INSTRUCTOR’S MANUAL

to accompany

Johnson-Sheehan

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION TODAY

Third Edition

Richard Johnson-Sheehan

Purdue University

with the assistance of

Christine Saidy and Mark Pepper

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An Introduction to Technical Communication Today
Richard Johnson-Sheehan

Many instructors consider technical communication their favorite course to teach. Courses in technical communication are intellectually challenging and the students are highly motivated to learn. Moreover, as our society continues moving further into the Information Age, the importance of technical communication is increasing considerably. So, the relevancy of these courses is already significant and only growing more so.

In this Instructor’s Manual for Technical Communication Today, our aim is to provide you with a pedagogical foundation for teaching a basic course in technical communication, usually at the college sophomore, junior, or senior level. This Instructor’s Manual divides into three areas:

Part I: Pedagogical Rationale for the Course. Professor Johnson-Sheehan will discuss the pedagogical principles on which Technical Communication Today was developed. He will define technical communication, discuss typical students in the course, and describe your role as the instructor.

Part II: Model Syllabi, Policies, and Assignments. These models will give you classroom-tested materials that you can adjust to your own needs. You will learn strategies for writing an effective assignment.

Part III: Chapter-by-Chapter Teaching Strategies. Teaching strategies are provided for each chapter, as well as discussions of the exercises and projects at the chapters’ ends. We have also included quizzes you can use to improve student retention.

If you are teaching technical communication for the first time, the aim of this Instructor’s Manual is to give you a basic understanding of the course, while offering you some strategies for success. If you have taught the course before, this manual should highlight the features and strengths of Technical Communication Today, so you can better incorporate this text into your pedagogical approach.
Pedagogical Rationale for the Course

Today, it is still fashionable to assign yourself to a pedagogical camp. Some people want to be called social constructionists. Others want to be called cognitivists or social cognitivists. Some see themselves as following an “ideological” approach flavored with Marxism. To be honest, I have always avoided being a card-carrying member of any theoretical camp, preferring to keep my options open. However, if someone were to corner me, I would call myself a pragmatist in the American tradition of C.S. Pierce, William James, John Dewey, and Donald Davidson. Pragmatism puts an emphasis on learning through action and activity. Meanwhile, pragmatism assumes that issues of truth and knowledge are always evolving to suit the practical needs of our society.

In the spirit of pragmatism, you will find *Technical Communication Today* to be a highly practical book that teaches the process of communicating in today’s technical workplace. The chief premise of *Technical Communication Today* is that computers have dramatically changed how we communicate in technical environments. Computers are no longer simply convenient tools for putting our ideas on paper. Instead, they are central to the writing process, especially in the technical workplace. They are thinking tools.

Consequently—here is the pragmatist in me—students need to learn technical communication by engaging in the activities of the technical workplace. Due to the advent of the computer, these activities have changed and are quite different than they were even a couple of decades ago. By centralizing the computer in the writing process, this book will help you prepare students for their careers and lives in the Information Age. My aim is to show them how to survive in a complex technical workplace in which they will need to communicate with and through computers.

Defining Technical Communication

To begin, let us first unpack the definition of technical communication offered in Chapter One of *Technical Communication Today*.

*Technical communication is a process of managing technical information in ways that allow people to take action.*

This definition is different from the typical ones you will find in other textbooks on this subject. In the past, technical communication has often stressed the “translation” or “transfer” of technical ideas. Quite differently, this definition stresses that the communication process itself is an important form of inquiry. Information is something to be creatively explored and managed, not translated or transferred.

The key words in this definition of technical communication offer some insights into how the course should be taught.

*Process*—Students need to learn that communication is a recursive activity. In other words, they should understand that preparing a document or presentation is not simply a matter of translating the ideas in their heads into words on paper. Rather, they need to see the process itself as a recursive activity of interpretation, discovery, reflection, invention, and expression. While communicating, the activities of researching, organizing ideas, drafting, developing a style, designing, editing, and delivering information are not simply means to an end. Rather,
they are important steps in a process of inquiry that helps a person decide what he or she believes and what actions should be taken.

**Managing Technical Information**—In this electronic age, the challenge is to properly manage all the information available. Students need to learn how to sort through the glut of information—some of it contradictory and some of it misleading—to shape their ideas and arguments. Computers have heightened the need for “information management” (IM) approaches to workplace activities. Students should see that information is something that flows. Their role as communicators is to manage that flow.

