

Academic Field Analysis Assignment

For this assignment, you will research a facet of the academic field of professional/technical communication to examine how the academic study of professional and technical writing works, is organized, and how it communicates its information and findings to the larger world (at this stage, through social media, conference presentations, and other online outlets).

This assignment will involve research online; at this stage, I ask that you **not** reach out to anyone in person. You may be able to do this at a later stage, but for right now, you are just fact finding.

There are two parts to this assignment:

Part 1: Academic sleuthing. In this part of the assignment, you will do some research on an academic researcher in technical and professional communication. Using our textbook, *Solving Problems in Technical Communication* as a starting point, choose a researcher who has written a chapter in that text. Then, scour the internet for publicly available information about that person and his/her career, answering questions such as:

- Where does this person work? How long has he/she worked there? What other institutions has he/she worked? Where was he/she trained (i.e., where did he/she earn a PhD, MA, BA, etc.)? Look for this information on a person's faculty profile page through his/her university and public profiles on Twitter, Academia.edu, Research Gate, etc.
- What has that person published recently? What kind of research, in what journals or edited collections? At what conferences has he/she presented? Look for evidence of this in the person's Curriculum Vitae (CV), publication announcements and advertisements, and programs from conferences.
- Does the person have an online presence (website, Twitter, etc.) that you can access? If he or she is on Twitter, can you see who that person is currently linked to? What are his or her "causes" or issues? Is he or she a prolific publisher online through a blog or website?
- What is your sense of this person? What kinds of contributions does the person make, and where are they made (in academics, in research, in industry, etc.)?

Part 2: Conference hashtag sleuthing. Academic work is primarily published in three spaces—journals, books, and at professional conferences. Professional conferences can hard to access because they are primarily attended by those in the profession, they are expensive to attend, and records of conferences are rarely kept, at least in conferences in the humanities. Increasingly, though, conferences will publicize and ask that people use hashtags on Twitter to promote and record conference presentations, findings, and conversations.

So, you will choose a conference and research its recent hashtag. Choose from among the conferences and hashtags listed here, and try your best to craft an overall impression of the conference based on some general web searching and analysis of posts that use the conference hashtag. Answer questions such as:

- When was the most recent conference held? Where was it? What was the theme or focus? What is the general purpose or objective of this conference? How long has it been run?

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- Who presented there? What were some presentations that got lots of tweets or online comments? What kinds of findings were being presented? Choose and analyze a few tweets. What is going on? What kinds of posts are made? What kind of evidence is being presented and what kinds of arguments are being made?
- What is your impression of this conference, based on this research? Based on your hashtag sleuthing alone, what kind of work happens here? What kind of work doesn't happen? Who is the primary audience? What do you think this conference is like?

Hashtag/conference options:

- Computers and Writing: #cwcon (fun fact: this conference is being held at George Mason in spring 2018, so you may consider attending it in person!)
- Rhetoric Society of America Conference: #rsa16
- Conference of College Composition and Communication: #4c17
- Society for Technical Communication Summit: #stc17

Please note: some of these hashtags are more stable than others; you will have to weed through some of them to find out which ones “belong” to the academic conference you are researching and which ones belong to other organizations.

Due Date: Monday, September 11, by the beginning of class. One copy posted to Blackboard, one hard copy in class. Prepare to share your findings with the class.

Criteria for Evaluation

This assignment will be evaluated on:

1. Adherence to the due dates and requirements.
2. Thoughtfulness and completeness of the research and your answers to the questions listed above.
3. Anticipated length is 2-3 single-spaced pages, but evaluation will be less focused on length than depth/breadth of analysis and discussion.