

English 213-01

Technical Writing

Lees-McRae College – Fall 2007

LIB 225 – TTh 1:00-2:20 pm

Policy Statement and Schedule of Readings

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NCB 19

Hours: MWF 2:00-3:00

TTh 11:00-12:00, 2:30-3:30

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Policy Statement and Reading Schedule: “Writing in the Professions,” Spring 2007

Policy Statement

Course Description

According to the Lees-McRae College *College Catalog* for 2007-2009, English 213, “Technical Writing” provides instruction in “Communications skills for business and the professions. A workshop approach covering such topics as memoranda, abstracts, technical instructions, proposals, and reports. *Prerequisite:* Grade of C or better in RHE 102 or permission of the Division Chair” (129).

This *Catalog* copy pretty much tells the story in terms of what we will do in this course. The approach will be a two-track approach: one track focusing on theory and the other on practice. The course for the theory track is charted—the readings and reference materials are selected, and we will begin that track right away. The practice track, however, is more open—while I have some ideas that will *quite likely* make their way into the final syllabus, I intend to involve you, the students, *directly* in the planning of the writing activities of this course (surprise!). That is where we will start the practice track: deciding what types of practice you expect to gain from this course, coordinating your experiences and expectations with my own.

So there will be reading (theory) and writing (practice). Beyond what’s laid out in the remainder of this document, you can expect that—in the near future—you will receive a map for the practice track of the course—a practice track that *you* have helped to design collaboratively.

Required Books, Materials, Connections, etc.

Books. There are two required textbooks for this course. One we will read cover-to-cover, if not exactly in order; it is required and is in the bookstore (or will be soon). The other is primarily for reference, but it is a good guide to general principles of document design, and I have it on good authority from a former student that it has come in quite useful in her “real-world” experience after taking this course; this book is strongly recommended and can be bought for about \$20 on Amazon.com (list price is \$30). The texts are:

- Harty, Kevin, J. *Strategies for Business and Technical Writing*. 5th ed. New York: Longman, 2005. (**Required**; ISBN: 0321241959)
- Williams, Robin. *The Non-Designer’s Design Book*. 2nd ed. Berkeley, CA: Peachpit, 2004. (Strongly Recommended; ISBN: 0321193857)

Materials. Without specific knowledge of what the projects are and of what strategies you will implement to complete those projects, it is hard to say what other materials

you will need or want. My general recommendation is: first, be prepared to choose creative, attractive, and appropriate materials, as needed, in completing your projects. Second, make sure you have (reliable access to) a printer and a supply of paper. Finally (and most strongly), make arrangements for backing up any data that you create in this course: Flash drives, blank cds, and other removable computer media are appropriate, in case you experience a computer meltdown mid-project in this course (stranger things have, unfortunately, happened).

Connections. Email is the most common way I will communicate with you, and the best way for you to communicate with me. I use my Lees-McRae email address, and I will use yours, too. Please be sure that you check this address often (at least daily is good). You will also need reliable Internet access because all course materials will be available on LMC's Sakai Course Management System, and because we will use Sakai's discussion board feature throughout the semester.

Policies Governing This Course

Attendance & Participation. Attendance at and active participation in all class sessions are mandatory and expected. There is no specific grade value attached to attendance, but if you don't attend, you can't participate, and participation will figure strongly in your final grade: for each class session you will either participate actively, or not; if you do, you get credit; if you don't you don't. **Note:** If you are excused from attending class due to a university-sanctioned activity (athletic, musical, etc), you will receive the participation point for that day; beyond these events, however, I do not make any distinction between excused and unexcused absences, and I will require appropriate documentation for these university-sanctioned events.

Completing Work. In order to receive a passing grade in the course, all of the major projects (whatever we decide they are) must be completed. Regardless of the weight assigned to a project or project component in the final course grade, failure to complete any project component will result in a failing grade for the course. Under *only* the most extreme circumstances, the grade of I [incomplete] will be considered.

Late Work. Turning in work late will severely impact your final grade in the course. All work should be turned in on deadline. Grades on any work not completed and submitted on time will be lowered by *one full letter grade* (e.g., from *A* to *B* for each weekday—not *class session, day*—late (Saturday and Sunday don't count).

