



COM 313 – Technical Writing (Section 101, CRN 91849)

Fall 2025 (9/4 – 12/11)

Classroom: CKB 320

Thursdays 6:00 pm – 8:50 pm

Instructor information

Name

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Office location

CAB 1019

Office hours

TR, 1:30pm – 2:30pm, or another time by request (in person or via Zoom)

Course Description

This is an advanced writing course combining theory with practice to prepare students as technical writers. Technical writing describes the process of turning complex knowledge into usable forms to be shared with colleagues and peers, community stakeholders, or less-expert audiences. To be effective technical writers, we must learn to do so across genres and media, and with a keen sense of audience expectations, as well as the purpose, contexts, and constraints of the rhetorical situation. In this course, you will sharpen your abilities to communicate information effectively, ethically, and authentically to people with different expectations and readers with specific needs. Students will analyze complex communication situations and design appropriate responses through tasks that involve problem-solving, rhetorical theory, document design, oral presentations, and ethical considerations.

Learning Objectives

- Learn and apply methods of textual and rhetorical analysis to identify patterns in professional and technical writing situations.
- Understand written genres as recurring rhetorical situations, shaped by discourse communities and social contexts.
- Develop and apply an understanding of how document design contributes to a text's effectiveness in a given rhetorical situation
- Develop and apply strategies for making complex information accessible to non-expert audiences in both oral and written communication contexts.
- Improve your writing and develop a polished and professional prose style that varies appropriately according to audience, purpose, and context.
- Draw on and apply research on how people read and use documents.
- Demonstrate information literacy: the ability to formulate appropriate questions, find, select, assess, analyze information sources, both print and electronic, from the open web and/or the NJIT Library, and to synthesize, credit, and integrate those sources in your own work.
- Increase your skill in writing collaboratively with others.
- Develop an awareness of your own writing processes, becoming a more reflective writer with language to explain your choices.

Required Materials (nothing!) and Learning Resources

All required textbooks and AI tools are free and open.

OER Textbooks

Open Technical Communications - <https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/facbooks/36/>

Technical Writing Essentials - <https://dev.pressbooks.usnh.edu/technicalwriting/>

Available AI Tool

- **Grammarly** (including generative AI functionality) will be available to students for the semester. Details on setting up accounts will be provided in class.

Accepted AI and AI-Enhanced Tools

- **Notebook LM** (used last semester; use will be expanded in Fall 2025) is an AI tool for organizing notes and summarizing information. Students will use it to create project notebooks, summarize research, outline and structure documents, and simplify complex content for non-expert audiences.
- **Google Gemini** is a multifunctional AI tool supported by NJIT. It will be used for brainstorming, drafting, revising, simulating tone shifts for different audiences, and generating visuals such as diagrams and illustrations. It will also suggest design elements and content layout.

Additional AI and AI-Enhanced Tools

- **Google Slides, with Gemini integration**, will support students in creating clear, well-structured, audience-focused presentations. Students can use AI assistance to generate content and design for slide decks that support oral communication.
- **Canva (free version)** will be used to create visually polished documents, including resumes, proposals, and infographics. Its templates and layout tools help ensure professional and accessible design.
- **Gamma.app** and **Tome.app** (free tiers) will allow students to transform structured outlines into polished slide presentations. These tools are useful for technical talks and instructional communication projects where clarity and visual design are essential.
- **Bing Image Creator** is a free tool that allows students to generate custom images for use in technical proposals, instructional materials, and presentations. It is especially useful for turning abstract concepts into visual metaphors.
- **Hypothes.is** is an open-source annotation tool used for collaborative reading, peer review, and usability feedback. Students will annotate articles, peer drafts, and online documents to support collaborative revision and analysis.
- **Zotero** is a reference management tool that helps students collect, organize, and cite sources. It integrates well with Hypothes.is and supports group research, source tagging, and citation formatting.

Grade Assessment

Final course grades will follow NJIT's scale, which does not include A+ or any minuses.

