Course description & purpose

English 5371 is designed to introduce graduate students in TCR to the field of technical communication. It focuses on technical communication theory – i.e. the scholarship of TC. This course is not intended to cover “tools” (e.g. FrameMaker) or teaching per se, except insofar as these topics are part of a larger emphasis on the theoretical foundations of technical communication.

The course will address questions such as: What is technical communication? What is the history of technical communication? What are the similarities and differences among the sites of technical communication (e.g. workplace vs. academy)? How do technical communicators construct knowledge? What are the ethical values of our profession? What are the roles for technical communicators in institutions and society? How is the field being formed and what is its relationship to composition, rhetoric, cultural studies, and other fields? Where is the field headed?

Two required texts

Purchase the required texts from the campus bookstore or another bookseller:


Course website

This document, the course schedule, class notes, and other materials are available online: [http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5371/fall05/](http://www.faculty.english.ttu.edu/zdenek/courses/5371/fall05/). If changes need to be made to the course schedule, you will be notified in class or by email.

Grading

Your final course grade will be calculated according to the table below, using the standard curve of 90-100% = A; 80-89.9% = B; 70-79.9% = C; 60-69.9% = D; 0-59.9% = F. Under no circumstances will grades be rounded up or down.
**Assignments**

Review the course notes (on the course website) for details about each assignment. Here is a short summary of each assignment:

**Reading responses**
Compose a written response to the reading assignments each week, and bring hard copies to class on the due dates. See the course schedule for due dates and topics. Each response should be in the range of 600-750 words. Each of your responses should have a descriptive title (as opposed to “Response 1”). The content of each of your responses should do all of the following (in this order):

1. Address a question, concern, or problem of interest to you;
2. Synthesize the readings into themes or topics that will enable you to explore this question or issue (at least 1/2 of your response);
3. Discuss the implications for at least one of the following (at least ¼ of your response)
   a. How do these readings inform teaching (courses you’ve taken, courses you’re teaching)?
   b. How do these readings inform practice (tech writing jobs you’ve had, other jobs you’ve had that require you to write, communicate with people and technology, and/or be user advocates)?
   c. How do these readings inform research (your own research interests, past and present)?
   d. How do these readings inform other readings in this course?

When discussing implications, you are encouraged to draw upon your own experience as a teacher of technical communication and/or as a practicing technical writer. If you do not have experience teaching or practicing technical communication, then you should consider how the readings inform your knowledge (i.e. where you are coming from academically, where you are going, where we as a class have traveled thus far in the readings).

You will want to demonstrate in your reading responses that you have read all the assigned readings. But more importantly you will want to show in your writing that you have read critically and carefully, that you have given thought to the questions and issues raised in the readings, and that you have thoughtfully considered the implications (for teaching, practice, your academic background, and/or the course). Approximately 1/4 of each of your responses should be devoted to a discussion of implications.

We will use the reading responses during class to jump-start discussion. You will also undoubtedly find your responses immensely useful when it is time for you to design a topic for the final report.

**Textbook recommendation report + presentation**
Choose a topic for an undergraduate course you are interested in teaching. Assume your “students” are comprised of TC majors at TTU. Possible topics include: Style, editing, case studies in TC, web design, ethics in TC, manuals, usability testing, grant and proposal writing, reports, the capstone course to the major, document design, the sophomore service course, etc. (To prevent too much overlap in topics, I will pass around a sign up sheet to ensure we have good coverage of the basic topics.) Write a recommendation report (1500 words) that evaluates at least three possible textbooks for this course and
recommends one textbook that meets your criteria. During the presentation portion of this assignment, you will present your recommendation as though you were making a case to a committee charged with making a text selection for your course.

Book review
Write a scholarly book review of Sauer’s *The Rhetoric of Risk*. Your book review should adopt the tone, form, and style of a book review you might find in a tech comm. journal (e.g. TCQ, JBTC, JTWC). The book review should also be informed explicitly by one or more theoretical perspectives in *Central Works*. The review should be 1500-2000 words in length.

Issue(s) in TC report
Plan and execute a report that explores a question, trend, or issue of interest within the context of the course. The final product should be of superior quality, suitable for presentation at a regional or national conference. The report should also be based extensively on outside research (i.e. a comprehensive review of the literature).

The reports of MA students should be in the range of 3500 words; doctoral students’ reports should be in the range of 5000 words. The report should serve as the culmination of your work over the semester.

Expected learning outcomes
Upon completion of the course, students should be able to:

1. Define technical communication from multiple perspectives, identifying the values and beliefs that support different ways of defining technical communication (definition outcome);
2. Historicize the practice and profession of technical communication (history outcome);
3. Situate technical communication in terms of its relationship to the workplace and the academy (sites outcome);
4. Situate the field of technical communication in terms of how knowledge is constructed in the field (methods outcome);
5. Apply readings in ethics and power to cases, issues, and trends in technical communication (ethics outcome)
6. Identify how the field of technical communication is being formed (e.g. through the influences of other fields, such as composition) and where it is headed (formation outcome).

The sixth outcome is intended to emphasize the impact that other fields are having and have had (rhetoric, writing studies, cultural studies) on the formation of technical communication as an academic discipline.

Methods for assessing the expected learning outcomes
The expected learning outcomes of the course will be assessed through:

Weekly written responses to the readings; landmark essays that cover each of the outcome areas (definition, history, pedagogical and academic sites, methods, ethics & power, field formation now and in the future); numerous seminar-style discussions of the issues raised in the readings, especially in terms of the implications of the readings for teaching and practicing technical communication; writing assignments that are intended as “gateway” opportunities for graduate students to become familiar with and enter the academic side of the profession (journal analysis, textbook recommendation, book review).

Course policies
- Be prepared for class by doing the assigned reading and writing in advance.
• Submit all required assignments to be eligible for a passing grade.
• Be on time for class.
• Expect to attend every class meeting. The success of the course depends upon your regular attendance. If you are absent more than two (2) times, your final course grade will be reduced 3% for each absence after three. Six or more absences will warrant a failing grade in the course. I do not excuse absences.
• Talk with me during the first two weeks of class to discuss your special needs or ADA accommodations, if any.
• Expect to participate actively in class discussions.
• Respect the views of others.
• Strive to reduce sources of distraction. For example, turn off or set to vibrate your cell phone prior to the start of class. Also, if you need to use the computers for activities that are not course-related (e.g. checking email), please do so before or after class only.
• Do not plagiarize. Your work must be your own. If you borrow words or ideas from another writer, you need to make it explicit (through proper citation) that the words/ideas in question are not your own. If you use someone else’s paper as your own (e.g. a paper found on the Internet), you are in violation of the University’s policy on academic integrity (p. 49 of the University Catalog). Please keep in mind that the penalty for plagiarism can be severe. See me immediately if you have questions about the University’s policy on plagiarism.
• Submit your work on time. Each assignment should be submitted in hard copy to the instructor at the beginning of class on the due date. Late work is penalized 10% per day. Assignments more than five days late will not be accepted.
• Check your email daily. Important course info may be relayed to you via email.
• Feel free to discuss course questions and concerns with me during office hours, by appointment, or via email. I will do my best to respond to your email queries within 24 hours, except during weekends and holidays. I can also arrange to meet with you on yahoo messenger (Yahoo IM: seanzdenek).