**People**—More than ever, technical communication needs to put people at the center of concern. At one time, technical communication was more about machines than people. Of course, people were the users of these machines, but the emphasis of technical communication was primarily on the workings of machines. Today, technical communication is much more about people working and living in a society permeated with technology. Increasingly, issues of ethics, politics, law, and cross-culturalism need to be addressed in the technical communication classroom.

**Take Action**—Ultimately, taking action with information is the aim of technical communication. Computers allow us to store vast amounts of information, so we are less concerned about retaining information in our own gray matter. Rather, we need to teach students how to use information to do things—take action. Meanwhile, the emphasis in technical documents and presentations has shifted toward giving people only what they need to achieve their goals. Students need to learn how to present information in ways that allow their readers to take action.

We all recognize that computers have dramatically changed our lives—that’s nothing new or revolutionary. However, we need to recognize that our definitions of writing and speaking also need to change to suit these new media. In other words, how we say things has changed what we say. By centralizing the computer in the writing process, *Technical Communication Today* addresses how people communicate in today’s technical workplace.

**Getting to Know Your Students**

New teachers of technical communication often remark to me that they are pleasantly surprised by their students in the course. You will likely find that students who elect to take technical communication are more studious, mature, and pragmatic than the first-year students you taught in composition. Most technical communication students are working toward careers in technical fields. They want to be engineers, scientists, medical personnel, social workers, archeologists, psychologists, and architects, among other careers. They are typically more focused on their studies than other first-year students, and they have a clearer sense about how technical communication will fit into their lives.

In my long experience teaching the course, I have noticed two important qualities in my students.

[*They learn best by doing.* Lecture and class discussion are acceptable to a point; however, these practical-minded students typically learn best by working on a specific task or project. Therefore, I like to give them plenty of time to work in class on their projects, especially in groups.*

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They are self-motivated. When I began teaching technical communication, I was pleasantly surprised to see how eagerly my students approached the work. They were especially motivated by projects that allowed them to apply things they learned in their majors.

A well-crafted course in technical communication takes advantage of these two qualities. The course needs to be oriented around activity, because these students are pragmatic and practical. Recent articles in technical communication journals have been laying out a foundation for Activity Theory or Neo-Pragmatic approaches to teaching technical communication. These theoretical stances lend support to the simple idea that technical communication students learn best by doing. Indeed, the more we can incorporate workplace issues and situations into the class, the more motivated our students will be to learn what we want to teach them.

Of course, our role is not to simply prepare our students for the workplace. We want to prepare them to critically approach non-academic contexts. We want them to recognize the social, ethical, political, and legal issues that shape our lives. Some imagination and proper planning will allow you to give them a rich experience that will prepare them for the complexities of a world permeated by issues involving technology.

**Developing Your Role as the Instructor**

The good news is that your students’ motivation and maturity will allow you to adopt a less central role in the classroom. I have always been skeptical about the idea of a student-centered classroom. We, as instructors, have an important role to play—and that role isn’t simply showing up each day. Rather, you should see yourself as a mentor to these eager students. They are apprentices who are here to learn from you. This mentor role is especially important in technical disciplines where mentoring is how new people enter the field. Your students are already being apprenticed in their other classes.

My best advice, therefore, is to view yourself as a mentor who is helping these students gain the communication skills and analytical abilities they need to succeed in the technical workplace. Certainly, mentors can lecture and hold class discussions, but they should also offer students hands-on guidance and insight. *Technical Communication Today* will help you foster this mentor-apprentice relationship with your students, because the book is built on process as a foundational concept. You will see that every chapter leads students step by step through the process of communication, just as a mentor would introduce an apprentice to the activities of his or her career.

One note. Some new instructors to this course are concerned that they are not “technical” enough, because they have never worked in a technical workplace or even taken courses in technical subjects. Of course, a background in technical subjects is helpful, but it is not necessary. Your role, after all, is not to be an engineer, scientist, psychologist, architect, etc. Your role is to be an expert in communication. Let your students be the experts in their own fields. After all, none of us would ever be able to master all the technical knowledge of these students’ fields. Usually, after a semester of teaching technical communication, most new teachers’ concerns about not being technical enough are gone.