A = 90 or above B+ = 87-89 B = 80-86 C+ = 77-79 C = 70-76 D = 60-69 F = less than 60

The final course grade will be calculated using the following categories. On Canvas, you can view the assignments and their point values:

<u>Deliverable</u>	<u>Weight</u>
Short Assignments (homework, in-class activities, low-stakes tasks, etc.)	10%
Project 1: Policy or Funding	30%

Project 2: Proposal Presentation	30%
Project 3: Instructional Document (Group)	30%

Please note that the total point value for each individual project includes drafts, peer reviews, and reflections preceding the final project.

Academic Integrity

We will have thorough and considered conversations about academic integrity, plagiarism, and what it means to synthesize knowledge and cite sources in different contexts. Ultimately, if you are presenting someone else's work as your own in a writing course, you are only doing yourself a disservice. Here is the university's official language:

"Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy that is found at: [NJIT Academic Integrity Code](#).

Please note that it is my professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu."

Description of Major Projects and AI Use

30 % * Project 1: Policy or Funding Proposal

Persuading Decision-Makers to Fund or Support an Initiative

Identify an existing problem in your disciplinary field of interest and write a proposal for a new policy or a modification to an existing policy that addresses the problem. Alternatively, you may choose to instead identify a real-world problem or project that needs decision-makers' support. Write a proposal that details why your idea is worth their time and/or funds.

AI ASSIST

- Students will use Notebook LM to collect and organize background research, summarize sources, and outline their proposal structure. The tool can help break down complex information into clear, persuasive sections tailored to decision-makers.
- Google Gemini will assist in brainstorming solutions, testing tone for different audiences (e.g., policymakers vs. funders), and generating visuals such as diagrams or concept illustrations to support arguments.
- Canva will be used to design a professional, visually accessible proposal layout, including charts or infographics if needed.

30 % * Project 2: "Tech Talk" Presentation

Giving Informative Technical Talks to Public Audiences

In no more than three or four minutes, and with well-designed slides, engage and inform a non-expert audience on a technical matter that you are familiar with or a project that you've contributed to.

AI ASSIST

- Students will use Notebook LM to simplify technical information, summarize

supporting materials, and build an outline for their talk.

- Google Gemini will help refine the language of the talk for a non-expert audience, generate analogies or visual metaphors, and produce relevant supporting images.
- Google Slides with Gemini integration will support clear and audience-friendly slide creation, with AI suggestions for layout and content organization.
- Students may also use Gamma.app or Tome.app to automatically transform their structured outline into a polished visual presentation that aligns with their spoken message.

30 % * Project 3: Technical Instructions (written as a group)

Helping Novice Users Navigate Something Using “How To” Documents

In small teams, write, design, user test, and revise a set of “how to” procedural documents that help a real-world user accomplish a task successfully.

AI ASSIST

- Groups will use Notebook LM to collaboratively organize steps, clarify complex terminology, and structure the instructional document.
- Google Gemini will assist in rewriting instructions for clarity and accessibility, simulating how a novice might interpret the task. It can also generate helpful visual aids.
- Canva will be used to design the instructional document with clear visuals, layouts, and accessible formatting.
- Gamma.app or Tome.app can be used if students choose to create a companion slide deck or visual walkthrough, especially for multimedia or web-based instructions.

10 % * Short Assignments (homework, in-class activities, low-stakes tasks, etc.)

LinkedIn profile, resume, portfolio, class participation, Zotero, etc.

Individually, students will complete a series of low-stakes activities that support their academic growth and professional development. These may include drafting and refining a LinkedIn profile, updating a résumé, curating a portfolio, practicing class participation skills, and learning to use reference management tools such as Zotero. Each task is designed to be short, practical, and directly applicable to students’ future goals.

AI ASSIST

- ChatGPT or Google Gemini can suggest revisions for résumés, portfolios, and LinkedIn profiles, focusing on clarity, tone, and alignment with industry expectations.
- Notebook LM can be used to organize resources, track revisions across assignments, and manage citations for Zotero practice.
- Canva may assist students in creating visually polished portfolios or résumé designs.
- Gamma.app or Tome.app can be used for optional visual presentations of portfolio highlights or personal introductions.

Note: For the projects in this course, you will be selecting topics that you authentically care about, so start brainstorming early!