Sakai. All course materials will be available through LMC's Sakai Course Management System. You should know how to log in to Sakai and gain proficiency in using it. Any course document you lose should be replaced through Sakai. In addition, we will make extensive use of the discussion groups feature in Sakai to collaborate outside of class. Also, please note that while we will be using Sakai *extensively*, I *will not* be using the grading system on Sakai: when I've used similar features of other CMSs (Blackboard, WebCT) in the past, it's been more trouble than it's worth. You can, likely, keep track of your own grades. We will discuss Sakai in class as needed.

Spell-Check. Remember, spell-check is *not* infallible. It doesn't know the difference between *there*, *their*, and *they're* or between *here* and *hear*; to be honest, it can't tell whether you mean *to get her* or *together*. Spell checkers are good: they'll tell you when you've put too many *cs* in "necessary" (which is incorrect). But don't just take their word for it—whatever "it" is. If you can't figure out what the correct spelling is, use a dictionary to verify your spell-check's suggestions: it may have several and only one is both correctly spelled *and* the word you want. Remember, too, that spell-checkers can only account for words that are misspelled: they can't help you with homophones (*their/there/they're*) or with words that are often confused, such as *imply* and *infer* or *compose* and *comprise*. So, *please*, use a dictionary in conjunction with your spell checker.

People-Friendly Environment. In this class, and when working on projects for this class(, and in life in general!), treat other people like you want to be treated. In practical terms, that means discuss things rationally, even when you disagree; it means that while some ideas are better than others (have more merit, are more practical, will produce a better product), and while some ideas will ultimately be rejected, there are no "stupid" or "lame" ideas. And there are no "stupid" people here, either—everyone here is in college, and that means *something*. Belittling people, their ideas, their identity, or their beliefs will not be tolerated in this class—*period*.

Academic Integrity and Intellectual Property. This is a course in writing, and it is a course in which you will be expected to integrate your ideas with those of others, to build on knowledge and information that others have previously put forth, and to generally use information and ideas not your own in your work. In order to do this, you must appropriately give credit for ideas where that credit is due. In short, you must respect the intellectual property of others and not claim their work as your own. Please take seriously the need for appropriate citation and documentation of source material; if you have questions about how to do these things, ask them. Remember that academic dishonesty, especially in the form of plagiarism, is taken seriously in the academy, and can have a range of consequences: failure of an assignment, failure of a course, academic probation, suspension from an institution, and dismissal from an institution. Please take your responsibility to the intellectual property of others and for your own academic integrity seriously.

According to the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*, "Lees-McRae College fosters a spirit of complete honesty and a high standard of integrity. All students are expected to act in a manner that does not infringe upon the rights and responsibilities of others, including the right to learn and prosper in a campus community free from fraudulence and dishonesty; every student has the responsibility to help maintain such a campus community. The attempt of any student to present as his/her work that which they have not honestly performed is regarded by the faculty and administration as a most serious offense and renders the offender liable to severe consequences and possible suspension" (7).

For further discussion of Lees-McRae College's Academic Integrity policy,

including definitions of the actions covered by the policies, the consequences of those actions, and the procedures governing implementation of the policy, please see pages 7-9 of the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*.

Grading. The subject of grades is always a delicate one. Students want good grades, and—though it may not always seem so—instructors want to give good grades. Grades, after all, reflect the quality of student work, and they are also often taken to reflect the quality of instruction. Everyone would be happiest if every student could earn an A in every course.

You may have heard, too, that instructors and administrators are concerned with “grade inflation,” a perennial worry in the university setting which can take two forms: either the grades awarded in the course are too high in relation to the quality of the work completed, or the course is so easy that every student can turn in a stellar performance in the course. In either case, these high grades mean little—even less than a grade as a measure of performance should be taken to mean. But you may also have heard (or more likely *overheard*) instructors complaining about a sense of “entitlement” to high grades among students: some instructors feel that some students believe their tuition dollars entitle them to a “good grade”—and it’s not really hard to see why when many instructors have had at least one student say, to their faces, “I pay your salary”; after all, the retail adage tells us, “the customer is always right.”

For me, and for this class, however, the biggest issue with grades comes down to a fundamental misunderstanding of what grades are, how they function, and their purpose in the educational setting. Grades lower than *A* are not punishment. I do not believe that every student starts with an *A* in every course, or on every assignment, and goes down from there when s/he “does something wrong.” When I give an objective exam, for instance, I do not keep track of how many points to *deduct* from the total possible points ($-8 = 92/100 = A-$); rather, I keep track of how many points the student has earned through correct answers ($+92 = A-$). Grades in my courses are related to students’ *accomplishments*, not their failings. My grading strategies are meant to make grades into reinforcement, not punishment; I want to focus attention at all times on what students have done *right*, not on what they have “done wrong”; I want students to realize that an *A-* (or a *B+*, *B-*, or *C+*) is a grade they can be proud of.