**Fostering Your Students’ Writing Processes**

When I began teaching writing in the late 1980s, the concept of a “process theory” was still rather strong. Many of the principles of process theory had been developed in the 1970s and
enhanced in the 1980s. So, the idea that students should be taught to develop a writing process was rather entrenched and rarely questioned.

Today, in academic journals, there is talk about “post-process” theories of teaching writing, though I find myself questioning what it means to be “post-” (i.e., after) process. Are we abandoning process theory? Or, are we beyond it in some way? As reflected in *Technical Communication Today*, I’m still a strong believer in process theory; however, I also recognize that the process theory developed in the 1970s is evermore outmoded in this computer-centered age. After all, the 1970s notion of a writing process was developed around the pen and typewriter as communication technologies. So, the stages of writing from that era (pre-writing, drafting, revision, and proofreading) were based on pen and typewriter as the media of communication.

The pedagogical approach you will find in this book is not post-process but rather “new process.” It recognizes that the media of communication have changed due to the advent of the computer; and, as a result, the process of communicating must change to suit these new media. Nevertheless, I believe students still learn best by paying attention to the process of communication. In this book, you will see that the process theory familiar to all of us has been modified to reflect how people invent, compose, revise, and design on their computers.

**Addressing Ethics, Cross-Culturalism, and Visual-Spatial Thinking**

Finally, before concluding this already-too-long section of the Instructor’s Manual, I wanted to highlight three important features of the textbook: ethics, cross-culturalism, and visual-spatial thinking.

At every turn, you should try to regularly work issues of ethics and cross-culturalism into your lectures, discussions, classroom activities, and projects. These issues have always been important in technical communication, but computers have made them especially consequential. The Information Age has brought about many new ethical dilemmas and challenges that students need to learn how to address and solve. Meanwhile, your students will be regularly communicating with people who are from different cultures. You need to prepare them for these new workplace realities.

*Technical Communication Today* should offer you many opportunities to incorporate these issues. Discussions of ethics and cross-culturalism are regular features in all chapters. Meanwhile, the case studies at the end of each chapter—most of them involving ethical or cultural issues—should give your students opportunities to explore their opinions and beliefs.

Issues involving visual-spatial thinking are also important but less tangible in *Technical Communication Today*. Personally, I believe we are just entering a visual age—one that will significantly alter how we think and communicate. To the best of my abilities, I have tried to create a book that will take advantage of our students’ preference toward visual-spatial learning.

The designers of this book, DK, have done a great amount to make that visual-spatial quality a reality. But visual-spatial thinking goes far beyond issues of page design. We need to recognize that students born after the advent of the personal computer (mid to late 1970s) actually think differently than those of us born earlier. They tend to learn visually, scanning texts for spaces of information. Moreover, students need to learn how to write visually and spatially, because their readers too are oriented toward the visual and spatial.
Therefore, in your lectures, discussions, activities, and projects, seek out ways to keep the discussion as visual as possible, and teach your students to write visually and conceptualize their documents spatially. You will find that *Technical Communication Today* stresses visual-spatial thinking in many ways. You can use the concepts in the book to help you introduce students to visual-spatial concepts.

**Looking Forward**

If this is your first time teaching technical communication, my guess is that you will enjoy teaching the subject more than you expected. I have known scholars trained in the most elevated forms of literature who have quickly fallen in love with this course and its students. Your students will be motivated and enthusiastic. The subject matter is tangible and worldly. Moreover, this course will allow you to explore issues of ethics, politics, and society in ways that often cannot be handled in less pragmatic courses.

If you have taught the course before, you will be pleasantly surprised by the features of *Technical Communication Today*. My intent was to write a text that would introduce a new generation of technical communication textbooks based on pragmatism and visual-spatial concepts. You will find that this book better reflects your students’ thought processes and the kinds of communicating they will be asked to do in the technical workplace.

**Model Syllabi, Policies, and Assignments**

In this section, you will find model syllabi and policies for 16-week versions of the course. Strategies for writing assignments will also be discussed. All of these materials, including model assignments, are available at *TCT Online* (www.pearsonhighed.com/johnsonweb3), the Companion Website for this textbook. You can download them from the “Instructor’s Companion” area of the website. You should, of course, modify these materials to fit your own needs.

