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WRIT 121.50: Introduction to Technical Writing

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INTRODUCTION TO TECHNICAL WRITING
Course Syllabus
 WRIT 121

Instructor: Ashley Preston
Contact: ashley.preston@umontana.edu
Office/Hours: HB02 aka “the fishbowl”; MW 12:30-1:30p.m. or by appointment on TuTh

Required Materials:

Professional and Technical Writing Strategies
 VanAlstyne
 10th Custom edition for Missoula College (2014-2015)

and

The Little, Brown Compact Handbook
 Aaron, Jane E. 8th edition

Course Description:

Offered every term. Introduction to technical writing situations that integrate text, design, and graphics. Emphasis is on evidence-based, informative writing that uses design and graphics to visually represent logic and organization. Course focuses on writing as a process and includes student self-assessment. Major assignments include a pure technical document, exploration of credibility, and public science writing. Students are expected to write without major faults in grammar or usage and to have basic computer literacy.

This course is for students who want to ready themselves for writing within the two-year programs here at the Missoula College. This is a basic 100 level writing course that requires successful passing of the Writing Placement Exam or successful completion of a composition course. Since writing is a process, one that takes time and often requires revision, students will need to be self-motivated and self-disciplined to work through the material in a timely fashion.

Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts
- Formulate and express written opinions and ideas that are developed, logical, and organized
- Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose
- Revise written work based on constructive feedback
- Find, evaluate, and use information effectively and ethically
- Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions
- Demonstrate appropriate English language usage

Course Objectives

1. Introduction to constructed text that accurately communicates technical information using appropriate technical writing constructs, document design, and graphic placement within 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 revising and editing.
4. Introduction to *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook* in order 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 power point presentations and public science writing. We will read and discuss technical documents as well as materials about technical writing. There is a special focus on audience as evidenced in this quote from 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 is all about the reader.

All writing classes address **writing conventions**. Sentence level issue exercises address punctuation, syntax, and basic sentence structure/mechanics problems. *The Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, is an invaluable tool for completing

this work and I recommend that you keep this book to use in other classes. It is appropriate to line edit technical documents, so this is a good opportunity to hone your editing skills.

All papers include revision days on which we work the **writing process** to better understand how we compose, and to learn once again that there is nothing neat and tidy about writing and revising. Because the audience is so important in technical writing, we need feedback from an audience in order to adjust our documents.

Students will be expected to apply their knowledge of correct sentence mechanics, strong technical text, graphic placement, and design features in all written assignments.

Required readings are found in Moodle, Pearson, and your text. They will require critical reading skills and are part of the daily assignments. The **in-class projects** are designed to help build a writing community. We never write alone and technical writing especially needs input from others. We often use small groups to help each other think through writing problems and acquire ideas from each other. The **public science paper** provides an opportunity to explore a subject and present it in a technical style. Readings will be available on Moodle and Pearson. Lastly, there will be an opportunity to **synthesize your writing knowledge**, 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+	60-69 D- -D+
93-90 A-	86-83 B	76-73 C	Below 60 F
	82-80 B-	72-70 C-	

Point Distribution*

In-class work/homework assignments/quizzes	280
Bad News Letter	50
Mechanism Description	150
Credibility in Cyberspace/PP/paper	200
Public Science Paper	220
Self-reflective Final	100

* This is a tentative distribution; values may change as assignments are added, subtracted, or revalued.

Course Policies

There will be no opportunity to make-up tests, quizzes, in-class assignments, or homework assignments that are not turned-in or completed during the designated class period. Plan ahead and make appropriate arrangements if you foresee an absence.

Attendance is expected and required. WRIT121 focuses on the process of writing and on building a community of writers; therefore, absences are particularly detrimental to success. For online students, this means checking Moodle frequently and participating in all online discussions and work sessions. For face-to-face students this means attending all classes and participating in in-class work. **On your 4th absence your final grade will drop one full letter grade. On your 5th absence you will fail the class. In addition, you will not receive credit for work done in class on the day of your absence.**

Format of all work 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 corner. Name, date, and course rubric/section number should be in the upper right corner. Save everything to disc 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.

Course Accommodations Statement (DSS)

Students with disabilities may request reasonable modifications by contacting me. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). "Reasonable" means the University permits no fundamental alterations of academic standards or retroactive modifications. The University of Montana assures equal access to instruction through

collaboration between students with disabilities, instructors, and Disability Services for Students (DSS). If you think you may have a disability adversely affecting your academic performance, and you have not already registered with DSS, please contact DSS in Lommason 154 as soon as possible. I will work with you and DSS to provide an appropriate modification.

Email policy at UM

According to the University email policy effective on 1 July 2007, an “employee must use *only* UMM assigned student email accounts for all email exchanges with students, since such communication typically involves private student information.” This means that you *must* send any correspondence through your official UM student email account. For more information on setting up and using your official UM student email account contact tech support.

Student Conduct Code Statement

All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or a disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the [Student Conduct Code](#).

This course requires an electronic submission (via Moodle) of an assignment stripped of your personal information to be used for educational research and assessment of the university’s writing program. Your paper will be stored in a database. A random selection of papers will be assessed by a group of faculty and staff using a rubric developed from the following Writing Learning Outcomes.

- *Compose written documents that are appropriate for a given audience or purpose*
- *Formulate and express opinions and ideas in writing*
- *Use writing to learn and synthesize new concepts*
- *Revise written work based on constructive feedback*
- *Find, evaluate, and use information effectively*
- *Begin to use discipline-specific writing conventions (largely style conventions like APA or MLA)*
- *Demonstrate appropriate English language usage*

This assessment in no way affects either your course grade or your progression at the university. Here’s the [rubric](#) that will be used to score the papers.