Of course, with more subjective assignments (essays and the like), this can be trickier. It is tricky because subjective assignments come with a set of guidelines and a plethora of possible strategies for fulfilling the assignment. The question then becomes one of where those guidelines set the bar: do they establish the bare minimum for a passing grade? do they describe what an *A* paper will do? do they establish an “average” performance that will earn a student a *C*? When this is unclear, one of the commonest mistakes that students make is to assume that the guidelines are for an *A* paper: that meeting the guidelines will guarantee them an *A*, leading back to the question of “what did I do wrong?” when the instructor issues a *B+* or a *C* for a paper that meets all of the assignment guidelines.

When making these subjective assignments in this course, I promise that—at the

very least—I will tell you where the bar is set. When you receive the guidelines, you will know what grade you will earn by meeting those guidelines. I will also make every effort to let you know how exceeding (or failing to meet) those guidelines will impact the grade you will earn on the project. While I will be more specific with each assignment, know that, in general, I apply the following understanding of letter grades:

- A Outstanding work; work of the highest quality receives this grade
- A-, B+ Well above average work
- B, B-, C+ Above average work
- C Average work; the assignment guidelines will generally set the bar here
- C-, D+ Work slightly below average; adequate but not up to expectations
- D, D- Below average work; only marginally adequate to the task
- F Severely below average or incomplete work; inadequate to the task

Please do not expect that assignment guidelines will tell you what you must do to earn each grade (“if you want a B+, do this...”); instead, expect that they will tell you what the general expectations are, what grade you will earn by meeting those expectations, and the ways in which exceeding or not meeting those expectations may impact the grade you earn.

Finally, please note that I have been careful throughout to refer to “the grade you earn” rather than “the grade you get” or “the grade I give.” You will earn your grades in this course; it’s true that I will *assess* your work and *assign* those grades, but my primary goal in this course is to help you *earn* a grade that you and I can both be proud of.

Statement on Assistance for Students with Disabilities. Lees-McRae College makes every attempt to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act. Therefore, reasonable arrangements will be made for any student with a documented disability. If you have a documented disability, you can make confidential arrangements through Tami Tressler-Blewitt, the Coordinator of Disability Services at Lees-McRae, to accommodate your disability. If a student with a documented disability wishes to request accommodation, they must inform their instructor of that disability and must meet with the Coordinator of Disability Services at Lees-McRae prior to receiving any assistance or accommodations. Students with disabilities should make an appointment to meet with Ms. Tressler-Blewitt as soon as possible to complete the necessary paperwork and to develop an Individual Accommodation Plan. Ms. Tressler-Blewitt’s office is in the Burton Center for Student Success and she can be contacted at ext. 2561 or via e-mail at: tressler-blewitt@lmc.edu.

Reading Responses. For each reading assigned in the course, you will complete a reading response. Responses will be more than summary; you should think about the points being made in the reading, and consider what you think in response to those points. Your *Reading Response* should then articulate your thoughts. You will post your response to the appropriate discussion board thread in Sakai, before class on the s day for which the reading was assigned, and—to aid discussion—you should bring a printed

copy of your response to class.

Other Important Information on Policies

In addition to these explicitly stated policies, this course will be governed by the policies laid out in the Lees-McRae College *Student Handbook*, and other university policies governing student conduct and the conduct of courses on LMC's campus.

Reading Schedule

*For each date listed below, please complete and respond to the listed reading **before** class on that day. All readings listed are from Strategies for Business and Technical Communication. Please come to class prepared to discuss the readings.*

