21W.783 Introduction to Technical Writing

Meeting times: Mondays 7 p.m to 9 p.m.

21W.783 is taught as a split class; after the initial meeting, the class is broken down into two sections that meet on alternate weeks.

Meeting place: Room 2-139

Instructor: Mary Caulfield
Email: mcaulfi@concentric.net
Office Hours: Monday evening 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. before class in 2-139.
(Other times by appointment)

Course Expectations

Course Description -- This course is designed to give you in-depth instruction and practice in written and oral communication. The primary focus is the technical 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 (approximately 15 to 20 pages) on a topic of their choice.

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

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>in-class assignments</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>take-home assignments</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>first draft of paper</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>final revision of paper</td>
<td>25%</td>
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Attendance -- Because participation is a vital component of this class, you must attend all classes and contribute to discussions. If an emergency prevents you from attending class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed and arranging to make up work. Please email me in advance of missed classes whenever possible. ⇒ Even one unexcused absence will lower your grade. A second absence may result in your failing the course.

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. While an occasional typo or editing error may slip through, the presence of several mistakes indicates lack of attention and will lower your grade.

Timeliness -- Meeting deadlines under time pressure is a vital skill in a systems development environment. ⇒ Late work will not be accepted.

Plagiarism -- 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. When in doubt, document the source.
Schedule of Meeting and Assignments

⇒ This schedule is subject to change, but I will distribute revised versions of the syllabus that reflect the latest information.

Class 1: Introduction. Why write technical documentation? What makes a piece of writing useful? Your semester project.
In-class discussion: Good and bad writing: from opinion to argument.

Assignment due in class: Bring in one example each of good and bad technical writing. Write two or three paragraphs for each example explaining what makes it good or bad. What would you do to improve the bad writing?

Class 2: Introduction to design proposals. Making primary and secondary criteria explicit. Developing an explicit focus for your work.

Assignment due: Submit a two-page summary of the question you plan to pursue, together with information on research you have already done or plan to do. You must also identify two technical reviewers who will agree to read and comment on the first draft of your paper.

Class 3: Planning and drafting a major document: time management, document design, and understanding the needs of an audience.

Assignment due: Submit formal proposal for semester project. Detailed outline, bibliography, and sample section due.

Class 4: Revision and responding to technical comments. How and when to reorganize. Making the document’s organization work for you.

Assignment due: First draft of paper due. You should also submit copies of your paper with comments from your technical reviewers.


Assignment due: Two-page summary of revisions you plan to make.

Class 6: Oral presentation of papers.

Assignment due: Final versions of semester projects.