

GE 3513 Technical Writing

Spring 2017 – Section 11 (TTh 8:00-9:15 a.m.) – McCain 215

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COURSE OBJECTIVES: GE 3513 Technical Writing is designed to provide engineering students with instruction and practice in the technical communication process. The course focuses on the broad steps of analysis, development, and revision: recognizing specific communicative situations and the objectives that arise out of them; analyzing audiences and suiting format, content, and tone to these audiences; designing documents and presentations that are structurally and mechanically effective; and creating documents and presentations to achieve clarity and correctness. Class assignments include letters, reports, instructions, and proposals based on “real-world” cases or job situations; numerous editing and analysis exercises; and a final-exam document on the concepts, techniques, and strategies discussed in class.

REQUIRED MATERIALS

- Access to MSU myCourses (<https://mycourses.msstate.edu/>) and Purdue University’s Online Writing Lab (OWL – <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/>), both of which serve as our textbook materials
- A laptop with the Respondus LockDown Browser installed (free from MSU ITS) for completing the final-exam document (unless you want to write this by hand)
- Regular access to a laptop or tablet (whether individually or in teams) to complete in-class assignments

You will also need a good college-level dictionary (*The American Heritage College Dictionary*, *Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary*, etc.) for the final-exam document (and in general).

ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING

GE 3513 coursework is divided into four major categories and accompanying percentages:

1. Three major writing assignments (50%)
2. Two presentations (25%)
3. One final-exam document (15%)
4. Numerous in-class writing projects (10%)

Final grades for the course will be based on a traditional ten-point scale: A=100-90, B=89-80, C=79-70, D=69-60, F=59 and below. NOTE: final grades that calculate to 0.5 – 0.9 get rounded (e.g., a 79.5 becomes 80); grades that calculate to 0.0 – 0.4 DO NOT get rounded (e.g., a 79.4 is a 79).

Final drafts of writing assignments and the final exam earn standard A-F letter grades (A+, B-, C, etc.). To facilitate the calculation of final grades, each letter grade gets a corresponding numerical value at the end of the semester (A+ = 98 & up, A=97-93, A- = 92-90, B+=89-88, etc.).

For a thorough description of these grades and criteria, see the “Grading Information” file in myCourses.

Writing Assignments: The first two assignments are written individually. The third assignment is a research report on one of two broad topics that is collaboratively written and submitted. Full information on all these assignments is available in myCourses. Each of these will be submitted in two drafts.

First drafts: Multiple hard copies of first drafts are due at the beginning of class for in-class review on the dates designated below. First drafts must be at least half of the length of the final draft, excluding (where applicable) the title page, table of contents, references, and appendices. (For example, if the assignment 3 final draft must be a minimum of 10 pages in length, then your rough draft must be a minimum of five pages.) Submitting first drafts of insufficient length or failing to bring the required copies of your first draft will cost one letter of the final assignment grade. Late first drafts will not be evaluated and will receive zero credit.

Final drafts: Final drafts (one copy) must be uploaded as Word documents or PDFs via their respective myCourses assignment links. **Hard copies of final drafts and alternate formats are not acceptable.** Failure to submit drafts on time will result in a late penalty as described in “Policies” (below).

Presentations: Both presentations will be done collaboratively in teams. Your grade on these presentations is based not only on my assessment of the presentation itself via grading forms but also on your team’s working relationship. Each student is responsible for maintaining open, honest, and consistent communication with his or her group members, voicing any concerns that threaten the group’s progress. Most presentation teams work well together without major difficulties. Should problems arise that affect your group’s work, however, you must document in writing any such problems (via, e.g., the required team evaluations) and inform me immediately – if you don’t, then I cannot and will not take any action.

Final-Exam Document: The final-exam assignment is optional. If you decide to take the exam, you will write a brief technical document during our three-hour exam time. If you opt to not take the final exam, the average of your three writing assignments will take the place of the final exam grade.

In-Class Projects: In-class projects consist of brief writing or discussion-based assignments that correspond with current class topics. These projects are worth 10 points each, largely based on participation, and they are not always announced in advance, so when you miss class without an excuse, you risk losing points on these projects.

Distinguished Speaker Allan McDonald: The Bagley College’s Distinguished Speaker Series is hosting Dr. Allan McDonald, one of the key figures in the space shuttle *Challenger* disaster, on Wednesday, April 19 at 7:00 p.m. in the Union Ballroom. Your attendance at this presentation is mandatory (the usual exceptions apply for excused absences) and will also involve a brief post-event write-up.

Class E-mail List: MSU considers e-mail an official means of University business (including coursework-related information), and I communicate extensively through e-mail in this class, particularly for the return of graded writing assignments and presentations (the “Send Email” function in myCourses uses your MSU-assigned netID address). You are responsible for ensuring you have consistent access to your netID email address throughout this semester.