You can also contact me in the “Contact Professor Johnson-Sheehan” area of *TCT Online*. Please join me there.
Model Syllabi and Policies
Writing an effective syllabus and a set of policies is essential to starting the class off right. The standard course in technical communication tends to be taught two ways: a) sequencing or b) genre-based.

**Sequencing.** The core idea of sequencing is that students are asked to write and revise smaller documents that lead to the development of larger documents. Usually, the course is divided into sequences (four sequences in a 16-week course and three sequences in a 10-week course). Each sequence becomes a stand-alone unit of two or three smaller assignments and one larger assignment.

*Genre-based.* A genre-based course moves from assignment to assignment, usually covering six to eight genres during the course. Each assignment typically stands alone and is graded separately; however, some teachers like to “bundle” assignments that respond to each other. For example, a proposal might be used to propose a project for a report.

Either approach works well for courses in technical communication. The sequencing approach is helpful for teaching revision, because students use smaller texts as the basis of larger texts. Sequencing also allows your students to compose larger documents as they build up from smaller documents. The genre-based approach is helpful for introducing students to a large variety of workplace documents.

**Sequencing Approach**
When using a sequencing approach, you should begin by dividing the semester into three or four sequences, usually 3-4 weeks apiece. Each of these sequences will typically include two smaller assignments that become part of a larger final assignment at the end of the sequence. A 16-week semester can be carved into four sequences, one month apiece. A 10-week semester can be carved into three sequences, three weeks apiece.

When using the sequencing approach, the smaller documents in each sequence should be viewed as drafts and therefore receive light commentary. The large document at the end of each sequence should be graded more thoroughly.

There are two advantages to the sequencing approach. First, students are asked to write more documents. In one semester, they will actually write twelve documents and give one presentation. Second, they will learn to incorporate revision more readily into their writing process. The disadvantage of the sequencing approach could be the amount of grading required on the instructor’s part. However, if the instructor only puts light commentary on the smaller documents, the grading load is much reduced.
## Sample 16-Week Syllabus (Sequencing Approach)

### Technical Communication Syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Introduction to Technical Communication</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 1, 18 Assign: Technical Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Technical Definitions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Writing Process</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 2, 19 Assign: Technical Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Designing Documents</td>
<td>Due: Technical Definition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Analyzing Readers and Contexts of Use</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 3, 10 Assign: Technical Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Technical Descriptions</td>
<td>Due: Technical Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Instructions and Procedures</td>
<td>Assign: Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teaming in the Workplace</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Researching and Managing Information</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 5, 7, 23 Assign: Analytical Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Analytical Reports</td>
<td>Due: Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ethics in the Technical Workplace</td>
<td>Assign: Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Organizing and Drafting</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 8, 22 Assign: Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Activity Reports</td>
<td>Due: Methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Using Visuals and Graphics</td>
<td>Assign: Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eight</td>
<td>Using Plain and Persuasive Style</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 9, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Revising and Editing for Usability</td>
<td>Due: Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Nine</td>
<td>Writing Proposals</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 21 Assign: Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Describing the Current Situation</td>
<td>Due: Analytical Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Ten</td>
<td>Describing a Work Plan</td>
<td>Assign: Description of a Problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using E-mail and Instant Messaging</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eleven</td>
<td>Conferences</td>
<td>Assign: Description of Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preparing and Giving Presentations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Twelve</td>
<td>Review Revising and Editing</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Thirteen</td>
<td>Presentations of Proposals</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 15 Assign: Career Portfolio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Starting Your Career</td>
<td>Due: Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Fourteen</td>
<td>Writing and Designing a Resume</td>
<td>Assign: Resume</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review Document Design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Week Fifteen</td>
<td>Writing an Application Letter</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 17 Assign: Letter of Application</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing Letters and Memos</td>
<td>Due: Resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Sixteen</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td>Due: Letter of Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finals Week</td>
<td>Career Portfolios Due this Week</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Genre-Based Approach
The genre-based approach allows students to concentrate on one genre at a time. For example, in the syllabus included here, the students are asked to complete each assignment separately and move on to the next assignment. First, they complete the technical description; then, they complete a set of instructions; and so on. Each assignment is thoroughly graded as a final assignment (unlike the sequencing approach in which some assignments are treated as drafts and receive lighter commentary).

