

Technical Writing Course Policies

English 3764 @ Virginia Tech, Taught by Traci Gardner, Summer I 2022



Last updated May 28, 2022

I acknowledge the Tutelo/Monacan people, who are the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognize their continuing connection to the land, water, and air that Virginia Tech consumes. I pay respect to the Tutelo/Monacan Nations, and to their elders past, present, and emerging. To learn more, visit [the Monacan Nation website](#). You can also visit the [American Indian & Indigenous Community Center](#) in 122 Squires Student Center.

I also acknowledge the enslaved Black people who lived and worked on the former plantation lands upon which Virginia Tech stands. These families include the Fractions, McNortons, and Saunders, as well as others. Read more about these families in the *Virginia Tech Magazine* article "[Family Tree](#)."



If you have any questions about the course, please ask them in the [General Q&A Discussion Board in Canvas](#).

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Policies (listed alphabetically)



Absences & Missed Work

You need to participate in this course on a regular basis every day by turning in your projects and collaborating with others in the class. If something prevents you from turning in your work, let me know as soon as possible so that we can find a way for you to catch up.

If you miss work because of an illness, death in the family, or family emergency, see [information from the Dean of Students Office](#) for details on how to document the situation. *Please provide official documentation within one week of any situation if you can.*

If you have an issue that affects your ability to complete the course, you may qualify for Academic Relief. For personal medical issues, contact the [Schiffert Health Center](#), and for psychiatric or psychological issues, contact the [Cook Counseling Center](#).



About Your Teacher

I'm Traci Gardner, an instructor in the professional and technical writing program in the English Department. In the past, I worked at a small, educational software company in Austin, Texas, where I did technical writing, user support, and interface design. I did just about everything except coding, though I did learn to hack code a bit.

I also worked as a web developer and curriculum developer for a nonprofit, educational association (National Council of Teachers of English). I created and maintained flat-file and database-driven websites, wrote online and print content, and wrote blog posts and social media updates for the association.

I have a B.A. and an M.A. in English from Virginia Tech. I originally taught in the English Department from 1986 to 1994, before I set off for Austin. I returned to the English Department in the Fall of 2013. My research focuses on ways to use digital tools for writing and teaching.



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I may need help with this course. What do I do? Everyone needs special accommodations at some point because we all learn differently. I am happy to work with the [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\) staff](#) or directly with you to make sure that you have the support you need.

How do I document what will help me? To document the special accommodations that will help you the most, please contact [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) in 310 Lavery Hall ([map link](#), above the Turner Place Dining Center) as soon as possible to ensure that you have the resources you need to participate in the class. The procedures and forms you need are also available on the SSD website.

I am happy to work with you and the SSD staff to make sure that you have the support you need. Please let me know what you need during the first week of the term so that I can be sure you have the resources you need as soon as possible.

Also email me your documentation from the SSD office by the end of the first week of class if possible. If not possible, send the information as soon as you can. Because I am not on campus due to COVID-19, do not take your documentation to my office.

What if I do not have official documentation? That's okay too. I know that the official testing can be expensive and time-consuming. Send me [a private message in Canvas](#) that tells me what you need, and I will try to help.

I need extra time on projects. No problem. If you need more time on a project or need to complete work in a less distracting environment, take the time you need. Check [the late policy](#) for more details.

What course accessibility resources are available online?

- VT Accessibility Policy: <https://vt.edu/accessibility.html>
- Canvas: <https://community.canvaslms.com/t5/Canvas-Basics-Guide/What-are-the-Canvas-accessibility-standards/ta-p/1564>
- Kaltura: <https://corp.kaltura.com/products/video-accessibility/>
- Zoom: <https://zoom.us/accessibility>

What course resources are designed for accessibility?

- I test HTML content with [WebAIM's Web Accessibility Evaluation Tool \(WAVE\)](#).
- Most resources we use can be magnified on your computer screen if the font is too small.
- All the LinkedIn Learning videos we use have accompanying text transcripts.



- Images in Canvas have descriptive alt attributes (unless they are purely decorative).
- Links have title attributes if the page title differs from the linked text.
- Canvas is accessible by screen readers.

What course resources may be inaccessible? Student projects used as examples may not be fully accessible. For instance, there may not be captions or alt attributes for the images in student work.

Anonymous Use of Student Texts

The work that you and your classmates create in this course may be used anonymously to demonstrate revision strategies.

In the case where student texts are used to show a weakness or error, the presentation will also include examples of how to revise and strengthen the text. As the author of such a text, you will gain direct examples of how to change your draft.

