

# TECM 4500 Content Analysis in Technical Communication

## Course Information

Term: Fall 2025  
Class time: T/Th 2:00pm–3:20pm  
Location: AudB 308

## Instructor Information

Instructor: Dr. Jiaxin Zhang (Dr. Zhang or Dr. Z)  
Office hours: T/Th 12:15pm–1:45pm, or by [appointment \(on Calendly\)](#)  
Office location: LANG 407-J  
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## Course Overview

Content analysis (CA) is the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics. It includes both human-coded analyses and computer-aided text analysis. There has been a growing interest among commercial researchers and communication practitioners in applications of CA (Neuendorf 2017).

By the end of this course you should be able to

- The building blocks of CA, including locating and cleaning content and designing a hypothesis-driven study that addresses validity and reliability.
- Human-coded and computer-aided analysis approaches. Create code books and analyze texts on linguistic and psychological dimensions.
- Data visualization skills to help tech comm practitioners understand the applicability of your CAs to workplace practices.
- Math isn't scary. Learn descriptive and basic inferential statistics to help communicate the significance of your results.
- Communicate your CAs in lay terms, emphasizing the value of your results to tech comm. Write up your results for practitioner-gearred publications.

## Textbooks

There is no required text for this course. Supplemental readings will be available on Canvas.

## Technology Requirements

To successfully complete this course, you should have access to a reliable internet source. You should also have these technical skills:

- Using the Canvas learning management system
- Using email with attachments

- Creating and submitting files in commonly used word processing program formats
- Copying and pasting
- Downloading and installing software
- Using spreadsheet programs
- Headset/Microphone (if required for synchronous chats)
- Word Processor

Remember that your password is the only thing protecting you from pranks or more serious harm.

- Don't share your password with anyone.
- Change your password if you think someone else might know it.
- Always log out when you are finished using Canvas.

## Attendance

I do expect you attend class when you're able, but I don't want you to attend when you're sick. If you can't come to class, please contact me to see what kind of a plan we can come up with.

Please note:

- If you have to miss class, you will miss out on any in-class assignments or activities we do that day.
- Three instances of arriving late or leaving early (for 10min) will count as one absence.
- **If you miss more than 6 classes (unexcused absences), you will receive a grade of 'F' in the class.**

## 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, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills.

Below is a brief description of the major assignments you will complete in this course and the assignment grade weights.

Complete assignment descriptions and assessment rubrics are available in Canvas.

Assignment	Description	Percentage
Content Analysis of LinkedIn Profiles (GROUP ASSIGNMENT)	Conduct a content analysis of LinkedIn profiles of practicing technical communicators who are employed in a subfield of interest. This will be a team assignment.	20%
Federal Plain Language Report and Analysis	Conduct a plain language analysis of content produced by the US Federal Government. I will assign you one of 21 federal agencies as well as direct you to the content options you have for this analysis.	25%
Content Analysis of Your Writing	Conduct a content analysis of your own writing using the tools and techniques we have learned. Submit a report of your findings as well as documentation of	30%

	how you collected and analyzed data.	
Case Activities, Discussion, and Professionalism	Complete activities (connected to the major assignments) that expand your data information literacies. Activities will include collecting and cleaning data, analyzing voice of customer data, understanding describing statistics, designing codebooks and obtaining inter-rater reliability, and conducting sentiment analyses. Complete assigned discussions as well as conduct yourself as a professional communicator.	25%
Total (Groupwork total)		100% (20%)

## Format and Deadlines

All assignments must be submitted through Canvas. Emailed assignments will not be accepted. You may not use program templates (e.g., Word templates) to format any of your documents. These don't encourage you to learn the programs and generally result in dull, unpersuasive documents.

In my late-work policy, I try to be fair and understanding while still encouraging you to keep up with the course. We move quickly, which means it can be easy to fall behind. I don't want that for you!