The advantage of the genre-based approach is that every assignment is completed separately. Students master one genre before moving on to learn a new genre. The disadvantage to this approach is that students don’t have much time for revising their documents. They hand in each assignment and move on to the next assignment.
## Sample 16-Week Syllabus (Genre-Based Approach)

### Technical Communication Syllabus

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week One</td>
<td>Introduction to Technical Communication Writing Technical Definitions</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 1, 18 Assign: Technical Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Two</td>
<td>Writing Process Writing Technical Descriptions</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 2, 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Three</td>
<td>Analyzing Readers and Contexts of Use Designing Documents</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 3, 10 Due: Technical Description Assign: Instructions or Procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Four</td>
<td>Instructions and Procedures Team in the Technical Workplace</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 4, 6, 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Five</td>
<td>Researching and Managing Information Writing Analytical Reports Ethics in the Technical Workplace</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 5, 7, 23 Due: Instructions or Procedure Assign: Analytical Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Six</td>
<td>Organizing and Drafting Writing Activity Reports</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 8, 22 Assign: Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Seven</td>
<td>Using Visuals and Graphics Conferences</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 11 Due: Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eight</td>
<td>Using Plain and Persuasive Style Revising and Editing for Usability</td>
<td>Reading: Chapters 9, 12 Due: Analytical Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Nine</td>
<td>Writing Proposals Describing the Current Situation</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 21 Assign: Proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Ten</td>
<td>Describing a Work Plan Using E-mail and Instant Messaging</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 13 Assign: E-mail Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Eleven</td>
<td>Conferences Preparing and Giving Presentations</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 16 Due: E-mail Activity Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Twelve</td>
<td>Review Revising and Editing Workshop</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Thirteen</td>
<td>Presentations of Proposals Starting Your Career</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 15 Due: Proposal Assign: Resume and Letter of Application</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Fourteen</td>
<td>Writing and Designing a Resume Review Document Design</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 10 Due: Resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Fifteen</td>
<td>Writing an Application Letter Writing Letters and Memos</td>
<td>Reading: Chapter 17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week Sixteen</td>
<td>Workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finals Week</td>
<td>Due: Resume and Letter of Application</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course Policies

You should view your course policies as a contract between you and the students. In the policies, you should be specific about your objectives for the course and your expectations. You should also be clear about issues involving plagiarism, absences, late work, special needs, and other issues. A solid welcome statement at the beginning of the policies sets a nice tone for the course and becomes the basis for introducing your class on the first day of the semester.

This set of policies can be downloaded in the Instructor’s Companion area of *TCT Online*. A set of policies for a genre-based course is also available on *TCT Online*. 
Technical Communication

Instructor:  
Office:  
Phone:  
Office Hours:  
E-mail:  
Website:  

Before we begin discussing the policies for this course, I first want to welcome you to Technical Communication. In this course, you will learn how to communicate effectively and efficiently in technical workplaces. In this “Information Age,” effective communication is essential for success in your career.

This semester, you will learn how to write a variety of workplace documents, including procedures, letters, memos, reports, and proposals. You will also learn how to confidently present information in public. To sharpen your rhetorical skills, you will learn how to interpret situations in the workplace; then, you will learn how to use techniques of reader-analysis, organization, style, and page layout to develop documents that address those rhetorical situations. Whenever possible, you will have the option to compose documents that suit your major and future career.

My aim in this course is to prepare you to communicate in the workplace communities you want to join after you graduate from college. There are no formulas for effective communication in the workplace, but some common genres (e.g. procedures, reports, proposals) and conventions (e.g. definition, graphics, page design) are used across disciplines. In this class, you will learn how to identify these common genres and conventions, and then you will learn how to shape them to fit your needs as an engineer, manager, architect, scientist, nurse, medical doctor, etc.

We will also study real or realistic situations to prepare you to communicate in workplace situations. You will learn to interpret complex workplace situations and then use problem-solving strategies to develop documents that take action in those situations.

The rest of this document will be devoted to the specific policies of this course. Please read through these policies carefully so you have a good idea of how this course will be conducted. If you have any questions, please ask.

