

English 388-002
Professional and Technical Writing
Spring 2012 Syllabus
[Professor Rebecca McGeehan](#)

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English 388-002

Professional and Technical Writing

Spring 2012

Tuesday/Thursday

1:30-2:45 PM, Innovation Hall 320

General Information

Professor Rebecca McGeehan

Office: College Hall 204

Email: rmcgeeh1@gmu

Office Hours:

- Face-to-face: Tuesday/Thursday, 10:30-11:30 AM & 3:00-4:00 PM
- Virtual Office Hours: Wednesday by appointment (via Blackboard Collaboration Session)

Required Texts

- *The Essentials of Technical Communication, First Edition*, Tebeaux and Dragga.
(available in the campus bookstore)
 - [Textbook Companion Website](#)
- Professor provided readings as assigned

Course Overview

In the professional world, you will always have to write. Whether it's an email to a co-worker, a proposal to USAID, a memo to your supervisor, or a white paper to a potential client, your writing is always viewed as a product—your product. If you develop this craft, your professional writing skill is a product you can offer an employer from day one.

Technical writers make sure everyone who needs to understand something can understand it completely, without question or pause. Successful completion of this course means you leave the classroom able to identify and understand varied situations and audience competences, and execute the appropriate form of written communication for a given professional assignment.

This course will introduce you directly to some of the most common professional genres and rhetorical strategies as well as challenge you to research and write for situations that will be unique to your professional experience.

The general format of the class meeting will be discussion, intensive in-class practice, and workshopping—individually and in groups. Your success in the course, therefore, relies on your engagement in course material and activities.

We will cover a significant amount of information on professional and technical writing. Some topics and forms covered will be more relevant to your field than others, but you are responsible for engaging in all aspects of the course. Your textbook is an invaluable resource and will lay the necessary foundation for you to come to class prepared to work. In order to engage and understand fully what we are looking to accomplish in each class period, you **MUST** read and do so on schedule. I advise that you read ahead, read assigned pieces more than once, and come prepared with questions and ideas.

Technology Requirements

Course Content Access via Blackboard @ [myMason](#)

Virtually all course content will be made available through Blackboard and you will complete and submit the majority of your work directly through Blackboard, unless otherwise instructed.

- You will log on to Blackboard site least twice a day during the week (morning and evening), more when requested by me or your groups.
- In addition to being our individual and collaborative workspace, this will be where all course announcements and updates will be posted. In the event of a face-to-face class cancellation, alternate instructions/assignments will be posted to Blackboard so that we do not fall behind schedule.

GMU Email Account

You must email me from an official GMU email account. All I cannot respond to emails from third-party accounts as I have no way to verify their authenticity.

- Go to [MASONLIVE](#) to set up your @masonlive.gmu.edu email account if you have yet to do so.
- Please let me know if you are faculty/staff and still using MEMO mail (@gmu.edu)

I will check my email twice a day during the week. I ask that you do the same. Please make sure your emails are thoughtful and well articulated. I will respond in kind.

- Be advised, I do not generally check email over the weekend so anything pressing should come to me before 5:00 PM on Friday if you need a response before Monday.

Email and Smartphones

If you need assistance setting up your Smartphone to receive and send email from your Mason account (as required), you can find helpful information at the [GMU Smartphones](#) site or contact the ITU Support Center at (703) 993-8870.

As with all email in a professional environment, when sending messages from your Smartphone, you still need to provide a greeting and signature!

Internet Connection, Computer and Software

You must have consistent access to a reliable high-speed internet connection and computer and to required software. Your internet connection should be reliably fast and the computer you're using must have

- Microsoft Word 2003 or higher
- the most recent version of [Acrobat Reader](#) (Free download)
- the ability to convert a Word file to a .pdf
- [Java](#) and its most recent updates (Free download)
- [Adobe Flash Player](#) and its most recent updates (Free download)

All GMU computer lab computers meet these course technology requirements, so if you don't have a reliable connection or computer at home or you do not want to download any new software, plan accordingly.