When I use student work in this course, I follow these guidelines:

- Student work is always used anonymously.
- Anonymous texts are typically analyzed in one of two ways:
 - To demonstrate a weakness and then show how to revise.
 - To model a strength and show how to use similar strategies.
- Anonymous work will be changed as necessary to remove any personal or potentially identifying information.
- Several examples of student work may be combined to create one composite example when appropriate.

Backup

Save backups of all your work for this class. Maintain these backups in multiple places (your laptop, a flash drive, Google Docs, Dropbox, Box). Printed backups can also be useful.

Do not discard any files, notes, or other work until the term is over and you have received your course grade. Be sure that you maintain backups so that you can continue your work when you encounter computer problems.

If you need assistance with your computer, check with the [Customer Support Center \(4Help\)](#).





Canvas Policies

This course uses Canvas for all major resources. You will find all assignments and activities posted in Canvas, and you will submit all your work in Canvas.

- All assignments in Canvas have unlimited submissions until the end of the grace period. If you find an activity that does not give you unlimited submissions, email me and I will fix it.
- The end of the grace period for each activity is listed as the “available until” date in Canvas.
- The Grades tool in Canvas keeps track of the work you do. Work that you submit is marked either as 1 for Complete or as 0 for Incomplete. These numbers are a simple binary code. They do not bear any point value.



Communication Guidelines

We will use Canvas for class discussion and email-based office hours. Rather than emailing general questions to me, post your questions in the [General Q&A Discussion Board in Canvas](#) so that anyone who knows the answer can help you.

- General questions about logistics (including the course or assignments) should be posted to the [General Q&A Discussion Board in Canvas](#). This will guarantee you a faster response time over emailing me.
- I respond to questions as quickly as possible, but please be prepared for a 24- to 48-hour response time. I take weekends and holidays off.

For personal questions, send a private message in Canvas, using [the Inbox tool](#). Because Canvas messages are secure, they meet all [FERPA requirements](#) and protect your privacy.

We all work at different times. Email me or send me a message in Canvas whenever you have a question, and I will reply when I am able. Remember that you always have the grace period to give you more time, so you will rarely need to worry if I can’t reply immediately.

Normally, I am online from late afternoon through early morning hours, so look for responses from me during those hours. I’m not a morning person, and I usually take a two- or three-hour break each evening around 7:30 PM for family time.





Contact Info

Please feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or concerns.

- **Name:** Call me Traci or Ms. Gardner please.
- **Pronouns:** she, her, hers
- **Email:** tengrrl@vt.edu
- **Office:** 214 Shanks Hall (Because of COVID-19, I will limit my time in the office.)
- **Office Phone:** 540-231-6739 (Canvas Inbox is the best way to reach me.)
- **Office Hours:** My office hours are asynchronous, through Canvas and email.
- **Details of Contact:** I check email and Canvas messages several times a day, every day. I try to answer student messages within 24–48 hours on weekdays. I take a break from email on weekends and holidays.
- **Questions about Your Grade or Work:** For personal questions, send a private message in Canvas, using the [Inbox tool](#). Because Canvas messages are secure, they meet all [FERPA requirements](#) and protect your privacy. I only answer messages about grades and course work via Canvas for this reason.
- **COVID-19 Info:** I have had three doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. I still wear a face mask because I am at high risk for side effects for the virus. Because of breakthrough cases and variants, I prefer to be cautious.
- **Personal Info:** I'm straight, cisgender, and white. I have several disabilities, including being a person with diabetes who has mobility challenges as a result of a knee injury. I'm a lifetime Girl Scout. While I love LOLcats, I'm a dog person, specifically a poodle lover.





Course Expectations

This course is 100% virtual. We will never meet in a classroom. As a result, it is important that you understand how the course will be conducted and what will be expected of me as the teacher and of you as a student enrolled in it.



My Responsibilities in this Course

As your teacher, it is my responsibility to (among other things)

- Answer any questions you might have that are not covered by the textbook or another course reading.
- Provide links or page numbers to any questions answered in the textbook or in other course readings.
- Provide feedback to you about your work as promptly as possible.
- Inform you promptly of any alterations to the schedule, such as due date changes.



