

San José State University
School of Humanities and Arts
Department of English and Comparative Literature

English 107: Technical Writing

Instructor:	Dr. Mark Thompson
Office Location:	Faculty Office Building 110
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Email:	mark.thompson@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	T 1:30–3:30 and by appointment
Class Days/Time:	T/R 10:30–11:45
Classroom:	The Internets
Prerequisites:	Upper-Division Standing

Canvas

All course materials such as readings, syllabus, handouts, notes, assignment instructions, etc. will be found on Canvas.

The login site for Canvas is:

<https://sjsu.instructure.com/>

Use your standard SJSU login to access the class. We will cover basic login in class, but there are additional resources to learn Canvas here:

<http://guides.instructure.com/>

If there are any issues with your Canvas account, email me immediately.

Course Description

Technical writing covers a large number of genres and applications, but is generally unified by the idea that we are creating documents that will “do” things in the real world. Whether we are looking to get a job, teach a reader how something complex works, or help a reader through a complex technical process, there are fundamental aspects of communication which must be followed if we are to be successful. These fundamental aspects can be boiled down to four questions. First, what are we trying to communicate (message)? Second, who are we communicating to (audience)? Thirdly, what are we trying to achieve (purpose)? Lastly, what’s

the best format to communicate in? Video, writing, an app? The answers to these questions start as the launching off point for all the work we will be doing this semester.

A second major focus will be *how do we communicate technical information to non-experts?* Our documents are used by business people trying to decide whether or not to fund a project. Our documents are used by customers to figure out how to use products. How do we translate complex computer or engineering concepts into language that the average person can understand and use? This is further complicated by the fact that we ourselves are probably not experts on every topic that we're asked to write about. What strategies can we as writers use to become "expert enough" to write about a topic with accuracy and authority?

Lastly, we will focus on testing how useful the writing we do in this class is. It's one thing to finish a document, but can someone else use it to achieve what they need to achieve? How do we know if our document works?

Department Goals

Students will demonstrate the ability to:

- G1. Read closely in a variety of forms, styles, structures, and modes, and articulate the value of close reading in the study of literature, creative writing, or rhetoric. (Students are taught and will use rhetorical analysis to make sense of the reading assignments that stretch across many genres covered in this class.)
- G2. Show familiarity with major literary works, genres, periods, and critical approaches to British, American, and World Literature. (This is a technical writing class. Student work may or may not engage with literature, according to their interests.)
- G3. Write clearly, effectively, and creatively, and adjust writing style appropriately to the content, the context, and nature of the subject. (This is a class that creates documents that will "do" things in the real world. Our work is contextually grounded to the real-world situations each major assignment will engage.)
- G4. Develop and carry out research projects, and locate, evaluate, organize, and incorporate information effectively. (Assignments #1, #2, #6, and #7 require significant research of outside material.)
- G5. Articulate the relations among culture, history, and texts. (Understanding the cultural and historical origins of current technical writing genres are key to understanding the tasks to be done.)

Course Learning Goals

By the end of this class, you will be able to:

- Engage in best practices when working remotely both individually and as teams.
- Apply rhetorical analysis methods to documents as a means of assessing their usability.
- Write across a number of technical genres using a rhetorical model that looks at message, audience, and purpose as a means of starting any technical writing project.
- Be able to recognize and communicate using the most common technical writing genres.
- Use a number of strategies to explain technical topics to non-expert audiences.
- Develop and deploy user testing methods for determining document usefulness.
- Use research strategies to understand technical topics to the level that they can be communicated to non-experts with authority.
- Have a realistic pathway to employment through work on job-finding strategies, resumes/cover letters, and job interviewing techniques.

Required Readings and Classroom Tools

Technology. There are no required books for this class. Please spend the money on tech. I know times are tough, but if you are serious about being a tech writer, you should have your own computer. Chefs carry their knives, carpenters bring their favorite tools to a job, and you have your laptop.

But. I realize tech might be an investment you're currently not in the position to make. No problem. I don't want your lack of access to tech to hamper your ability in this class. If at any point you are unable to do work because you can't get the tech tools you need, let me know and we can work around it.

