

ENGLISH 673: Research & Theory in Technical Communication

Section 01

Fall 2016 / Minnesota State University, Mankato

Instructor Information

Dr. Dawn Armfield
207I Armstrong Hall
dawn.armfield@mnsu.edu / phone: 507-389-5511

Office Hours: MW 9:00am-11am, Th 10am-11am, by appointment
Adobe Connect: https://connect.shot.smsu.edu/engl673_fa2016/

Communicating with the Professor

Include ENG 673 on the subject line of all email correspondence about the course as well as a concise topic of the message. I can also be reached by phone or email during office/online hours. Voice mail is recorded and forwarded to email, so please leave a message when you call my office if you want a reply.

General Information

Course Catalog Description

Seminar for students engaged in conducting a major research project in the technical communication field. Emphasizes theoretical approaches to research, development and implementation of the individual research project, and presentation and publication opportunities in professional writing.

Course Materials

Books

- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches: 4th Edition*. Sage publications.
- Hughes, M. A., & Hayhoe, G. F. (2009). *A research primer for technical communication: Methods, exemplars, and analyses*. Routledge.
- Spinuzzi, C. (2013). *Topsight: A guide to studying, diagnosing, and fixing information flow in organizations*.

Articles/Videos will be required and linked to within the course.

Learning Objectives

Students completing the course will successfully demonstrate their competency in the following areas:

1. Using a sample of readings from a variety of academic journals, students will gain an understanding of the field of technical communication: its research, theory, sites, issues, questions, and problems.
2. Using information about research methods from the textbook, synchronous and asynchronous discussions, and research practices, students will develop competency in planning data collection and analyzing sample data using a variety of methods.
3. Using information from readings and discussions about responsible conduct of research, students will write and submit applications for research involving human subjects to the MSU Mankato Institutional Research Board.
4. Drawing upon all of the readings and discussions, students will synthesize the information they have learned to write either a research proposal for a thesis or alternate plan paper (APP) or a short journal article-style research paper.

Course Format

We will meet for a group chat on Wednesday evenings from 7:00-8:30 PM CDT/CST (depending on the time of the semester) via Adobe Connect (URL: https://connect.shot.smsu.edu/engl673_fa2016/). You do not need any software nor do you need to create an account to join the chats. The remainder of the work will be completed on your own, including weekly asynchronous discussions using the D2L content management system.

Bookmark this page in your browser: https://connect.shot.smsu.edu/engl673_fa2016/

Troubleshooting advice

1. Connect appears more stable using the Firefox browser.
2. Ask other members of your household to turn off their wireless devices and avoid streaming movies or other activities that consume Internet bandwidth for the duration of the meeting.
3. When possible, use an Ethernet connection rather than a wireless connection to the Internet.
4. When using audio and/or video during a meeting, be prepared for technical problems.
5. Use the Audio Setup Wizard to test your computer. Try logging out of the meeting and then returning if the wizard is not able to restore your ability to broadcast audio and/or video.

Attendance, Participation, and Late Work

University classrooms work best when we all engage and participate. Participation includes engaging with your peers and with me, engaging with your readings, and responding in our digital spaces. If you do not participate, your course grade will be lowered. **Late work is not accepted.** If you must miss class, notify me immediately. **Missing more than two class sessions will result in an F for this course.** Plan to spend at least 12-15 hours a week on readings, homework, and projects. If you cannot keep up, this class is not for you.

Institutional Information

Academic Honesty

All work must be original. Plagiarism occurs when a writer, speaker, or designer uses someone else's language, ideas, images, or other material without fully acknowledging its source by quotations marks, in footnotes or endnotes, and in lists of works cited. All documents are to be your own original work (in collaborative contexts, generated 100% by you and your teammates). Any articles, images, music, interviews, websites or other electronic media—any content beyond what you have created—must be documented. **Plagiarism will not be accepted.**

The Academic Honesty Policy for Minnesota State University, Mankato can be found at <https://www.mnsu.edu/policies/approved/academichonesty.pdfz>

Academic Support

The Center for Academic Success is the primary on-campus source for free academic support in the areas of writing, speech, modern languages, math, science, and business. Students can work with trained consultants to receive objective, constructive feedback on their academic work in these areas. This includes paper reviews, speech development and rehearsal, modern language tutoring, math, and science problems and projects, and business/accounting coursework. For more information, visit them online at www.mnsu.edu/success.

Disabilities Accommodation

Minnesota State University, Mankato provides students with disabilities reasonable accommodation to participate in educational programs, activities, and/or services. Students with documented disabilities requiring accommodation to participate in class activities or meet course requirements should first register with Accessibility Resources (Memorial Library 132, telephone 507-389-2825, TDD 711) to establish an accommodation plan and then contact me as soon as possible.

