

# Introduction to Professional, Science, and Technical Writing

**Class & Section Number:** 1700.004

**Term:** Fall 2025

**Location:** AUSB 313

**Time:** Tuesday & Thursday 9:30-10:50 AM

## Instructor Information

**Name:** Dr. Ashley Rea-Maharaj (you can call me Dr. Rea!)

**Office:** LANG #407K

**Student Hours:** Tuesday 12:30-1:30, Wednesday 10:00-12:00, and by appointment

**Email:** [ashley.rea@unt.edu](mailto:ashley.rea@unt.edu)

## Course Description, Structure, and Objectives

This course meets the requirements for the University CORE and is a process-oriented introduction to writing, especially for science, pre-engineering, and business students. We will focus on understanding the writing situation and practice writing in response to professional, scientific, and technical situations.

### Learning Objectives

You will fulfill the following objectives by the end of this course:

- Learn effective study skills
- Learn to practice time management
- Learn to work as an effective member of a collaborative team
- Learn skills for evaluating effective writing
- Enhance grammar and punctuation skills
- Become familiar with the genres of writing common to technical disciplines
- Learn to apply the rhetorical situation (audience, purpose, occasion) to the decision-making process when writing and learning

### Office Hours & Conferences

Office hours offer you an opportunity to ask for clarification or find support with understanding class material. Come visit me! I encourage you to connect with me and/or my TA for support. Additional office hours, in person and virtually, will be offered as the semester concludes. Your success is our goal.

See me when you have questions about an assignment, when you would like to try out some ideas before a document is due, or when you have questions about a comment. You should also see me to get help with particular writing problems, to resolve differences about grades, or to suggest ways to improve the course.

## Required Materials

To fully participate in this class, students will be required to have access to the following:

- *Open Technical Communication* by Tiffani Reardon, Tammy Powell, Jonathan Arnett, Monique Logan, and Cassie Race. This open-source textbook can be found: <https://alg.manifoldapp.org/projects/open-tc>
- *Technical Writing Handbook* by iFixit. This open-source handbook can be found:

- Canvas Login to access course readings and documents
- UNT student email

## Assignments

The assignments in this course are designed to provide you with the opportunity to demonstrate and develop your writing abilities. As this is a writing-intensive course, each assignment, whether individual or group, requires substantial contribution and solid evidence of audience analysis, ethical considerations, and problem-solving skills. Instructions for each assignment will be explained in a detailed handout. Below are general descriptions.

### **Basic Technical Communication Analysis**

Technical communication is meant to be used and not just read. Good technical communication conveys information to an audience who will act on that information in a variety of ways: in making hiring decisions, in following technical procedures, in developing research plans, and more. In this assignment, you will evaluate the usability of a piece of technical communication—that is, you will analyze whether the document effectively communicates the necessary information to its audience and where it fails to do so. In this way, the assignment will introduce you to basic elements of technical communication.

### **Correspondence Package**

Communicating clearly and professionally in writing is a critical part of technical communication. For the correspondence package assignment, you will craft professional responses to specific academic and professional communication contexts. This assignment includes two individual responses (one claim letter and one proposal letter) as well as one group response (a workplace policy memo).

### **iFixit Standard Project**

Technical communicators frequently create user guides and instructional material. Our overarching project this semester asks you to work in teams to create a full service instruction manual for a real-world audience through the iFixit platform. You will select a real-world piece of technology from iFixit, collaboratively author a troubleshooting page, device page, and user guide suitable for publication on their platform. Finally, you'll have the chance to peer review another team's guide and practice usability testing.

### **Final Reflection**

Numerous studies show that metacognition, that is, thinking about your thinking, is a critical part of transferring what you have learned in one context to another. In lieu of a final exam, you will submit a final reflection that asks you to create your own "Theory of Writing" including principles of effective user-centered design.