I do accept late work, but only under one of these three circumstances:

- **If the assignment is submitted within the grace period.** I allow a grace period of 24 hours for each assignment due. This means that you have 24 hours from the specified due date to turn in your assignment without penalty. Because in-class assignments are due at the end of class, there is no grace period for them.
- **If we have agreed on a deadline extension.** If you know you have an extenuating circumstance that will prevent you from meeting a deadline or submitting an assignment within in the 24-hour grace period, please let me know by email at least 48 hours before the assignment is due. We can then discuss next steps.
- **If you missed a deadline due to an emergency.** If you or a loved one has an emergency that you must attend to, please do so. When things have calmed down, email me. I will never ask for specifics about the situation or for any kind of proof that what you're telling me is true—I believe you! We'll arrange for a deadline extension.

All assignments in Canvas, except in-class assignments, are set to automatically close 24 hours after the due date (i.e., at the end of the grace period). This means that unless you have made arrangements with me beforehand, you will not be able to submit assignments past the due date. They will simply be marked with a "0". In-class assignments are set to close at the end of the class period in which they are due.

Please note that lost or corrupted files do not constitute an excuse for late or unsubmitted work.

## Grading

I will round your final grades to the nearest whole number based on two decimal places, but that is all. So, for example, if you earn an 89.50% at the end of the semester, your grade will round to an A. However, if you earn an 89.49%, your grade will be a B.

Grading criteria serve as general guidelines for evaluating all assignments.

"A" (90-100%): A manager would be very impressed and would remember the work when a promotion is discussed. In this course, that means work that is a pleasure to read, with excellent content, grammar, sentence structure, mechanics, and visual design. In addition, work is thorough, complete, coherent, well organized, supported sufficiently, and demonstrates a superior understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.

"B" (80-89%): A manager would be satisfied with the job, but not especially impressed. This means that documents are well written and well produced, and demonstrate a substantial addition to the learning process. Work is sufficiently developed, organized, and supported, and demonstrates a solid understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.

"C" (70-79%): A manager would be disappointed and ask you to revise or rewrite sections before allowing clients and others to see the work. In other words, the document may have clear, but underdeveloped ideas, or it might not engage or affect the reader. The documents may contain some errors in grammar, mechanics, or logic.

"D" (60-69%): A manager would be troubled by the poor quality of work. This level of work forces the reader to work too hard to understand the main ideas. The documents may contain incomplete information, have serious grammar and mechanical problems, lack clear organization, or be conceptually unclear.

"F" (0-59%): A manager would start looking for someone to replace you. In particular, work fails to address the tasks of the assignment, is so underdeveloped as to demonstrate incompetence, and is mechanically and grammatically incomprehensible. This grade will also be assigned for any evidence of plagiarism.

## Use of AI Writing Tools

Artificial intelligence tools (like OpenAI's ChatGPT) have become freakishly sophisticated. Their use in school and professional settings has caused people to ask a lot of questions about how to use them ethically. For many of these questions, we don't have good answers. We're still figuring things out.

I recognize that there can be a lot of value in using AI tools to help with the writing process, and I believe that we should be figuring out how to use them well. For that reason, we'll be using them this semester. However, as I've been working with these tools in my own work, I've come to learn that using them effectively takes skill, critical thinking, and quite a bit of work.

Expecting that you can entirely offload the work of learning and writing to an AI tool is a mistake. As you work on the assignments for this class, I encourage you to explore how AI tools might help you, but always be aware that you are ultimately responsible for the work you submit.

# **UNT Policies**

## **Academic Integrity Policy**

According to UNT Policy 06.003, Student Academic Integrity, academic dishonesty occurs when students engage in behaviors including, but not limited to cheating, fabrication, facilitating academic dishonesty, forgery, plagiarism, and sabotage. A finding of academic dishonesty may result in a range of academic penalties or sanctions ranging from admonition to expulsion from the University.

## **ADA Policy**

UNT makes reasonable academic accommodation for students with disabilities. Students seeking accommodation must first register with the Office of Disability Accommodation (ODA) to verify their eligibility. If a disability is verified, the ODA will provide a student with an accommodation letter to be delivered to faculty to begin a private discussion regarding one's specific course needs. Students may request accommodations at any time, however, ODA notices of accommodation should be provided as early as possible in the semester to avoid any delay in implementation. Note that students must obtain a new letter of accommodation for every semester and must meet with each faculty member prior to implementation in each class. For additional information see the [ODA website](#).

