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WRIT 121.51: Introduction to Technical Writing

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WRIT 121 INTRODUCTION TO TECHNICAL WRITING

Course Syllabus

Instructor: Cathy Corr 243-7903 cathy.corr@umontana.edu

Required Materials:

Professional and Technical Writing Strategies

VanAlstyne, tenth custom edition

Little, Brown Compact Handbook,

Jane E. Aaron, eighth edition

Course Objectives:

1. Introduction to constructed text that accurately communicates technical information using technical text, document design, graphic placement, and technical formats.
2. An awareness of both academic and technical writing genres and how the writing situation shapes the document.
3. Introduction to a writing process that includes revision and editing.
4. Introduction to *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* as a tool to gain control of punctuation, grammar, syntax, and spelling.

Workload and Expectations Overview:

This course focuses on the kind of writing that fills manuals—description, instruction, and analysis—as well as public science writing. We will read and discuss technical documents and materials. There is a special focus on audience as evidenced in the Society for Technical Communicator's Code of Ethics: Technical writers “satisfy the audience's need for information, not the writer's own need for self-expression.” This kind of writing focuses on the reader.

All writing classes address **writing conventions** at some point. I address punctuation problems through clauses and basic sentence structure that leads to a working knowledge of the *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, a tool you take with you to use in other classes. It is appropriate to line edit technical documents, so this class addresses editing skills.

All major papers will include a revision day where we can work the **writing process** as we revise these papers to better understand how we compose, and to learn once again that there is nothing neat and tidy about writing and revising. In technical writing with the audience so important, we need feedback and must adjust our documents continually.

After completing the technical/professional papers and assignments, students will be expected to apply knowledge of strong technical text, graphic placement, and design features within all other assignments, especially the public science piece.

There are **readings** both in Moodle and a Pearson Publishing mode that will require your critical reading skills and are part of the daily assignments. Some designated readings will require you to **define what credible writing in cyberspace is** and how a reader determines what is credible.

The **in-class projects** are designed to help build a writing community. We never write alone and technical writing especially needs input from readers. We often use small groups to help each other think through writing problems and acquire ideas from each other.

The **public science paper** gives you an opportunity to explore a subject and present information in a technical style. Lastly, there will be an opportunity to **synthesize your writing knowledge in a self-reflective final**, both the already acquired and the new, and to articulate a new understanding of writing that is broader and more inclusive. It is your opportunity to build bridges between all of your writing classes.

Grading Scale:

94-100 A	87-89 B+	77-79 C+
93-90 A-	86-83 B	76-73 C
	82-80 B-	72-70 C-

Attendance

Attendance is an expectation. Students who do not attend class do not perform as well as students who do attend class.

First, why it matters A writing course is unlike most of the classes you will take while at the University of Montana. In other classes, there will be a specific amount of well-defined material to be covered, and lecturing is the most common mode for distributing that information. Although your instructor will give you information and guide you as you develop effective writing strategies and practices, becoming a better writer does not happen from listening to lectures. "Learning" in this course takes place mainly through engagement and inquiry--that means you will be participating in many class discussions and group-related activities. You will not find yourself sitting in class taking notes.

Personal situations and required university events may arise that, on a rare occasion, make it impossible for you to be in class. Remember, however, that's why three (3) absences are allowed; please reserve those for *exceptional circumstances*. If you must miss class, you are responsible for obtaining any handouts or assignments for the class. Make sure you talk with your instructor in advance if you are worried about meeting a deadline or missing a class.

The Policy

You are allotted 3 "free" absences: you do not need permission, and I don't need an explanation. Use these three wisely. More than three absences will compromise your grade.

4th absence: final grade drops one letter grade

Why the policy? Without attending class, you cannot participate as a member of a learning community, and you cannot be a writer and collaborator with your peers. Participation includes taking part in class discussions, asking questions, and contributing to the classroom experience. Of course, this includes doing the required reading and writing assignments.

Other Course Policies

There will be no opportunity to "make-up" tests, quizzes or in-class assignments that are not turned-in during the designated class period. This make-up policy is applied at the discretion of the Instructor.

Format of all works produced will depend upon the specific assignment. All final drafts must be word-processed. Do not put writing assignments in folders or binders; staple them in the upper, left hand corner. Back up your assignments for your own protection.

Plagiarism of any sort will result in a course grade of F. The U of M's student Conduct Code defines plagiarism as "representing another person's words, ideas, data, or materials as one's own." Students may be asked for their research or sources at any time.

Disability Services: Students with disabilities are provided accommodations upon presenting the proper verification. Come see me.

WTS writing curriculum is in transition. Missoula College is part of the UM system and the student populations attending all the campuses are diverse and dynamic. As UM at large and Missoula College specifically continue to grow, the faculty must address the needs of these varied populations. Missoula College's Department of Applied Arts and Sciences and the writing curriculum in particular are facing exciting and varied curricula and pedagogical challenges. The changes reflect current research and conversation going on in the discipline of rhetoric and composition that dynamically act as an evolving 'answer' to the needs of Missoula College students as well as responding to administrative directives. Students are invited to participate in the ongoing course development and to assess changes in the writing curriculum and instruction.