Canvas. Because I'm sensitive to the amount of paper a writing/editing class can consume, this course will make extensive use of Canvas, an online classroom management tool. Your readings and assignments will be posted as .pdfs for you to download and print (as you see fit).

You will still need to have readings open during class. I will give random pop quizzes throughout the semester to test whether you are keeping up with the reading.

Additionally, I will use Canvas to communicate with you during the week, and will be returning drafts to you via email/Canvas.

I will also use Canvas to make your grades available to you throughout the semester, so you know where you stand at all times.

Every semester I seem to have a student or two who can't quite figure the technology out. If you are having any problems logging on to your account, please contact me! Your success in this class is dependent on this!

Readings. There is no reader or textbook for this class. All readings will be posted on Canvas. This allows me to pick and choose from the best writing out there, as well as adjust reading difficulty to the level of our class. I fully understand that some of this isn't always the most interesting reading in the world. However, these chapters and articles are crucial to building a classroom vocabulary for the work we are doing. There is no busy work in this class. All readings have been curated to make sure they are of use to class projects. You are expected to read EVERYTHING and come to class prepared to discuss each article. If you start slacking here, I can guarantee you will struggle with the assignments.

Classroom Tools: Software

- Unless otherwise specified, assignments should be turned in as a Word (.doc) file. Microsoft Office is free/cheap to SJSU students.
- Additionally, we will be learning some of the most common tech tools used in technical writing, such as SnagIt, DITA, and Madcap Flare. I'll provide links when appropriate.
- If there are ANY other applications that you would like to learn, please don't hesitate to ask me about them. I'm happy to accommodate your individual research interests.

Software Links:

- Microsoft Office:
<http://its.sjsu.edu/services/software/microsoft-students/index.html>
- SnagIt:
We will download the trial version of SnagIt when we get to that part of the semester. (Don't download these early!)
- Slack (for the final project):
<https://slack.com/>
- All other software will be linked to from Canvas.

Course Requirements and Assignments

ASSIGNMENT #1: JOB APPLICATION MATERIALS

For this assignment, you will research and find a job ad to apply to, and then create an appropriate resume and introductory email using the job ad as a guide.

ASSIGNMENT #2: PROPOSAL ADAPTATION

For this project, you will be writing a proposal, adapting information that I will be providing you to the proposal genre. You may also choose your own proposal topic.

ASSIGNMENT #3: DEVELOPER GUIDE

Using a Word template, you will properly format a developer guide for programmers at Facebook and Twitter to implement a photo-sharing app. The data for this project comes from an actual client.

ASSIGNMENT #4: PRESENTATION OF TECHNICAL MATERIAL TO A NONEXPERT AUDIENCE

You will create a short video that explains a technical topic or process to the class, along with a one-sheet handout that summarizes the technology.

ASSIGNMENT #5: COMPUTER TUTORIAL

Using screen-capturing software, you will produce a short computer tutorial that explains how to do a moderately difficult computer task in both print and video formats. You will also use test your instructions and write a user testing report.

ASSIGNMENT #6: PROFESSIONAL INTERVIEW MEMO

In this assignment, you will find and interview a local professional about their use of technical communication in the workplace. After completing this interview, you will submit your interview questions, as well as a two-page memo that summarizes your findings.

ASSIGNMENT #7: TECHNICAL MANUAL AND WEBSITE (GROUP ASSIGNMENT)

For the major project in this class, you will work in groups of three or four to produce a user manual that accompanies a phone app for iPhone or Android. The manual should describe major features, explain basic tasks, and include other sections of user manuals as appropriate to the project. We will be learning and using DITA and/or Madcap Flare to create an online version of your manual. You will present your manual in the finals slot to a panel of local tech professionals who will ask questions and assess your work.

***ONE-UNIT ENHANCEMENT**

This class has shifted from 3 to 4 units. In some ways, this brings the workload in line with the unit count. In addition, I am introducing an Augmented Reality project and lessons of the Markup language DITA to expand course coverage.

Final Exam. Your group will present its final project in the final examination schedule. You will be graded as to how well you articulate your group's work in light of all the work we've done this semester.