## Assessing Your Work

This class uses labor-based contract grading. Therefore, the default grade for the course is a "B" (3.0). In a nutshell, if you do all that is asked of you in the manner and spirit it is asked, if you work through the processes we establish and the work we assign ourselves in the labor instructions during the quarter, if you do all the labor asked of you, then you'll get a "B" course grade. It will not matter what I or your colleagues think of your writing, only that you are listening to our feedback compassionately. We may disagree or misunderstand your writing, but if you put in the labor, you are guaranteed a B course grade. If you miss class (do not participate fully), turn in assignments late,

forget to do assignments, or do not follow the labor instructions precisely, you will get a lower course grade (see the final breakdown grade table on the last page of the grading contract on Canvas).

### **"B" Grades**

You are guaranteed a course grade of "B" (3.0) if you meet all of the following conditions.

1. **Presence and Participation.** You agree to fully participate in at least 86.6% (21 of 24) of our scheduled class sessions and their activities and assignments, which means you will need to be present in class, as most activities cannot be done before or after class and require your colleagues to complete. So, you cannot miss more than 3 class sessions and still meet our contract's guidelines. Usually, attendance in class equates to participation.

NOTE: Assignments not turned in because of an absence, either ones assigned on the schedule or ones assigned on earlier days in class, will be late, missed, or ignored (depending on when you turn it in finally, see the guidelines #4, #5, and #6 below).

Any absence due to a university-sponsored group activity (e.g., sporting event, band, another class field trip, etc.), military-related absences (e.g., deployment, work, duty, etc.), or documented illness will be considered independently of the above attendance policy, as long as the student has FIRST provided written documentation as soon as they are aware of the days they will be absent. This will allow us to determine how he/she will meet assignments and our contract, despite being absent. This may include absences due to illness that has a medical/doctor's note confirming the illness. Each of these circumstances will be determined on a case-by-case basis in consultation between the student and me (Ashley) in a manner that is fair to all parties involved.

2. **Lateness.** You agree to come on time or early to class. Walking into class late 1-2 times in a semester is understandable.
3. **Sharing and Collaboration.** You agree to work cooperatively and collegially in groups. This may be the easiest of all our course expectations to figure out, but we should have some discussions on what we expect from each other.
4. **Late/Incomplete Work.** You agree to turn in properly and on time all work and assignments expected of you in the spirit they are assigned, which means you'll complete all of the labor instructions for each assignment. During the semester, you may, however, turn in a few assignments late. The exact number of those late assignments is stipulated in the table on the last page of this contract, which we negotiate. Late or incomplete work is defined as any work or document due that is turned in AFTER the due date/time BUT within 48 hours of the deadline. For example, if some work (say a written reflective piece) was due on Thursday, February 15 at 11:59 pm, that piece must be turned in by 11:59 pm on Saturday the 17th.
5. **Missed Work.** If you turn in late work AFTER the 48 hours stipulated in #4 above (Late/Incomplete Work), then it will be considered "missed work," which is a more serious mark against your grading contract. This is due to the fact that all assignments are used in class when they are due, so turning in something beyond 48 hours after it is due means it is assured to be less useful, and its absence has hurt your colleagues in class (since they depended on you to turn in your work for their use).

6. **Ignored Work.** You agree not to ignore any work expected of you. Ignored work is any work unaccounted for in the quarter – that is, I have no record of you doing it or turning it in. My sense is that ignoring the work so crucial to one's development as a learner in our community is bad and unacceptable, so accumulating any "ignored work" will keep you from meeting our contract expectations (see table below).
7. **All Work/Labor needs to meet the following conditions.** To be *complete and On Time*, you agree to turn in on time and in the appropriate manner complete essays, writing, or other labor assigned that meet all of our agreed upon expectations. (See #4 above for details on late assignments).

### Knowing Where You Stand

This system is better than regular grading for giving you a clear idea of what your final grade looks like at any moment. If you are doing everything as directed and turning things in on time (no matter what anyone says), you're getting a B. As for participation in class, you'll have to keep track of it, but you can check with me at any time. I'll tell you what I have recorded. If I mark you absent / non-participatory, I'll always email you and let you know.

