Independent Study in Idaho

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Eng 317
Technical Writing

The University of Idaho in statewide cooperation with Boise State University — Idaho State University — Lewis-Clark State College
Course Guide

English 317
Technical Writing

University of Idaho
3 Semester-Hour Credits

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Table of Contents
Welcome! ........................................................................................................................................................... 1
Policies and Procedures ................................................................................................................................. 1
Course Description .......................................................................................................................................... 1
Course Materials ............................................................................................................................................... 1
Course Delivery ............................................................................................................................................... 1
Course Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 1
Learning Outcomes ......................................................................................................................................... 2
Projects ........................................................................................................................................................... 2
Grading ............................................................................................................................................................ 4
About the Course Developer ............................................................................................................................. 4
Contacting Your Instructor .............................................................................................................................. 4
Project 1: Technical and Scientific Prose Style ............................................................................................ 5
Project 2: Technical Definitions and Descriptions .......................................................................................... 13
Project 3: Data Visualization .......................................................................................................................... 20
Project 4: Usability Test .................................................................................................................................. 27
Project 5: Grant Writing .................................................................................................................................. 34
Project 6: Professional Identity ....................................................................................................................... 41
Eng 317: Technical Writing 3 Semester-Hour Credits: UI

Welcome!
Whether you are a new or returning student, welcome to the Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) program. Below, you will find information pertinent to your course including the course description, course materials, learning outcomes, as well as information about projects and grading. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

Policies and Procedures
Refer to the ISI website at www.uidaho.edu/isi and select Students for the most current policies and procedures, including information on setting up accounts, student confidentiality, exams, proctors, transcripts, course exchanges, refunds, academic integrity, library resources, and disability support and other services.

Course Description
Principles and practice of effective technical communication. Projects teach conventions of tone and style appropriate to the specific discourse situation in a variety of formats, including oral, written, visual, and multimedia genres. Prerequisite: Engl 102 or Equivalent; junior standing or permission. UI students:
General education: Communication.
Required: access to a computer, speakers and/or headphones
6 graded assignments, no exams

This course is designed for students to work through each assignment sequentially. Students should plan on spending between 2-4 weeks on each of the six projects; see each project for specific details. Grades and feedback on assignments may take up to three weeks after date of receipt by the instructor.

ALL assignments must be submitted to receive a final grade for the course.

Course Materials
Required Course Materials

Course Delivery
All ISI courses are delivered through BbLearn, an online management system that hosts the course lessons and assignments and other items that are essential to the course. Upon registration, the student will receive a Registration Confirmation Email with information on how to access ISI courses online.

Course Introduction
In this course students will be introduced to the definition of technical writing developed by the Society of Technical Communication and the US Department of Labor:
Technical writers, also called technical communicators, prepare instruction manuals, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex and technical information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information among customers, designers, and manufacturers. (US Department of Labor).

A central principle that informs this definition of technical writing is a concept known as User-Centered Design (UCD). User-centered design is a process in which the needs, wants, and limitations of end users of a product, service, or process are given extensive attention at each stage of the design process. The testing of UCD informs everything we use from the apps on our phones to the design of traffic intersections.

**Learning Outcomes**

This course addresses the University of Idaho learning outcomes as follows:

- **Learn and Integrate:** learn the importance of user-centered design to technical writing and develop and apply the ability to leverage discipline-specific discourse to meet organizational and disciplinary user needs.

- **Think and Create:** learn and practice how to think about technical writing as a problem-solving activity. Develop skills to generate creative approaches to solving problems using techniques such as serious play and metaphors to generate new ideas and approaches to solving problems.

- **Communicate:** develop skills in assessing and articulating the affordances and constraints of technologies to a wide range of stakeholders and audiences. Gain an advanced understanding and application of key rhetorical constructs—specifically toward the visual and verbal design of documents.

- **Clarify Purpose and Perspective:** foster skills in effective time management by learning to work incrementally to produce project deliverables.

- **Practice Citizenship:** study how successful technical writers apply ethical tradeoffs to navigate complex social/cultural workplace situations in a way that reflects socially responsible behavior, respect for diversity in an interdependent world, and a commitment to advance and sustain local and global communities.