8.28.2007	Introduction (pp. 1-4) Michael E. Adelstein (15-20)
8.30.2007	John Keenan (pp. 5-14)
9.04.2007	Peter Elbow (pp. 21-25)
9.06.2007	Linda Flower and John Ackerman (pp. 26-38)
9.11.2007	John S. Harris (pp. 39-48)
9.13.2007	Sheryl Lindsell-Roberts (pp. 49-52)
9.18.2007	John L. Munschauer (pp. 263-293)
9.20.2007	Steven Graber (pp. 294-308)
9.25.2007	Richard H. Beatty (pp. 309-325) Burton Jay Nadler (pp. 326-332)
9.27.2007	Stuart Chase (pp. 53-63)
10.02.2007	William Zinsser (pp. 64-71)
10.04.2007	William Lutz (pp. 72-85)
10.09.2007	Alan Siegel (pp. 86-96)
10.11.2007	University of Wisconsin (pp. 97-102)
10.16.2007	Mid-Semester Recess (no class; no reading)
10.18.2007	Mid-Semester Recess (no class; no reading)
10.23.2007	David V. Lewis (pp. 103-113) Royal Bank of Canada (pp. 114-121)
10.25.2007	Allan A. Glatthorn (pp. 122-126) Harold K. Mintz (pp. 127-130)
10.30.2007	John S. Fielden and Ronald E. Dulek (pp. 131-140) Heidi Schultz (pp. 141-166)
11.01.2007	J. C. Mathes and Dwight W. Stevenson (pp. 167-186)

11.06.2007	Richard W. Dodge (pp. 187-194) Christian K. Arnold (pp. 195-199)
11.08.2007	Vincent Vinci (pp. 200-206)
11.13.2007	Walter E. Oliu, Charles T. Brusaw, and Gerald J. Alred (pp. 207-232)
11.15.2007	David W. Ewing (pp. 233-244)
11.20.2007	Philip C. Kolin (pp. 245-262)
11.22.2007	Thanksgiving Day (no class; no reading)
11.27.2007	Dorothy A. Winsor (pp. 333-346) Darrell Huff (pp. 347-354)
11.29.2007	Dan Jones (pp. 355-366) Carolyn D. Rude (pp. 367-378)

Still To Come...

In the near future, within the first two weeks of class, we will work out what types of projects this course will entail. When that has been decided, you will receive information briefly describing those projects, specific instructions for the first of those projects, and detailed information on the grading breakdown of this course.

To: Students in English 213-01 (Technical Writing)
From: Dr. Michael Kapper
Date: September 6, 2007
Re.: Course Projects and Schedule

Overview and Notes

The results are in! Those of you who were in class on Tuesday, September 4, voted on the course projects, and I have added my own thoughts to yours, and we have a selection of projects to complete. I have also planned a schedule for us. It's going to be pretty intense, but I think we will all—including me, given your interests—learn a lot in the process of completing these projects.

I have learned a couple of things about you as a group already. First, that—even though you're all part of the “digital generation,” that group for whom the Internet has *always* been a fact of life, you're a bit computer-phobic. Any project that seemed to be computer intensive went down in flames, particularly the Software Documentation idea—only one person voted in favor of that one. Second, I've learned that any project that seems like it might not exactly belong in school had a pretty good chance of landing in the rotation: I'm not surprised that the graphic design project had a strong showing with so many Comm Arts majors in the room, and it made the cut, but it's not *just* about graphic design; also, the most popular project was the Technical Report for a Popular Audience—the word *Popular* in that one seemed to really do it for all of you.

So, the list of projects (I've grouped some together, and am calling them four major projects, though they consist of six of the elements you voted on) is:

- The Concept Essay and Ebook Project
- The Graphic Design, Testing, and Report Project
- The Process Documentation Project
- The Technical Report for a Popular Audience Project

They are presented in this list in no particular order; keep reading for more information about them.

The Projects

There are four (4) major projects in this course, and two (2) of them consist of two (2) fairly hefty components—enough so that the components each have their own weighting in the final course grade. Each project is described in some depth below (in the order we'll *begin* them).

The Concept Essay and Ebook Project. This is the first major project that we'll begin, and it will be introduced in class on September 6, 2007. It is one of the projects that has two large components (the *and* should be a tip-off in that regard). It is unusual in that its two components are different in how they will be completed. *The Concept Essay* will be completed by each class member individually. *The Ebook Project* will be completed first in teams, and eventually by the whole class working as a team to divide and manage labor.

In *The Concept Essay* you will choose a key concept, practice, or skill in your major academic field, one that you did not understand when you started college, and that you wish now, looking back, that you had understood. You will identify this concept, explain it, and tell

why it is so important to you, your field, and your academic career. I expect that this essay will be roughly 1,500 words in length (about 6 double-spaced, manuscript pages). *The Concept Essay* will, again, be completed individually, and will be weighted at 15% of your final grade in the course.