Assignments & Grades

According to university policy, a “C” is equivalent to average performance, a “B” represents better than average performance, and an “A” represents superior work.

I expect all assignments to adhere to genre conventions, to be properly formatted and have graduate level syntax and grammar. Document design should be an important part of your presentation (when possible).

Major Assignment Descriptions

Consultation with a Research Librarian

After watching the video about using the library’s online services (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7zLLAEgJo>), schedule an appointment with one of the research librarians at Memorial Library to get help locating materials on your particular topic.

To earn credit for this assignment, schedule your consultation no later than September 15. Copy Dr. Armfield on the thank you email that you send to the research librarian after your consultation.

IRB Application/CITI Ethics Training

Prior to submitting an IRB proposal, researchers are required to participate in institutional training on ethical behaviors of research. This training, CITI Training, is then disbursed to Institutional Review Board (IRB) panels. You will complete this training and submit the certificate you receive upon completion.

Before collecting any data from humans, researchers at public universities must submit an application to the institution’s IRB. In terms that laypersons can understand, the application describes what you will do, why you will do it, who you will use as participants, how you will reach them, and how you will protect them from harm. In this assignment, you will develop one of your research plans into an IRB application. As you work, you will notice that the application requires information that would naturally fit into a research report’s methodology section.

Do not submit the application to the IRB. Your actual IRB application will require the signature of your capstone project advisor and will be submitted via an online form.

Annotated Bibliography

An annotation is "a note added by way of comment or explanation" (MerriamWebster.com). This assignment requires you to "write to understand" (Booth, Colomb, and Williams, 2008) what you are reading. The annotations will help you draw connections between what you're reading, remember what you've read, and quickly find important information later. Locate, read, and annotate 10-15 items related to your topic. Each annotation must include the following elements:

1. A full citation of the source formatted in either APA or Chicago style.
2. A summary of the source (if using an anthology, of the relevant chapter(s))
3. A reflection of the relevance of the source to your research question, including any quotations, statistics, or other elements that are particularly meaningful.

Note: At this point, you are not writing the research paper. You are gathering information about materials that you can use in the future to write a literature review or research paper.

Outline

Moving one step beyond the annotated bibliography, this assignment has you organize your secondary research into an outline. (You may include items that you have read in other classes.) What is the relationship between the items you have read? What pattern of organization makes sense to help the reader understand that relationship?

Research Proposal or Literature Review

In the final assignment, you will develop your outline into a research proposal/prospectus or a literature review for your capstone project using items from your annotated bibliography and other sources that you may have read during your plan of study.

D2L Discussions

Each week, I will post a set of prompts on the class's D2L discussion. While you should try to directly respond to a majority of the prompts I post, you should also engage with your classmates by responding to their posts. The interaction with classmates seems to be a continual source of frustration since many people wait until the last minute to participate. Only those who comment early will be able to receive full points for the discussions.

Your participation in the D2L discussion will be graded according to the level of response. I expect, as grad students, for you to engage the materials with a substantive response. A "substantive response" will include references to the text (paraphrase or quote, cited correctly and expanded on in subsequent text), a reference to a classmate's post (paraphrase or quote and expanded on in subsequent text), and/or details of your background and experiences relevant to the topic. A "substantive response" will also include a semblance of organization (topic sentences and a paragraph structure) and be free from major errors (spelling, grammar). A substantive response needn't be long, but it will reflect engagement in the text and the course.

Grade Scale

A 94-100%

A- 90-93%

B+ 87-89%

B	84-86%
B-	80-83%
C+	77-79%
C	74-76%
C-	70-73%
D+	67-69%
D	64-66%
D-	60-63%
F	59% & below

Assignment/Discussions Point/Percentage Allotment

Assignment	Points	Percentage
Consultation with Research Librarian	10	10%
IRB Application/CITI Ethics Training	10	10%
Annotated Bibliography	15	15%
Outline	15	15%
Research Proposal or Literature Review	25	25%
D2L Discussions	25	25%
Totals	100	100%

Course Schedule

TOP: Spinuzzi's *Topsight*

RD: Creswell's *Research Design, 4th Edition*

RPTC: Hughes' & Hayhoe's *A Research Primer for Technical Communication*

*Schedule may be altered as we progress. All assignments due in D2L by 11:59pm on due date. No emailed assignments will be accepted.