POLICIES – READ THESE VERY CAREFULLY.

1. Every student in GE 3513 must submit serious, substantive attempts at every major assignment in the course – writing assignments, presentations, and the exam – even if these are late and earn grades of zero. Failure to complete any of these assignments will mean an automatic failing grade for the course.
2. You are expected to attend every class meeting. **If you accumulate five unexcused absences during the semester, you lose one letter grade off of your final grade in the course; each additional absence costs you one additional letter grade apiece. If you arrive more than 10 minutes after class start time, you will be counted absent, and that absence is subject to the same excused/unexcused policy.** Excused absences must be accompanied by appropriate in-advance documentation and include MSU-related travel (including professional-society events), job interviews, your own extreme illness, or a death in the immediate family. Providing documentation to me in advance for excused absences is entirely your responsibility. (NOTE: I report all absences with final grades, both excused and unexcused – only the unexcused ones count against your final grade.)
3. You must participate fully in all in-class work (discussions, group projects, and especially draft reviews). Excessive lack of participation – whether from missing class, sleeping, doing homework for other classes, surfing the internet, texting, or simply not doing the work assigned – can cost up to one letter of your final grade in the course. Note that I will not necessarily call you out or remind you about this policy if I see you violating it persistently; I will simply make a note of the violations and lower your final grade accordingly.
4. Laptops, cell/smart phones, Kindles/e-readers, and other electronic devices may only be used in class with my permission, typically for in-class work – **you are not allowed to use them during class otherwise.** Note that this policy aligns with MSU policy AOP 10.08 (<http://www.policies.msstate.edu/policypdfs/1008.pdf>), which prohibits the use of electronic devices in class unless the instructor gives permission. Wearing earbuds

and headphones is strictly forbidden during class. Violations of this policy will affect your course grade in accordance with policy 3 above.

5. I provide thorough, clear information for this class in my syllabus and in the plethora of materials available in myCourses. If any of this information is unclear, by all means ask me for clarification. Do not, however, ask me to provide answers via email or in-person for questions that can be answered by the syllabus and/or myCourses (e.g., “When are your office hours?” “Where is your office?” “What do we have due this week?” “When is/what do we have to do for the final exam?”).
6. All writing completed outside of class must be typed with 1-inch margins and 12-point body type; line spacing may vary with assignments. Additionally, all writing assignments and presentations must be uploaded via their respective myCourses assignment links as Word or PDF files on the specified due dates. Failure to do so will subject an assignment to the late policy described below.
7. Late or missing first drafts will not be evaluated and will cost you one letter of the final assignment grade. Late final drafts will be penalized 2 letter grades for each day late (including weekends) unless we discuss your situation in advance. Assignments that are more than three days late will receive a permanent grade of zero but must still be submitted (see 1 above). I am more than willing to make exceptions to the late policy described above for legitimate reasons but only if we discuss these matters before the assignment in question is due.
8. Teamwork is a required and essential part of this course. You will complete writing assignment 3, presentations 1 and 2, and nearly all in-class work collaboratively throughout the semester. As a matter of professionalism and of course policy, you are required to work together (in person and remotely), to divide all work equally, and to communicate consistently and professionally with the entire team. The required team charters and evaluations are meant to help you establish ground rules and avoid or document problems hindering the team’s progress. Team evaluations consist of rating your fellow team members by distributing the assignment’s total possible points as you think they should be distributed based on each member’s input. The first rating (after presentation 1) does not count toward your grade but is a way to ensure all teams are functioning well; if the ratings indicate obvious problems, we will meet to solve them, probably several times. **The second rating CAN count toward your grades** for writing assignment 3 and presentation 2 at the instructor’s discretion if the overall team ratings establish a consensus about team-member performances; the ratings can raise or lower these grades dramatically, as the example below shows:

	Member A	Member B	Member C	Member D
Member A	---	45%	10%	45%
Member B	40%	---	20%	40%
Member C	33.3%	33.3%	---	33.3%
Member D	40%	40%	20%	---
Total %	113.3%	118.3%	50%	118.3%
Raw Team Grade (RTG)	90	90	90	90
Final Member Grades (RTG x total %)	102/A+	106.5/A+	45/F	106.5/A+

The moral of this story, then, is ***Be a good, consistent, thoughtful, professional teammate.***

9. Nearly all content for this course will be available to you through myCourses. It is your responsibility to maintain consistent access to myCourses and to retrieve assignment information on time.
10. On any assignment for which you use outside print sources (i.e., not websites), you must submit photocopies or printouts of these sources with your assignment. Failure to do so will subject your assignment to the late policy described above.
11. While nearly all of what you submit in this course must be created specifically for this course, sometimes your prior work may be useful to you here. Before you use such prior work, however, you must obtain written permission from me AND from the instructor to whom you originally submitted the work. Failure to do so can result in charges of academic misconduct (see 15 below along with <http://www.policies.msstate.edu/policypdfs/1207.pdf>).

