*
- *Winter Session*
- *Holidays*
- *Lesson-Posting Times*

Schedules for this course follow a lesson-based system in which one lesson provides one week's instruction in a regular (fall and spring) semester. Thus, the course contains 15 lessons.

The frequency with which lessons are delivered depends on the semester type: regular semester, summer session, or winter session.

Regular Semester

Regular semesters are the standard spring and fall semesters, which last 15 weeks.

For regular semesters, one lesson is posted each of the 15 weeks. Refer to the [*regular semester quick reference*](#) to see a recommended model for rolling out lessons during a regular semester.

Summer Session

There are two summer sessions, each lasting approximately six weeks.

Summer sessions require lessons to be posted multiple times per week. This means using a predictable pattern for the student, such as every Tuesday and Thursday or every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.

The Monday, Wednesday, and Friday model works well for summer sessions because it allows for skipping a lesson on summer holidays such as Memorial Day without risking falling behind in the class.

Refer to the [*summer session quick reference*](#) to see a recommended model for rolling out lessons during a summer session.

Winter Session

The winter session is an accelerated three-week period between the fall and spring semesters.

To meet the demands of the accelerated winter session, you must post one lesson on each of 15 weekdays. Depending on which day the [*New Year's holiday*](#) falls, you may have to post a lesson on a weekend day to make up for not posting on New Year's Day.

This session is the most difficult to manage because you must make adjustments to project deadlines to give students adequate time to write and edit their work. For example, in a regular semester, you can assign a project in one lesson that is due the next lesson because the student has a full week to work on the project. However, in the winter session, the next lesson is only one day later. Therefore, you must make such adjustments as extending the lesson in which the project is due or assigning the project on a Friday, giving the student the weekend to complete it.

Refer to the [*winter session quick reference*](#) to see a recommended model for rolling out lessons during the winter session.

Holidays

University holidays affect how you might post lessons during the semester.

Regular Semester Holidays

University holidays during the [*regular semester*](#) often fall on a Monday, making Tuesday the better day for posting weekly lessons. In general, if any lesson-posting day falls on a university holiday, the lesson should be posted the next day the university is open. No lessons are posted for week-long breaks such as Thanksgiving and spring break. Snow days are **not** university holidays, and lessons therefore should be posted even if the university closes for snow or other reasons.

Summer Session Holidays

Typically, the only holiday to manage during the [*summer sessions*](#) is Memorial Day, which means simply not posting a lesson on that day. Fourth of July is usually between the two summer sessions and therefore does not pose a scheduling issue.

Winter Session Holidays

The *winter session* begins after Christmas, leaving New Year's Eve and New Year's Day as the only holidays to consider when posting lessons. Because of the condensed time period in the winter session, you should post a lesson on New Year's Eve (assuming it falls on a weekday), allowing you the flexibility to skip a posting on New Year's Day (recommended). If New Year's Day falls on a weekday and you skip posting a lesson, you may have to post a lesson on a Saturday to fit all 15 lessons into the semester.

Lesson-Posting Times

While you are free to post lessons on any day and time you find appropriate for your class, keep in mind that students in an online course could be located in different time zones around the world, especially during summer and winter sessions when students return home.

Because of the potential variation of time zones among students, lesson-posting times are an important consideration, particularly for deadlines. Timeframes that work for students in the continental United States are 1:00 or 2:00 PM ET, which keep lesson postings and deadlines not too early for students in earlier time zones and not too late for students in later time zones.

Chapter

9

Quick Reference Schedules

Topics:

- *Regular Semester*
- *Summer Session*
- *Winter Session*

Quick references provide a brief one or two-page schedule for students to quickly see time-related issues such as lesson postings, quiz deadlines, and assignment postings.

Because there is no structured class schedule to help students remain organized in a virtual classroom, the quick reference helps them remain organized and pay attention to deadlines without having to constantly look through the *comprehensive syllabus*.

Quick references are based on *semester* type (regular semester, summer session, and winter session). These semester types are similar in terms of what topics and deadlines are assigned for each lesson; however, they differ in how deadlines are assigned based on number of weeks (and therefore lesson frequency) in the course. For example, in a regular semester course it is easy to assign students a major deadline for the following lesson because that lesson is scheduled for the following week. However, the same deadline would be more difficult in a winter session because the next lesson could be the very next day.

Regular Semester

The regular semester quick reference is based on a 15-week schedule, with lessons posted once per week.

Using Tuesday as the lesson-posting day works well during *regular semesters* because *university holidays* often fall on a Monday. Also, a Tuesday lesson-posting day allows students one extra day after the weekend to finish any work that might be due by the next lesson.



Note: The reading and quiz assignments in the example quick reference below are based on the *textbook Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* by Mike Markel. Also, one week is deliberately excluded from this example to represent a one-week university closure for spring break.

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
1	Tue 1/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Writing in the workplace • Correspondence • Start grammar and punctuation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 1: Introduction to Technical Communication • Readings on writing in the workplace from Canvas (no quiz) • Ch 9: Writing Correspondence • Appendix B: Editing and Proofreading Your Documents (no quiz) 		
2	Tue 1/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meet your workgroup • Collaboration and social media • Definitions and descriptions • Reviews and copyedits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 3: Writing Collaboratively and Using Social Media • Ch 14: Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 358–374) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo with self-introduction • Business “claim” letter 	
3	Tue 2/2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Description document • Ethics and legal considerations • Writing style • Finish grammar and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 2: Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations • Ch 6: Writing for Your Readers • Appendix A: Documenting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended definition (group) • Punctuation and grammar worksheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Workshop draft of description document