Week / Date	Topics	Readings/Videos	Assignments
1 Aug 24	Course Introduction		Read for Week 2

2 Aug 31	Why we need research in technical communication	<p>TOP: Chapter 1 & 4 RPTC: Chapter 1</p> <p>Spilka, Rachel. (2009). Practitioner research instruction: A neglected curricular area technical communication programs. <i>Journal of Business and Technical Communication</i>, 23(2): 216-237.</p> <p>Rude, C. D. (2009). Mapping the research questions in technical communication. <i>Journal of Business and Technical Communication</i>, 23(2): 174-215.</p>	<p>In class: Discuss readings</p>
3 Sept 7	Starting your research	<p>TOP: Chapter 2 RD: Chapter 1 & 5 RPTC: Chapters 2</p>	<p>In class: Discuss Readings</p> <p>D2L Discussion: Respond to exercises in TOP, pg. 30 and engage with 2 peers by Sept. 6.</p> <p>Schedule a consultation with a research librarian (due Sept. 20)</p>
4 Sept 14	Ethics in research	<p>TOP: Chapter 3 RD: pp. 92-99</p> <p>Office of Research Integrity “Introduction to the Responsible Conduct of Research” Part 1 (in D2L)</p> <p>College of Research & Graduate Studies “IRB—Institutional Review Board” (http://grad.mnsu.edu/irb/)</p>	<p>In class: Discuss Readings</p> <p>Complete CITI Program (Social & Behavioral Research - Basic Course) How to enroll (Due Sept. 27)</p> <p>Begin working on your IRB proposal (forms in D2L) (Due Sept. 27)</p>
5 Sept 21	Literature Reviews	<p>RPTC: Chapter 3 RD: Chapters 2 & 8</p> <p>Miller, C. (1979). A humanistic rationale for technical writing. <i>College English</i>, 40(6): 610-17.</p>	<p>In class: Discuss Readings</p> <p>DUE: Evidence of consultation with research librarian (Sept. 20)</p>
6 Sept 28	Using Theory	<p>RD: Chapter 3</p>	<p>In class: Discuss Reading</p> <p>DUE: IRB Proposal & CITI training certificate (Sept. 27)</p> <p>D2L Discussions: Choose 1 of the 4 writing exercises in RD, pg. 75 (Due Oct 4)</p>

7 Oct 5	What is Qualitative Research?	TOP: Chapter 5 & 6 RPTC: Chapters 5 & 9 RD: Chapter 9	No Connect Class. Dr. Armfield is at the AoIR conference. D2L Discussion: #2 in RD, pg. 212 (Due Oct 11) Begin working on your annotated bibliography (Due Oct 18)
8 Oct 12	Qualitative Methods	RPTC: Chapters 4 & 8 Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector's Field Guide: https://www.fhi360.org/resource/qualitative-research-methods-data-collectors-field-guide	In Class: Discuss Reading
9 Oct 19	What is Quantitative Research?	TOP: Chapters 7, 8, & 9 RPTC: Chapters 6 & 10 RD: Chapter 8 Fundamentals of Survey Research Methodology: https://www.mitre.org/publications/technical-papers/fundamentals-of-survey-research-methodology	In class: Discuss Readings D2L Discussion: #1 in RD, pg. 181 (Due Oct 25) DUE: Annotated Bibliography (Oct 18)
10 Oct 26	Mixed Methods Research	RD: Chapter 10	In class: Discuss Readings D2L Discussion: Choose one of the exercises in RD, pg. 239 (Due Nov 1) Begin working on your Outline (due Nov 8)
11 Nov 2	Designing your Research	TOP: Chapter 10 & 11 RD: Chapters 6 & 7	In class: Discuss Readings
12 Nov 9	Collecting Data	TOP: Chapters 12 & 14	In class: Discuss Reading DUE: Outline (Nov 8) Begin working on your Proposal/Literature Review (due Dec 6)
13 Nov 16	Analyzing Data	TOP: Chapters 22 & 23	In class:
14 Nov 23	Writing the Proposal/Literature Review	Writing a Research Proposal: http://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/researchproposal Literature Review (pay particular attention to the Getting Started tab):	No class: Thanksgiving Break

		http://guides.lib.umich.edu/c.php?g=283139&p=1886326 Detecting Common Mistakes & Considering Dilemmas in Responsible Authorship: http://ori.hhs.gov/education/products/niu_authorship/mistakes/index.htm	
15 Nov 30	Writing your Proposal/Literature Review	Work on your proposal/literature review	In class: Discussion of Proposal/Literature Review
16 Dec 7	Final Assessment	Course Evaluations	DUE: Final proposal/Literature Review (Dec 6)