21W.783 – Technical Writing for Phase 2

Instructor: Mary Caulfield
Meetings: Tuesdays 7 to 9 p.m. in 2-139
Email: mcaulf@mit.edu (better than telephone; I check several times a day)
Office: 14N-234
Office Hours: Thursdays 3-5 p.m. Other meeting times by appointment.

Course Description – This course aims to give you in-depth instruction and practice in written and oral communication. The primary focus is the research and writing process, but we will also explore other areas of professional presentation. In-class writing and peer review will provide a forum to practice and refine your ability to communicate complex ideas clearly. Students will plan, write, and revise an original technical document on a topic of their choice. (For details on this document, see Requirements for Semester Project on page 2.)

Calendar – The table that follows lists important dates for this course and significant MIT deadlines.

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<th>DATE</th>
<th>CLASS MEETING</th>
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<td>February 3, 2004</td>
<td>Lecture 1</td>
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<td>February 10, 2004</td>
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<td>February 24, 2004</td>
<td>Lecture 3</td>
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<td>March 9, 2004</td>
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<td>March 12, 2004</td>
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<td>March 15-30, 2004</td>
<td>Proposal conferences</td>
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<td>April 13, 2004</td>
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<td>April 16-26</td>
<td>First draft conferences</td>
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<td>April 22, 2004</td>
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<td>May 4, 2004</td>
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<td>May 11, 2004</td>
<td>Course Evaluations – Final Draft due</td>
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General Notes on Class Meetings and Assignments – You must attend all class meetings. Major assignments (in bold above) are due in hard-copy form in class on the dates indicated above. Short assignments and readings are also due for each lecture. Be sure to refer to the Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments on page 3 for details on the lecture topics and homework due.

To receive full credit for class attendance, complete each weekly short assignment and email it to me by 5:00 on the Monday preceding lecture. I will return the assignments in Tuesday’s class, and they will form the basis for in-class work.

If you cannot meet the attendance requirement you should not enroll in this section. Students who miss more than one lecture and/or do not submit an acceptable proposal for a semester project by the Institute Add Date will be asked to withdraw from the course. Similarly, students who do not
submit a complete first draft of the semester project before the Institute Drop Date will be asked to withdraw.

**Texts** – *The Craft of Research* (Booth, Williams, and Colomb; referred to in the syllabus as *Craft*) is available at the MIT Coop and most larger book stores.

*The Mayfield Handbook of Technical and Scientific Writing* (Perelman, Paradis, and Barrett; referred to as *Mayfield*) is available online at [https://web.mit.edu/21.guide/www/home.htm](https://web.mit.edu/21.guide/www/home.htm). I will also distribute handouts or assign material on the Web to supplement in-class discussions.

**Criteria for Grading** – Grades will reflect your grasp of effective written and oral communication, as well as your improvement throughout the term. Final grades will be based on:

- Attendance and short assignments 25%
- Formal proposal and cover letter 15%
- Oral presentation 10%
- First draft of paper 25%
- Final draft and cover letter 25%

**Written Work** – Written work must be typed, spell-checked, and neatly formatted. Please include your name, the course number, assignment number, and date at the top of the page. When you submit homework as an electronic document, please include your name or initials in the file name. While an occasional typo or editing error may slip through, the presence of several mistakes indicates a lack of attention and will lower your grade.

**Documenting Sources** – Do not cut and paste material from web pages or other documents without making evident the source of the information. Using work that is not your own without attribution is a serious offense and subject to formal action by the Institute. Inadequately documented papers (including bibliography and footnotes or in-text citations) will not receive a passing grade. When in doubt, document the source.

**Requirements for Semester Project** – The paper you submit for credit in this class must:

- Be at least 10 pages long
- Consist of your original writing
- Have been written especially for this class, or be a documented, substantial revision of a paper for another class, job, or UROP
- Use at least three research sources, documented according to the standards for your field
- Include at least one table, chart, or other illustration
Schedule of Class Meetings and Assignments

**Lecture 1: February 3, 2004**
Questionnaire and Introductions. What is technical writing? Why do researchers write?
In-class exercise: team puzzle solving

**Lecture 2: February 10, 2004**
Finding a new topic or breathing new life into an old one: how to find a paper topic suitable for this class; rules for revising an existing paper; workshop of one-page summaries; researching and focusing.

For Lecture 2 read Section I and II in *Craft* and submit a one-page discussion of your preliminary ideas for the paper. Also, find at least two people who will agree to read the first draft of your paper and give you constructive verbal or written comments; these people will be your expert reviewers.

**Lecture 3: February 24, 2004**
Proposals and cover letters. Why do we write proposals? How do they help us understand the audience for our work?

For Lecture 3, read Section III in *Craft*. Write one or two paragraphs on the type of research you are doing for your paper. What kinds of sources have you chosen? How do these sources shape your thinking about the subject matter? In addition, read Chapters 2.5 and 2.6 (Letters and Proposals) in *Mayfield*. Write a draft of a cover letter that would accompany 

\begin{enumerate}
  \item a resume you are sending to a potential employer,
  \item a document you are sending to an expert reviewer.
\end{enumerate}

**Lecture 4: March 9, 2004**
Graphics: what makes a graphic effective; how text and graphics work together; writing conventions.

For Lecture 4, read Chapter 15 in *Craft* and locate at least one graphic in a print publication or on the Web. Submit the graphic to me, either in hard copy, electronically, or as a link so that I can make a slide of it. Be prepared to present the graphic to the class. If you find flaws, make at least two concrete suggestions for improving the graphic. Also, submit at least one paragraph from your paper as the basis for an in-class writing workshop.

**Lecture 5: April 13, 2004**
Presentation skills and editing.
For Lecture 5, bring your *completed, beautifully formatted and proofread* first draft to class.

**Presentations 1 and 2: Group I – April 27, 2004; Group II – May 4, 2004**
Prepare a 10-minute oral presentation on some aspect of your semester project. In addition, you will give constructive suggestions to at least two other members of the class.

**Final meeting: May 11, 2004**
Hand in *completed, beautifully formatted and proofread* final draft and cover letter; fill out course evaluation.