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
		punctuation review	Your Sources (no quiz) • Last chance: All readings and quizzes to date		
4	Tue 2/9	• Graphical aids • Instructions and safety information	• Grammar tests (1 and 2) • Ch 8: Creating Graphics • Ch: 14 Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 375–386)		• Paper 1: Feedback from description document workshop
5	Tue 2/16	• Page layout and visual design	• Ch 7: Designing Documents and Web Sites	• Instructions	• Paper 1: Final draft of description document
6	Tue 2/23	• Workshop: Instruction set • Proposals	• Ch 11: Writing Proposals		• Paper 2: Workshop draft of instruction set
7	Tue 3/1	• Recommendation reports • Project 1 group brainstorm	Ch 13: Writing Recommendation Reports	• Proposal summary	• Paper 2: Feedback from instruction set workshop
8	Tue 3/15	• Audience and purpose • Research	• Ch 4: Analyzing Your Audience and Purpose • Ch 5: Researching Your Subject	• Letter of project 1 understanding (group)	• Paper 2: Final draft of instruction set
9	Tue 3/22	• Online content • Project 1 group work	• Online content tutorials from Canvas (no quiz)	• Audience assessment (group) • Research sources (group)	

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
10	Tue 3/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job-application materials • Project 1 group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 10: Writing Job-Application Materials 		
11	Tue 4/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White paper readings from Canvas (no quiz) 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 1 (group): Final draft of formal report (no workshop)
12	Tue 4/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making oral presentations • Localization and translation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 15: Making Oral Presentations (no quiz) • Localization and translation readings from Canvas (no quiz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of Project 2 understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 3: Final draft of job-application cover letter (no workshop)
13	Tue 4/19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: White paper 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Workshop draft of white paper
14	Tue 4/26	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 12: Writing Informational Reports 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Feedback from white paper workshop
15	Tue 5/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap-up 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Final draft of white paper and presentation

Summer Session

The summer session quick reference is based on a 6-week schedule, with lessons (15 total) posted multiple times per week.

Using the Monday, Wednesday, and Friday model works well during *summer sessions* because it allows for skipping a lesson on *summer holidays* such as Memorial Day without risking falling behind in the class. It also allows for posting only two lessons the first week as students get settled.



Note: The reading and quiz assignments in the example quick reference below are based on the *textbook Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* by Mike Markel. Also, two weekdays are deliberately

excluded from this example to represent a 2-lesson first week and a Monday university closure for Memorial Day.

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
1	Mon 5/23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Writing in the workplace • Correspondence • Start grammar and punctuation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 1: Introduction to Technical Communication • Readings on writing in the workplace from Canvas (no quiz) • Ch 9: Writing Correspondence • Appendix B: Editing and Proofreading Your Documents (no quiz) 		
2	Fri 5/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing style • Definitions and descriptions • Reviews and copyedits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 6: Writing for Your Readers • Ch 14: Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 358–374) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo with self-introduction • Business “claim” letter 	
3	Wed 6/1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Description document • Ethics and legal considerations • Finish grammar and punctuation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 2: Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations • Appendix A: Documenting Your Sources (no quiz) • Last chance: All readings and quizzes to date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended definition (group) • Punctuation and grammar worksheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Workshop draft of description document
4	Fri 6/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphical aids • Instructions and safety information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar tests (1 and 2) • Ch 8: Creating Graphics 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Feedback from description document workshop

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch: 14 Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 375–386) 		
5	Mon 6/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page layout and visual design Recommendation reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch 7: Designing Documents and Web Sites Ch 13: Writing Recommendation Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 1: Final draft of description document
6	Wed 6/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workshop: Instruction set Proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch 11: Writing Proposals 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 2: Workshop draft of instruction set
7	Fri 6/10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration and social media Meet your workgroup Project 1 group brainstorm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch 3: Writing Collaboratively and Using Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proposal summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 2: Feedback from instruction set workshop
8	Mon 6/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Project 1 group decision Audience and purpose Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch 4: Analyzing Your Audience and Purpose Ch 5: Researching Your Subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Letter of project 1 understanding (group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Paper 2: Final draft of instruction set
9	Wed 6/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online content Project 1 group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Online content tutorials from Canvas (no quiz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Audience assessment (group) Research sources (group) 	
10	Fri 6/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Job-application materials Project 1 group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ch 10: Writing Job-Application Materials 		

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
11	Mon 6/20	• White papers	• White paper readings from Canvas (no quiz)		• Project 1 (group): Final draft of formal report (no workshop)
12	Wed 6/22	• Making oral presentations • Localization and translation	• Ch 15: Making Oral Presentations (no quiz) • Localization and translation readings from Canvas (no quiz)	• Letter of Project 2 understanding	• Paper 3: Final draft of job-application cover letter (no workshop)
13	Fri 6/24	• Workshop: White paper			• Project 2: Workshop draft of white paper
14	Mon 6/27	• Informational reports	• Ch 12: Writing Informational Reports		• Project 2: Feedback from white paper workshop
15	Wed 6/29	• Wrap-up • Presentation submission			• Project 2: Final draft of white paper and presentation

Winter Session

The winter session quick reference is based on a 3-week schedule, with lessons (15 total) posted 5 times per week (primarily on each weekday).

To meet the demands of the accelerated *winter session*, you must post one lesson on each of 15 weekdays during the winter session. Depending on which day the *New Year's holiday* falls, you may have to post a lesson on a weekend day to make up for not posting on New Year's Day.

The winter session is challenging for both instructors and students to manage because, despite the condensed schedule, students still need adequate time to write and edit their work. Having a paper be due by "the next lesson" is often not possible in the winter session because it gives only one day to complete the assignment.



Note: The reading and quiz assignments in the example quick reference below are based on the *textbook Practical Strategies for Technical Communication* by Mike Markel. Also, one lesson is deliberately moved from a weekday to a Sunday in this example to represent a one-day university closure for New Year's Day.