Your Responsibilities in this Course

To do well in this course, you must

- **Possess Junior-Level Writing Skills**
This is not a remedial course designed to assist you in the development of basic writing skills (which includes spelling, grammar, and punctuation skills). You are not expected to already know how to write workplace documents (like memos and reports). Since this is a 3000-level course however, I assume that you possess writing skills on the junior level, and I provide feedback on your work based on this assumption.
- **Be Aware of Due Dates/Times**
All assignments are submitted online in Canvas and are due by 11:59 pm (Eastern Time). You can, of course, upload your work earlier. I do not accept emailed course work since I can only grade your work in Canvas to ensure your [FERPA rights](#) are protected.
- **Read All Announcements in Canvas**
Announcements are the primary way I keep in touch with everyone in the course, so read each one completely. If you do not read the Announcements, you may miss information about activities and assignments that are due, changes in course work, or revisions to the class schedule. You are responsible for the information in the Announcements, so be sure that you read them.



- **Read the Textbook and Review Examples**

At the end of each chapter of our textbook, you'll find Writer's Checklists. You'll also find example documents in the textbook and on Canvas. Review them. Pay attention to them. Many of them are workplace-ready documents produced in this (or a similar) course.

- **Apply What You Are Learning**

Do your best to apply what you have read and what you have learned to your own work. Applying these lessons can help you as you produce and improve your projects.

- **Follow Assignment Instructions**

Each assignment provides you with a description of the work and the specifications, including the project format and expectations.

- **Conduct Yourself Professionally**

As a student at Virginia Tech, you are expected to adopt and follow the [Principles of Community](#). For this course, just as for one that meets in a classroom, you should be civil to other participants and to the instructor.

- **Conduct Yourself Honestly**

All work and participation in this course is governed by the [Undergraduate Honor System](#). In this course, you are expected to be honest and forthcoming as you assess your work, to follow all self-assessment guidelines fully, and to document any work that you borrow from others. All work that you submit in this course must be your own, original work.



Early Work Policy

All the work for the term is posted in Canvas. You can work ahead if you desire. There are some limitations to early work however:

- Check-In Conferences cannot be completed in advance. The goal of these activities is to update me each week and ask any questions. You can't guess your questions in advance.
- I will provide feedback to early work as I can; however, I give priority to the current work. If you have a specific question about a project you are working on early, send me an email and I'll help you out.



Honor Code

All work and participation in this course is governed by the [Undergraduate Honor System](#), following this official university policy.

The Undergraduate Honor Code pledge that each member of the university community agrees to abide by states:

“As a Hokie, I will conduct myself with honor and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the actions of those who do.”

Students enrolled in this course are responsible for working according to the Honor Code. A student who has doubts about how the Honor Code applies to any assignment is responsible for obtaining specific guidance from the course instructor before submitting the assignment for evaluation.

Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the University community from the requirements and expectations of the Honor Code. Academic integrity expectations are the same for online classes as they are for in person classes. All university policies and procedures apply in any Virginia Tech academic environment.

For additional information about the Honor Code, please visit the [Undergraduate Honor System page](#).

Incomplete Course Grade

My department's policy states, "Incompletes are for students who did their work during the semester but could not complete course requirements because of a problem or emergency at the end of the term."

As a result, I cannot offer Incompletes for anyone who fails to keep up during the term. If you find you have an impossible amount of work to complete by the end of the term, withdrawing from the course is likely the best solution.



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Late Policy & Grace Period

I accept late work on most of the work in this course. You don't need to ask in advance or explain why your work is late. Just take more time when you need it, as many times as you need it. Turn your work in when you can before the grace period ends.

Grace Period

The grace period covers most situations, whether a religious holiday, academic conflict, illness, or a personal issue. If you cannot meet a due date, use the grace period.

The grace period occurs between the due date and the last moment that you can submit work in the course. Canvas indicates the end of the grace period as the "available until" date, shown in the screenshot on the right.

If you turn in your work during the Grace Period, Canvas will mark the activity as *Late*. Don't worry about this late label. There is no grade penalty for work submitted during the grace period.

Due Dates and Grace Period, by Assignment Type

Most work in this course has a grace period, but there are exceptions. The length of the grace period depends upon the kind of activity (explained below).

Assignment Type	Open Grace Period	3-Day Grace Period	No Grace Period
Syllabus Review		✓	
Contact Info Form		✓	
Check-In Conferences		✓	
Weekly Activities	✓ *		
Full Draft Submissions	✓ *		
Optional Final Exam			✓ †

* Ends at 11:59 PM on Wednesday, June 29.

† Optional Final Exam must be submitted by 11:59 PM on Friday, July 1, 2022, so I can submit course grades on time. There are no make-ups or extensions unless approved by the Dean of Students.