File Backup Plan

Excuses will not be accepted for completely "lost" work. I understand technology mishaps can happen, but they are neither natural nor rare. So be proactive and constantly save and **backup** your work. For example, save to your hard drive or flash drive and backup using the likes of [Google Docs](#), or vice versa. You can also create a wiki page on Blackboard for housing your assignment files as you are developing them.

Managing The Course: Policies and Requirements

Communication

It is your responsibility to remain in communication with me and your classmates throughout the semester. You will do this primarily through Blackboard.

- The “Ask the Prof.” discussion forum is where you should ask me virtually ALL of your questions about the course and assignments. This ensures that that everyone may reap the benefits of an answer to a question that only one person may have the guts(?), foresight(?), willingness(?), to ask.
- Questions or concerns that you know are specific to you and that you would not like to share with the entire class should be emailed to me (via your MASONLIVE email account) or brought to me during office hours. The latter is preferable.
- All assignment-related questions must be sent or posted at least 24 hours in advance of an assignment’s due date, bearing in mind weekend questions may not be responded to until the following Monday.
- Course content missed due to an absence/late arrival will not be discussed via email. When you are late or absent you must check Blackboard, touch base with your classmates for information on what was covered, and then come to office hours to further discuss the content if necessary.

Graded Work

You earn your grades and they are non-negotiable.

You must meet with me in person during office hours within one week of receiving back graded work if you’d like to discuss it. Under no circumstance will I discuss grades via email or in the classroom.

I encourage you to take a more active role in your education by asking questions in class, in real time, posing critical questions to “Ask the Prof.” and coming to speak with me in person prior to an assignment’s due date. If after you’ve earned a grade, you still need some help understanding the evaluation of your work and developing your knowledge and skill, you can swing by my office then, too! While these discussions will not earn you a higher grade (unless there’s a revision option), they are invaluable to your writing and problem solving process.

While you will receive individualized feedback from me on many major assignment elements, short assignments and process work may be handled more generally in class, so you may need to compare/apply the in-class content to your work in order to understand its assessment.

Coursework, Grade Weights, and Final Document Deadlines

Coursework (See assignment prompts as assigned for process work instructions and point breakdown, deadlines, and submission info)	Points and Weight	Final Due Date (Subject to change)
Genre Analysis Project	225 pts. 15%	2/23
Recommendation Report Group Project	300 pts. 20%	3/27
New Instruction, Policy or Procedure Project	750 pts. 50%	5/3 (IPPD) 5/15 (PPR)
Engagement (<i>Short assignments, attendance, active participation</i>)	225 pts. 15%	All semester

I will add up all final points earned and divide them by points possible to determine your final course grade. 1500 points = 100%. Eg: $1255/1500 = .837 = 83.7\%$

Final percentages will earn the following letter grades:

98.0 – 100: A+	88.0 – 89.9: B+	78.0 – 79.9: C+	65.0 – 69.9: D
94.0 – 97.9: A	84.0 – 87.9: B	74.0 – 77.9: C	64.9 – below: F
90.0 – 93.9: A-	80.0 – 83.9: B-	70.0 – 73.9: C-	

Short Assignment Evaluation

Short assignments will receive a 5, 4, 3, or 0. Work that

- exceeds expectation = 5
- is satisfactory = 4
- is unsatisfactory = 3
- is not completed/demonstrates little to no effort = 0

All turned-in-on-time assignments that are at least close to the mark will earn a 5 or 4. Work that might completely miss the mark but demonstrates significant effort will receive a 3.

These small assignments are part of your overall engagement grade and will be averaged together with the points earned for each class period. If you turn something in AND regularly attend and engage in class (see engagement policy) you'll likely earn at least a B-. If you turn in nothing, those zeros could greatly jeopardize your final engagement and overall grade.

Please note, more labor intensive short assignments, such as peer reviews, will be weighted more heavily. For example, a peer review might be worth up to three short assignments or a maximum of 15 points.

Short assignments may not be made-up or revised for a grade change.

