



ENGL 4375 Special Problems in English: Technical Style and Editing

Summer 2024

Online

3 Credit Hours

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Hours Online by appointment; e-mail to set up a convenient time to visit.

Course Description

Building on the undergraduate course in technical editing, this independent-study course aims to bridge the skills necessary for editing in professional spaces and build the skills in rhetorical analysis as applied to editing and stylistic choices.

Textbook Information

We will be using several books in this course. Please get your copies (or check library access) as soon as possible. Please let the instructor know if you have any trouble accessing materials. Continuation in the course indicates you have the necessary materials and can meet appropriate deadlines that require access to course materials.

Required

- ***The Copyeditor's Handbook and Workbook***, 4th edition. Einsohn, Schwartz, & Buky. University of California Press. ISBN: 978-0520306677
- ***Handbook of Technical Writing***, 12th edition. Alred, Brusaw, & Oliu. Bedford St. Martin's Press/Macmillan Learning. ISBN: 978-1319362200

Access to the following digital books is available through our library.

- ***Chicago Manual of Style*** 17th edition. 978-0226287058
- ***Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary***, 11th edition. ISBN: 978-0877798095

Course Goals

Approach

This class is an asynchronous online course, so instructional material will be delivered via video and posts to BlackBoard. The course will be divided into modules that will move you from one topic to another with ascending difficulty. We will also have weekly “check ins” to augment the skills challenges (assignments). Editing is very much a skill, so the course is based around you completing significant practice with the craft, in the form of challenges and practice using course materials and outside professional documentation.

“Style and Editing” as a subject of study is also concerned with the bigger picture of rhetorical appropriateness and social justice. Your style choices and line editing choices can have much larger impacts than the physical change you make to a manuscript. Studying how to identify rhetorical appropriateness and improving what’s already in the source documents you edit is a process that I like to think of through Gestalt theory—the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

We will have to consider the bigger picture of our editing choices or the information you learn will have little purpose (and no sticking power). We will discuss readings and tackle ideological problems within the course conversation threads and some of our assignments will ask you to work as technical editors on community documents in order to hone your skills in authentic environments.

Objectives

- Apply effective elements of technical writing style;
- Examine texts for issues with grammar, mechanics, and style;
- Determine how your editing moves affect the context and culture of the source document;
- Recommend strategies for improving professional documents across genre and disciplines; and
- Produce documents that conform to best practices and principles of technical communication.

Course Evaluation

Your grade for the course will be determined according to the following assignments and percentages:

Initial copyediting “test”	10%
Final copyediting test	10%
Style-guide scavenger hunt	10%
Grammar tutorial	20%
Learning Logs	25%
Community editing project.....	25%

Grading Standards

I assign grades on a 100-point scale, which corresponds with the University's letter grades as follows:

Quality of Work	Score	Grade
Excellent work – exceeds all requirements with minimal or no errors. In the workplace, your supervisor would be impressed and would pass the document along to others, as is. A customer would use the document successfully and with ease.	90 – 100	A
Very-good/good work – exceeds/meets most requirements with few significant errors. In the workplace, your supervisor would appreciate your work, but would want you to revise it before passing it along. A customer may notice simple mistakes and draw conclusions about the quality of your company.	80 – 89	B
Fair/adequate work – meets most/some requirements, but with fundamental errors. In the workplace, your supervisor would be disappointed with the document and would want it revised significantly before passing it along. In addition, the supervisor could begin to doubt your ability to complete similar assignments successfully. A customer might wonder whether your company deserves her/his business.	70 – 79	C
Flawed work – meets few requirements; has excessive errors. In the workplace, your supervisor would have another employee re-do the document. A customer would likely abandon the document and resent your company for wasting her/his time.	60 – 69	D
Does not meet the assignment's requirements. In the workplace, your supervisor would assume that you don't care about your job. A customer would withdraw business, find your company's replacement, and/or ask to work with a different representative from your company.	0 – 59	F

Policies

Please read these policies carefully and keep them in mind as you work through the course materials.

This is a professional communication course. Your communication with me is extremely important. If anything personal or professional comes up that will affect your ability to work within the scheduled activities, affects your interactions community editing project, please reach out to me. I will always try to help you work through any issues that may be standing in the way of your success; however, without your communication that won't be able to happen.

Participation

- Log in to BlackBoard often (daily, preferably). You are responsible for keeping up with the class modules and the assignments and topics we cover. Reach out to me if you have

questions, need clarification, seek approval, etc. I can only work with you when you keep a constant relationship with me and the course materials.