Second Chance. I expect perfection, but realize that you're still learning this stuff. Because I'm a tough grader, I'll let you redo one major assignment and submit it for full credit—the only requirement being that you also turn in a memo describing your errors and the ways that you fixed them. The grade on this second attempt will replace the first. *The second chance is not available if you didn't turn anything in the first time.*

In-Class Exercises. On most days that we discuss readings, there will be short, in-class writing assignments to practice various writing techniques and strategies. These may be group-based, or individually based. I attempt to cater these exercises to issues that I'm seeing in your work. These will generally be graded for completion. Each exercise won't be worth many points, but they will add up. You generally have until the end of the day to finish these.

Student Workload

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

GRADE INFORMATION

Relative Weights for Determining the Final Course Grade: The letter grades you earn on individual assignments are translated into numbers to be crunched in order to determine the overall course grade. An F is 0, a D- is 1 and so on . . . all the way to A+, which is 12.

Classroom Participation, Homework, In-Class Exercises, Quizzes	20%
Assignment #1: Job Application Packet	10%
Assignment #2: Proposal Adaptation	10%
Assignment #3: Developer Guide	10%
Assignment #4: Oral Presentation of Technical Material	10%
Assignment #5: Computer Tutorial	15%

Assignment #6: Professional Interview Memo	10%
Assignment #7: User Manual & Website	15%

Grading Criteria: The following paragraphs sum up my criteria for grading work. Though I assign number grades for each essay, here is a general guide to my grading.

An "A" is awarded to work that is consistently excellent. It is professional, publishable, generically appropriate, and contains no more than two minor errors.

A "B" is awarded to work that is consistently above average—and occasionally excellent. While documents may not exhibit the same depth of research, analysis, or polish, the author has done a competent job. This document would be publishable with another round of revision.

A "C" is awarded to work that is in the ballpark of what a document is attempting to achieve. The author does many things right, but there are omissions or errors that significantly damage a document's usefulness. The author, while not yet accomplished in the craft of technical writing, is producing competent work that would require significant revision on the part of a more experienced technical writer.

A "D" is awarded to work that shows developing competence. The author understands the conversation to be addressed, but it's a poor effort. This is the type of work that would be rejected and assigned to another writer.

An "F" is awarded to work that demonstrates incompetence or that is fatally incomplete.

Grading Shorthand:

A = Professional

B = Intern

C = Student

D = Not Cutting It

Within any of the letter grade ranges (e.g. B+/B/B-), the assignment of a + or - grade will reflect stronger (+) or weaker (-) completion of the goals of the assignment.

“A minimum aggregate GPA of 2.0 SJSU Studies (R, S, & V) shall be required of all students as a graduation requirement.” To see full text, review [University Policy S11-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S11-3) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S11-3.pdf>.

CLASSROOM PROTOCOL

Understanding. I understand that we are in a global pandemic generously seasoned with fires, heat waves, power outages, evacuations, Constitutional crises, protests, white supremacy, murder hornets, etc. I also understand that many of us are cramped at home with family or roommates. Some of us are trying to get our own kids through school. Some of us have nine other people

trying to use the internet. Some of us have lousy or no internet. I understand all of this and factor it into grading. Keep in contact with me and let me know how I can help.

Netiquette. Lordy, what a terrible word. Remember that you are in a professional environment and that you're training to be in an ever-more professional environment. Be yourselves, but be respectful of each other. No trolling. I'm the only one allowed to troll. Being able to disagree or critique without being mean is a skill you need to develop AS IS the ability to take fair criticism without getting your feelings hurt. Without the context of verbal communication, written communication seems much harsher than it's usually intended and sarcasm doesn't always come across. Don't take out your frustration on others and also realize that the person next to you might be having the hardest week of their life.

Cameras. Talking to black boxes sucks. I would prefer you to keep your camera on during class. This is the professional standard at the places you'll end up working. Wear a hat and sunglasses if you need to, pause if you have a huge sneeze coming on. If there's a reason you can't leave your camera on, please let me know.

