



Independent Study | in Idaho

Engl 317
Technical Writing

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Course Guide

Independent
Study | in Idaho

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English 317 Technical Writing

University of Idaho
3 Semester-Hour Credits

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University of Idaho

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3-Engl 317

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Engl 317: Technical Writing

3 Semester-Hour Credits: UI

Welcome!

Whether you are a new or returning student, welcome to the Independent Study in Idaho (ISI) program. Below, you will find information pertinent to your course including the course description, course materials, learning outcomes, as well as information about projects and grading. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the ISI office for clarification before beginning your course.

Policies and Procedures

Refer to the ISI website at www.uidaho.edu/isi and select *Students* for the most current policies and procedures, including information on setting up accounts, student confidentiality, exams, proctors, transcripts, course exchanges, refunds, academic integrity, library resources, and disability support and other services.

Course Description

Principles and practice of effective technical communication. Projects teach conventions of tone and style appropriate to the specific discourse situation in a variety of formats, including oral, written, visual, and multimedia genres. Prerequisite: Engl 102 or Equivalent; Junior standing or Permission. UI students: General education: Communication.

Required: access to a computer, speakers and/or headphones

6 graded projects, no exams

Course Materials

Required Course Materials

This course does not require a textbook.

This course is designed for students to work through each assignment sequentially. Students should plan on spending 18 weeks on this course; see each project for specific details. Grades and feedback on assignments may take up to three weeks after date of receipt by the instructor.

ALL assignments must be submitted to receive a final grade for the course.

Course Delivery

All ISI courses are delivered through BbLearn, an online management system that hosts the course lessons and assignments and other items that are essential to the course. Upon registration, the student will receive a *Registration Confirmation Email* with information on how to access ISI courses online.

Course Introduction

Technical Writing is both a field of study and a profession with a unique history and set of distinctive practices. It is also the writing done by professionals in other careers. Technical writing may be defined broadly as any professional workplace writing or more narrowly as in this definition written by the *Society of Technical Communication* and the *US Department of Labor*:

Technical writers, also called technical communicators, prepare instruction manuals, journal articles, and other supporting documents to communicate complex information more easily. They also develop, gather, and disseminate technical information among customers, designers, and manufacturers.

This course uses both definitions and the philosophy of User-Centered Design (UCD). UCD informs the design of everything we use. So, whether have an interest in becoming a technical writer or are preparing to write in another career, in today's workplace you will craft messages using ever changing and increasingly integrated media. The projects in this course will help you meet these challenges.

Learning Objectives

After successfully completing this course, you will be able to:

- translate discipline-specific discourse to meet the needs of audiences with lower levels of technical expertise,
- articulate the affordances and constraints of technologies to stakeholders,
- apply rhetorical constructs to produce the visual and verbal design of communication,
- communicate solutions to rhetorical problems in a variety of print and electronic genres.

Project Descriptions and Deliverables

Five of the six projects require both written and oral communication deliverables (an audio-only podcast, two slidecasts, and two screencasts). Students will use free easy-to-use cloud computing tools to compose these and will not need prior experience in creating multimedia communication products.

Project 1: Technical and Scientific Prose and Presentation Speaking Style (10%). In this project, you will analyze some of your prior writing to determine the level of readability and create a podcast.

- Memo Report write-up of findings from the analysis, about 3-4 pages.
- Podcast about research at the University of Idaho, up to 3 minutes.

Project 2: Technical Definitions and Descriptions (15%). In this project, you will compose technical documentation (a type of planning document), an extended technical definition, and a technical description. Your goal will be to translate dense technical information to a lay audience.

- Technical Documentation, about 350 words.
- Extended Slidecast Technical Definition, up to 3 minutes.
- Technical Description of a Process or Mechanism, about 250-350 words organized around a visual.

Project 3: Data Visualization (20%). In this project, you will create a data-driven infographic that visualizes a statistical data story.

- Infographic. Length will vary.
- Screencast justifying design choices, up to 3 minutes.

Project 4: Usability Test (25%). In this project, you will compare a communication product by conducting a cognitive walk-through usability test.