**Project Descriptions and Deliverables**

**WARNING:** Page length and word counts are not a valid way to determine how long a project will take you to complete in this course.

**Project 1: Technical and Scientific Prose Style (10%).** For this project, you will learn technical prose style concepts and apply these to analyze some of your prior writing. This project is designed to help you evaluate the readability of prose style and develop goals for improving your style.

- **Memo Report** about 3-4 pages.

**Project 2: Technical Definitions and Descriptions (20%).** An important writing skill technical writers draw upon frequently is the ability to define and describe technical information within a variety of
genres and for specific audiences and rhetorical purposes. For this project, you will write an extended technical definition and a developed technical description for an audience, purpose, and placement of your choice.

• **Technical Documentation Memo**, about 350 words,
• **Extended Technical Definition**, about 500 words,
• **Technical Description**, about 350 words wrapped around a visual.

**Project 3: Data Visualization (20%).** In this project, you will build important data visualization skills by creating a data infographic based on analyzing one or more statistical data sets to extract the story you will tell about this data. Students are not expected to have prior graphic design experience.

• **Technical Documentation Memo**, about 350 words,
• **Infographic**, size varies.

**Project 4: Usability Test (20%).** For this project, you will conduct a usability test known as a *cognitive walkthrough* to test the ease-of-use of two digital tools or apps useful for technical writers or for communication tools used in your field of study such as 3-D modeling tools.

• **Technical White Paper**, about 2000 words. Length will vary greatly depending on the size and number of screenshots you incorporate to support the narrative of your findings.

**Project 5: Grant Writing (20%).** Winning a grant requires not only a great idea, but the skills to convince a funding agency to give you money to do it. For this project, you will choose a funding opportunity, develop an idea for a research or creative project, and write a grant proposal to obtain funding for it. **NOTE:** you will not do the research or creative project -- only propose it to a funding agency.

• **Grant Proposal.** Length will be based on the RFP you choose.

**Project 6: Professional Identity (10%).** You may apply this project toward an entry level job or internship in your field of study or as part of materials sent in application to a graduate program. For this project, you will compose a letter of application and a resume that target a specific audience. In addition, you will create an online portfolio that supports these application materials and populate this portfolio with artifacts from this course and/or others with the aim of showcasing your work to potential employers or graduate programs.

• **Cover Letter and Resume**, about 1 page for the letter and 1-2 pages for the resume. Length will vary depending on your skills, experience and the choice of application.
• **E-Portfolio** using a web authoring tool of your choice, home page plus others to showcase your sample work.

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1 **Deliverables** are simply the writing you produce in various workplace genres that I will evaluate, and this word better describes how writing is referred to in workplace environments.

2 **Note:** all page lengths are based on single-spaced text using a font size for the body of the text between 10 and 12 point type with a line of white space between paragraphs and include using headings to help readers navigate through and revisit information in technical documents. In addition, these are given only as approximations only.
In technical writing, you never write more or less than is necessary to meet the needs of a specific writing situation.

**Study Hints:**
- Keep a copy of every lesson submitted.
- Complete all reading assignments.
- Set a schedule allowing for course completion one month prior to your personal deadline. An *Assignment Submission Log* is provided for this purpose.
- Web pages and URL links in the World Wide Web are continuously changing. Contact your instructor if you find a broken Web page or URL.

**Grading**
Final grades will be based successful completion of six project deliverables, weighted as follows:
1. Technical and Scientific Prose Style (10%)
2. Technical Definitions and Descriptions (20%)
3. Data Visualization (20%)
4. Usability Testing (20%)
5. Grant Writing (20%)
6. Professional Identity (10%)

Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating or plagiarism are considered a very serious transgression and may result in a grade of F for the course.

**About the Course Developer**
Karen Thompson is a faculty member in the English Department at the University of Idaho. Her experience includes developing and teaching undergraduate courses in writing, literature, American Studies, and year-long Core classes in both the social sciences and humanities. In teaching technical writing, she draws upon more than fifteen years of professional experience in the private sector.

**Contacting Your Instructor**
Instructor contact information is posted on your BbLearn site.