Policies

Occasionally, and if it benefits the whole class, I will offer extensions to everyone and announce them in advance. **Late work that has not been granted an extension will receive feedback but lower points.**

I do not deduct points from your grade for missing class. However, other aspects of your grade are affected by in-class participation and completion of daily tasks. We meet 14 times total this semester. Everyone gets a free day or two without penalty to account for inevitabilities, but if you start to willingly miss class for no good reason, your grade will likely suffer.

Excused absences are reserved for documented professional commitments, illness, or religious observances; as with any other professional context, make requests for excused absences in courteous advance. When you miss class for something unforeseen, send me an email whenever you are able. Use your best professional judgment here: what's most important is your acknowledgement that you have looked at Canvas and know what you need to do for the upcoming class. If you are uncertain about something, let me know.

General Expectations & Resources

- We should arrive on time for class, whenever possible.
- We should be present for each other's ideas and should listen to understand first, rather than to evaluate first.
- We should listen to each other with assumptions of goodwill, respect, and charitable intention.
- We should use inclusive, invitational language to build a class community that does not alienate but rather promotes the diversity of thought, culture, and identity. If anyone feels that we are not building an inclusive and safe culture within our class, please talk to me so that we can do better. And if you do not think you can talk to me about concerns, you can always reach out to your advisor or report concerns to the
- Students and teachers should deliver written work on time. If the work is not on time, we should communicate with each other about the lateness.
- Students and teachers should communicate about problems or concerns that arise. If students feel uncomfortable about an aspect of the course, they should share that concern with the teacher. Concerns can be about anything specific to our course material, pace, rigor, or classroom interactions.

Accessibility Accommodations

As your teacher, I want to empower you to become your own advocate for your learning. If there are improvements that I can make in class to help you access material more easily, please tell me. I'm happy to do anything to improve your learning experience.

If you have needs that require more formal accommodations, you can contact the **Office of Accessibility Resources and Services at OARS@NJIT.EDU, or visit the office in Kupfrian Hall 201 to discuss your specific needs.** According to their website, "a Letter of Accommodation Eligibility from the office authorizing student accommodations is required."

Inclusive Language & Mutual Respect

In this class, we will talk *a lot* about how our words impact the world around us. I take a reader-oriented, people-first view of language and standards, and I encourage you to make decisions about your written language choices according to how your reader may respond. This view means that we use language to connect with a community of readers and that we do not use language that might exclude or alienate anyone. When we communicate, we do not want to create an "othering" effect with our language. One more recent example for writing inclusively is to use non-binary gendered pronouns. The emerging convention for using gendered pronouns is that we should consider writing in a rhetorically inclusive style.

The National Council of Teachers in English (NCTE) gives us some examples on their website [for gender](#)

neutral language: <http://www.ncte.org/positions/statements/genderfairuseoflang>. Whenever possible, we aim to use our language to build a connection with our audience. Using inclusive language can help us make that connection.

Note: Language conventions are tricky and situated in various social contexts - they are almost never simple. In other words, reason about them. Ask people how they want to be referenced in your writing. Don't apply language formulas.

Guidelines for Self-Care (C-CAPS)

This semester should be challenging, engaging, and fruitful. However, don't be embarrassed if you're having trouble staying afloat. Ask for help. All of us benefit from support during times of struggle. You are not alone.

The busier we get, the easier it is to forget about maintaining a healthy mental state. If you are struggling and need course-related assistance or accommodations, please do not hesitate to reach out to me for a request—no personal details needed.

There are many helpful resources available on campus, including the [Center for Counseling and Psychological Services](https://www.njit.edu/counseling/) (C-CAPS). Here is a quote from their web page (<https://www.njit.edu/counseling/>):

"Personal issues, family, emotional, and other concerns can be challenging and may impact your academic, personal, and overall functioning. C-CAPS provides safe, non-judgmental, and confidential services, including individual and group counseling and workshops.

Staffed by psychologists and professional counselors, C-CAPS can help with the transitions and stresses of college life and other psychological concerns or difficulties.