## **Prohibition of Discrimination, Harassment, and Retaliation (Policy 16.004)**

The University of North Texas (UNT) prohibits discrimination and harassment because of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, disability, genetic information, veteran status, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal or state law in its application and admission processes; educational programs and activities; employment policies, procedures, and processes; and university facilities. The University takes active measures to prevent such conduct and investigates and takes remedial action when appropriate.

## **Emergency Notification & Procedures**

UNT uses a system called Eagle Alert to quickly notify students with critical information in the event of an emergency (i.e., severe weather, campus closing, and health and public safety emergencies like chemical spills, fires, or violence). In the event of a university closure, please refer to Canvas for contingency plans for covering course materials.

## **Retention of Student Records**

Student records pertaining to this course are maintained in a secure location by the instructor of record. All records such as exams, answer sheets (with keys), and written papers submitted during the duration of the course are kept for at least one calendar year after course completion. Course work completed via the Canvas online system, including grading information and comments, is also stored in a safe electronic environment for one year. Students have the right to view their individual record; however, information about student's records will not be divulged to other individuals without proper written consent. Students are encouraged to review the Public Information Policy and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) laws and the University's policy. See UNT Policy 10.10, Records Management and Retention for additional information.

## **Acceptable Student Behavior**

Student behavior that interferes with an instructor's ability to conduct a class or other students' opportunity to learn is unacceptable and disruptive and will not be tolerated in any instructional forum at UNT. Students engaging in unacceptable behavior will be directed to leave the classroom and the instructor may refer the student to the Dean of Students to consider whether the student's conduct violated the Code of Student Conduct. The University's expectations for student conduct apply to all instructional forums, including University and electronic classroom, labs, discussion groups, field trips, etc. Visit UNT's [Code of Student Conduct](#) to learn more.

## **Access to Information - Eagle Connect**

Students' access point for business and academic services at UNT is located at: [my.unt.edu](http://my.unt.edu). All official communication from the University will be delivered to a student's Eagle Connect account. For more information, please visit the website that explains Eagle Connect and how to forward e-mail [Eagle Connect](#).

## **Student Evaluation Administration Dates**

Student feedback is important and an essential part of participation in this course. The student evaluation of instruction is a requirement for all organized classes at UNT. The survey will be made available during weeks 13, 14 and 15 of the long semesters to provide students with an opportunity to evaluate how this course is taught. Students will receive an email from "UNT SPOT Course Evaluations via IASystem Notification" (no-reply@iasystem.org) with the survey link. Students should look for the email in their UNT email inbox. Simply click on the link and complete the survey. Once students complete the survey they will receive a confirmation email that the survey has been submitted. For additional information, please visit the [SPOT website](#) or email [spot@unt.edu](mailto:spot@unt.edu).

## **Survivor Advocacy**

UNT is committed to providing a safe learning environment free of all forms of sexual misconduct. Federal laws and UNT policies prohibit discrimination on the basis of sex as well as sexual misconduct. If you or someone you know is experiencing sexual harassment, relationship violence, stalking and/or sexual assault, there are campus resources available to provide support and assistance. The Survivor Advocates can be reached at [SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu](mailto:SurvivorAdvocate@unt.edu) or by calling the Dean of Students Office at 940-5652648.

## **Use of Student Work**

A student owns the copyright for all work (e.g. software, photographs, reports, presentations, and email postings) he or she creates within a class and the University is not entitled to use any student work without the student's permission unless all of the following criteria are met:

- The work is used only once.
- The work is not used in its entirety.
- Use of the work does not affect any potential profits from the work.
- The student is not identified.
- The work is identified as student work.

If the use of the work does not meet all of the above criteria, then the University office or department using the work must obtain the student's written permission.

## Academic Support & Student Services

### Student Support Services

#### Mental Health

UNT provides mental health resources to students to help ensure there are numerous outlets to turn to that wholeheartedly care for and are there for students in need, regardless of the nature of an issue or its severity. Listed below are several resources on campus that can support your academic success and mental well-being:

- [Student Health and Wellness Center](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center>)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/counseling-and-testing-services>)
- [UNT Care Team](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/care>)
- [UNT Psychiatric Services](https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry) (<https://studentaffairs.unt.edu/student-health-and-wellness-center/services/psychiatry>)

#### Chosen Names

A chosen name is a name that a person goes by that may or may not match their legal name. If you have a chosen name that is different from your legal name and would like that to be used in class, please let the instructor know. Below is a list of resources for updating your chosen name at UNT.

