

**English 501: Introduction to Professional Writing and Rhetoric**  
**Fall 2017 | Monday 7:20 to 10:00 p.m. | Robinson Hall A 243**

**Professor Info:**

Dr. Heidi Y. Lawrence  
Robinson A, 422  
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**Course Websites:**

Homepage: <http://mason.gmu.edu/~hlawren2/501/>  
Blog: <http://profwriting17.blogspot.com/>

**Office Hours and Contact**

Office Hours, Fall 2017: Wednesday, 5 to 6 p.m.

I am also available other times (including in the evenings) to meet and discuss the course, your progress, or issues related to assignments or Professional Writing and Rhetoric more generally. If you are struggling or having other difficulties with the class, or just have a lot of unanswered questions, please come and talk to me sooner rather than later.

In general, the best way to contact me is email. I will make every attempt to respond to your email within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on the weekend.

Please note that, to keep up with course communications, you must frequently check your GMU email. Although you have supplied a Gmail email for our Google Drive folder and blog, I will only communicate course information via your GMU account. Plan to check this account frequently.

**Course Description**

This course broadly examines the history, theory, and practice of professional and technical writing and rhetoric. The study of rhetoric and professional communication has long involved addressing issues related to technology, science and the environment, health and medicine, and visual communication because its practitioners do the work of these seemingly disparate disciplines daily. We will read and discuss the origins of professional and technical writing as a profession, its historic theoretical connections to the study of rhetoric, and its products and contexts in many arenas and forms. At different intervals, our class will focus on theoretical and practical examination of the historical and contemporary issues that occupy this field.

If you are currently a practicing professional or technical writer, our course readings and your own research should give you a sense of the theoretical and discipline-wide concerns that connect to your day-to-day experiences; if you are new to the field or are hoping to enter it, you will leave this class with a sense of what professional and technical writing are and how you may go about pursuing a career in it. Everyone should leave this class with a deeper sense of the goals and focus of the Professional Writing and Rhetoric (PWR) program at George Mason and a sense of how you might pursue further research and study.

## Course Objectives

This course:

- Provides a rhetorical foundation for each student's understanding of professional communication in preparation for future coursework in the program
- Examines how theory relates to the practice of professional communicators and the production of text in the workplace and public sphere
- Facilitates a starting point for working with histories of the field, research questions, methods, and disciplinary literature common to knowledge-making practices in Professional Writing and Rhetoric

## Texts and Materials

### 1. *Central Works in Technical Communication*

Authors: Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber

Edition: First (2004)

ISBN-10: 0195157052

ISBN-13: 978-0195157055

### 2. *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*

Authors: Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart Selber

Edition: First (2013)

ISBN-10: 0226924076

ISBN-13: 978-0226924076

3. A laptop computer or tablet (if available)

4. Other materials and readings, as assigned

5. Online material. We have four main online sources of content in this course:

- Our course website. <http://mason.gmu.edu/~hlawren2/501/>
  - The course website will contain all permanent course materials, such as the syllabus, course calendar, and assignment sheets. This material will be updated throughout the semester, so please check it periodically for updates. Changes to the course materials will be announced in class and on our class blog.
- Our course blog. <http://profcommf17.blogspot.com>
  - This is where you will post your weekly responses and analyses to the work we do in class. I will also post course announcements here, so check it periodically as well.
- Google Drive.
  - Our Google Drive folder will have all of the readings that are not in your textbooks. This is also the space for you to collaborate on documents with me or with your classmates.
- Blackboard.
  - We will only use Blackboard for assignment management. Usually, you will submit one electronic copy of your assignments there, and grades will be managed via Blackboard. No other content or data will be stored there.

## **Course Evaluation**

Blog and Participation: 25%

Academic Field Analysis: 10%

Industry Analysis: 10%

Journal Review: 20%

Annotated Bibliography and Analysis: 25%

Professional Portfolio: 10%

Evaluation criteria for each assignment will be provided on assignment sheets.

## **Class Activities**

Since this is a seminar, class time will include in-depth discussion of the week's readings and your reactions posted on the blog. Every week, we will discuss key concepts in small groups, as a class, and on the blog. You will need to be comfortable talking, working, writing, and otherwise communicating with your classmates both online and in person.