### Improving Your Contracted Grade

The grade of B (3.0) depends primarily on *behavior* and *labor*. Have you shown responsible effort and consistency in our class? Have you done what was asked of you in the spirit it was asked? Have you put in the appropriate amount of labor? Higher grades than the default, the grade of A (4.0), however, require *more labor that helps or supports the class* in its mutual discussions and work. To raise your grade, you may complete as many of the following items of labor as you like. Each item completed fully and in the appropriate manner will raise your final course grade by one grade category (see Breakdown table below).

- **A lesson/activity/handout.** These handouts are on a topic and material that you research for the class's benefit and will need at least 2 weeks lead time, working with me (Ashley) on the materials. While we'll determine together the scope of your lesson, the main elements of your labor will be to produce: (1) a 1-2 page handout for the class's benefit in our writing and thinking; (2) some outline for our in-class activity that introduces your handout; and (3) a short reflective essay to me (Ashley) of about 1-2 pages (300-600 words) on what you learned in the process of doing this labor and what you feel the class stands to gain from the lesson you offered us.
- **Revised Drafts.** You may do the optional labor instructions for revising your Assignments 1 or 2. You may turn these in to me (Ashley) any time before week 14.
- **Some other labor that benefits the class and our mutual learning.** Do you want to write about and report to us on a cultural event related to the class? Or maybe you would like to read an article for us and summarize some of its findings or ideas that you think will help us do our work in class? If you have an idea, come to me (Ashley) early. We will plan it; while making sure the amount of labor is commensurate with the other items above, and schedule it.

For every item you complete on the above list, your contracted grade will improve by one grade category on the breakdown table below. So if you meet all the conditions for a B-contract (3.0), then your grade can improve in the following ways:

- 1 item completed = course grade of 4.0 (A)
- 2 items completed = just you being awesome :)

If you only meet the requirements for a C-contract (2.0) or lower, the same movement up the grade ladder applies by completing items on the list above. You may even do more than two items and continue to raise your grade regardless of what grade you are qualified for. For example, if you only meet the requirements for a C (2.0) contract in the table below, but do 2 extra labors above (the max), then your final course grade will be an A (4.0).

In accordance with FERPA regulations, I am not allowed to discuss your grades via email or in public settings. Similarly, I cannot discuss final grades via email once the semester concludes. These policies are in place to protect your privacy. If you have questions about your grade, please reach out to me to set up an in-person meeting in my office to discuss my evaluation of your performance in the class.

### **Final Exam**

Students will submit their final reflection on Canvas as the final exam for the class. There will not be an in-person final exam. Final drafts are due by the end of our scheduled final exam period.

## **Course Policies and Procedures**

These policies provide you with the formal regulations governing this course. Submission of your first assignment indicates you have read, understood, and agreed to these policies.

### **Drop Dates**

Please be aware of the [UNT drop dates](#).

### **Medical Withdrawals**

If you must withdraw due to medical reasons, prior to the withdrawal deadline as indicated in the academic calendar, you may do so through the regular withdrawal process. If you are incapacitated or unable to make the request on your own, please contact the Dean of Students Office for assistance at 940-565-2648. For details regarding the withdrawal process, go to <http://deanofstudents.unt.edu/withdrawals>.

### **Computer Operations and Access Requirements**

You are expected to be familiar with the day-to-day operation of computers including UNT email (and sending attachments), Canvas, and standard software. You are also expected to have regular access to computing technology, whether it be your personal computer or the computers provided by UNT. There are 14 computer labs on campus, including one 24-hour lab.

### **Device Requirements**

Your TECM classroom is a collaborative BYOD lab (bring your own device). Therefore, you must either bring your own device to every class period or reserve a device from our TECM TechLab.

If you bring your own device, it must be equipped with a non-web-based word processor and internet access capabilities via the UNT Wifi network. Tablets or devices with cloud-based word processors, such as GoogleDocs, are not recommended because they do not give you the full capabilities required in this TECM course. As a UNT student, you can install a free version of MS Office Suite on your personal computer. Visit <https://it.unt.edu/installoffice365> for more information.