12. You must be prepared to present orally on the dates designated below. Missed oral presentations receive zero credit but must be delivered on another day (unless the absence is excused). Even when you are not delivering presentations yourself, *attendance is mandatory on presentation days* – you must be present and participate in the process as an active audience member by listening carefully, asking thoughtful questions, and thoroughly completing evaluation forms for every assigned presentation. Failure to do so will cost one letter of your own individual presentation grade.
13. The final-exam document requires you to successfully deploy all of the concepts for effective communication we discuss and practice throughout the semester. As the course instructor, I consider the exam document a major opportunity for you to show how well you can communicate in terms of professional writing. Be sure to treat this assignment with its due care.
14. In the event of a grade dispute, you have five weekdays from the time I return an assignment to discuss your grade with me; there is no time limit on questions regarding the content or mechanics of the assignment. However, (a) you must read all of my written comments on your work before we discuss the assignment in question, and (b) our discussion must be rooted in your reading of my comments – discussions that begin with “I want to know why I got a [insert grade]” are wholly unproductive.
15. **ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:** Unless denoted by the words “team,” “group,” or “collaboration,” the work in this course is individual, meaning you must write your own documents and do your own work. Failing to do your own work in a writing class constitutes a specific type of academic misconduct known as **PLAGIARISM**. This can include misuse of sources – incorrect paraphrasing, omitted citations, etc. – even when you turn in copies of the sources with your assignment. **The penalty for plagiarism is an XF/0 for the course in addition to a record of the infraction filed with the Honor Code Office.** You are responsible for learning and observing all MSU policies regarding intellectual honesty and academic misconduct, especially those concerning plagiarism, posted at <http://www.policies.msstate.edu/policypdfs/1207.pdf> (these guidelines apply to this course). For additional discussion on plagiarism, see the “Plagiarism” file in myCourses. Lastly, Mississippi State University has an approved Honor Code that applies to all students. The code is as follows: “As a Mississippi State University student 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.”
16. In accordance with MSU Operating Policy 91.301 (<http://www.msstate.edu/dept/audit/91301.html>), “Tobacco use in any form [...] [such as] cigarettes, cigars, pipes, smokeless tobacco, snuff, and chewing tobacco [...] shall not be permitted in university facilities and vehicles owned or leased, regardless of location.” This policy applies to our classroom: no tobacco use of any kind is allowed in McCain 215 or any GE 3513 classroom.
17. From MSU’s Director of Title IX/EEO Programs: “MSU is committed to complying with Title IX, a federal law that prohibits discrimination, including violence and harassment, based on sex. This means that MSU’s educational programs and activities must be free from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know has experienced sex discrimination, sexual violence and/or harassment by any member of the University community, you are encouraged to report the conduct to MSU’s Director of Title IX/EEO Programs at 325-8124 or by e-mail to titleix@msstate.edu. Additional resources are available at <http://www.msstate.edu/web/security/title9-12.pdf>, or at <http://students.msstate.edu/sexualmisconduct/>.”
18. MSU and I are dedicated to making reasonable accommodations for people with documented disabilities. Students should notify Student Support Services (325-3335) and me of any special needs, preferably during the first week of class.

ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULE

(WA = writing assignment; PA = presentation assignment)

Date	Activity
January 10, 12	Introductory material; in-class work; read through the syllabus and all of the information in myCourses very carefully
January 17, 19	In-class work

January 24, 26	In-class work; WA1 (individual) first draft due for in-class review January 26
January 31; February 2	In-class work; WA1 (individual) final draft due February 2; last day to change teams February 2
February 7, 9	In-class work; team research topics due February 9
February 14, 16	PA1 (team) in-class slide review
February 21, 23	PA1 (team) final version due in class
February 28; March 2	In-class work; WA2 (individual) first draft due for in-class review March 2
March 7, 9	In-class work; team critique of PA1 video due March 9; WA2 (individual) final draft due March 9
March 14, 16	No class—spring break
March 21, 23	In-class work; ethics and the Challenger disaster; mid-semester team evaluation due March 23
March 28, 30	Ethics (cont.); WA3 (team research report) first draft due for in-class review March 30
April 4, 6	PA2 (team research report) slide reviews
April 11, 13	PA2 (team research report) final version due in class
April 18, 20	WA3 (team research report) final draft due April 20; final team evaluation due April 20
April 25 (last day of class)	In-class work; final team evaluation due April 25
Friday, April 28, 8-11 a.m.	Final exam (optional) for Section 11; must inform me via email about your exam option by 5:00pm Wednesday April 26