- [UNT Records](#)
- [UNT ID Card](#)
- [UNT Email Address](#)
- [Legal Name](#)

*\*UNT eUIDs cannot be changed at this time. The collaborating offices are working on a process to make this option accessible to UNT community members.*

#### Pronouns

Pronouns (she/her, they/them, he/him, etc.) are a public way for people to address you, much like your name, and can be shared with a name when making an introduction, both virtually and in person. Just as we ask and don't assume someone's name, we should also ask and not assume someone's pronouns.

You can [add your pronouns to your Canvas account](#), so that they follow your name when posting to discussion boards, submitting assignments, etc.

Below is a list of additional resources regarding pronouns and their usage:

- [What are pronouns and why are they important?](#)

- [How do I use pronouns?](#)
- [How do I share my pronouns?](#)
- [How do I ask for another person's pronouns?](#)
- [How do I correct myself or others when the wrong pronoun is used?](#)

### **Additional Student Support Services**

- [Registrar](#)
- [Financial Aid](#)
- [Student Legal Services](#)
- [Career Center](#)
- [Multicultural Center](#)
- [Counseling and Testing Services](#)
- [Pride Alliance](#)
- [UNT Food Pantry](#)

### **Academic Support Services**

- [Academic Resource Center](#)
- [Academic Success Center](#)
- [UNT Libraries](#)
- [Writing Lab](#)

## **Copyright Notice**

Materials used in connection with this course may be subject to copyright protection. Materials may include, but are not limited to: documents, slides, images, audio, and video. Materials in this course Web site are only for the use of students enrolled in this course, for purposes associated with this course, and may not be retained for longer than the class term. Unauthorized retention, duplication, distribution, or modification of copyrighted materials is strictly prohibited by law. For more information, visit the [UNT Policy Office](#) or [Copyright.gov](#)

## Course Schedule

**NOTE: Below is a tentative schedule for this section of 4500. Check back regularly for updates.**

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA)Due	Homework Due
W1	Tue-Aug 19	Class intro The content industry	Read: Fifty Crucial Content Facts to Make Your Content Make a Difference Now  Watch: Nouns, Verbs, Adjectives, and Adverbs (Grammar is the Foundation for Content Analysis)		
	Thu-Aug 21	Analyzing reactions to different content presentations	Jones, "Digital keeps diverting the road to success"  Read: Bricker content on open-heart surgery  Read: Sherer content on open-heart surgery	Do: Open-heart surgery content reaction	Do: Open-heart surgery CA (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 8/22)
W2	Tue-Aug 26	Definition of CA Core competencies of a content analyst	Jones, "Do content well or die"		
	Thu-Aug 28	Voyant Tools	Watch: Voyant Tools Tutorial  Watch: Additional Voyant Tutorials (recommended)		Do: Voyant Tools Analysis of Job Postings (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 8/29)
W3	Tue-Sep 02	Types of jobs in tech comm	Read: Research About Your Preferred Area of Tech Comm		

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA)Due	Homework Due
			Read: Palmer, "LinkedIn: Are You Making the Key Connections?" (recommended reading)		
	Thu-Sep 04	Case Activity 1 Data Collection  Individual check-ins	Read/Watch: How to Save a LinkedIn Profile		Do: Case Activity 1: Identifying and retrieving content (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 9/05)
W4	Tue-Sep 09	Coding, inventorying, and summarizing content	Read: Spot these Overused Words in Our LinkedIn Profiles 2010-2018  Read: Should You Zap Your Buzzwords?	Do: Analyze Your LinkedIn Sample for Buzzwords	
	Thu-Sep 11	Metadata and Data in MS-Excel	Read: Chapple, "What is Metadata?" Watch: Organizing and Filtering Your Data in Excel  Watch: Summarizing Your Data with Pivot Tables		Do: Case Activity #2: Building Your Content Inventory (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 9/12)
W5	Tue-Sep 16	Codebooks	Read: Neuendorf, "Measurement and validity"	Do: Go With Your Gut Coding (finish before class)  Do: Coding with a Code book	
	Thu-Sep 18	Inter-rater reliability (IRR)	Read: Understanding Inter-Rater Reliability (IRR)  Watch: Calculating IRR in Excel	Do: Calculate IRR	Do: Case Activity 3: Creating a code book (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 9/19)