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
1	Sun 12/27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Writing in the workplace • Correspondence • Start grammar and punctuation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 1: Introduction to Technical Communication • Readings on writing in the workplace from Canvas (no quiz) • Ch 9: Writing Correspondence • Appendix B: Editing and Proofreading Your Documents (no quiz) 		
2	Mon 12/28	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing style • Definitions and descriptions • Reviews and copyedits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 6: Writing for Your Readers • Ch 14: Writing Definitions, Descriptions, and Instructions (pp. 358–374) 		
3	Tue 12/29	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Description document • Ethics and legal considerations • Finish grammar and punctuation review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 2: Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations • Appendix A: Documenting Your Sources (no quiz) • Last chance: All readings and quizzes to date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memo with self-introduction • Business “claim” letter 	
4	Wed 12/30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graphical aids • Instructions and safety information 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grammar tests (1 and 2) • Ch 8: Creating Graphics • Ch 14 Writing Definitions, Descriptions, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extended definition (group) • Punctuation and grammar worksheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Workshop draft of description document

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
			and Instructions (pp. 375–386)		
5	Thu 12/31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Page layout and visual design • Recommendation reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 7: Designing Documents and Web Sites • Ch 13: Writing Recommendation Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Feedback from description document workshop
6	Mon 1/4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: Instruction set • Proposals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 11: Writing Proposals 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 1: Final draft of description document
7	Tue 1/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaboration and social media • Meet your workgroup • Project 1 group brainstorm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 3: Writing Collaboratively and Using Social Media 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal summary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 2: Workshop draft of instruction set
8	Wed 1/6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 1 group decision • Audience and purpose • Research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 4: Analyzing Your Audience and Purpose • Ch 5: Researching Your Subject 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of project 1 understanding (group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 2: Feedback from instruction set workshop
9	Thu 1/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online content • Project 1 group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Online content tutorials from Canvas (no quiz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience assessment (group) • Research sources (group) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 2: Final draft of instruction set
10	Fri 1/8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job-application materials • Project 1 group work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 10: Writing Job-Application Materials 		
11	Mon 1/11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White papers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • White paper readings from 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 1 (group): Final draft

Lesson	Day	Lesson Topics	Reading/Quiz/ Test Due	Exercise Due	Paper/Project Work Due
			Canvas (no quiz)		of formal report (no workshop)
12	Tue 1/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making oral presentations • Localization and translation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 15: Making Oral Presentations (no quiz) • Localization and translation readings from Canvas (no quiz) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letter of Project 2 understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paper 3: Final draft of job-application cover letter (no workshop)
13	Wed 1/13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop: White paper 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Workshop draft of white paper
14	Thu 1/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Informational reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ch 12: Writing Informational Reports 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Feedback from white paper workshop
15	Fri 1/15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrap-up • Presentation submission 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project 2: Final draft of white paper and presentation

Chapter

10

Syllabus Components

Topics:

- *Definition*
- *Instructor Information*
- *Textbooks and Resources*
- *Overview*
- *Objectives*
- *Student Perceptions of Teaching*
- *Grading*
- *Writing Assignment Deadlines*
- *Policies*
- *Disability Accommodations*
- *Schedule*

A comprehensive syllabus should include components that clearly explain to students the policies, deliverables, and schedule for the course.

The sections provided here describe specific sections you should consider including in your course syllabus. You can use them to create your course syllabus, or modify them to meet specific needs for your course. These sections are the basis for the sections in this handbook's *example syllabus*.



Important: While you are free to create your syllabus as you deem appropriate for your course, Virginia Tech and the Department of English require you to include the following sections with specific content requirements:

- *Principles of community*
- *Use of written work by the Department of English*
- *Academic honesty*
- *Disability accommodations*

Definition

The syllabus should begin with a brief definition of the course and the specific section so students can quickly identify the document and corresponding class.

The relevant information for the definition includes:

- Document title
- Purpose
- Semester

Example

ENGL 3764: Technical Writing Syllabus

This document contains the complete **ENGL 3764: Technical Writing** (virtual campus) syllabus for the **Spring 2016** semester.

Instructor Information

Students need instructor information to know who the instructor is and how to reach them.

The relevant instructor information includes:

- Instructor name
- Office location and contact information
- Office hours (which you can facilitate through a *chat tool* such as Skype)

Example

Instructor Information

Instructor: John Doe

Office: 323 Shanks Hall

Office Hours: Tue 1:00 PM–3:00 PM via Skype (handle: *john-doe*)

Email: john-doe@vt.edu (preferred method of contact)

Phone: (540) 123-1000

Textbooks and Resources

Students need to know the textbooks and resources that are required for the course and those that are optional.

The relevant information for textbooks and resources includes:

- Required textbook(s)
- Resources such as websites, applications, and access to the learning management system
- Optional books

Example

Textbook and Resources

This course has a required textbook and several required resources.

[Required Textbook](#)

Markel, M. (2013). *Practical strategies for technical communication*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN-13: 978-1457609404.

Required Resources

There are additional resources required for this course:

- This course is conducted through the Canvas learning management system, which you can access at: <https://canvas.vt.edu>.
- Some lessons are conducted through interactive multimedia modules that require Adobe Flash to be installed on your computer. You will access these modules through Canvas, which should automatically verify that you have the appropriate version of Flash installed.
- Some classes require you to view tutorials on Lynda.com. Lynda.com is available for free to Virginia Tech students through <http://www.olcs.lt.vt.edu/lynda/>.
- To ensure your technical documents are formatted professionally, you must have a professional word-processing tool. Since Microsoft Word is the most common tool used in professional environments, I recommend it as your primary tool for this course. Alternatively, you might choose to use Google Docs, which provides content formatting features and allows for online collaboration with others. You will be required to submit most of your work as **PDF** files, which both tools can manage for you.

Optional Book

In addition to the required textbook and resources, I also recommend the latest copy of your favorite grammar book or similar writing reference, such as *A Writer's Reference* by Diana Hacker.

Overview

The syllabus should provide an expanded description of the course.

The relevant information for the overview includes:

- The instructor's own description of the course, which may be the same as the *course registration description*



Note: If the class is conducted during an accelerated *summer* or *winter* session, the overview should include a *subsection with a statement about the intensity of an accelerated writing course*

Example

Overview

Technical writing encompasses a wide range of writing genres including reports, proposals, correspondence (memos and letters), user documentation (instructions), and many others. The distribution media for these documents are equally vast including print, email, web (including different device types), and more.

