

San José State University

Department of English

English 107: Technical Writing

Instructor:	Dr. Mark Thompson
Office Location:	Faculty Office Building 110
Telephone:	408-924-4433 (I don't check voice messages)
Email:	mark.thompson@sjsu.edu
Office Hours:	Tues 3:00–4:00 and by appointment. Zoom and in-person meetings are available. (Link on Canvas)
Class Days/Time:	T/TH 10:30–11:45
Classroom:	Sweeny 229
Prerequisites:	Upper-Division Standing

Canvas

All course materials such as readings, the 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/>

Course Description

Technical writing covers many 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 businesspeople 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.
- 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. Everything in this class is on Canvas will make extensive use of Canvas. 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.
- I use Canvas to communicate with you during the week and will be returning drafts to you via email/Canvas.
- I update your grades on Canvas as I assess your assignments. You can see where you are at by checking Grades. If I give you the wrong grade or give you a 0 for an assignment you turned in, please let me know!

Every semester I seem to have a student or two who struggle with Canvas. If you are having any problems, 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 add new stuff. 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 365 is free for SJSU students.
- Additionally, we will be learning some of the most common tech tools used in technical writing, such as SnagIt and DITA. 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:
<https://www.sjsu.edu/it/services/support/desktop/instructions.php>
- 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 with to the proposal genre. You may also choose your own proposal topic.

ASSIGNMENT #3: 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 #4: DEVELOPER GUIDE

Using a Word template, you will properly format a developer guide for programmers at Facebook and Twitter to implement an app.

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 user 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 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	15%
Assignment #1: Job Application Packet	10%
Assignment #2: Proposal Adaptation	10%
Assignment #3: Video Presentation Explaining Technical Material	10%
Assignment #4: Dev Guide	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 is producing passable 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.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S11-3.pdf>.

CLASSROOM PROTOCOLS

Understanding. I understand that we live in a world of total chaos seasoned with fires, heat waves, power outages, earthquakes, rising fascism and floods. I also understand coming back to a physical classroom and interacting with real people remains a challenge for some of us. I get it. If you need anything, 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. If you are experiencing an ongoing issue, please let me know and we'll figure it out.

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 during 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. If there is something unavoidable in your schedule/life, you may request an extension with 48-hours' notice; otherwise, no extensions will be granted.

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. Though it most likely will not be an issue, any plagiarism will earn you an automatic "F" in my class. This includes recycling work from students from previous semesters. Just do your own work. If you are ever in a position where you feel the need to cheat, please let me know and we can work it out.

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. Stay focused! When potential employers ask about you, they ask if you goof off during class. And I am always honest.

Use of AI. We have designated AI assignments in this class. AI is cool and has tons of helpful potential for technical writing. BUT, AI use needs to be limited while you are learning the basics of tech writing. I especially have an issue with students copy-and-pasting AI responses and turning them in as their own thoughts, especially for daily discussion assignments. The business world is trying to replace writers with AI. If you can't do better than ChatGPT, there's no reason to hire you. Most major assignments will have a "Statement of AI Use" where I clarify what you can use AI for and where you will disclose what tools you used and how you used them. Saving time is great.

Brainstorming aids...sometimes ok? Turning in machine-generated work as your own is a waste of everyone's time. If you have any questions about legit use of AI, please ask me.

First Violation: A warning and a 0 on the assignment.

Second Violation: You will enter the "slop zone" for two weeks. Everything you turn in will be scanned for AI use and you are prohibited from working with groups on class assignments.

Third Violation: I will report you to the university for cheating and stop giving feedback on assignments.

Food and beverages. Feel free to eat and drink during class. Coffee (black, no cream, no sugar, no spit) and food bribes gladly accepted.

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, any other aspect of the course, job advice--whatever. Just talk to me after class, send me an email, or arrange to meet with me outside class. COME TO MY 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 (My office phone isn't connected to anything). 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.

We get approximately 10 requests per year from local employers looking for graduates from our program. If you do well in this class, I will pass your name along and do what I can to make sure you get an interview. Last year alone, 5 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 writing, 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).

Visit [Peer Connections website](http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu) at <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu> for more information.

SJSU Writing Center

The SJSU Writing Center is on the second floor of MLK library. 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>.