English 2950: Scientific and Technical Report Writing
Common Syllabus

How to Use this Common Syllabus

In the summer of 2009, recognizing the impact new technology has had on professional and technical communication and new opportunities for students to participate in community engagement, a group of UT instructors explored new assignments and learning objectives for this course in order to make it fit contemporary situations that our students will encounter in their career fields. Students are encouraged to explore writing done by technical professionals and to engage new media as they study technical and scientific writing in this course.

This common syllabus is a key for instructors to use in developing their individual course syllabi if they have been assigned to teach sections of ENGL 2950 at the University of Toledo. Technical writing is an important skill for persons in many scientific and technical professions, and our students have benefited from the lessons in this course for many generations.

Experienced instructors of ENGL 2950 should use the following common syllabus (and resources provided by the English Department) to transform their pedagogy and offer their students the best experience of professional scientific and technical writing possible. New instructors of this course will find the guidelines provided useful in developing their syllabus.

Course Description and Overview

Catalog Description:
ENGL 2950 Scientific and Technical Report Writing [3 hours]: Instruction and practice in writing informational and analytical reports to varied audiences in medical, scientific or technical fields. Prerequisite: ENGL 1100 or 1110 English core course

Focus Areas
The core of this course consists of the following four skill areas.

- Research Skills (using primary and library research to discover information)
- Correspondence Skills (learning the generic conventions of each)
- Explanatory or Demonstrative Writing Skills (to disseminate technical information to either non-technical or technical readers, such as descriptions, instructions, informational handouts, FAQs, etc. [not persuasive, per se])
- Visual Communication Skills (may appear as separate assignments or as components of other assignments)

Course Learning Objectives
Note: The Higher Learning Commission of Ohio now requires that all course syllabi include a list of course learning objectives. These course learning objectives must be included as written on your syllabus.
The following course learning objectives form the basis of successful pedagogy in this course. The goal of each assignment is to demonstrate mastery in one or more of the following areas:

1. Model effective scientific and technical communication in the workplace by actively participating in writing activities, both individually and collaboratively.
2. Apply technical information and knowledge in practical documents for a variety of a.) professional audiences (including peers and colleagues or management) and b.) public audiences.
3. Write documents that demonstrate professional style: concise, clear, accurate, honest, economical, and unambiguous.
4. Use professional writing strategies: Direct order organization, objective voice, unbiased analysis and summary, and use of transitional devices to create coherence.
5. Recognize, explain, and use the rhetorical strategies and the formal elements of specific genres of technical communication, such as technical abstracts, data based research reports, instructional manuals, technical descriptions, web pages, wikis, and correspondence.
6. Collect, analyze, document, and report research clearly, concisely, logically, and ethically; understand the standards for legitimate interpretations of research data within scientific and technical communities.
7. Recognize and develop professional format features in print, html, and multimedia modes, as well as use appropriate nonverbal cues and visual aids.
8. Revise and edit effectively in all assignments, including informal media (such as email to the instructor).
9. Demonstrate professional work habits, including those necessary for effective collaboration and cooperation with other students, instructors, and, if applicable, Service Learning contact representatives.

**Required Course Assignments & Assessment**

The following list of *core required assignments* is provided so instructors understand the amount of minimum coursework to assign. Unlike composition courses, these minimums are not stated as page or word counts because some assignments are in media that do not readily convert to page or word count measurements. The main goal is to create a *common experience* across sections and to answer the question "What should every student who has taken English 2950 be expected to know how to do?"

**Note:** Modules describing typical assignments and how they meet learning objectives are available on the course site. You can use these as guidelines for planning individual assignments. Additionally, you may refer to the *Common Syllabus Components Chart* to clarify how each assignment outlined below fits one of the four course focus areas previously outlined in this common syllabus.

1. At least one analytical report, white paper or proposal written for specific audience(s) and that is based on significant and in-depth primary and/or secondary research, which aims to analyze a problem, make recommendations, promote a new technology, or propose a solution.
2. An **abstract** which effectively condenses technical research into a condensed format.

   **Note:** The abstract assignment can be used as either a stand-alone assignment or related to the report assignment.

3. A **set of written instructions** about a technical process that readers might perform in a technical, medical, or scientific setting.

4. A **precise description** of an object, mechanism, or process included in a set of instructions, short report, webpage, wiki, data sheet, or other informational document.

5. Several brief assignments to demonstrate genre knowledge of **correspondence** protocols, including at minimum professional letters, memoranda, email messages, and/or discussion forum posts and blogs.

6. At least one assignment which produces a single document by a **collaborative effort** of two or more students.

   **Note:** Collaboration incorporated into any major assignment, excluding correspondence, will satisfy this requirement.

7. At least one assignment that demonstrates the knowledge of how to create **graphic aids** and insert them successfully into a document.