This course will introduce you to these genres and distribution media and give you the opportunity to explore and write documents of different genres in a constructive environment. You will learn how to assess your audience, plan technical writing projects, research subject matter, structure and organize content, write document drafts, edit existing content, and prepare final documents.

Classes will include a mixture of lecture, examples, workshops, and exercises to help you understand the craft and allow you to practice your newly acquired technical writing skills. Smaller exercises will help you build specific skills that you can directly apply to your larger writing projects, which will include writing technical documents of different genres.

This is a writing-intensive course that will require you to write every day, but you will leave the course feeling confident in your writing skills and in your ability to write within technical and professional environments.

Accelerated Session Statement

If the class is conducted during an accelerated summer or winter session, the syllabus should include a statement about the intensity of an accelerated writing course.

The relevant information for an accelerated *summer* or *winter* session should be included as a subsection to the *overview section* and should include:

- A statement about the intensity of an accelerated writing course
- The time they should be prepared to allocate toward taking such a class

Example (Summer Session)

Special Note About the Summer Session

The summer session version of this course is intense. To uphold the integrity of the Technical Writing course and ensure students receive the instruction they deserve, we cover the same content and have the same assignments as the courses conducted during standard semesters. This condensed scheduling means we cover a 15-week semester in only 6 short weeks—we have two to three class lessons per week, and each of those class lessons represents over two weeks of a standard semester. You must ensure you have a large amount of time every day not only for the classwork but also for the additional hours of homework, tests, quizzes, and assignments. Missing a class lesson is simply not an option to be successful in this version of the course. This statement is not intended to scare you away from the course but to prepare you for its intense workload.

Example (Winter Session)

Special Note About the Winter Session

The winter session version of this course is intense. To uphold the integrity of the Technical Writing course and ensure students receive the instruction they deserve, we cover the same content and have the same assignments as the courses conducted during standard semesters. Each class in the winter session represents at least one week of a standard semester, and we have a class every weekday of the session. This condensed scheduling means that months of work are covered in a few short weeks. You must ensure you have a large amount of time every day not only for the three plus hours of classwork, but also for the additional hours of homework, quizzes, workshops, and assignments. Missing a class lesson is simply not an option to be successful in this version of the course. This statement is not intended to scare you away from the course but to prepare you for its intense workload.

Objectives

The syllabus should provide the learning objectives for the course.

The relevant information for the overview includes:

- The instructor's learning objectives, which should reflect the *objectives from the formal course description*

Example

Objectives

At the end of this course, you will be able to:

- Analyze the rhetorical situation, including the problem that creates the need for written communication.
- Analyze the audience or users of the written communication, including knowledge, experience, and work environment; consider needs of global audiences and people with disabilities.

- Conduct research appropriate to workplace problem solving, such as literature review, evaluation of online resources, interview, and site inspection.
- Interpret research findings with understanding of ethical and human implications.
- Select and apply appropriate ways of ordering information for specific effects, including hierarchical, chronological, and spatial arrangements.
- Use conventions of various workplace genres, such as proposals, instructions, correspondence, reports, and slide decks, with understanding of how the genre conventions can be used as heuristics and as principles of arrangement.
- Design visual representations of quantitative information to enhance accurate interpretation.
- Manage writing projects by planning and completing tasks according to a schedule.
- Collaborate with classmates in planning, researching, writing, revising, and presenting information.
- Write accurately and clearly.
- Apply principles of effective visual design for print and electronic presentation.
- Present technical information orally.

Student Perceptions of Teaching

Students should know they will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the class and instructor when the semester comes to an end.

The relevant information for the student feedback discussion includes:

- A statement that students will have the opportunity to provide an evaluation and that they should keep track of the things that work or don't work throughout the semester
- A statement that evaluations are performed through Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT)
- A reminder that students should also feel comfortable approaching the instructor about any concerns throughout the semester instead of waiting for SPOT evaluations

Example

Student Perceptions of Teaching

Though we will conduct course evaluations at the end of the course, I would like to start discussing Student Perceptions of Teaching (SPOT) now. My goal is to continually improve this course, including myself as its teacher. The only way I can be successful with this goal is to receive honest feedback from you, the student taking this course. When we near the end of the course, I will remind you about SPOT and provide more information for completing evaluations. In the meantime, I encourage you to make note of any ideas for improvement as you think of them over the duration of the course. Likewise, if you think something is particularly effective, it is worth noting so that I make sure I keep it in future curricula. Of course, you should also feel free to bring suggestions directly to me during the semester.

Grading

The syllabus should explain how grading works for the required course deliverables.

The relevant information for grading includes:

- A breakdown of deliverables for the course
- How grading applies to each of the deliverables

Example**Grading**

You can track your grades at any time in Scholar. Grading for this course is based on the following components:

- **Projects** (2 of them) account for **30%** of your grade (**15%** each).
- **Papers** (3 of them) account for **15%** of your grade (**5%** each).
- One **oral presentation** (recorded and delivered digitally) accounts for **10%** of your grade.
- **Tests** (2 of them on punctuation and grammar) account for **10%** (total) of your grade.
- **Quizzes** (15 of them, open book) account for **15%** of your grade (**1%** each).
- **Exercises** (approximately 8–12 of them), **professionalism**, and **participation** account for **10%** of your grade.
- **Virtual workshops** (3 of them) account for **10%** of your grade.

As you can see, no one component alone can give you a passing grade. All components are important and carry enough weight to affect your final grade. Your **final grade** is the **sum total of the point scores** calculated from the grades of all components.

Qualitative Grading

Because written papers are qualitative in nature, some instructors prefer to grade them based on a letter grade (as opposed to a quantitative number). If you want to have content that explains how qualitative grading may work with regard to written deliverables, you can include such a section.