Course Engagement

Your engagement grade is the average of your short assignment grades (see above), and points earned for attendance AND active presence in class—this starts on day one. You can earn 1 engagement point for each class period, but simply showing up won't get you more than .5. Engagement points may not be made-up.

1. Attendance

The days you do not attend class, a zero '0' will be averaged into your final engagement grade. These zeroes cannot be made up.

2. Active Presence

Being actively present means you are prepared and willing to engage in whatever the day's agenda requires. You should always be ready to respectfully speak your mind, listen to what your classmates have to say, and participate in in-class exercises without hesitation or reservation.

Students who are dozing, texting or surfing unrelated websites, working on assignments for other classes, or unprepared for class, etc., are not actively present and thus may lose class participation points. Any serious breach of good classroom conduct may cause you to lose all points.

Computer classrooms pose endless temptations; please try to resist them. Remember that your screen may distract others who might otherwise be learning something, *and be aware that it's really not difficult for me to guess when you're not typing class notes.*

Arriving Late and Leaving Early

I will take attendance within the first five minutes of each class period. If you are not in your seat ready to participate when begin calling roll, you are counted as absent. If you arrive during or after roll call, it is your responsibility to make sure you have been marked present by seeing me after class. If you don't touch base with me that day, your absence may stand. If you arrive late or leave early for any reason/amount of time, you may not receive full engagement credit for that day.

Students who arrive late to class will be allowed into the classroom at my discretion. While late arrivals can be disruptive, in an emergency, I would rather have you come late than not at all. Students more than 20 minutes late cannot earn more half engagement credit for the day.

The same holds true for leaving early. While leaving early can be disruptive, in emergency cases, I would like you to attend as much of the class period as possible. If you must leave early, let me know prior to the start of the class period. If you leave with 20 minutes or more remaining in the period, you may not earn more than half engagement credit for the day.

Major Assignment Evaluation

Although most individual assignments will have specific grading criteria, I will always use the following general criteria as a baseline for evaluating your work:

A-level Work

Demonstrates exceptional audience awareness—both in form and language; fulfills and appropriately exceeds expectation; implements a unique voice and style without compromising essential information, purpose, or audience awareness; can be used as intended with minimal or no revision; virtually error-free.

B-level Work

Demonstrates strong audience awareness—both in form and language; fulfills requirements and exceeds some expectation, but its unique voice and style is limited and/or somewhat inappropriate; can be used as intended but would need some minor revision; mostly error-free: very few sentence-level and/or design errors which do not impact readability and/or usability.

C-level Work

Demonstrates adequate audience awareness—both in form and language; fulfills the basic requirements without exceeding expectation or implementing an effective and appropriate unique voice and style; can be used by an employer/in the field but would need some revision; some sentence-level and/or design errors which do not impact readability and/or usability.

D-level Work

Does not demonstrate audience awareness in form or language, although it may be clear that concepts and requirements are somewhat understood; does not fulfill the basic requirements despite some possible moments of effective execution; would not be used by an employer/in the field; contains significant sentence-level and/or design errors which impact readability and/or usability.

F-level Work

Does not demonstrate an understanding of concepts and requirements; does not fulfill the basic requirements, and does not contain significant moments of effective execution; would not be used by an employer/in the field; contains significant sentence-level and/or design errors.

Assignment Instructions and Submission

All work must be submitted as instructed. An assignment that is improperly submitted is considered not submitted.

Work is due at the beginning of the class period on its due date, unless otherwise noted. You are responsible for reading and understanding instructions, including the how and when behind proper submission. Any questions about an assignment, including its submission process, should be brought to me well in advance of an assignment's due date.

Late Work

Final major assignments are the only work I will accept late. Late work is work submitted after its deadline. Late work will incur a 1/3-letter-grade late-work penalty for each calendar day it is late. After one week, the submission window will close. In the event that you do not submit your work in that window, you must come to me during face-to-face office hours to discuss the issue.

Exceptions to the late work penalty **may** be made in cases of documented illnesses or emergencies. In any of these cases, contact me as soon as possible via e-mail with the late work, in its current state of development, attached and let me know of the issue.