Course Texts and Materials
The following book can be found at the bookstore:

Projects and Grading
This course is divided into four sequences. Each sequence includes two smaller documents that will form the basis of a larger document. Your grade for the course will be determined according to the following percentages:

**Sequence One: Writing a Procedure**
- Technical Definition: 5 percent
- Technical Description: 5 percent
- Procedure or Set of Instructions: 10 percent

**Sequence Two: Writing an Analytical Report**
- Methodology: 5 percent
- Activity Report: 5 percent
- Analytical Report: 20 percent

**Sequence Three: Writing a Proposal**
- Description of a Problem: 5 percent
- Description of a Plan: 5 percent
- Proposal: 20 percent

**Sequence Four: Creating a Career Portfolio**
- Resumé: 5 percent
- Letter of Application: 5 percent
- Career Portfolio: 10 percent

Here’s the meaning behind the grades I put on your paper (you can use these comments as clues about how to work toward a higher grade):

C- to C+ You did what the assignment asked of you. Work in this range tends to need some revision, but it is complete in content and the organization is logical. The style and visual design are straightforward but unremarkable.

B- to B+ You did what the assignment asked of you at a high quality level. Work in this range needs little revision, is complete in content, is organized well, and shows special attention to style and visual design.

A- to A You did what the assignment asked for at a high quality level, and your work shows originality and creativity. Work in this range demonstrates all the qualities listed above for a B; but it also demonstrates that you took extra steps to be original or creative in developing content, solving a problem, or developing a verbal style or visual design.

D- to D+ You did what the assignment asked for at a poor quality level. Work in this range tends to need significant revision. The content is often incomplete and the organization is hard to discern. Verbal style and visual design are often non-existent or chaotic.

F Failure means you did not do what was asked of you. If you gave an assignment an honest try and still received an ‘F’ consider dropping the class and retaking first-year composition to improve your writing skills.
Plagiarism
Plagiarism is defined as the improper use of someone else’s work. Improper use means 1) copying or paraphrasing from a published or unpublished work without citing it, 2) using the ideas of others without citing them, or 3) handing work in for a grade that you or one of your group members did not produce. Plagiarism is not as hard to detect as you may think. The Internet offers me an easy way to check whether your assignment was taken from another source.

Your best course of action is to do your own work and learn something in this course. Academic dishonesty only hurts you and your classmates. After all, if you cannot write in professional workplaces, you will not be able to hide behind your inflated GPA. Meanwhile, plagiarism cheats the students who are honestly completing the work.

If you plagiarize, you will fail the course in most cases. Then, your case will be referred to the Dean of Students who will decide whether stronger measures are needed.

Grammar
In this class, we will talk about grammar issues when appropriate, but you should have mastered English grammar by this point in your academic career. Grammar problems will annoy me as much as they will annoy your future employer. If I find grammatical mistakes in your work, they will negatively affect your grade. More importantly, though, they will hurt your career. After all, your boss might not recognize good style or organization, but he or she will know when you make grammar mistakes or spelling errors.

If you have issues with grammar, please consult the Grammar and Punctuation Handbook (Appendix A) in our textbook, Technical Communication Today. A few hours of dedicated study will often clear up grammar problems in your writing.

Late Work
If you must be late with an individual assignment, write me a memo or e-mail that tells me that you will be late and when I should expect the assignment. I don’t need excuses. However, the absence of the memo will cost you a half grade per day (A becomes an A-, B- a C+).

Keep in mind, though, that this class moves quickly. Late work tends to lead to more problems down the line. Therefore, you should turn in your work late only in the most exceptional cases.

Attendance
I will take attendance. I expect you to be here almost every class day, ready to work. If you miss more than four class periods, I will penalize you by lowering your course evaluation one grade (A- becomes B- and so on). After that, I will penalize you a grade for each day you miss. If you miss seven or more classes, I will fail you for the course.

If you need to miss class, please call or e-mail me so I can tell you what we will be doing in class the day you are absent. If you e-mail or call, your absence will still count against the limit, but at least you will be aware of what the class did that day.

Special Needs or Disabilities
If you have a special need or disability that might require individual accommodations, please make me aware of it as soon as possible. That way, we can work together to develop a plan for helping you succeed in this class.
Professionalism
We will be discussing contentious subjects in this class and the workload is heavy. At all times, I expect you to behave as a professional. You should listen respectfully to the opinions of others. You should show your classmates and me the respect we deserve. If you are disruptive to the activities of this class or you choose not to participate, I will ask you to leave. You will be marked absent for that day, which will count against your absences for the course. If you are asked to leave the class more than two times in the semester, I will ask you to drop the course or fail you.
Assignments

There are, of course, countless assignments that could be devised for a course in technical communication. Some assignments, though, are richer and more engaging than others. In this section, we will go over some strategies for writing effective assignments.