Services provided are in a hybrid manner – remotely via phone, video conferencing, and in-person. Initial consultation meetings are typically held remotely. To schedule a meeting with C-CAPS, contact (973) 596-3414 or email counseling@njit.edu."

While it's easier said than done, you can make proactive choices so that you can act with resilience as you face the unfolding demands and expectations of college life. Being resilient means that you can bounce back from setbacks and disappointments and that you can take on somewhat intimidating tasks. Resilient people make sure that they get enough sleep, eat a variety of foods, stay connected with friends, and get some physical exercise.

There are a variety of campus resources meant to support your well-being if you experience hardships like housing or food insecurity. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the CAPS team or myself for help.

Use of Technology and AI in the Classroom

We will frequently need to access Canvas, Google Docs, and other online spaces for our activities and analyses for this course. You should bring a laptop or tablet to each class. While using your devices, please be courteous to your peers and instructor and refrain from engaging in activities on your devices that may distract others (and you!). Professional use of technology is instrumental for professional communication, and fostering those good habits starts in the classroom.

Personally, I do not believe in policing the use of large language models (LLMs) or restricting your access to useful tools like Grammarly. In fact, we will be working with some of these tools during the semester. I have spelled out in the syllabus and in the project descriptions of how and when AI tools will be used, and we will discuss this topic in detail in class. To put it in a nutshell: AI can assist you in learning, help keep you organized, serve as a tutor, and support brainstorming ideas. What it cannot and should not do is think or write for you.

We will explore both the advantages and drawbacks of generative AI tools, as well as the ethical issues surrounding their use. These tools have many pitfalls, including a lack of originality, but they are powerful enough to produce (mostly) convincing output. Still, that output is often riddled with errors and characterized by a somewhat stale style of writing. In addition, NJIT has adopted the student guide [AI-U](#) (updated for 2025), created by Elon University and the AAC&U.

This course is meant for you to practice identifying rhetorical and linguistic strategies that you can put into your writing

toolbox. Your use of tools like ChatGPT for text generation will only be strengthened by practicing writing yourself in this course, applying principles to the other classes you may be taking this semester. If you rely on generative AI rather than engage with the course material and activities, you would only be doing yourself a disservice.

To put it more formally: you may use LLMs, but if you do, you must cite the model and explain how you used it in your writing process. If you present machine-generated text as your own, you are engaging in plagiarism, and I will need to follow the procedures described in the section above on academic integrity. If a student submits a paper that Turnitin identifies as written by AI, the case will be referred to the Dean of Students. (And I can tell you that, if I were to assess it as your own work, a purely LLM-generated paper would not receive a high grade, no matter how good your prompt engineering may be. We will talk about this more as the semester progresses.)

Course Schedule (Abridged)

Technical Writing & Rhetorical Analysis	Week 1	9/4	
Read-oriented document design	Week 2	9/11	
Identifying different linguistic registers			
Information literacy and research	Week 3	9/18	
Editing and assessing linguistic choices	Week 4	9/25	
Exploring large language models (LLMs) & critical approaches to AI			
	Week 5	10/2 Wellness Day NO CLASS	
Communicating novelty, expertise, and credibility in proposals	Week 6	10/09	Project 1 DRAFT
The Importance of Brevity in Communication: Emails, Executive Summaries, Data Reports	Week 7	10/16	Resume, cover letter, LinkedIn profile
Strategies for Accommodating Technical Information for Non-Experts	Week 8	10/23	Project 1 FINAL
Slide Design	Week 9	10/30	Project 2 DRAFT
Proposal Presentations	Week 10	11/6	Project 2 FINAL
Proposal Presentations Designing instructional materials	Week 11	11/13	Project 3 DRAFT
Social research methods and user-testing	Week 12	11/20	
		11/25 TUESDAY	<i>Instead of 11/27(Thanksgiving)</i>

Synthesizing research as a team (Thanksgiving Break)	Week 13	11/27 Thanksgiving NO CLASS	
Group Conferences/Presentations	Week 14	12/4	Project 3 FINAL
Group Conferences/Presentations Writing Workshop & Course Wrap-Up!	Week 15	12/11	<i>This class does not have a final exam.</i>