When you come to class, unless otherwise assigned, you should have:

1. Completed all required readings for that class period.
2. Read through any comments or commentary that I have posted on our class blog. I will have any notices or information posted there by midnight the Sunday before class.
3. Posted a 400-500 word analysis blog post on one aspect of the readings by **11:59 p.m. the Friday** before class.
4. Read through the comments your colleagues have posted, gaining a general sense of their reactions to the readings, and posted one response prior to class time. (see Blog assignment for full assignment requirements)

## **Attendance and Late Policy**

Unless you have made prior arrangements with me, each missed class beyond the first will lower the final grade by 5%. Frequent late arrivals or early departures (arriving more than 10 minutes late or leaving more than 10 minutes early) will also lower your final grade by up to 5%.

You are expected to attend every class, be on time, contribute productively to class discussion and group work, and turn things in on time. Work we complete in class will directly inform the out-of-class work you do, so it will not be possible for you to complete this course without regular, active, and on-time attendance.

If you expect you will miss an upcoming class because of a work, personal, or university-related obligation, please let me know as soon as possible. If you are sick and unable to attend class, it is your responsibility to let me know about your absence as soon as possible and to obtain notes or other materials distributed during class from a colleague. I strongly suggest that you come to my office hours to discuss material you have missed.

Late work is only accepted on a case-by-case basis. If you anticipate that you will not meet an upcoming deadline, then you must contact me immediately to discuss the issue further. If you miss a deadline, you must email me within 24 hours of the assignment deadline to discuss your assignment.

If accepted late, the assignment will be subject to up to a 20% late work grade deduction. All assignments must be submitted using the submission and formatting requirements outlined on that assignment.

### **Late Blogs**

Blogs—including analysis, response, and reflection blogs—are due by the times stated in class and designated in the syllabus and assignment sheets. They need to be posted on time to generate out-of-class discussion. Blogs are not accepted late.

### **Technology Policy**

During class time, you should remain entirely on task. Avoid: social media, work email, texting and the like. Cell phones should be kept on silent and, preferably, out of sight completely, particularly during class discussions. If you have a work or family emergency that requires you to have your phone on during class, please alert me to this at the beginning of class time.

### **GMU Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC)**

If you are interested in professional or technical communication or career opportunities in writing, please consider joining the GMU Chapter of the STC. STC is the world's oldest and largest professional association for technical communicators. As a student organization, GMU STC is dedicated to helping current and future professional technical communicators—writers, editors, designers, and more—achieve their career, education, and service goals. We provide opportunities for networking with other students and area professionals interested in professional writing, professional development workshops and training, and job and internship connections. To learn more about joining, please visit us on Facebook [facebook.com/masonstc](https://www.facebook.com/masonstc) or contact us for more information at [masonstc@gmu.edu](mailto:masonstc@gmu.edu).

### **University Resources: The Writing Center**

The Writing Center is available to graduate students at George Mason. The Writing Center will help you with nearly all parts of the writing process—generating ideas for your paper, reading for clarity, and honing a thesis. They won't just proofread your paper, though. I highly encourage you to seek their assistance as you develop your writing throughout the semester.

Their website is: <http://writingcenter.gmu.edu>

### **Honor Code**

Plagiarism will not be tolerated in this course. You are expected to know and follow the GMU honor code, which can be found at <http://oai.gmu.edu/honor-code/>.

When using source material, you must give proper credit to the originally published work. Please note that the University defines plagiarism as follows:

- Cutting and pasting from other sources
- Improper and/or lack of proper citations
- Using someone's ideas, thoughts and/or words without citing
- Using poor paraphrasing
- Submitting someone else's work as your own
- Copying word for word without citing
- Submitting the wrong document

All instances of plagiarism, cheating, or other violations of the GMU honor code will be reported to the GMU Office of Academic Integrity.

### **Citation**

Any time you use material derived from specific sources, whether directly quoted passages, summaries, or paraphrases of facts, opinions, explanations, or ideas, you are ethically obligated to let your reader know who deserves the credit.

We will use a range of citation forms and styles in this course, and you are responsible for properly using the form appropriate to the assignment and situation in question.

### **Special Accommodations**

If you are a student with special needs or accommodations, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you require special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, see me during my office hours or provide me with information about your necessary accommodations from the Office of Disability Services: <http://ods.gmu.edu>.