Late-work penalties cannot be changed through revision.

Extra Credit

I do not offer extra credit.

Incompletes

An Incomplete will be given only if you have completed two-thirds of the work for the semester, attended two-thirds of the class sessions, and have a valid reason for being unable to attend class and/or complete the remainder of the work on time, such as a documented lingering illness, family emergency, or work obligation that involves unforeseeable extended travel. Poor time management will not be accepted as a reason for an incomplete and you must have been in contact with about the issue at hand well in advance of requesting the incomplete.

Requests for incompletes must be made in person, prior to the last day of class, and you must present a written proposal addressing in detail the reason an incomplete should be given and how and when you will complete and submit the remaining coursework and how you will make-up engagement points.

If an incomplete is granted, we will draft a contract addressing specific requirements and deadlines based on your unique situation.

Naming Conventions for Online Work

Unless otherwise noted, file and wiki page names must be labeled with your last name and first initial and an appropriate version of the assignment name

- Jane Student's genre analysis saved as a Word 2003 document: *StudentJ GA.doc* or *StudentJ Genre Analysis.doc*
- If your work is incorrectly named or not accessible to me or your classmates (when required) it may be returned or not earn credit

Revision

Based on your completion of English 302 (or its equivalent) and writing/research intensive courses in your major, I expect that you have developed and are using a smart researched writing process that includes revision while drafting all assignments for this course. Minimally, you will revise your work after peer review (when offered). Additionally, you may re-revise your genre analysis, after it's been graded, for a possible new grade—either through a Complete Revision or a Revision Memo. If the entire group agrees, can meet with me per the policy above, and participates in the process, you may revise your group recommendation report as well.

Complete Revision

Before undertaking a Complete Revision, you must schedule a revision conference with me. This meeting must occur within one week of the essay's return to you. You should come to this conference—face to face or electronic—prepared to explain and ask questions about your plan for your revisions.

- Complete Revisions must themselves **demonstrate substantial change** to the focus, support, approach, or organization of the text in addition to comprehensive error correction, or they will be returned with no grade change. Substantial change may be thought of as change **to at least 15-20%** of the assignment's text; you must address widespread issues as well as providing small fixes. Revised essays must, however, retain the original text's topic and approach; revision does not mean "write a new essay."
- Complete Revisions must be accompanied by a brief **Revision Guide**, which can be typed at the top of the new draft:
 - "I primarily worked on improving ____ and ____."
 - "I think these parts were hard for me because ____."
 - "In other advanced writing tasks in the future, I'll try to solve these writing problems better by ____"
- Complete Revisions will result in a new assignment grade: thoughtful revisions usually result in a full letter grade improvement, though some grades may improve by more.
- Complete Revisions must be completed within one week of your conference with me.

Revision Memo

You may instead choose to write a **Revision Memo**, to increase an essay's grade by a half letter grade (B to B+, for instance). You must use standard memo form and style. In about 200 words, you should include actual examples of improvements you would make ("For instance, in paragraph 3 I would add two sentences about the research article I found on ethics in accounting") along with explanations of why the changes would improve your writing.

- **Memos that only repeat my comments or provide vague ideas will earn no points.**

- Revision Memos must be completed within one week of the assignment's return to you.

University Policies

Students with Disabilities

(703) 993-2474; <http://ods.gmu.edu>; SUB I 4205

Students with documented disabilities are legally entitled to certain accommodations in the classroom. If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the [Office of Disability Services](#) (ODS) at 703-993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

GMU Nondiscrimination Policy

George Mason University is committed to providing equal opportunity and an educational and work environment free from any discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or age. Mason shall adhere to all applicable state and federal equal opportunity/affirmative action statutes and regulations.

Statement on Plagiarism

Plagiarism means using the exact words, opinions, or factual information from another source without giving that source credit. Writers give credit through the use of accepted documentation styles, such as parenthetical citation, footnotes, or end notes; a simple listing of books, articles, and websites is not sufficient.