   **Note:** The use of graphic aids can be satisfied in one of the other assignments.

8. All assignments should demonstrate the knowledge of how to use **design elements** (such as white space, horizontal rules, and overall layout) to enhance written communication in both print and digital media.

9. A **final electronic portfolio** of work prepared in the course for use as program assessment by the English Department and objects that the student can include in a career search portfolio. Instructors should use the electronic portfolio for final course assessment. **Please refer to the Sample Student Syllabi for a statement on electronic portfolios that can be included on your own syllabus.**

**Course Policies**

The following list contains suggested policies that should be incorporated into a course syllabus distributed to students.

1. **Computer Access and Proficiency**
   Most sections of this course will be assigned to computer equipped classrooms. In addition, the university makes access to computers for student use at numerous locations on campus.
As instructors, you should assume that all students at the beginning of the course have a basic knowledge of writing on computers, including knowledge of how to create, save and store files in a format assigned by the instructor. Students should also know how to submit files to drop boxes, edit and view documents sent as email attachments, and access university sponsored software.

*Please refer to the Sample Student Syllabi for an example of a computer proficiency statement.*

2. **Peer Reviews**
Collaboration in the workplace is a common activity. Therefore, this course should stress the need for students to develop peer evaluation skills. In addition to offering students a collaborative experience, peer review develops a student's own sense of the standards for good writing, as well as aids other students in their revision. The Composition Program strongly recommends that instructors incorporate peer review activities as part of each assignment. See the Faculty Handbook for examples of peer review activities.

3. **Service Learning, Community Engagement & Experiential Learning**
A number of opportunities exist for classes to partner with UT campus programs engaged in the university's sustainability initiatives as well as institutions in the surrounding community for service and experiential learning projects. Students in classes engaged in these projects would write, as class assignments, research, instructional/informative, and new media documents that met needs of partner offices or agencies. While optional, these collaborations would allow students to experience the reality of writing in an institutional environment, receive feedback from readers outside the classroom, and make a material impact on campus and the city of Toledo.

*Please refer to the Service Learning section of the Professional and Technical Writing Faculty Handbook for further information regarding service learning and community engagement. Also, see the Sample Student Syllabi for an example of a service learning/community engagement statement.*

4. **Grading and Course Evaluation Criteria**
Final grades earned for this course will range from "A" (highest) to "F" (lowest) in accordance with the university's normal 12 point grade reporting system. Plusses and minuses are included with grades B through D. Entry in to some majors and professional programs may require a minimum passing grade of C.

All instructors must include a statement regarding how final course grades will be assessed on either the course syllabus or as a separate policy handout.

*Please refer to the Sample Student Syllabi and/or Sample Grading Criteria handouts for sample grading criteria.*

5. **Plagiarism**
Article VIII-A under the Conduct and Discipline System (Section 5) of the Student Handbook outlines the University's Policy regarding Academic Honesty for Undergraduate Students:

Academic dishonesty, including, but not limited to, cheating and plagiarism is a violation of acceptable standards of behavior and a violation of the Student Code of Conduct. Cases of alleged academic dishonesty shall be resolved at the departmental, college, or graduate level in accordance with procedures printed in the University catalogue or printed in departmental, college, or graduate school publications. The accused student has the right to request that the case be reviewed by the Student Grievance Council (See Student Handbook Academic Grievances Section). College of Law cases are dealt with under the College of Law Honor Code. (34).

The University of Toledo Student Code of Conduct provides students with a minimal definition of plagiarism:

Plagiarism - A student shall not represent the work of another as his or her own, or use a passage or idea from the written work of another without proper quotation marks, citation, or other explanatory insert. (22)

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a more comprehensive description of actions that constitute academic dishonesty. That description can be found at the following web address:

http://www.utoledo.edu/catalog/2009catalog/pdfs/policy_academic_dishonesty_cat.doc

Instructors should, therefore, include a plagiarism statement in which they clearly define plagiarism on their syllabus.

Please see sample plagiarism statements on the Sample Student Syllabi.

6. Collegiate Standards for Human Research Subjects
Student projects which involve study of individual human beings through direct observation, survey or other data gathering techniques must abide by the national standards for Human Subject Research. If the finished work is posted, published or otherwise reported outside the specific classroom environment, research projects may need to be approved by the university IRB (Internal Review Board).

Instructors are cautioned to discuss Human Research Subject guidelines with their class members, make sure to obtain written permissions of subjects who participate in surveys or studies, and, in general, encourage students to respect the privacy rights of human beings being observed in college research projects.

For more information, see the University of Toledo Department for Human Research Protection website:

http://www.utoledo.edu/research/RC/HumanSubs/index.html
7. **Course Accessibility**  
Federal requires that all syllabi include a statement of accessibility. *See the Sample Student Syllabi for accessibility statement models.*

8. **Department Policy on Distance Learning Courses**  
Please refer to the English Department’s policy letter to students for any DL version of English 2950 or 2960.