- Consider your schedule; logging in regularly is essential to do well in the course. The pace of this course can be intense if you put off work until the due date. Doing some work each day will serve you better than trying to complete all your assignments over the weekend.
- Plan for travel dates. Anything that will keep you from meeting course expectations should be discussed with me prior to your departure.
- Keep in contact with me through office (Zoom or BlackBoard Collaborate visits, e-mail, phone calls, etc.). We will have a minimum of one required weekly “check-in,” which could be a virtual meeting, an extended e-mail conversation, or some other form of structured communication. We will set the day of the week and time according to mutual consent and availability. The preference is to schedule it for the same time each week, so that it becomes part of our normal routines.

Academic Integrity

As artificial intelligence, primarily in the form of chatbots, has further evolved, we must address the use of AI-assisted writing in a writing classroom. As a technical communicator, I recognize that professional writers will increasingly collaborate with AI to produce documentation. Originality remains a core value in higher education and professional contexts. To that end, I do allow and at times even encourage students to use technological resources at their disposal, including AI, to assist them with developing their original work. When using AI, students should:

- Use AI to assist in short inquiries, to offer guidance on formatting or structure, or for inspiration (as you might use other digital tools when seeking assistance)
- Disclose the assistance of AI when you use the technology to create an image or draft specific language that gets included in your work.
- Offer enough detail regarding disclosure so that I am clear on which information was taken from AI and where your own thoughts, knowledge, and practice intersect.

Submitting work entirely or substantially generated through AI is unethical and a mix of plagiarism, collusion, and abuse of academic resources. Doing so will result in a violation of the Academic Integrity Policy.

Asking for AI or another human to edit materials you are assigned to edit yourself, fits in the definition of academic dishonesty. Please check with me if you think you have a reason to work with AI in the editing course.

Students are expected to maintain honesty and integrity in the academic experiences both in and out of the classroom. Please be aware that plagiarized work and any form of academic dishonesty will result in an “F” on the assignment. SHSU [Academic Policy Statement 810213](#) outlines the definition of academic honesty and the related disciplinary procedures.

You should also familiarize yourself with [Academic Policy 900823](#), which outlines the procedures for students to file an academic grievance should you wish to appeal your grade for reasons other than academic dishonesty. Please read over these policies.

Absences on Religious Holy Days, Students with Disabilities, and other information about your rights and responsibilities as a member of this class can be found at: <http://www.shsu.edu/syllabus>.

Overview of Activities

Throughout the semester, you will complete a variety of individual assignments and complete a project with professional client documentation. I will provide detailed assignment sheets, supporting documents, due dates, and times through each module posted in BlackBoard. New Module folders will open in time for the new activities to begin and once you have uploaded your assignment(s) from the previous module. We will meet early in the semester to determine a weekly “work schedule” and discuss the methods of sharing information and documents across the course timeline. Because this is an independent study, we will have more flexibility to design components in ways that are convenient to both the faculty member and student. This also allows for a bit more tailored curriculum for the individual student. We will strive to make the course outcomes work so that the activities focus on student needs and goals.

The syllabus calendar provides an overview of how the learning activities will build throughout the semester and the general timeline for each module. Note that based on your feedback and activities, these dates are subject to change slightly, but any changes will be made in advance.

This is a an upper-level undergraduate course in technical communication; accordingly, you must have a full understanding of basic grammar and writing mechanics before taking this course, as well as a basic understanding of technical writing style and design principles.

Readings from your text and handouts

Obtain copies of the textbooks as close to the first day of the class as possible. You will rely on them heavily to work through the activities and projects in this course.

I assign readings from the textbooks and from outside sources that support your learning in the course. It is assumed you will attend to the course readings without having to prove you read by taking quizzes or developing regularly scheduled discussion board posts. Additionally, at times your books will be reference works that will help you to answer the “beguiling” problems your source documents will present.

Learning logs

To become proficient editors, we must have command of the complexities of English grammar. Throughout the semester you will complete style and copyediting exercises. Learning logs will help you track the development of your knowledge over the course of the semester.

Copyediting tests

Most jobs in editing—and some in writing—require copyediting tests to evaluate a job candidates’ ability to identify and correct grammar/mechanical/style mistakes in written documents. In this class you will complete two copyediting tests. One at the beginning of the semester, which could basically be called a “test” with the quotations meaning that it’s not meant to be a pass/fail situation. The “test” will challenge you on general mechanical concepts and ask you to do specific edits. The point is to do the exercise without any assistance, and then to use the outcome as a base for you to discover some of the areas you might need work.