- Technical White Paper write up of test findings. Length will vary greatly depending on size of screenshots but about 2000 -2500 words.
- Screencast of a usability test finding, up to 3 minutes.

Project 5: Technical Instructions (20%). In this project, students will create set of step-by-step slidecast technical instructions to help viewers perform a specific task and pitch the instructions for publication to editors of an appropriate online magazine or other website.

- Slidecast technical instructions, up to 5 minutes.
- Business Letter pitch for publication, about 350 words.

Project 6: Professional Identity (10%). In this project, you will write a targeted cover letter and resume and create an e-portfolio populated with sample work.

- Cover Letter and Resume, about 1 page for letter and up to 2 for resume.
- E-Portfolio, home page and at least one other with sample work.

1.1 **Course Pace.** Students have one year to complete the course from the date of enrollment. There are six projects in the course. Each has a schedule of steps with the estimated time it will take you to complete each step.

The minimum number of total hours you will need per project is as follows: project 1 (12 hours); project 2 (12 hours); project 3 (12 hours); project 4 (16 hours); project 5 (12 hours); project 6 (10 hours).

Students are strongly advised to work incrementally and allocate the time for 12 hour projects over 3 weeks; the 16 hour project over 4 weeks; and the 10 hour project over 2 weeks.

This means you will need a minimum of 18 weeks to complete the course.

1.2 **English Language Proficiency.** You must meet the standards of language proficiency as defined by the University of Idaho [academic requirements](#) to take English 317.

1.3 **Technology Requirements.**

- *Microphone.* Students are required to have a microphone. Most computers have an integrated microphone that will work fine for this course. If you need to purchase one, however, here are two inexpensive microphones that bblearn recommends: [Logitech 1](#) (\$14.99) and [Logitech 2](#) (\$19.99)
- *Reliable Backup.* You will need a reliable backup to store the latest drafts of your work other than the hard drive of your computer or an easily lost thumb drive. Here is one I recommend: <http://www.dropbox.com>

1.4 **Multimedia Project Deliverables.** Four of the projects require both written and multimedia communication deliverables (an audio-only podcast, slidecast, and two screencasts).

Students are not expected to have prior experience in producing multimedia products and will be invited to create these using free, cloud-computing tools that will also host the file. Should you choose to create your file another way, your file must be hosted in the cloud and play as a video without a user needing to download it first.

- 1.5 **Test Recording.** Students are responsible for completing a test recording in projects where a multimedia project deliverable is required. Should a test recording fail, students are required to follow the troubleshooting steps under *Tools and Resources* on each of the four project pages.

Failure to do a test recording early enough to resolve technical issues will not be accepted as a reason for not submitting a multimedia project deliverable.

- 1.6 **Accepted File Formats.** The following are the only accepted file formats.

- *Written Deliverables:* Word or PDF.
- *Infographic Deliverable:* jpg, png, PDF, or the URL where the file is hosted.
- *Multimedia Deliverables:* URL where the file is hosted.

Digital media files (MP3, MP4, etc.) are not accepted in this course because you are practicing how such files are shared in the workplace.

- 1.7 **Submitting Work for My Evaluation.** Projects must be submitted in the order given in the course because they are related.

Students may submit only ONE project per week. I grade student work each week, usually on a Thursday or Friday, so you may expect timely feedback that will help you with future projects.

Confirming that Work Submitted Correctly. Students are responsible for confirming that all work submitted properly in the bblearn project drop box, and this includes confirming that files will open and that any URL addresses work.

If you discover that your work did not submit correctly or you didn't submit all required work before hitting the submit button in the drop box, contact me, and I will reset the drop box for you.

Self-Evaluations are Required. Students are required to submit a self-evaluation for each project they complete. Directions and requirements are covered in course materials.

- 1.8 **University Disability Support Services.** Reasonable accommodations will be made for students with disabilities. Disability Support Services must approve your request: (208) 885-6307 • dss@uidaho.edu

- 1.9 **Plagiarism.** Violation the University of Idaho Student Code of Conduct will result in a course grade of 'F'.