For students who cannot bring a device to class, the TECM TechLab provides laptops that can be checked out at the main service desk in AUBD307. Reserve your device early and through the WebCheckout link: <http://checkout.unt.edu/patron>. If you think you will need a device throughout the semester, WebCheckout allows you to make recurring reservations. These reservations are not to exceed your scheduled class time.

### **Hardware and Disk Media Requirements**

It is your responsibility to ensure that the computer(s) and disk(s) you use are functional and that you have backed up your data in the case of technological failure. As a student at UNT, you can back up data, up to 25 GB, through [OneDrive](#). A corrupted disk or crashed hard drive does not constitute an excuse for late or unsubmitted work. If you need to bring electronic files to class, please email them to yourself as attachments or use the OneDrive available through your EagleConnect account.

### **Email Requirement**

All students must have a valid UNT email address, as it is the only email address I can use to communicate with you. You can forward your UNT email to your regular account (Hotmail, Yahoo, etc.), should you not wish to directly check your UNT account. It is also your responsibility to check your email regularly. I often use email to send class emails, including notices, updates, and advisories.

### **Classroom Behavior**

I value the many perspectives students bring to our campus. Please work with me to create a classroom culture of open communication, mutual respect, and belonging. All discussions should be respectful and civil. Although disagreements and debates are encouraged, personal attacks are unacceptable. Together, we can ensure a safe and welcoming classroom for all. If you ever feel like this is not the case, please stop by my office and let me know. We are all learning together.

Our class is structured around in-person discussion, so it's especially important you to come to our class prepared with your materials and ready to discuss the day's content. For more information about UNT's expectations, you can consult the Code of Student Conduct (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/07-012>).

### **Teamwork Behavior**

You will complete one major project in teams. I will assign these teams based on your shared academic interests. Before any teamwork begins, you will create a charter that is designed to improve communication. Your charter will include information on team goals and member roles, strategies for conflict resolution, and protocols for missing deadlines. If your team encounters any project management issues, consult the charter before asking me to intervene. You will evaluate yourself and each team member at the semester's end.

### **Generative AI (GenAI) Use**

Throughout the semester, you may use specific Generative AI (GenAI) tools for certain assignments, with guidance on responsible use. These assignments help build ethical resilience and GenAI literacy, preparing you for careers in a GenAI-oriented workforce.

I use GenAI to generate examples and refine my pedagogical materials. I will always disclose how I use GenAI, and I expect the same from you. In accordance with the UNT Honor Code, unauthorized use of GenAI tools is prohibited. Using GenAI content without proper credit or substituting your own work with GenAI undermines the learning process and violates academic integrity. If you're unsure whether something is allowed, please seek clarification.

### **Academic Integrity**

I follow UNT's academic integrity and dishonesty policies. UNT defines six acts of academic dishonesty (see [UNT Policy 06.003](#)). Below is a brief description of these acts and the related 2700 penalty for committing each act:

- *Cheating* –using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or study aids in any academic exercise. The term academic exercise includes all forms of work submitted for credit or hours. You will receive a grade of 0 for any assignment that involves cheating.
- *Plagiarism* – the deliberate adoption or reproduction of ideas, words, or statements of another person as one's own without acknowledgment. You will receive a grade of 0 for any assignment that involves plagiarism.
- *Forgery* – altering a score, grade, or official academic university record or forging the signature of an instructor or other student. You will receive a final grade of F in the course for any act of forgery.
- *Fabrication* – intentional and unauthorized falsification or invention of any information or citation in an academic exercise. You will receive a grade of 0 for any assignment that involves fabrication.
- *Facilitating academic dishonesty* – intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to help another to violate a provision of the institutional code of academic integrity. You will receive a grade of 0 for any assignment that involves facilitating academic dishonesty.
- *Sabotage* – acting to prevent others from completing their work or willfully disrupting the academic work of others. You will receive a final grade of F in the course for any act of sabotage.

