

To: Dr. David Blakesley, Director Professional Writing at Purdue
From: Allen Brizee
Date: April 4, 2006
Subject: Course Proposal for Junior/Senior Level Technical Writing Course

Introduction

This memo proposes a junior/senior level technical writing course for Professional Writing at Purdue based on the University of Maryland's Professional Writing Program course English 393: Technical Writing. The class is a service course for students from majors including, but not limited to, Engineering, Computer Science, Business, and Medicine. The purpose of the Technical Writing class is to teach students how to write for the workplace in settings that require a more technical analysis and product than those covered in business writing. This type of curriculum is important to students because it prepares them for the rhetorical situations they face when they leave college.

Pedagogical Approach

What makes this course special is that it includes the latest professional writing theories involving the user-centered, or reader-centered, approach advocated by scholars such as Dr. Paul V. Anderson (Miami, Ohio), Dr. Robert R. Johnson (Michigan Tech), and Dr. Stephen A. Bernhardt (University of Delaware). The user-centered approach focuses on involving users in the design and writing process as well as incorporating precise, well-researched audience analyses. The user-centered approach affects every aspect of the composing process and even impacts the way in which sentences are organized.

In addition, the course integrates classical rhetoric as a springboard into contemporary writing events to underscore the importance of invention (heuristics), *kairos*, and sound reasoning. The class is unique because it also includes a focus on visual rhetoric and technology. The class meets at least once a week in a computer lab, and students develop all major assignments on the PCs. The latest software applications, such as MS PowerPoint, Adobe PhotoShop and Acrobat, as well as Dreamweaver MX, help students model their writing process after workplace standards to unleash the full potential of their rhetorical and creativity abilities. With some alterations, this course could transition into a service-learning class, as the capstone projects are a proposal and a problem-solution report based on locally focused, empirical research. Lastly, the course could also transition into a purely online class for distance learning courses offered by Purdue.

Course Description for English 393: Technical Writing

Prerequisites: English 106 or English 108 (First-Year Composition)

Required Texts:

- *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*, 6th Edition by Paul V. Anderson
- *Technical Communication* Textbook Website: <http://english.heinle.com/anderson/>
- *Rhetoric in Technical Communication*, Course Website: <http://web.ics.purdue.edu/~hbrizee/Website/hbrizeehome1.htm>
- *The Brief Penguin Handbook*, 2nd Edition by Lester Faigley

Technical writing teaches students how to make the technologies with which they work understandable to many different types of readers. The course covers the complex process writers need to learn to accomplish this goal, including how to research efficiently, how to accommodate information for specific audiences, how to use stylistic and visual devices to make information more accessible, and how to edit their work as well as their peers'. Students will apply the skills they learn to a wide variety of formats, which may include technical descriptions, letters and résumés, instructional manuals, brochures, research reports, memorandums, progress reports, and proposals. Assignments parallel the writing demands students will face in college and in the workplace. Students will emerge as powerful, confident, and effective communicators sensitive to users' needs.

Course Objectives

Course objectives include the following:

- Identify and explain workplace writing forms, methods, and issues
- Identify and explain the roles technical writing plays in the workplace
- Identify and explain the role rhetoric plays in technical writing
- Write clear, coherent prose that meets the needs of your audience
- Master the style and citation requirements expected in professional writing
- Work effectively in teams
- Produce articulate and well-developed documents that solve problems and stimulate action
- Adapt your writing skills to meet the demands of ongoing changes in the workplace culture.

Course Outline

The course begins with an introduction to the reader-centered approach and how it applies to college and workplace writing. The class works on close audience analysis and develops an awareness of the rhetorical situations involved in writing cover letters and résumés. The class also studies how to write clear, reader-centered prose.

The next section of the course focuses on how rhetoric works in professional communication. The class studies classical rhetoric (the proofs, induction, deduction, *kairos*, and the fallacies) and then moves into visual rhetoric and document design.

The course then covers how to write successful proposals and how to conduct thorough, ethical research for the problem-solution report. The class splits into groups to work on the semester project. We study Dr. Bernhardt's use of Seed documents to learn how writing can guide research and science, and we begin studying the dynamics and technical requirements of oral presentations. While the class works in groups on the semester project, individual students study and learn how to write clear, reader-centered instructions. The class ends with professional group presentations using MS PowerPoint in a lab.

Thank you for taking the time to read this course proposal. Attached is the course syllabus, which contains the policies and schedule. Please contact me at hbrizee@purdue.edu if you have any questions.

Attachment: Course Syllabus, Technical Writing