Attendance. I guarantee that missing more than a few days will significantly affect your understanding of the material. Please notify me if you are unable to attend class. **DO NOT DISAPPEAR ON ME.** In the past, students who have vanished without explanation for more than two or three classes have failed this class. I am a human being. If you are experiencing an ongoing crisis, please let me know and we will come to some sort of arrangement.

Lateness. I understand that we're all late every now and then, but a routine failure to arrive on time will significantly affect your participation grade in this class. If there is something that will make you late to class, whether reoccurring or not, please let me know. *That being said, don't let potential lateness keep you from coming to class.*

Grading class participation. I expect everyone to participate in class. This means you are awake and engaged, having done the readings and the homework, are actively participating in discussion and are working constructively when we break into small groups. A participation grade allows me to reward those students who are actively engaged in each class, while being able to account for students who are routinely late, absent, sleepy, or engaged in non-class related activity during our brief time together. An "A" means always engaged, a "B" means mostly engaged. A "C" is sometimes engaged.

Late work. I don't accept it. Part of being a writer is, though the Earth itself may be aflame, you meet your deadlines. All of them. I understand your life is complicated, with many responsibilities pulling you in multiple directions. If you are unable to attend on a day that an assignment is due, it is up to you to make sure that you get me your work before the beginning of that class. *Some assignments are due at midnight, some are due before class. Be sure to check with Canvas.*

Acting with academic integrity. In both your academic and professional careers, you are expected to act with integrity. You are in this class for more than a grade, you are here to emerge with actual skills—skills which are not developed through cheating. I am well aware of the essay mills, and have designed this class to make the purchase of or plagiarism from other writing

sources painfully obvious. Though it most likely will not be an issue, any plagiarism will earn you an automatic “F” in my class. Just do your own work.

Technology use. I realize the temptation to refresh your Instagram feed as we delve into the intricacies of dangling participles may be strong. Emailing, texting, swiping right, decapitating orcs, and engaging in unrelated activities are discourteous and distracting to me and your classmates. When potential employers ask about you, this is usually the second thing they ask about. Try not to get distracted.

Food and beverages. Feel free to eat and drink during class. No slurping noises, please.

My open door policy. I want you to succeed in this class. I’m happy to talk with you at any time about the readings, assignments, and any other aspect of the course. Just talk to me after class, send me an email, or arrange to meet with me outside class. **COME TO MY ONLINE OFFICE HOURS!** My highest compliments from students have always come from the one-on-one help I give outside of class. In addition to teaching, I’ve worked as a professional writer and editor for the past 20 years. I’m here to mentor you and help you transition into the workplace. Come talk to me!

Contacting me. Please use email to contact me (I don’t check voice messages and I don’t answer the phone if I’m busy). I check email at 10 am and 2 pm Monday-Thursday and 3pm on Fridays. So, don’t expect a response from a panicked email sent at midnight about an assignment due the next day.

After this class. In addition to my assistance in this class, I extend to all my students an offer to help with any future writing issues which may arise once this class is over. In the past, I have assisted former students with cover letters, updated resumes, grad school applications, and have even helped with the abstract of a scientific paper. Additionally, for all students who receive an A in this class, I will happily write a letter of recommendation for any grants, schools, programs, or internships you may be applying to. Also, if you receive an A in this class, you may include me as a reference in any jobs you might apply to—as long as you haven’t committed any felonies in the interim.

We get approximately 20 requests per year from local employers looking for graduates from our program. If you do well in this class, I pass your name along and do what I can to make sure you get an interview. Last year alone, 12 students got full-time writing jobs with my help. Work hard, and you can be the next.

University Policies

Per University Policy S16-9, university-wide policy information relevant to all courses, such as academic integrity, accommodations, etc. will be available on Office of Graduate and Undergraduate Programs’ [Syllabus Information web page](http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/gup/syllabusinfo/>

Student Technology Resources

Computer labs for student use are available in the [Academic Success Center](http://www.sjsu.edu/at/asc/) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/at/asc/> located on the 1st floor of Clark Hall and in the Associated Students

Lab on the 2nd floor of the Student Union. Additional computer labs may be available in your department/college. Computers are also available in the Martin Luther King Library. A wide variety of audio-visual equipment is available for student checkout from Media Services located in IRC 112. These items include DV and HD digital camcorders; digital still cameras; video, slide and overhead projectors; DVD, CD, and audiotape players; sound systems, wireless microphones, projection screens and monitors.