As you design an assignment, you should always remember that our goal as teachers is not to simply show students how to write a letter, set of instructions, or report. Rather, our aim is to teach students how to use communication to take action in the technical workplace. So, you should focus on creating projects that simulate the activities of the technical workplace.

Genre, Conventions, Issues

Assignments in a technical communication course usually concentrate on specific genres, such as procedures, reports, or proposals. An assignment, for example, might be designed to teach students how to write an analytical report. The assignment sheet would describe a situation in which an analytical report is needed to complete a task.

Assignments should also be written to teach students specific conventions, while exposing them to common workplace issues. For example, your analytical report assignment might also be designed to teach students specific conventions, such as a) analyzing readers, b) writing in plain language, and c) using graphics to illustrate important points. You cannot, of course, cover all aspects of technical communication in each assignment. So, design each assignment to focus on specific conventions that students can master.

In each assignment, you should incorporate issues of workplace ethics and politics that complicate each project. For example, perhaps you are asking students to write an analytical report on “alternative energy.” In your assignment sheet, mention that the president of the university (one of the report’s readers) has recently challenged the university community to reduce its dependence on fossil fuels. Mention the ethics and politics involved in researching such an issue.

Figure 1 shows a helpful table for designing an assignment. On the left, you should identify the genre or genres that you would like the assignment to address. Then, in the middle column, list the three to five conventions that you would like students to master while completing the assignment. And finally, in the right-hand column, identify one or two issues that you would like students to confront as they are completing the project.

Figure 1: Sketching the Elements of an Assignment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Genre</th>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analytical Report</td>
<td>➢ Analyzing readers</td>
<td>➢ Politics of alternative energy on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Using plain language</td>
<td>➢ Ethics involved in converting to alternative energy sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Using graphics</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➢ Composing effective introductions and conclusions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Typically, an assignment will only address one genre and a limited number of conventions. However, you may want to link a few assignments together, exposing students to a few different genres and a broader set of conventions.

**Setting Objectives and Specifying Outcomes**

Once you have identified the genres, conventions, and issues involved in the assignment, you should specify five to seven objectives that you want the project to reach. For each of these objectives, describe what kinds of outcomes you expect. Your outcomes should describe a “good” response to the assignment and an “excellent” response.

Again, a table can be helpful toward sorting out your thoughts. Figure 2 shows an objectives and outcomes table for an assignment.

**Figure 2: Objectives and Outcomes Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Good Outcome</th>
<th>Excellent Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write an Analytical Report.</td>
<td>Uses genre to organize ideas.</td>
<td>Uses genre as an invention tool. Innovates with the genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master reader analysis.</td>
<td>Shows awareness of primary reader’s needs.</td>
<td>Actively anticipates needs of primary, secondary, and tertiary readers. Choices about organization, style, and design reflect needs of all readers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to use graphics in a large document.</td>
<td>Uses properly placed and labeled graphics to reinforce written text.</td>
<td>Graphics tell a clear story, provide a second path for understanding material, and create access points into the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to use plain language.</td>
<td>Sentences consistently make the “doer” the subject and put the action in the verb. Paragraphs use clear claims and support sentences.</td>
<td>Sentences are efficient and concise with maximum understanding. Paragraphs are woven together with effective subject alignment and given/new techniques.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve abilities to write strong introductions and conclusions.</td>
<td>Introduction and conclusion identify the subject, purpose, and main point.</td>
<td>Introduction captures readers’ attention, making them want to read. Conclusion drives main points home, persuading the readers to take action.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learn to interpret politics and ethics involved in energy issues.</td>
<td>Shows awareness that change can be threatening to specific interest groups on campus.</td>
<td>Anticipates and addresses political and ethical complexities, allowing readers to see a clear path toward saying ‘yes’ to the ideas in the report.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you have identified your objectives and outcomes, you can develop an assignment that targets these goals. Of course, any given assignment is not going to address all technical communication conventions and issues. So, you should identify the abilities you want the students to master in each assignment. Then, focus on these abilities in class and in your assignment.
Some instructors share their Outcomes and Assessment Chart for each assignment with their students. That way, the students have a clearer sense of the teacher’s objectives for the assignment and what qualities show excellence. Whether you choose to share your objectives and outcomes or not, they will provide you with a way to target specific abilities in a project, and they offer you a touchstone for assessing your students’ work.