This class will include direct instruction in strategies for handling sources as part of our curriculum. However, students in composition classes must also take responsibility for understanding and practicing the basic principles listed below.

To avoid plagiarism, meet the expectations of a US Academic Audience, give their readers a chance to investigate the issue further, and make credible arguments, writers **must**

- put quotation marks around, *and* give an in-text citation for, any sentences or distinctive phrases (even very short, 2- or 3-word phrases) that writers copy directly from any outside source: a book, a textbook, an article, a website, a newspaper, a song, a baseball card, an interview, an encyclopedia, a CD, a movie, etc.
- *completely rewrite*—not just switch out a few words—any information they find in a separate source and wish to summarize or paraphrase for their readers, *and also* give an in-text citation for that paraphrased information
- give an in-text citation for any facts, statistics, or opinions which the writers learned from outside sources (or which they just happen to *know*) and which are not considered “common knowledge” in the target audience (this may require new research to locate a credible outside source to cite)

- give a *new* in-text citation for *each element* of information—that is, do not rely on a single citation at the end of a paragraph, because that is not usually sufficient to inform a reader clearly of how much of the paragraph comes from an outside source.

Writers must also include a References list at the end of their document, providing full bibliographic information for every source cited in the document.

While different disciplines may have slightly different citation styles, and different instructors may emphasize different levels of citation for different assignments, writers should always begin with these conservative practices unless they are expressly told otherwise. Writers who follow these steps carefully will almost certainly avoid plagiarism. If writers ever have questions about a citation practice, they should *ask their instructor!*

Instructors in the Composition Program support the [George Mason Honor Code](#), which requires them to report any suspected instances of plagiarism to the Honor Council. All judgments about plagiarism are made after careful review by the Honor Council, which may issue penalties ranging from grade-deductions to course failure to expulsion from GMU.

Useful and Useable Campus Resources

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS)

(703) 993-2380; <http://caps.gmu.edu>; SUB I 3129

Please don't hesitate to take advantage of the wonderful services provided by [CAPS](#). Whether you're having a difficult time adjusting to your new schedule or are concerned about your roommate, CAPS is fully committed to you. Let me know if you need someone to walk over with you.

The University Writing Center

(703)993-1200; <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>; Robinson A114

Since writing is recursive, it would benefit your work and your process to visit the University Writing Center, located in Robinson A114. The Writing Center is one of the best resources you will find on campus. The center has an [outstanding website](#) that offers a wealth of online resources for student writers. You can schedule a 50-minute appointment with a trained tutor to help with any phase of the writing process. You can even obtain assistance with papers by visiting the online writing center. Go online, call, or drop in to make an appointment.

The Library

<http://library.gmu.edu> (multiple locations)

In addition to a wealth of printed resources, the library hosts around 150 electronic journals. GMU is also a member of the Washington Research Library Consortium (WRLC), which means you have hassle-free access to the library resources of eight area universities!

Please take some time to explore the library's offerings; you may also instant message the library with any questions. Don't hesitate to "[Ask a Librarian](#)"!

Important University Calendar Dates

For more important dates and additional information on the content provided below, go to the Registrar's [Academic Calendars](#) page

<i>January 1 Day of Week</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Martin Luther King Day (no classes)	Mon Jan 16
First day of classes ; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date; full semester waitlists removed	Mon Jan 23
Summer 2012 Graduation Intent Available via Patriot Web	Mon Jan 30
Last day to drop with no tuition penalty	Tues Jan 31
Last day to add classes	Tues Jan 31
Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty	Tues Feb 14
Last day to drop with a 67% tuition penalty	Fri Feb 24
Last day to drop	Fri Feb 24
Last day to file your Spring 2012 Graduation Intent	Fri Feb 24
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)	Mon Feb 27 - Fri Mar 30
Spring Break	Mon Mar 12 - Sun Mar 18
Last day of classes	Sat May 5
Reading Days	Mon May 7 & Tue May 8
Exam Period (beginning at 7:30 a.m.)	Wed May 9 - Wed May 16

** These dates will not change.