SJSU Peer Connections

Peer Connections, a campus-wide resource for mentoring and tutoring, strives to inspire students to develop their potential as independent learners while they learn to successfully navigate through their university experience. You are encouraged to take advantage of their services which include course-content based tutoring, enhanced study and time management skills, more effective critical thinking strategies, decision making and problem-solving abilities, and campus resource referrals.

In addition to offering small group, individual, and drop-in tutoring for a number of undergraduate courses, consultation with mentors is available on a drop-in or by appointment basis. Workshops are offered on a wide variety of topics including preparing for the Writing Skills Test (WST), improving your learning and memory, alleviating procrastination, surviving your first semester at SJSU, and other related topics. A computer lab and study space are also available for student use in Room 600 of Student Services Center (SSC).

Peer Connections is located in three locations: SSC, Room 600 (10th Street Garage on the corner of 10th and San Fernando Street), at the 1st floor entrance of Clark Hall, and in the Living Learning Center (LLC) in Campus Village Housing Building B. Visit [Peer Connections website](http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu) at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is located in Clark Hall, Suite 126. All Writing Specialists have gone through a rigorous hiring process, and they are well trained to assist all students at all levels within all disciplines to become better writers. In addition to one-on-one tutoring services, the Writing Center also offers workshops every semester on a variety of writing topics. To make an appointment or to refer to the numerous online resources offered through the Writing Center, visit the [Writing Center website](http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>.

SJSU Counseling Services

The SJSU Counseling Services is located on the corner of 7th Street and San Fernando Street, in Room 201, Administration Building. Professional psychologists, social workers, and counselors are available to provide consultations on issues of student mental health, campus climate or psychological and academic issues on an individual, couple, or group basis. To schedule an

appointment or learn more information, visit [Counseling Services website](http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling>.

ENGLISH 107 – TECHNICAL WRITING

Fall 2020 · t/r · 10:30-11:45

Daily Schedule

MODULE 1 JOB APPLICATION PACKAGE & STRATEGIC WRITING	
Aug 20	Introducing the Course
Class	Review course syllabus. Meet each other.
Homework	Reading 1
Aug 25	Rhetorical Communication
Class	Discuss Reading 1. Discuss Assignment #1: Job Application Packet.
Homework	Reading 2 Homework #1 – Job Ad Analysis
Aug 27	The Resume
DUE	Homework #1
Class	Discuss Reading 2.
Homework	Reading 3
Sep 1	The Cover Letter, Internal/External Organizational Communication
Class	Discuss Reading 3.
Homework	Reading 4
Sep 3	Elements of Visual Design for Documents
Class	Discuss Reading 4.
Homework	Finish Resume and Email Draft (Bring 4 paper copies to class and submit via Canvas)
Sep 8	Workshop Resume and Email Drafts
DUE	Assignment #1 Rough Draft
Class	Workshop resume, introduce “the elevator speech.”
Homework	Reading 6, practice elevator speeches
MODULE 2 RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION OF TECH MATERIALS	
Sep 10	Writing with Clarity, Elevator Speeches
Class	Discuss Reading 6, give elevator speech to instructor.
Homework	Reading 7, Finish Assignment #1: Job Application Packet
Sep 15	Writing Proposals #1
DUE	Assignment #1: Job Application Packet (Printed copy AND submitted via Canvas)

Class Discuss Reading 7, introduce Assignment #2: Proposal Adaptation, go over Homework #2: Analyzing a Technical Proposal.
Homework Reading 8, Finish Homework #2

Sep 17 Writing Proposals #2

DUE Homework #2

Class Discuss Reading 8.
Homework Reading 9

Sep 22 Dev Guides & Research Of Technical Topics

Class Discuss Reading 9, discuss Assignment #3: Writing a Developer Guide.
Homework Reading 10, Homework #3: What is an API? (10 pts.)

