

TECM 4200 – Research Methods for the Practitioner

Spring 2026 | Face-to-Face | 13625

Meeting Time: 12:30pm – 1:50pm Tu/Th
Meeting Location: AUDB 306
Instructor: Dr. Mason Pellegrini
Email: mason.pellegrini@unt.edu
Office Location: LANG 407G & [Zoom](#)
Office Hours: 11am-12pm, M/W (via [Zoom](#))

Course Information

Course Description

This course introduces the types of research commonly used by professional and technical communicators in workplace and organizational contexts. Rather than training students to become research specialists, the course focuses on developing practical research judgment and competence with methods used to understand work, frame problems, and evaluate design decisions. Students will examine research as a professional practice shaped by purpose, audience, and constraints, and will gain experience conducting limited workplace research, design-oriented inquiry, and evaluative research such as usability-focused feedback. Students will also learn how to interpret, produce, and evaluate professional research reports that support decision-making in technical and professional communication contexts.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify appropriate areas for applied research in technical and professional communication contexts and scope feasible, time-bounded research activities
- Formulate clear and purposeful research questions appropriate to workplace, design, and evaluative research contexts
- Select and justify appropriate research approaches based on research goals, stakeholders, and practical constraints
- Demonstrate a working understanding of qualitative workplace research, design research, and usability- or evaluation-focused inquiry
- Interpret and produce professional research documents that report findings, articulate implications, and support informed decision-making
- Conduct basic evaluative research, including usability-focused feedback, to assess and refine technical communication artifacts or design concepts
- Locate, evaluate, and synthesize secondary sources to analyze research practices and support applied research projects

Required Materials

- Readings will be provided on Canvas
- A laptop for each class session (you will write in class – laptops can be rented from the TECM Tech Lab in AUDB 307 if you don't have one)

- UNT email access
- Canvas access

Methods of Communication

Email is the best way to reach me (mason.pellegrini@unt.edu). During the semester, I usually respond to emails within a business day (9AM–5PM M-F). Also, before sending me an email, make sure to check any documents I have provided which might answer your question first. In other words, read the syllabus first if you have class policy questions or the assignment sheet first if you have assignment questions. In general, please remember to write professionally when you send me an email (I am a writing teacher after all!).

If you have something more complicated you want to speak about, consider scheduling a meeting with me. I have my office hours set aside so that any of you can drop in and get extra feedback on an assignment, discuss grades, or even ask for help writing something from outside class. While you can come to my office hours unannounced, send me an email in advance if you can. I am also flexible about scheduling meetings outside my office hours, especially when it comes to scheduling a Zoom meeting.

Major Assignment Descriptions and Grade Value

Below, I include short descriptions of all of the work you will complete in this class as well as how much of your total grade each project or assignment type is worth.

- **Research Practices Report (20%)**
You will produce a short, secondary-research-based report analyzing how research is conducted within a specific sub-area of technical or professional communication (e.g., usability testing, UX research, content strategy, technical documentation, workplace communication, information design), focusing on common research questions, valued forms of evidence, research methods, and how findings inform professional decisions.
- **Micro-Workplace Research Findings Memo (20%)**
You will work in a group to conduct a small, time-bounded workplace research study focused on a specific activity, process, or communication practice. You will write a professional findings memo that describes research methods, synthesizes key qualitative findings, and discusses implications for communication or organizational practice, while clearly acknowledging the limited scope and constraints of the research.
- **Problem and Research Brief (20%)**
You will work in a group to identify a communication-related problem grounded in an existing artifact, process, or system where communication breakdowns affect users. Through design-oriented research (such as stakeholder interviews or contextual inquiry), you will produce a brief that synthesizes research insights, identifies stakeholders and constraints, and defines a clear, research-informed problem that will guide the ongoing design project.
- **Evaluation and Design Recommendations Report (20%)**
Continuing the same group project, you will develop low-fidelity prototypes that respond to the defined problem and evaluate them through user feedback or usability-focused inquiry. You will produce a report documenting prototyping and evaluation activities, synthesizing

findings, and presenting evidence-based design recommendations or revisions grounded in earlier research.

- **Participation (20%)**
You will be expected to attend class throughout the semester and complete in-class assignments.

Grading Policies

Participation Grade

20% of your grade is based on how many of the total classes you attended. This is both to incentivize you to come to class, but also to have the in-class assignments reflected in the grade. I will give two free absences, but after that, I will give you whatever percentage of the total classes you attended as your grade. For example, if you missed four out of 32 classes, that would mean that you attended 87.5% of the classes, so you would receive 87.5% of that total 20% of your grade.

I also reserve the right to lower someone's grade in this area if a student misbehaves in class, particularly if they do this in a way which is distracting to me and/or other students (like playing video games or wearing headphones/listening to music while I'm lecturing or frequently showing up very late).