These tests are evaluated differently: the first is to assess where your skills lie in determining some methods of editing for meaning; the second is an actual test to see what you can do.

Style-guide scavenger hunt

Any editing project depends on the prescribed style for the document. Therefore, editors must be able to locate style information in style guides efficiently. You will work to locate information in the Chicago Manual of Style during a scavenger hunt.

Grammar tutorial

Editors must often explicate a grammatical rule or style suggestion for their clients, and some editors serve extra roles in educating colleagues, either officially or unofficially, at various organizations. Thus, you will produce a grammar tutorial for a defined audience as a means of practicing this skill.

Editing project

You will work with professional documents to edit and fulfill client-based specifications. You will complete the project and will submit both the original and revision to me. You will keep logs of your interactions with the client (not to be confused with the semester-long “learning log” assignment)

Correspondence

As students in technical communication every e-mail you send within our class is expected to include appropriate subject lines, salutations, a clear error-free message, a professional tone, and a signature line, as appropriate to the genre.

During the week I will typically respond to you e-mails within a few hours, but if you do not hear from me within 24 hours, please follow up. Responses over the weekend are less likely, based on the urgency of the message and my availability. You can expect a response on the next business day at the latest.

Calendar

This calendar serves as a general guide for our activities, readings, and due dates this semester. While I have structured the course according to preconceived notions of student ability and expectations, I reserve the right to modify the calendar, the readings, and to supplement your study with additional readings based on need. Any changes to this calendar will be noted with plenty of opportunity to adjust, and in consultation with you. Each module will open in BlackBoard (BB) as we begin working with that topic; accordingly, additional detailed information and resources will be provided on BB.

The following schedule contains readings and assignments for the semester. “Work weeks” will be determined in consultation with you and we will try to stick to a firm schedule so that the semester goes smoothly. What that means is that you will begin a module on a particular day and end on a particular day each week. If a module takes more than a week, we will discuss a shift in our traditional “work week.”

Not every assignment is listed on this calendar, but the major divisions of the course are listed for your planning purposes. For all assignments I will post detailed descriptions, but you are welcomed and encouraged to reach out to me for information to answer general questions.

General Information

We will follow this general calendar in completing our assignments. Please note that these dates are subject to change, depending on student need and class activities. In general, readings should be completed prior to the activities and reflections should be the last item finished in the module. Thus, activities and are only 1/3 of the expectations for each module and items should be completed in order.

Legend for Book Titles:

1. **HB** – The Copyeditor's Handbook
2. **WB** – The Copyeditor's Workbook

NOTE: We are not bound to work on one module per week, nor are we bound to complete each module within a one-week period. Dates and times will be negotiated based on desired outcomes. ENGL 4375 is a 10-week, full summer term course. Module activities are expected to be completed consecutively and time spent with each module will vary based on student ability.

Readings:

Blog

<https://leffcommunications.com/2019/10/22/the-art-and-science-of-editing/>

Plain Language

<https://www.plainlanguage.gov/resources/humor/nine-easy-steps-to-longer-sentences/>

Reading:

HB Chapter 1, pp. 3-37; 39-66
WB-TBD

MODULE ONE: WHAT EDITORS DO

In this module, students examine professional style and editing concepts, discover their baselines, and begin forming specific objectives for the course. Time is spent discussing current skills, defining desired outcomes, and setting personal goals.

Deliverables:

1. Initial Copyediting Test.
2. Learning Log post with reflection.

MODULE TWO: STYLE GUIDES

In this module, students work with style guides and references. Time is also spent improving clarity in writing and editing. Activities and intermediate deadlines posted in BB module.

Deliverables:

1. Style-guide scavenger hunt
2. Learning Log with reflection

Reading:

HB, Ch 14: pp. 333-338 & Ch.
15: pp. 399-416
WB-TBD

*Readings TBD based on topic
chosen by student.*

**Resource materials as
determined by project**

MODULE THREE: LESSONS LEARNED

In this module, students will choose at least six skills to practice. Timelines and activities will be determined by mutual consent.

Deliverables:

1. Proposal for editing activities;
2. Learning Log with reflection

MODULE FOUR: GRAMMAR TUTORIALS

In this module, students create a grammar tutorial to share with a specified audience.

Deliverable: TBD based on faculty/student interaction

MODULE FIVE: PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

In this module students work with a professional document in a professional space. “Client” and project determined by mutual consent.

Deliverable: TBD based on faculty/student interaction

END OF COURSE

Students prepare the final copyediting test and reflect on learning progress.

Learning logs collated for assessment.