Sep 24 Adaptation Strategies For Non-Expert Audiences

DUE Homework #3: What is an API?

Class Discuss Reading 10, Introduce Assignment #4: Group Presentation Of Technical Material To A Non-Expert Audience, Break into groups, assign topics. *Demo: Applying a style guide in Word.*
Homework Reading 11

Sep 29 Presentation Strategies for Non-Expert Audiences

DUE Assignment #2: Proposal Adaptation

Class Discuss Reading 11, group presentation planning/workshop.
Homework Prepare for Presentations

Oct 1 Presentations, Day 1

Homework Reading 12

Oct 6 Presentations, Day 2;

Class Finish presentations, discuss Reading 12, introduce Assignment #5: Computer Tutorial.
Homework Reading 13

MODULE 3 WRITING INSTRUCTIONS & USER TESTING

Oct 8 Written Instructions #1

Class Discuss Reading 13.
Homework Homework #4: Computer Tutorial Planning Doc

Oct 11 (Sunday) Assignment #3: Dev Guide

DUE:

Oct 15 Written Instructions #2, Screen Capture Tutorial

Class Discuss Reading 13.
DUE Homework #4: Computer Tutorial Planning Doc
Homework Reading 14: User Testing

- Oct 15 Usability Testing #1**
 Class Advanced User Testing, Conduct User Testing on Your Instructions.
 Homework Start Homework #5: User Testing Report
- Oct 20 Guest Speaker:** Christopher Freeman, Head Tech Writer, Blue Coat Systems (SJSU alum)
 Homework Finish Draft of Assignment #5: Computer Instructions
- Oct 22 User Testing #2, Testing Your Drafts**
DUE Rough Draft Of Assignment #5: Computer Instructions
DUE Homework #5: User Testing Report (End of Day. Also, turn in with Assignment #5)
 Class Conduct User Testing
 Homework Finish Computer Instructions

MODULE 4 CONTENT MANAGEMENT AND TOPIC-BASED WRITING

- Oct 27 Content Management Systems**
DUE ASSIGNMENT #5: Computer Instructions
 Class Discussion of Reading 16, Break into groups, assign topics. Tech workshop.
- Oct 29 Content Management Systems, pt. 2**
 Class In-class management work.
 Homework Reading 17.
- Nov 3 Software/Product Documentation, Pt #1,** Introduce Assignment #6: Professional Interview Memo. *Demo: Building a TOC,*
 Class Discuss Reading 17.
 Homework No homework.
- Nov 5 Guest Speaker: Joe Fernandez from Google**
 Class Listen to Joe, yo.
 Homework Reading 18,
- Nov 10 Topic-Based Writing, Introducing DITA**
 Class Discuss Reading 18, DITA Workshop.
 Homework Start DITA training, Introduction to DITA.

MODULE 5 TEAM PROJECTS – PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

- Nov 12 Planning Multipage Documents, Style Guides, Group Planning**
 Class Discuss Assignment #7: Technical Manual, Form Groups, Start playing with apps, Start Group Planning Doc.
 Homework Group Planning Doc.

Sunday Nov 15

DUE DITA Training Certificate/Form

Nov 17 In-Class Group Work, App User Testing

Class Figure out what needs teaching, write instructions.

Homework Finish Group Planning Doc.

DUE Group Planning Doc

Nov 19 Guest Speakers: Society for Technical Communication

Homework Finish Instructions, draft of manual for user testing, finish DITA training.

Nov 24 User Testing, Instructions

Class Final User Testing on Manual Instructions, finish drafting manual.

DUE Draft of Manual Instructions

Dec 1 User Testing, Entire Manual

Class Final User Testing & In-Class Group Work.

DUE Draft of Manual

Homework Finish Final Projects.

Dec 3 Professional Interview Discussion, Informal Final Group Presentations

Class Discussion, Informal presentations, job interview prep, last steps.

DUE Assignment #6: Professional Interview Memo

Homework Finish Final Projects.

Dec 15 (Friday) Final Projects Due with Final Group Presentation! 9:45 AM!!!