

## WRT 307: Professional Writing

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### Contact: Jessica Pauszek

Email: jmpausze@syr.edu

Office Hours: Wednesday 11-12

Office: HBC 006

*When you write at work, you act. You exert your power to achieve a specific result, to change things from the way are they are now to the way you want them to be.*

Anderson, 10

*Professional and technical writers create the small documents that make the world run.*

B. L'Eplattenier

Course Description: In this WRT 307 course, we will be interested in professional communication, specifically through the study of audience, purpose, and ethics. We will be learning about rhetorical problem-solving principles and how they are applied to diverse professional writing tasks and situations. Within this, our goal is to practice multiple real-world writing tasks, through a variety of genres that are common to pre and professional settings, such as bios, resumes, memos, instructions reports, and feasibility studies.

### [The WRT 307 Outcomes](#)

### Texts and Materials:

Anderson, Paul V. *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach*. 8<sup>th</sup> Edition. Wadsworth, 2013. ISBN: 113330981X

### Major Assignments:

Almost everything we do this semester will be part of three major projects. As in the workplace, these projects will not run consecutively. Rather, they will overlap, and the techniques, skills, and strategies gained from each will inform the others.

Following are brief overviews of the work sequence. Full descriptions will be available as each begins.

**The Onboarding Project** will introduce the fundamental principles that will be central to the rest of the course. Employing the framing concept of the “onboarding process” many companies or institutions use to orient new employees, the project will establish the course’s expectations of you as a worker (writer, editor, collaborator, . . .) and for

the quality of your work. The project will result in a number of collaborative products and a portfolio of individual work that demonstrates understanding of and facility with the fundamentals of Professional and Technical Communication, rhetoric, workplace conventions, and genres.

**The Instructions Project** is designed to address two issues in modern professional writing.

- The first of these is that writing to teach, to instruct, to demonstrate, or to document procedures is a prevalent form of writing in which almost all professionals engage and yet is widely ignored as a skill to be learned and practiced.
- The second is the fact that much of the professional writing that you will do in the future will never see paper, will not be linear in design, and will require very different things of both readers and writers than traditional paper texts. The project will take up the design and navigation issues of non-paper, non-linear texts.

**The Feasibility Study** will require that you work collaboratively with a team who will create a workplace, starting with a problem or need and working through designing, producing, advertising, etc. the product or approach you propose as a solution. This project will officially launch near mid-term and continue to the end of the semester, but I suggest considering ideas, topics, possible teammates, and related issues now. This project involves multiple genres—most notably a substantial proposal and report—and consistent workflow management. More detail will be available later in the Assignments section of Blackboard.

Here's how the point structure breaks down:

<b>Project</b>	<b>Available Points</b>
Onboarding Project	250
Instructions Project	250
Feasibility Study	500
<b>Total Available</b>	<b>1000</b>

An elaborated breakdown of points within each unit will accompany each unit assignment.

All three projects must be completed; failure to complete any one project will result in an F for the course.

There is a common misconception that WRT 307 is a course in which students work on their resumes. In fact, it is not a major assignment in the 307 curriculum because it comes under the heading of pre-professional writing (rather than professional writing), and many of your home colleges already provide instruction in resume writing

appropriate for your field. I encourage you to make use of the University's resume resources available at [http://careerservices.syr.edu/undergraduates/Resumes\\_and\\_coverletters.html](http://careerservices.syr.edu/undergraduates/Resumes_and_coverletters.html).

**Grades:**

Since this is a course in professional writing, your work will be graded as though you were submitting it to your immediate manager.

A A-	940-1000 900-939	A manager would be very impressed with your work and remember it when a promotion is discussed. In our course, this means your final product has excellent content, clean text, and excellent document design. Additionally, your work is thorough, coherent, well-supported, and organized in a useful fashion. It demonstrates a superior understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
B+ B B-	880-899 840-879 800-839	A manager would be satisfied, but not particularly impressed. This means that your product meets the basic standards of writing and overall production, as well as demonstrates a step forward in your learning process. It is sufficiently developed, organized, and supported, and you have demonstrated a solid understanding of audience, purpose, and rationale.
C+ C C-	780-799 740-779 700-739	A manager would be disappointed, and would require you to revise the document before a client sees it. Your work may have clear but undeveloped ideas, or it may not engage or affect the reader. It likely contains some errors in logic, mechanics, or grammar.
D	600-699	A manager would be troubled by the poor quality of your work and likely note it in your annual review. The level of writing skill forces the reader to work too hard to understand your ideas. The text may have incomplete information, lack clear organization and design, and have serious grammar or mechanical issues.
F	599 and below	A manager would start looking into replacing you. In this case, your work does not fit the assignment parameters, is so underdeveloped as to demonstrate incompetence, or is mechanically and grammatically incomprehensible. The most likely root cause is a pronounced lack of concern about audience perceptions of the writer as a professional.

**Course Policies:**

**Initiative and Responsibility:** One of the most significant ways in which this course may differ from the other writing studios you've taken is the degree to which you will be expected to be responsible for and to initiate your own learning. For instance, when you are preparing for a presentation, you are responsible for determining what means will work best and for letting me know if you need some assistance from me to make things work.