All acts of academic dishonesty will be reported to UNT's Academic Integrity Office. At the beginning of the semester, we will review the six acts of academic dishonesty and their related penalties. You must also complete a quiz on the subject, which will certify that you understand the policies and procedures.

### **How to Succeed in this Course**

UNT strives to offer a high-quality education in a supportive environment where you can learn, grow, and thrive. As a faculty member, I am committed to supporting you, and I want to remind you that UNT offers a range of mental health and wellness services to help maintain balance and well-being.

Utilizing these resources is a proactive way to support your academic and personal success. To explore campus resources designed to support you, check out [mental health services](https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies) (<https://clear.unt.edu/student-support-services-policies>), visit [unt.edu/success](https://unt.edu/success), and explore [unt.edu/wellness](https://unt.edu/wellness). To get all your enrollment and student financial-related questions answered, go to [scrappysays.unt.edu](https://scrappysays.unt.edu).

### **Accommodations**

The University of North Texas makes reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities. To request accommodations, you must first register with the Office of Disability Access (ODA) by completing an application for services and providing documentation to verify your eligibility each semester. Once your eligibility is confirmed, you may request your letter of accommodation. ODA will then email your faculty a letter of reasonable accommodation, initiating a private discussion about your specific needs in the course.

You can request accommodations at any time, but it's important to provide ODA notice to your faculty as early as possible in the semester to avoid delays in implementation. Keep in mind that you must obtain a new letter of accommodation for each semester and meet with each faculty member before accommodations can be implemented in each class. You are strongly encouraged to meet with faculty regarding your accommodations during office hours or by appointment. Faculty have the authority to ask you to discuss your letter during their designated office hours to protect your privacy. For more information and to access resources that can support your needs, refer to the [Office of Disability Access](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access) website (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/office-disability-access>).

### **Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, & Assault**

UNT is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of discrimination and sexual harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. If you (or someone you know) has experienced or experiences any of these acts of aggression, please know that you are not alone. UNT has staff members trained to support you in navigating campus life, accessing health and counseling services, providing academic and housing accommodations, helping with legal protective orders, and more. (See UNT Policy 16.005)

UNT's Dean of Students website offers a range of [on-campus and off-campus resources](#) to help support survivors, depending on their unique needs.

### **Religious Holidays**

If you will miss class due to the observance of an officially recognized religious holy day, please consult with me at least one week in advance so we can schedule missed work accordingly.

## **Course Schedule**

Below is a tentative schedule for this section of 1700. The schedule is subject to change pending our progress this semester. You will be notified by Eagle Alert if there is a campus closing that will impact a class and describe that the calendar is subject to change. For more information, see the [Campus Closures Policy](https://policy.unt.edu/policy/15-006) (<https://policy.unt.edu/policy/15-006>).

Date Agenda	Readings Due	Assignments Due
Week 1: Introduction to Technical, Science, and Professional Writing		



Aug. 19	<b>Class introduction</b> Review syllabus Introduction to teamwork Writing diagnostic		
Aug. 21	<b>Intro to Technical, Science, and Professional Writing</b> Writing technical descriptions Lab Orientation Review diagnostic and practice 3 keys: verbs, sentence structure, punctuation Grammar review: Faulty agreement	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 1 "Introduction to Technical Writing"</a>  Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.7 "Basic Patterns and Elements of the Sentence"</a>	Introduction Letter  Sign up for an office hours chat with me!
<b>Week 2: User-centered Design</b>			
Aug. 26	<b>What is technical communication?</b> Introduction to technical writing genres Grammar review: Sentence structure	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.13 "Memos and Email"</a>	
Aug. 28	<b>Understanding Audience</b> Design thinking model User research methods	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.2 "Audience Analysis"</a>  Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 5 "Audience"</a>	Basic Technical Communication Analysis
<b>Week 3: Professional Correspondence</b>			
Sept. 2	<b>The Writing Process</b> Writing Professional Emails Grammar review: Agreement Individual Correspondence Case Practice	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.8 "Common Grammar, Usage, and Punctuation Problems"</a>	
Sept. 4	<b>Workplace Memos and Letters</b> Team Correspondence Case Practice Mechanics review: Punctuation	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.1 "Business Correspondence and Resumes"</a>	Correspondence Package Rough Draft
<b>Week 4: Technical Editing</b>			
Sept. 9	<b>Organizing for Readers</b> Introduction to iFixit: Sign up for a team, create a profile Mechanics review: Usage	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.11 "Information Structures"</a>	
Sept. 11	<b>Editing for a Professional Style and Tone</b> Paraphrasing vs. Plagiarism	Read <a href="#">iFixit Paraphrasing vs. Plagiarism</a>	Correspondence Package
<b>Week 5: Collaborative Writing &amp; Ethics</b>			
Sept. 16	<b>Teamwork &amp; Ethical Tech Com</b>	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.10 "Strategies for Peer-Reviewing &amp; Team Writing"</a>	
Sept. 18	<b>Global Considerations</b>	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 3 "Ethics in Technical Communication"</a>	