Writing the Assignment Sheet

Occasionally, to simulate the workplace, technical communication instructors will give assignments verbally; however, in most cases you should provide your students with a detailed assignment sheet that describes the project you want them to complete. That way, students can refer back to the assignment sheet to check whether they are properly completing the project.

Minimally, your assignment sheet should identify or anticipate the four basic elements of the project’s rhetorical situation: subject, purpose, readers, and context of use. For example, an assignment sheet for an analytical report on using alternative energy on campus would include some or all of the following elements:

**Subject:** Alternative energy on campus

**Purpose:** Your assignment is to conduct research and compose an analytical report that discusses the feasibility of converting a feature of campus to an alternative energy source.

**Readers:** Your analytical report will be submitted to the president of the university and an alternative energy task force of faculty, staff, and students.

**Context of Use:** The report will be presented at an “Energy Summit” in which plans will be made to begin converting parts of the campus to alternative energy sources.

Once you have defined the elements of the rhetorical situation, you should use them to help you compose a narrative that introduces the assignment to your students. Your narrative will specify the *who, what, where, when, why, and how* of the assignment.

In your narrative, you do not need to mention all the elements of the rhetorical situation. For example, perhaps you want the students to identify their own readers for the report. If so, don’t name specific readers in your assignment sheet. You should, however, anticipate the kinds of readers your students might choose. Then, in class, make sure you leave time to discuss how to choose the appropriate readers for the report.

Another helpful strategy for writing assignments is to incorporate local issues. Using current events where possible, give your students the opportunity to study issues related to campus or the community. The benefits of local issues are three-fold:

> Students will address an issue that is part of their lives, making it more meaningful to them.

> The assignment will be narrow enough for them to handle in a smaller document.

> The opportunities for plagiarism are much reduced. After all, the Internet has plenty of websites about a topic like *violence*, but there is probably very limited information on violence on your campus or community.
Figure 3 shows a model assignment sheet for an analytical report assignment. (Other model assignments are available in the Instructor’s Companion in *TCT Online*.) In this assignment, the subject, purpose, readers, and context of use are spelled out for the students. Also, notice how the local angle makes the assignment more relevant to the students’ lives.

**Figure 3: Model Assignment**

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**Technical Communication**

Memorandum

Date:  
To: Technical Communication Class  
From: Your Instructor  
Subject: Analytical Report Assignment

Recently, the president of the university announced that she would be holding an “Energy Summit” in February to devise strategies for reducing the university’s dependence on fossil fuels. Though she stressed energy conservation as the most immediate solution, she also challenged researchers on campus to study other energy sources, such as solar, wind, biomass, nuclear, and hydrogen fuel cells as potential solutions to the university’s energy needs.

For our next project, our class is going to take up the president’s challenge. We are going to explore opportunities to use alternative energy sources on our campus. Your assignment is to collaborate with three other members of our class to write an analytical report in which you discuss the feasibility of converting some feature of our campus (e.g. a building, the football stadium, campus shuttle busses, a cafeteria) to an alternative energy source.

Your report should be addressed to the president of the university, but keep in mind that other readers will look over your report. Compose and design your report so it can be used effectively in the Energy Summit. Use visuals to illustrate your points.

You should also keep in mind that alternative energy can be controversial in this region because the local economy is tied to the oil, gas, and coal industries. The university receives financial support from these industries in the form of grants and gifts.

This assignment is due on December 10 in class. It should be about 5-10 pages in length, double-spaced. Include a letter of transmission addressed to the president of the university.

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In this assignment, note how the subject, purpose, readers, and context of use are all mentioned in the narrative. The assignment sheet also highlights a potential political/ethical concern that students should consider.

When writing an assignment sheet, leave plenty of room for the students to interpret and innovate. Avoid describing projects in which only one or two approaches are acceptable. Instead, write assignments that allow students to achieve the objectives of the assignment their own way.