My responsibility is to respond to your inquiries and requests for assistance, to offer whatever help I can, and to suggest alternatives when I don't think I can offer substantial help; however, I will not be telling you what you should be doing. It is your job to determine what is appropriate and to ask questions when you don't know.

**Attendance and Participation:** You are expected to show up and participate in all class sessions, peer reviews, presentations, and out-of-class meetings. Writing studios are courses in language learning, and language is learned in communities; therefore, it is essential that you attend class and participate. Absences and lack of preparation for class will affect your classmates work as well as your own. The work you do in class, the work you do to prepare for each class, is as important as any polished assignment you turn in for a grade. In addition, each unit calendar is only a projection and may be subject to occasional changes and revisions as it seems appropriate, necessary, or just interesting. That is another reason why your attendance is vital. These policies also mirror the expectations of your future employer.

If you must miss a class, you are responsible for work assigned. Please realize, however, that class time cannot be reconstructed or made up, and that your performance, your work, and your final course grade will be affected by absences. *If you miss the equivalent of three weeks of classes or more without any official documented excuse it is unlikely you will pass the course.* I don't anticipate any of you will be in that position, however, so let's all agree to do the work, come to class, learn a lot, and make the course a meaningful experience.

**Late Work:** Deadlines are crucial in professional contexts, whether for a job application, a client proposal, or a grant progress report. They are similarly important in this course, where project planning and time management are part of the skill set you should be developing. Written assignments are due by the beginning of class or at the time specified for online submission. Major assignments (i.e. not blog posts or weekly assignments) are reduced by one letter grade per *business day*. All major assignments must be completed in order to pass the course. In-class work cannot be made up.

That said, nobody wants you to do well more than I do. If a documented emergency arises, please do not hesitate to let me know. The sooner you contact me, the sooner we can begin working together to make sure you remain on track in the class. University-sanctioned absences such as team travel should be cleared with me early in the semester. I do not give extensions or incompletes except in instances of documented illness or the death of close relatives.

**Collaboration:** You will be working in groups throughout the course. This work will include drafting documents, organizing team roles, and preparing for class, as well as collaborating on the production of actual texts. Relying on others and negotiating differences in working styles and tastes can be frustrating, but it is also part of the way work is done in the world. Therefore, you will be expected to conduct yourself as a professional, to complete jobs on time, and to contribute to the success of the team and the class.

I expect for you to be able to use your social skills to resolve your basic differences on your own. However, if you find a particular collaborative situation to be unreasonable or unresolvable, please notify me so that I can help you resolve it. If you find yourself

considering taking this step, use this test: in a real job, would this be an issue worth taking to your boss and soliciting managerial intervention? If so, then it's time to let me know. If not, then find ways to work it out yourselves.

**Professionalism and Respect:** This course models the standards of professional conduct applicable in virtually any context. You are expected to behave professionally in your contributions to discussions, feedback given to your peers, interactions with the instructor, and, of course, in the work you do on class assignments. Respect works both ways. I do my best to be courteous and fair in all situations and at all costs. If you ever feel that you've been treated otherwise, come and talk to me about it.

**Technology:** Computers and networked applications are a part of writing culture, especially in the workplace, and any professional writing course must address current technologies. Obviously, we will be using computers as a means of communication as well as a means of production.

All texts produced must be cross platform compatible; despite what we may hear, the reality is that the working world is a mixed platform environment. You are responsible for knowing how to save files in formats that anyone can read. In most cases, saving text files in Microsoft Word format (.doc or .docx), for instance, is safe; I do not accept Microsoft Works, Word Perfect, Apple Pages, or Microsoft Publisher files. Specific guidelines will apply to each assignment, but you should assume that all submissions of work will happen in digital formats. Much of class business will be conducted via email. We will use your SU email address; if you choose to use some other account, it is your responsibility to either (a) also check your SU account or (b) take care of forwarding your SU mail to that other account. You will be expected to check your e-mail daily and to respond promptly. *All email messages to me regarding this class should include "307" in the subject line; otherwise, I cannot guarantee that I will respond promptly. All attached files should bear names that indicate the writer and the assignment (e.g., smithproject1.doc).*

We may be doing some writing for the web; however, the degree to which this will become a significant feature of your work will depend on the choices you make in the nature of your projects and your level of experience and interest. None of the things we'll be working with require you to do any programming or have any special technical knowledge, but they do require that you be prepared to push yourself and ask questions when you need to.

In addition to the computer use that I assign, you will be responsible, just as you would be in the workplace, for using the technology in whatever ways will make your work more efficient and appropriate for the audience.

**The Writing Center:** Experienced writing consultants at the Writing Center (101 HB Crouse Hall, on the Quad) can teach you how to succeed on individual assignments and

ultimately become a better writer. They're prepared to work one-on-one with you at any stage of your process and with any kind of writing you're attempting while attending SU. Whether you need help understanding an assignment, brainstorming ideas, revising subsequent drafts, or developing editing strategies, face-to-face and online appointments are available for 25- or 50-minute sessions throughout the semester and can be reserved up to seven days in advance via their online scheduling program, WOnline. In addition, drop-in appointments are welcome Monday through Thursday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and brief concerns or questions can be emailed to consultants via the eWC. For more information on hours, location and services, please visit <http://wc.syr.edu>. This is a free resource to all students and highly recommended for every assignment you work on in this class.