You could include the following information as a subsection to the *grading section* to explain quantitative grading as it may apply to graded deliverables:

- A statement that qualitative grading is applied to written work
- A matrix that maps letter grades to numeric grades

Example**Qualitative Grading**

Because projects and papers are qualitative, I grade them using **letter grades**. However, because the final grade is based on a quantitative score, I must convert the letter grade to an equivalent numeric grade to use in each component's scoring formula. The following table shows the equivalent numeric grade I use for each letter grade:

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
A+	100
A	96
A-	92
B+	89
B	86
B-	82
C+	79
C	76
C-	72
D+	69

Letter Grade	Numeric Grade
D	66
D-	62
F	0

Component Grade Calculations

The syllabus should explain grading and policies for each deliverable that students must submit.

Under the *grading section*, you should have **one subsection for each** of the graded deliverables. The information for each of these sections might include:

- Description of the corresponding deliverable(s)
- Explanation of the grading formula used to calculate the grade
- Grade weight against the final grade
- Explanation of grading criteria and due dates
- Any policies on late submissions
- Example of how grading works

Example

Projects

Projects are the most extensive assignments, requiring you to work thoroughly through the entire technical writing process. There are **two** projects:

- A formal report (group project), which is a **proposal or recommendation report** (your choice) on a subject your group selects
- A **white paper** on a subject you know well

I will provide you with specific information for completing these projects in Canvas.

Scoring Methodology and Policies

Scoring Formula	Point Score = (Numeric Grade of Project) X (Project Grade Weight)
Grade Weight	30% total (15% for each project)
Grading Criteria	Grading is based on the total overall reading experience of the project, considering the factors discussed in the <i>Grading and Feedback</i> section.
Due Dates	Due dates for projects are specified in the <i>Writing Assignment Deadlines</i> section and are posted with the corresponding project assignment in Canvas. You will upload projects to the corresponding Canvas assignment, which is programmed to stop allowing uploads at the exact deadline.
Late Submissions	Late submissions are not accepted. You must submit each project by its deadline to receive a passing grade for that project. Any late project (even if only by a minute) automatically receives a 0 for a grade.
Grading Example	John's group earns an A- on the formal report. An A- is equivalent to 92 , and the formal report project accounts for 15% of the final grade. Therefore, John's point score for this project is 13.8 ($92 \text{ grade} \times .15 \text{ weight}$). Then John earns a B+ on the white paper. A B+ is equivalent to 89 , and the white paper project accounts for 15% of the final grade. Therefore, John's point score for the final project is 13.4 ($89 \text{ grade} \times .15 \text{ weight}$, rounded). The total point score for projects is 27.2 (the sum of

both point scores). This score is the number that gets added to the total point score for John's final grade.

Final Grade Calculation

The syllabus should explain how calculation of the final grade of all deliverables works.

The relevant information for final grade calculation should be included as a subsection to the *grading section* and should include:

- Scoring formula and any numerical conversions
- Policies on rounding of grades
- Example of how final grade calculation works

Example

Final Grade Calculation

Your final grade is the sum of all point scores for all components, converted to a letter grade.

Scoring Methodology and Policies

Scoring Formula	Final Point Score* = Sum of All Component Scores <i>*The final score gets converted to a letter grade.</i>																											
Score-to-Grade Conversion	The final score is converted to a letter grade, as follows:																											
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Total Score</th><th>Grade</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>93-100</td><td>A</td></tr> <tr><td>90-92</td><td>A-</td></tr> <tr><td>87-89</td><td>B+</td></tr> <tr><td>83-86</td><td>B</td></tr> <tr><td>80-82</td><td>B-</td></tr> <tr><td>77-79</td><td>C+</td></tr> <tr><td>73-76</td><td>C</td></tr> <tr><td>70-72</td><td>C-</td></tr> <tr><td>67-69</td><td>D+</td></tr> <tr><td>63-66</td><td>D</td></tr> <tr><td>60-62</td><td>D-</td></tr> <tr><td>0-59</td><td>F</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Total Score	Grade	93-100	A	90-92	A-	87-89	B+	83-86	B	80-82	B-	77-79	C+	73-76	C	70-72	C-	67-69	D+	63-66	D	60-62	D-	0-59	F
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0-59	F																											
Rounding	Decimals for the final point score get rounded to the next whole number, where .5 and above rounds up and below .5 rounds down. For example, if your final point score were 89.4, you would receive an 89 (B+ letter grade). If your final point score were 89.5, you would receive a 90 (A- letter grade). I never round a whole number final point score up, regardless of how close to the cusp it is. For example, I would not round an 89 (B+) up to a 90 (A-).																											

Example	<p>John earns the following point scores for each component:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Projects: 27.2 • Papers: 12.7 • Oral presentation: 8.2 • Tests: 8.2 • Quizzes: 11.3 • Workshops: 6.7 • Exercises and participation: 8.0 <p>The sum total of these point scores is 82.3, which gets rounded down to a whole number of 82. This numeric grade corresponds to a B- letter grade, which would be John's final grade for the course.</p>
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Writing Assignment Deadlines

Although instructors likely have deadlines posted in a semester calendar, it is useful for students to see deadlines as they apply to their graded papers and projects.