Week 6: Technical Descriptions & User Guides			
Sept. 23	<b>Writing Technical Descriptions</b> LEGO ® device page and troubleshooting page	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.14 "Technical Definitions &amp; Descriptions"</a>	
Sept. 25	<b>User Guides</b> Team Charter LEGO ® device repair guide	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.7 "User Guides"</a>	Team Charter
Week 7: Proposal Writing			
Sept. 30	<b>Proposals</b> "Unboxing" Day iFixit: Proposal draft	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 1 "Look Before You Write"</a>	iFixit Standard Project Proposal Draft
Oct. 2	iFixit: Proposal Final	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.4 "Proposals"</a>	iFixit Final Proposal
Week 8: Editing for Concision & Clarity			
Oct. 7	iFixit Milestone 1: Orientation	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 2 "Being Concise"</a>	iFixit Troubleshooting Page Draft
Oct. 9	iFixit Milestone 1: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 3 "Crystal Clarity"</a>	iFixit Troubleshooting Page Final
Week 9: Instruction Sets			
Oct. 14	Instructions and Procedures iFixit Milestone 2: Orientation	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 4 "Communicating with Style"</a>	iFixit Troubleshooting Page Changes
Oct. 16	iFixit Milestone 2: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 6 "Photographing the Process"</a>	
Week 10: Document Design			
Oct. 21	iFixit Milestone 3: Orientation	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 8 "Organizing Your Content"</a>	
Oct. 23	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.12 "Organizing Information"</a>  Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 2.11 "Titles, Abstracts, Introductions, and Conclusions"</a>	iFixit Final Device Page
Week 11: Visual Design			
Oct. 28	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 4.8 "Graphics"</a>	
Oct. 30	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 7 "Using Other Visuals"</a>	First Guide Draft

<b>Week 12: Accessibility</b>			
Nov. 4	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read Web Accessibility Initiative <a href="#">"Accessibility, Usability, and Inclusion"</a>	
Nov. 6	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 9 "Legal Requirements"</a>	Submit Final First Guide Draft to iFixit
<b>Week 13: Publishing &amp; Iterative Design</b>			
Nov. 11	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 10 "Publishing"</a>	
Nov. 13	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">TWH Chapter 11 "After You Write"</a>	
<b>Week 14: Usability Testing</b>			
Nov. 18	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 6 "Usability Testing"</a>	
Nov. 20	iFixit Milestone 3: Workshop Group evaluation form		Submit Final Guides to iFixit
<b>Thanksgiving Holiday–No Class 11.24 to 11.30</b>			
<b>Week 15: Peer Review &amp; Revision</b>			
Dec. 2	Milestone 4: Peer Review	Read <a href="#">OTC Chapter 5.5 "Power Revision Techniques"</a>	
Dec. 4	Final Day of class! Wrap up discussion		Evaluations
<b>Week 16: Metacognition &amp; Reflection</b>			
Dec. 11	Final reflection available online		Final Reflection