**Special Needs and Accommodations:** If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), <http://disabilityservices.syr.edu>, located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible.

Syracuse University and I are committed to your success and to supporting Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. This means that in general no individual who is otherwise qualified shall be excluded from participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity, solely by reason of having a disability. You are also welcome to contact me privately to discuss your academic needs although I cannot arrange for disability-related accommodations.)

**Religious Observances:** SU's religious observances policy, found at [http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp\\_ben/religious\\_observance.htm](http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the rights of students, faculty, and staff to observe religious holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. For fall and spring semesters, an online notification process is available through MySlice/Student Services/Enrollment/My Religious Observances from the first day of class until the end of the second week of class.

**Student Writing:** All texts written in this course are generally public. You may be asked to share them with a peer, the class, or with me during classroom activities or for homework. You will also be asked to sign a consent form requesting the use of your writing for professional development, teacher training, and classroom instruction within the Syracuse University Writing Program.

**Academic Honesty:** The academic community requires ethical behavior from all of its participants. For writers, this means that the work we claim as ours must truly be ours. At the same time, we are not always expected to come up with new ideas; we often build our thinking on the ideas of others. We are expected, however, to credit others with their contributions and to clearly indicate the boundaries of our own thinking. In cases where academic dishonesty is detected (the fraudulent submission of another's work, in whole or part, as your own), you may be subject to a failing grade for the project or the course, and in the worst case, to academic probation or expulsion. For a more detailed description of the guidelines for adhering to academic honesty in the College of Arts and Sciences, go to: <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu>

<b>WRT 307: Schedule of Events</b> (subject to change)		
<b>Week One</b> (8/25-8/30)	Policies and Procedures Rhetorical Terms & Concepts Rhetorical Analysis of Prospective Employers	pp. 4-8, "Characteristics of Workplace Writing" Ch. 3: Defining Your Communication's Goals <b>Brief Bio (in Blackboard)</b> <b>Application Letter, Analysis, and existing resume due for review</b>
<b>Week Two</b> (9/1-9/5)	Expectations of You as a Writer & Employee Workplace Writing Conventions Intro to Superstructures and Other Genres Style/Tone	Ch. 10: Developing an Effective Professional Style Ch. 23: Letters/Memos
<b>Week Three</b> (9/8-9/12)	Document Design Basics Collaboration and Teamwork Project Planning	Ch. 16: Designing Pages & Documents Ch. 19: Creating Communications with a Team Brown et al, "Project Planning and Tracking" (PDF) <b>Peer Review Of Portfolio Drafts</b>
<b>Week Four</b> (9/15-9/19)	Designing Instructions Writing for the Web	Ch. 28: Writing Instructions Ch. 22: Creating Reader-Centered Websites <b>Onboarding Portfolio due</b>
<b>Week Five</b> (9/22-9/26)	User-Centered Design Usability Testing	Ch. 4: Planning for Usefulness Ch. 18: Testing for Usefulness & Persuasiveness
<b>Week Six</b> (9/29-10/3)	Working With Graphic Elements In-Class Usability Testing	Ch. 14: Creating Graphics <i>Also consider:</i>

		<i>Ch. 15: Creating Eleven Types of Reader-Centered Graphics</i>
<b>Week Seven (10/6–10/10)</b>	Revision Process Intro to Feasibility Study Working with Multi-Level Docs	Ch. 24: Proposals Ch. 8: Paragraphs, Sections, & Chapters <b>Instructions Project due</b>
<b>Week Eight (10/13–10/17)</b>	Managing Client-Centered Projects Persuasion	Ch. 21: Managing Client & Service-Learning Projects Ch. 5: Planning Your Persuasive Strategies
<b>Week Nine (10/20–10/24)</b>	Conducting Workplace Research Organizing Your Findings	Ch. 6: Conducting Reader-Centered Research Ch. 9: Patterns for Organization <b>Client Memo/Project Description due</b>
<b>Week Ten (10/27–10/31)</b>	Creating Effective Reports Proposals Workshop	Ch. 26: Feasibility Reports Ch. 13: Front & Back Matter
<b>Week Eleven (11/3–11/7)</b>	Effective Presentations: Delivery Visual Design	Ch. 20: Creating & Delivering Oral Presentations, Reynolds, excerpt from Presentation Zen (PDF) <b>Full draft of proposal due for online peer review</b>
<b>Week Twelve (11/10–11/14)</b>	Individual conferences	<b>Final Proposal due</b>
<b>Week Thirteen (11/17–11/21)</b>	Final Presentations	Final Presentations <b>Full draft of report due for online peer review</b>
<b>Week Fourteen (11/24–11/28)</b>	<b>Thanksgiving</b>	<b>Thanksgiving</b>
<b>Week Fifteen (12/1–12/5)</b>	Final Presentations	<b>Final Feasibility Package Due</b>