The relevant information for deadlines depends on the specific assignments you have in your class but should generally include:

- The assignment name
- The date and time each draft of the assignment is due
- A reminder that the dates are for graded assignment deadlines only and that there are also other deadlines for other assignments such as reading, quizzes, and tests

Example	<p>Writing Assignment Deadlines</p> <p>The following table provides a chronological listing of when writing assignments for projects, papers, and presentations are due:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="background-color: #f2e0d2;">Assignment</th><th style="background-color: #f2e0d2;">Deadline (Eastern Time Zone)</th><th style="background-color: #f2e0d2;">Draft</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Paper 1: Description Document</td><td>Wednesday 6/1/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Workshop</td></tr> <tr> <td>Friday 6/3/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Return Workshop Reviews</td></tr> <tr> <td>Monday 6/6/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final</td></tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Paper 2: Instruction Set</td><td>Wednesday 6/8/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Workshop</td></tr> <tr> <td>Friday 6/10/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Return Workshop Reviews</td></tr> <tr> <td>Monday 6/13/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final</td></tr> <tr> <td>Project 1: Formal Report (Group)</td><td>Monday 6/20/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final (No Workshop)</td></tr> <tr> <td>Paper 3: Cover Letter</td><td>Wednesday 6/22/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final (No Workshop)</td></tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Project 2: White Paper</td><td>Friday 6/24/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Workshop</td></tr> <tr> <td>Monday 6/27/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Return Workshop Reviews</td></tr> <tr> <td>Thursday 6/30/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final</td></tr> <tr> <td>Oral Presentation</td><td>Thursday 6/30/16 at 2:00 PM</td><td>Final</td></tr> </tbody> </table>	Assignment	Deadline (Eastern Time Zone)	Draft	Paper 1: Description Document	Wednesday 6/1/16 at 2:00 PM	Workshop	Friday 6/3/16 at 2:00 PM	Return Workshop Reviews	Monday 6/6/16 at 2:00 PM	Final	Paper 2: Instruction Set	Wednesday 6/8/16 at 2:00 PM	Workshop	Friday 6/10/16 at 2:00 PM	Return Workshop Reviews	Monday 6/13/16 at 2:00 PM	Final	Project 1: Formal Report (Group)	Monday 6/20/16 at 2:00 PM	Final (No Workshop)	Paper 3: Cover Letter	Wednesday 6/22/16 at 2:00 PM	Final (No Workshop)	Project 2: White Paper	Friday 6/24/16 at 2:00 PM	Workshop	Monday 6/27/16 at 2:00 PM	Return Workshop Reviews	Thursday 6/30/16 at 2:00 PM	Final	Oral Presentation	Thursday 6/30/16 at 2:00 PM	Final
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This table does **not** include the deadlines for all work that you must complete. Deadlines for reading assignments, quizzes, and tests are listed in the Schedule section. All deadlines are also available in Canvas.

Policies

The syllabus should contain all of the policies for the class.

The relevant information for policies includes:

- A high-level section overview that leads into all of the policy subsections
- Multiple subsections, one subsection for each policy

Example

Policies

The only way for me to manage this course fairly and objectively is to follow the policies of this syllabus consistently and unequivocally for every student, regardless of circumstances.

Changes to the Syllabus

The syllabus should explain policies for updating the syllabus during the semester.

The relevant information for policies on changing the syllabus could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and should include:

- A statement that you have the right to update the syllabus as needed

Example

Changes to this Syllabus

I reserve the right to make modifications to any part of this syllabus throughout the course. When a change to the syllabus is necessary, I will post the updated syllabus and notify all students of the change as soon as possible. Typically, the schedule is the only section that might require modification.

Attendance

The syllabus should explain the concept of attendance as it relates to your class as an online course.

The relevant information for attendance could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and should include:

- A statement that explains the concept of attendance as it relates to your class as an online course

Example

Attendance

Because this course is in an asynchronous online format, there is no concept of attendance. You conduct your studies at your own time and pace (within the parameters of our deadlines). The lesson schedule and deadlines are posted well in advance of their actual dates. Therefore, you have time to complete work by all deadlines even if you are sick for a day or two.

Etiquette and Professionalism

The syllabus should explain expectations for behavior and involvement in the class.

The relevant information for policies on etiquette and professionalism could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and should include:

- A statement that explains your expectations with regard to involvement and treatment of other students

Example

Etiquette and Professionalism

I expect everyone to treat each other with courtesy, respect, and professionalism, especially when working in workshops, project groups, and exercise groups. If you have a disagreement with another person in your group, try to resolve it respectfully and professionally. If you cannot resolve the disagreement, then ask me to join the conversation, and I will help you resolve the issue. Your class etiquette and professionalism are reflected in your exercises and participation grade (discussed in the *Grading* section).

Principles of Community

Students must understand that Virginia Tech has principles of community to which they must adhere.

- ❗ **Important:** This is required content for your syllabus. The included example suffices for the content required in your syllabus.

The relevant information for the principles of community could be included as a subsection to the *etiquette and professionalism subsection* (in the *policies section*) and includes:

- A statement that the principles of community exist
- The website URL where students can read the principles of community

Example

Principles of Community

As practicing professionals and students, we will all adhere to the Virginia Tech Principles of Community, which you can find at diversity.vt.edu/principles-of-community/principles.html.

Assignments

The syllabus should explain all policies about the submission and grading of assignments.

The relevant information for assignment policies could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and should include:

- A brief statement of assignment types in the class
- Subsections that explain your policies about the submission and grading of assignments

Example

Assignments

In addition to reading assignments (discussed in the *Schedule* section), there are quizzes/tests, projects, papers, workshops, and exercises that you must submit for a grade or completion credit (discussed in the *Grading* section).

Format and Method for Submission

The syllabus should explain the required file formats for assignments and policies on how to take tests and quizzes.

The relevant information for policies on the format and method of assignment submissions could be included as a subsection to the *assignments subsection* (in the *policies section*) and includes:

- A statement that explains your policies on how to take tests and quizzes
- A statement that explains your policies for file submissions

Example**Format and Method for Submission**

You will take all quizzes and tests through Canvas. You must submit all projects, papers, and exercises as a **PDF document through Canvas** unless otherwise directed in class.

Deadlines

The syllabus should explain your policies on deadlines and the time zone for those deadlines in case students are in a different geographic location.

The relevant information for policies on assignment deadlines could be included as a subsection to the *assignments subsection* (in the *policies section*) and includes:

- A statement that explains your policies on deadlines for assignments
- The time zone you use for deadlines
- What to do if the *learning management system* is down, thus preventing assignment uploads

Example**Deadlines**

The *Writing Assignment Deadlines* section contains the date and time each writing assignment is due (including workshops). Deadlines for tests and quizzes are posted with each test/quiz in Canvas and are also listed with their corresponding assignment due dates in the *Schedule* section. Deadlines for exercises are due by the deadline posted within the corresponding exercise assignment in Canvas.