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA)Due	Homework Due
W6	Tue-Sep 23	IMR&D organization	Read: IMR&D Cheat Sheet Read: The Effect of Cookie Type on Rate of Disappearance		
	Thu-Sep 25	Reporting research	Read: "Writing Analysis and Results Sections"		Do: Case Activity 4: Writing your methods section (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 9/25)
W7	Tue-Sep 30	Analyzing Data in Excel	Read: Notes and Outline for Team Report		
	Thu-Oct 02	<b>LinkedIn profile report workshop – group check-ins</b>			<b>LinkedIn profiles CA (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/03)</b>
W8	Tue-Oct 07	Introduction to Plain Language	Read: Cutts, Ch1 “Writing short sentences and clear paragraphs” Read: Cutts, Ch11 “Six writing myths explored and exploded”		
	Thu-Oct 09	Plain Language Discussion	Watch/Read: Three Plain English Lessons		Do: Plain Language Discussion (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/10)
W9	Tue-Oct 14	Content vocabulary and readability	Read: Cutts, Ch6 “Using vertical lists” Read: Cutts, Ch7 “Converting negative to positive”	Do: Plain Language Readability Activity	
	Thu-Oct 16	Readability	Read: Federal Agency Assignments		Do: Case Activity 5:

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA)Due	Homework Due
		Formulas and Reliability			Federal agency background (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/17)
W10	Tue-Oct 21	Anatomy of an excellent homepage	Read: Cutts, Ch21 “Clarity for the Web” Read: Cutts, Ch24 “Basics of clear layout”	Do: Federal Plain language assessment	
	Thu-Oct 23	<b>No class.</b> (Dr. Z is out of town for SIGDOC conference travel)	Read: Center for Plain Language, “Five Steps to Plain Language”		Do: Case Activity 6: Content vocabulary and readability (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/24)
W11	Tue-Oct 28	Self-mentions Introduction to AntConc	Download AntConc and Progress Reports ZIP Watch: Getting Started with AntConc Watch: Using the Concordance Tool in AntConc Watch: What Are Self-Mentions?	Do: Self-Mentions Activity	
	Thu-Oct 30	<b>Federal Plain Language analysis workshop - Individual check-ins</b>			<b>Federal Plain Language analysis (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 10/31)</b>

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA)Due	Homework Due
W12	Tue-Nov 04	Reporting verbs	Watch: What Are Reporting Verbs? Watch: Word list Feature in AntConc	Do: Reporting verbs activity	
	Thu-Nov 06	Content compilation and inventory	Read: Resources for CA of Your Own Writing		Do: Case Activity 7: Content compilation and inventory (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 11/07)
W13	Tue-Nov 11	Federal report card Evaluative adjectives	Watch: What Are Evaluative Adjectives? Read: Fact Sheet on Evaluative Adjectives	Do: Evaluative adjectives activity	
	Thu-Nov 13	Passive voice	Read: Passives Voice aka The Most Misunderstood Clarity Marker Read: An Introduction and Orientation to Writing Style (html)		
W14	Tue-Nov 18	Hedges and boosters Transitions	Read: Fact Sheet on Hedges and Boosters Watch: Opening AntConc Output in Excel Read: Fact Sheet on Transitions	Do: Hedges and boosters activity	
	Thu-Nov 20	Sentiment analysis	Read: Free Sentiment Analysis Tools		Do: Sentiment analysis of your PL Reports (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 11/21)

Week	Date	Topic and Resources	Readings/Videos on Canvas (before class)	In-Class Assignments (ICA) Due	Homework Due
W15	Thanksgiving Break (No Classes). November 24-30, 2025				
W16	Tue-Dec 02	Final thoughts, sprinting toward the finish line			
	Thu-Dec 04	<b>Content Analysis of Your Own Writing workshop</b> Last Day of Class			<b>Content Analysis of Your Own Writing (Due by 11:59pm on Friday, 12/5)</b>