- 1.10 **Contacting Me.** You are invited to email me when you have a question or need help composing a project deliverable. I answer emails even on the weekends, and you may expect a reply within 24 hours, often earlier.

Study Hints:

- Keep a copy of every lesson submitted.
- Set a schedule allowing for course completion one month prior to your personal deadline.

- Web pages and URL links in the World Wide Web are continuously changing. Contact your instructor if you find a broken Web page or URL.

Grading

Final grades will be based successful completion of six project deliverables, weighted as follows:

- Project 1: Technical and Scientific Prose and Presentation Speaking Style (10%)
- Project 2: Technical Definitions and Descriptions (15%)
- Project 3: Data Visualization (20%)
- Project 4: Usability Test (25%)
- Project 5: Technical Instructions (20%)
- Project 6: Professional Identity (10%)

Acts of academic dishonesty, including cheating or plagiarism are considered a very serious transgression and may result in a grade of F for the course.

About the Course Developer

Karen Thompson is the director of Professional Writing at the University of Idaho. She has over 20 years of experience as a technical writer and teacher of technical writing.

Contacting Your Instructor

Instructor contact information is posted on your BbLearn site.

Lesson 1

Technical and Scientific Prose and Presentation Speaking Style

Lesson Objectives

Estimated time you will need to complete this project: **12 hours**.

The following schedule describes the steps you will need to do in order to compose deliverables 1 and 2 and the estimated time needed for each step.

Step	Do the Following to Complete Deliverable 1	Time
1	<p>Read project 1 handout. Look briefly at Slidedoc 3: <i>How to Write the Memo Report</i>, and view the examples so you have an idea of the end product you will compose for deliverable 1.</p> <p>Pay close attention to how you need to write-up the entries from your findings in conducting the analysis as covered in Slidedoc e.</p> <p>Choose prior writing you will analyze. You may use any <u>non-fiction</u> writing you have done previously. Creative writing will not work for this project. You may want to choose several types of non-fiction writing you have done such as lab reports, essays, longer reports etc. because it may reveal weaknesses that happen based on what type of writing you were doing.</p>	1 hour
2	<p>Watch Slidedoc 1: <i>Technical and Scientific Prose Style</i> and analyze your prior writing.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are three prose style concepts. These are bolded in the table of contents. Indented under each concept you will find a list of subtopics you need to apply. You will need to apply <u>all three concepts and their corresponding subtopics</u> when analyzing your writing. • TIP: open Slidedoc 1 and compare your writing to each of the possible causes / subtopics for a given concept to determine if your writing is weak or strong in this concept. Mark your writing and take notes as you do this. <p>Watch Slidedoc 2: <i>Style vs. Grammar</i> to identify errors workplace readers are likely to notice and analyze your to identify if you have made any of these.</p> <p>WARNING: Stay focused on analysis because when you write the report, you should not revise your writing. Here's why. If you find weaknesses in your prose style, it means your reviewing process is weak. The purpose of the project is to improve this aspect of your writing process.</p>	4 hours

Step	Do the Following to Complete Deliverable 1 <i>continued</i>	Time
3	Watch Slidedoc 3: <i>How to Write the Memo Report</i> . Draft, revise, and edit your memo report.	3 hours
Step	Do the Following to Complete Deliverable 2	Time
1	Sign-up for SoundCloud or PodSnack and <u>do a test recording</u> . Follow troubleshooting advice under Tools & Resources to resolve any technical issues.	1 hour
2	Watch Slidedoc 4: <i>How to Create the Audio-Only Podcast</i> to understand how to write the script about research at the University of Idaho and listen to the examples so you have an idea of the end product you will compose for deliverable 2. Write the podcast script, practice it a few times, and record your podcast.	3 hours

Submit your work to the project drop box by the deadline listed on the project page. This deadline is also posted in bold on the main course menu in bblearn.

Submit your work as follows:

- Deliverable 1: *Memo Report*: submit a Word or PDF file.
- Deliverable 2: *Podcast*: submit the URL address where your digital media file is hosted.

Submit the full URL instead of a live link because bblearn sometimes won't work right from a live link.

You may cut and paste the URL in the comment box or put it in your self-evaluation, whatever works for you.