Canvas stops allowing assignment uploads at the deadline for the assignment. All deadline date and times are based on the **eastern time zone**. Do not wait until the last minute to submit your assignment, as you never know when a slow network connection or other problem might cause your submission to miss the deadline.

If you have a problem accessing Canvas, I will allow you to email the assignment to me. In such a case, I will use the time I receive your email to determine whether or not an assignment has met its deadline.

I strongly encourage you to submit your assignments early. Do not wait until the deadline.

Grading and Feedback

The syllabus should provide a rubric or a set of guidelines that otherwise explain the criteria for grading assignments.

The relevant information for policies on grading and feedback could be included as a subsection to the *assignments subsection* (in the *policies section*) and includes:

- A summary that highlights the primary characteristics you are looking for in students' writing
- How you will return grades and feedback for assignments
- A rubric or grading guidelines that explain properties that yield specific grades

Example**Grading and Feedback**

As you will discover in this course, no formula exists that can be applied to a technical document to determine its quality. For example, a technical document could have useful and accurate content, but it would be all for naught if the document were riddled with numerous grammatical errors and typos that made it too distracting to read. Therefore, grades for papers and projects are based on the total overall reading experience, considering the following factors (in no specific order):

- Substance and conventions of the genre based on class lessons and textbook readings

- Required content as specified in the assignment description
- Grammar, spelling, and typographical errors
- Quality of writing and appropriate use of lists, tables, and other content structures
- Appropriateness to the document's applicable audience
- Information design and flow of prose/exposition, including use of headings and subheadings
- Professional tone
- Page and graphic design, images, and other graphical aids

Just as you submit projects and papers electronically, I will return grades, corrections, and notes on them electronically unless I specify otherwise in class.

Grading Guidelines

The following grading guidelines can help you understand the qualitative properties of documents against their corresponding grade range:

Grade Range	Document Properties
A (90-100)	<p>The document is great to outstanding, given the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a whole, the document demonstrates your creativity and mastery of the objectives and material, and it meets or exceeds the assignment requirements. • Tone, content, design, and organization are consistent and ideally suited for the audience and purpose. • There are no typographical errors, such as (but not limited to) missing words, repeating words, obvious spelling errors and transpositions, and obviously missed punctuation (for example, no period at the end of a sentence). • There are minimal errors in grammar, mechanics, or formatting. • To be outstanding (an A+ as opposed to an A or A-), the document must be completely error free. <p>In a professional work environment, your supervisor would feel confident sending out the document as is.</p>
B (80-89)	<p>The document is good to very good, given the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a whole, the document demonstrates your understanding of the objectives and material as well as your ability to use templates and patterns effectively. It meets the assignment requirements. • Tone, content, design, and organization are appropriate for the audience and purpose. There may be a minor and easily correctable error or inconsistency. • There may be a few minor and easily correctable typographical errors or errors in grammar, mechanics, or formatting. <p>In a professional work environment, your supervisor would ask you to make a few changes before you send out the document.</p>
C (70-79)	<p>The document is fair to adequate, given the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a whole, the document indicates that you understand some, but not all, of the objectives and material. It meets most of the assignment requirements. • Most, but not all, elements of tone, content, design, and organization are appropriate for the audience and purpose. There might be inconsistencies that undermine the cohesion of the document. • Typographical errors or errors in grammar, mechanics, or formatting are distracting and unprofessional, but they do not render the document unreadable.

Grade Range	Document Properties
	In a professional work environment, your supervisor would want to review your changes before sending out the document.
D (60-69)	<p>The document is poor, given any of the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The document does not reflect your understanding of the objectives or material. It meets only some of the assignment requirements. There is at least one major flaw in tone, content, design, or organization that makes the document ineffective as a whole. There is one or more major or critical typographical error or error in grammar, mechanics, or formatting. <p>In a professional work environment, your supervisor would question your ability to work on this project.</p>
F (0)	<p>The document is unacceptable, given any of the following properties:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The document does not reflect your understanding of the objectives or material, and it does not meet the assignment requirements. The document does not demonstrate your ability to write adequate and original content. The tone, content, design, and/or organization are inappropriate for the audience and purpose. Typographical errors or errors in grammar, mechanics, or formatting affect the reader's ability to understand the document. <p>In a professional work environment, your supervisor would question your ability to do your job.</p>

Use of Written Work by the Department of English

Students must understand that the Department of English may use their work anonymously in its assessment of its teaching and learning goals.

 **Important:** This is required content for your syllabus. The included example suffices for the content required in your syllabus.

The relevant information for this statement could be included as a subsection to the *assignments subsection* (in the *policies section*) and includes:

- A statement that the Department of English may use their work anonymously for assessment purposes

Example

Use of Written Work by the Department of English

The Department of English may use your written work in its assessment of its teaching and learning goals. In such cases, your name will be removed and your work assessed anonymously. Your work will not be shared with any individual outside of the department. It will be used strictly to help the department offer students the best possible academic experience.

Academic Honesty

Students must understand that the class requires that they abide by the Virginia Tech honor code.

 **Important:** This is required content for your syllabus. The included example suffices for the content required in your syllabus.

The relevant information for the honor code could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and includes:

- A statement that students must abide by the honor code
- A reminder of the undergraduate honor code pledge they must abide by
- The website URL where students can read more information about the honor code

Example

Academic Honesty

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for abiding by the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit: honorsystem.vt.edu.

Online Classes

The syllabus should explain policies for how you will conduct the class and post lesson materials in an online environment.

The relevant information for policies conducting the online class could be included as a subsection to the *policies section* and should include:

- The days and times you will post new lesson materials
- How students should work in the online class environment
- How groups should interact in an online class environment

Example

Online Classes

I will post materials for each lesson on **Tuesdays at 2:00 PM**. If the posting day falls on a day when university classes are not in session, I will post the lesson the following day. I send an announcement through Canvas for each lesson, and I post each lesson under the Canvas **Modules** menu.