Major Assignments

Major assignments (i.e., the four main projects described above) will constitute the majority of the points you receive in this class. Each of the four main projects you complete may consist of more than one part (i.e., one major project might consist of two or three separate, smaller documents). I will outline each of these major assignments on an assignment sheet, which will include a rubric that breaks down how many points each part of the assignment is worth. I will always fill out this rubric when evaluating your major assignment, so you can see how your grade was determined. You can expect to receive grades within one week of the project deadline.

Percentage Breakdown of Final Grades

The grading criteria below serve as general guidelines for evaluating all assignments. Assignment-specific rubrics will be housed on Canvas.

Grade	Percentage	Description
A	90-100%	Work is a pleasure to read, with excellent content, grammar, sentence structure, mechanics, and visual design. It is thorough, complete, coherent, well organized, well supported, and demonstrates a superior understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
B	80-89.99%	Work is well written and well produced and demonstrates a substantial contribution to the learning process. It is sufficiently developed, organized, and supported, showing a solid understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
C	70-79.99%	Work contains clear but underdeveloped ideas or does not fully engage the reader. Some errors in grammar, mechanics, or logic may be present.
D	60-69.99%	Work is difficult to understand and may include incomplete information, serious grammar or mechanical problems, weak organization, or conceptual confusion.

F	Below 60%	Work fails to address the assignment, is severely underdeveloped, demonstrates incompetence, or is grammatically and mechanically incomprehensible. Any evidence of plagiarism results in this grade.
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Course Policies

Be Ready for Class

Nearly every day, I will come into class well-rested, well-nourished, well-prepared, in an upbeat mood, and ready to participate. I'm also going to do my very best to create a positive classroom environment and treat you all with respect. *I expect you all to do the same.*

Attendance

My job is to help you all to learn the class content. Since you can't learn when you aren't in class, attendance is required. In most cases, I will fail a student who has absences that are equal to three weeks of class. In other words, you may fail if you have three absences in a class that meets once a week or six absences in a class that meets twice a week.

I don't make any distinction between "excused" and "unexcused absences," though I still appreciate it when students email me to let me know that they are missing class. The only exceptions to my policy here are outlined in [UNT's official attendance policy](#) and includes pregnancy and parenting, military service, religious holy days, and official university functions. Despite these exceptions, you still need to communicate with me about your situation. Extreme illness or other extenuating circumstances need to be documented through the Dean of Students' office.

Submission and Late Work

You will submit all major assignments on Canvas by 11:59pm on a date listed on each assignment sheet. You must submit assignments in a format which Canvas can render (e.g., .doc, .docx, .pptx, .pdf, etc.). For every day that a major assignment is late, I will remove 10% of the total points from the grade you would have received. If you feel like you have extenuating circumstances, email me at least 48 hours in advance and ask for an extension. Normally, I am willing to grant extensions, but only if you ask in advance.

Generative AI

You can use GenAI in this class. Each assignment sheet will specify in more detail which parts of the assignment you should use AI for and which you should not use AI for.

University Policies

University policies regarding [disability accommodations](#), [student attendance and authorized absences](#), and [student academic integrity](#) can be found at the respective links.

Course Outline

The course outline below gives the due dates of all major assignments and overviews the content that will be covered in each unit. I will distribute a detailed calendar before the start of each unit.

UNIT	CONTENT
Unit One Weeks 1-3 Research for Practice (Foundations)	CONTENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research as a professional practice and decision-making activity • The philosophy of research • Qualitative and quantitative research • Types of research questions • Secondary research, precedent, and research synthesis • Ethics, constraints, and responsibility in applied research DELIVERABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research Practices Report due 2/1 at 11:59pm
Unit Two Weeks 4-7 Workplace Research	CONTENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understanding work as it is performed in organizations • Interviews, observation, and contextual inquiry • Scoping and conducting time-bounded workplace research • Identifying patterns, themes, and breakdowns in work practices • Reporting qualitative findings for internal and professional audiences DELIVERABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Micro-Workplace Study due 3/8 at 11:59pm
Unit Three Weeks 8-11 Problem Discovery & Design Research	CONTENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design research and problem framing in technical communication • The Double Diamond Model of Innovation • Stakeholder and user discovery for design contexts • Translating research insights into design directions • Defining constraints, assumptions, and design goals DELIVERABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem & Research Brief 4/12 at 11:59pm
Unit Four Weeks 13-16 Prototyping & User/Usability Testing	CONTENT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototyping as a research and communication activity • Low-fidelity prototyping methods (wireframes, mockups, workflows) • User feedback, walkthroughs, and usability-focused evaluation • Interpreting evaluation findings and identifying design tradeoffs • Reporting evidence-based design recommendations and limitations DELIVERABLES: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation and Design Recommendations Report due 5/1 at 11:59pm