In *The Ebook Project*, you will work first with a small team (3 or 4 people) to design a layout for an ebook collection of everyone's *Concept Essay* submissions, which we will publish. Each team will submit a layout design, and then we, as a class, will adopt one of these designs, and begin to go about the task of publishing the book. There will be a lot of decisions to make along the way here, and we will deal with what those are and what we want to do about them as we go along. *The Ebook Project* will be completed in teams and as a class, and will represent 15% of your final grade in the course.

The Graphic Design & Testing and Report Project. This is the other project with two major components, and all components will be completed in teams. In this project, teams will be working with a fictitious client (played by me) to design a corporate logo. Several designs should be considered and tested (and we'll talk about testing methods). Then, each team should prepare a formal report for the client detailing the designs they tried, their testing process, and the design they recommend, with supporting reasons and evidence; the report will likely be roughly 2,000 words in length. You will be evaluated on the *process* of design and testing (15% of final grade) and the *product* of the written report (15% of final grade). This project will be introduced in class on September 25, 2007.

The Process Documentation Project. This project asks you to choose an activity—perhaps from your academic field, perhaps from your personal expertise—and provide detailed instructions for completing that activity to someone who might not have the expertise in that area that you do. Audience will be a key consideration here—neither making your instructions too basic nor assuming too much knowledge on the part of the audience. You should also consider illustrating your instructions with sketches, line art, photographs, or screen shots (and you all know what it means when a professor says *should*, right?). *The Process Documentation Project* will be introduced in class on October 9, 2007, and will count for 15% of your final grade in the course. It's hard to give even an estimated word count for this project, but probably 1,000-2,000 would be a *very rough* guideline.

The Technical Report for a Popular Audience. In this project, you will write a report which deals with technical subject matter from an area of your expertise, but presents it to a popular audience. Remember, though, that *popular* does not mean *dumb*. You should assume an educated, interested, literate audience in your work. We will look at examples of work that do exactly this. Basically, you're trying, here, to get a non-expert audience to the point where they can understand enough of an expert's (your) technical concepts, jargon, and ideas to understand what you have to say on a particular topic. This project will be introduced in class on October 23, 2007, and will account for 15% of your final grade in the course. I expect that this essay will be roughly 3,000 words in length (about 12 double-spaced manuscript pages).

With the exception of the completed draft of *The Concept Essay*, there will be **no** formal due dates for projects in this course, except for the end of the semester. We will devote class time, every day, to discussing progress on the projects, and you will be expected to be working on projects after they are introduced. The team-based nature of several of the projects should provide you with positive peer pressure to avoid procrastination. *The Concept Essay* will have a separate due date in order to be certain that you have your submission for the ebook collection ready in time to get it included in the final book. We will negotiate when we will meet in teams and as a class for larger discussions. But all work must be completed by the end of the semester (say, Tuesday of finals week).

Grades, So We're 100% Clear

The grading breakdown for the course is:

The Concept Essay and Ebook Project	30%
The Concept Essay (Individual)	15%
The Ebook Project (Team)	15%
The Graphic Design & Testing & Report Project	30%
Graphic Design and Testing (Team)	15%
Client Report (Team)	15%
The Process Documentation Project (Individual)	15%
The Technical Report for a Popular Audience Project	15%
Participation in In-Class Discussions	<u>10%</u>
Total	100%

In-class discussions will be of assigned readings and course projects; readings can come from the course textbook, *Strategies for Business and Technical Writing*, or be supplemental, project specific readings which will be available to you on Sakai (so it's **really** important that you know how to access Sakai, and soon!).

The Nice Surprise at the End

I'm going to suspend the written responses to the readings. The idea of the written responses is to make sure that everyone does the reading and comes to class prepared to discuss it. This has not been a problem so far, maybe because of the responses, but maybe because you care about your education; I would like to (and am going to) assume the latter.

You don't have to do the written responses any more (they seem to be doing little but adding stress to your lives, anyway, and I don't want to be responsible for *that*). Please note, however, that your participation in class discussions is being evaluated, and so your responsibility for doing the reading and coming prepared to discuss the reading assignment and/or ask questions about it *is not* going away.

Final Thoughts

You'll have to plan your time independently, with members of your team(s), and—most of all—carefully in completing the projects for this course. You'll have to assign concrete tasks and appropriate roles to team members throughout the term. You'll have to make use of your resources well, and to remember that I, too, am a resource. Please raise any issues as they come up, so that small issues don't grow into large ones and large issues don't become earth-shattering ones.