You will conduct your studies at your own time and pace (within the parameters of our deadlines). Most class lessons have multiple components that may include written, audio, and video lectures, handouts, assignments, and other related items. I will order and explain each component so that you can follow them in their intended sequence for that lesson.

Some lessons include “in-class” exercises. You have until the start of the following class to submit any corresponding in-class exercise, unless I specify otherwise with the exercise. You must submit in-class exercises as a **PDF document through Scholar** unless otherwise directed in class.

For group work, I will assign students to groups and post the groupings in Canvas. It is up to each student to contact the other student(s) in the group (through Canvas, email, etc.). To be fair to your fellow classmates, make contact with each other as soon as possible after the groupings are posted. Notify me as soon as possible if you are unable to contact a classmate assigned to your group. If you are constantly unavailable to your fellow classmates for group exercises, your class participation factor will suffer, as discussed in the *Grading* section.

Disability Accommodations

Students must be assured that the class will accommodate any disabilities they might have.

-  **Important:** This is required content for your syllabus. The included example suffices for the content required in your syllabus.

The relevant information for the disability accommodations includes:

- A statement that disability needs will be accommodated in the class
- Student requirements to provide appropriate documentation
- The website URL where students can read information from the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office

Example

Disability Accommodations

If you require special arrangements because of a disability, please contact me as soon as possible so that I can help facilitate any needed accommodations. You must also provide documentation of your disability to the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) office. More information is available at ssd.vt.edu.

Schedule

The syllabus should include a comprehensive schedule that explains the date and topics for each lesson.

-  **Note:** You should also consider using a *quick reference schedule* as a separate reference document for students in addition to the comprehensive schedule you include in your syllabus.

The relevant information for the schedule includes:

- A general explanation on how the schedule works
- A breakdown of the dates and topics for each lesson in the course

Example

Schedule

The schedule in this section highlights the preparation, readings, quizzes/tests, topics, and work due for each class lesson of the semester. You can also keep an eye on upcoming project, paper, and test deadlines by referring to the *Writing Assignment Deadlines* section. Exercises are considered part of the classwork and are thus not listed here as deadlines.

So that class lessons are meaningful, and so that you will have thoughts or questions to contribute, you must complete the corresponding preparation, readings, and quizzes **before** the class. These items are listed under **Due** for the corresponding class. Always look at due items well in advance of the lesson to give yourself adequate time to prepare and take quizzes prior to that lesson.

Lesson Details

The syllabus should provide the dates and topics for each lesson of the semester.

Under the *schedule section*, you should have **one subsection for each** of the lessons you will post in the course (typically 15 lessons). The information for each of these sections might include:

- The date the lesson will be posted
- Readings and/or tests/quizzes that must be completed prior to the lesson
- Assignments that must be completed by the lesson

- Topics that will be covered as part of the lesson

Example**Lesson 3: Tuesday 2/16**

Due	Chapter 2: Understanding Ethical and Legal Considerations Chapter 6: Writing for Your Readers Appendix A: Documenting Your Sources (no quiz) Paper 1 (workshop draft): Description document Last chance: All readings and quizzes to date
Topics	Workshop: Description document (Paper 1) Ethical and legal considerations Reusing content and illustrations Writing style Finish grammar and punctuation review

Chapter

11

Syllabus Example

Topics:

- [*Example Syllabus*](#)

Instructors are free to create a syllabus that they feel best defines their delivery of the course. However, the syllabus should contain well-described sections that define the entirety of the course.

You can use an example syllabus as a starting point to create your own course syllabus for your classes.

Example Syllabus

You can use this example syllabus as needed to create your own course syllabus for your classes.

Example Syllabus

- *Syllabus in PDF format*: This example shows a complete syllabus for a regular semester course.
- *Syllabus in Word (.docx) format*: This example provides an editable template.

Chapter

12

Instructor Checklists

Topics:

- [*Checklist: Class Setup*](#)
- [*Checklist: Class Completion*](#)

Checklists can help instructors accomplish the tasks required for planning and managing their class.

In an online course, you can easily become so focused on making sure the students are participating in all of the lessons and posting their work on time that you forget the work you may owe your students. When an exercise is set to automatically become available at a specific time, it's easy to forget that students will post corresponding work for which you must review and give credit.

Checklists will help you stay organized and ensure you are performing necessary tasks in a timely manner.

Checklist: Class Setup

This checklist guides instructors through setting up their ENGL 3764 online class.

Timeframe	Task
Prior Semester	Work with the Director of Professional and Technical Writing to ensure you are listed with your class in course registration with a course description, as needed.
Prior Semester	Submit a textbook order with the bookstore.
Prior Semester	Verify a Canvas course has been made available with registered students.
Up to One Week Before Classes Start	Write a syllabus for the class (you can use a syllabus example as a starting template if necessary). Also consider writing a quick reference schedule as a supplement to the syllabus.
Up to One Week Before Classes Start	Build, edit, and complete the Canvas site for the class. Publish it when ready.  Tip: If you are re-using an existing course as a template, be sure to adjust all dates and times (for example, deadlines or lesson release times) to match the dates and times for your class.
Week Before Classes Start	Send welcome email to registered students to prepare them for the class.

Checklist: Class Completion

This checklist guides instructors through final tasks when completing their ENGL 3764 online class.

Timeframe	Task
Deadline Established for Semester by University	Have students perform SPOT evaluations.  Note: The university hosts the website for SPOT evaluations and provides availability dates and deadlines for each semester.
Between Final Lesson and End of Semester	Grade and post feedback for final projects/papers.
Between Final Lesson and End of Semester	Send completion email to students as a "goodbye" and formal closure of the class.
Deadline Established for Semester by University	Post final grades through HokieSpa.  Note: The Department of English and the university in general send out announcements to inform faculty of the submission deadline for each semester.