Interruptions in Course Progress

In the case of extenuating circumstances, please let me know immediately. I understand that things happen. As long as you're honest and timely in letting me know, we can try to work something out.



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Learner Support

Please contact me with concerns or questions about special needs or considerations that fall outside of the services listed in this section. All information shared will be kept confidential. For complete information on student services at Virginia Tech, see the [Division for Student Affairs](#).



Primary Contacts for Mental or Physical Well-Being

- **Emergencies:** Dial 911. Subscribe to [campus alerts](#) Emergency Warning System.
- **Personal Counseling** (including help with drinking, drug abuse, mental health, stress, sexual assault recovery): Contact the Cook Counseling Center (240 McComas Hall) at 231-7473 or visit the [Cook Counseling Center](#) online.
- **Reporting sexual assault:** Dial 911, or call the Student Health Care Center at 231-7642, or contact the Women's Center (206 Washington Street) at 231-7806.
- **Health Care Appointments:** Call the Schiffert Health Center at 231-7642, or visit the [Health Care Website](#).
- **Legal Concerns:** Contact Student Legal Services at 231-4720 or visit the [services website](#).
- **Food Pantry:** [209 Manna Ministries](#) helps VT students in need. Email 209MannaVT@gmail.com with questions. You may also find help from the [Interfaith Food Pantry](#). Any student who faces challenges securing their food or housing and believes this may affect their performance in the course is urged to contact the [Dean of Students](#) for support.
- **More options:** Visit the Dean of Students page on [Basic Needs and Services](#).



Academic Support Services

If you require academic support, investigate the University's services. Service areas include:

- [Student Success Center](#)
- [Multicultural Academic Opportunities Program](#)
- [Student Athlete Academic Support Services](#)
- [University Academic Advising Center](#)
- [Office of Veterans' Services](#)

There are orientation services for [new graduate students](#) and for [new or transfer undergraduate students](#). For tutoring, visit the Student Success Center at Newman Library Suite 419, call the center at 231-5499 or visit their [website](#). For career counseling, visit Career Services in the Smith Career Center, call them at 231-6241 or refer to the [Career Services website](#). For study skills advice, visit [Cook Counseling Center](#) in 240 McComas Hall or call 231-7473.





Virginia Tech Official Accessibility Policy

Students will be provided access to educational materials, buildings, library, computer and classroom opportunities. Videos will have closed captioning. All lecture videos have audio. It is uncertain if the textbook or reading material outside of the textbook is offered in a braille version or on audio. Visually-impaired students may request that the instructor verbally describe the required figures and the images used in the video lectures. Students may request that any requirement to do a field delineation project, attend a field trip, and to lead Zoom sessions be waived, modified, or enabled. Review questions and exams may be presented in audio format upon request, and questions answered verbally by voice recording. Read more information in the university's [accessibility policy](#).



Accommodations for Special Needs

Any student who has been confirmed by the University as having special needs for learning should notify me in the first week of the course. The university provides [services for students with disabilities](#). If you are a student with disabilities and/or challenges, visit the [student services website](#) for course support.



Library Assistance

The library has [extensive help services](#), including services and guides for those [using the library through the Internet](#). There are several methods to [contact a librarian](#).



Technical Support

I cannot provide technical support. For requests for technical support for Canvas, use the help button at the end of the leftmost toolbar in Canvas. VT specific technology support can be directed to 4Help via the [Help Site](#), or by calling (540) 231-HELP (4357). You can also refer to [Zoom support](#) for help.



Writing Support

The [Writing Center](#)—located on the second floor of Newman Library—is for all writers. You can go if you have a draft, an outline, or just ideas. Bring your assignment description with you. You can make appointments online by setting up an account with [WOnline](#). In addition, multilingual or international students may be interested in their Conversation Groups. (Click on this option from the drop-down menu on the online appointment page.)





Official Course Description

English 3764: Technical Writing will enable you to gain an understanding of the theories, issues, and practices of technical communications you might encounter in the workplace, such as general correspondence, proposals, reports, and presentations.

From a foundation based on the principles of rhetoric, you will learn to analyze writing situations, consider the needs of your audience, assemble researched and original evidence, and design final documents that are user friendly and visually persuasive. By the time this course is over, you should be able to understand these documents and produce them with ease and confidence.



Official Course Objectives

Having successfully completed this course, students will be able to perform the technical writing tasks defined by the course learning objectives (CLO):

- Analyze the rhetorical situation and determine the appropriate audience or users of written communication, considering the needs of global audiences and people with disabilities. **[CLO 1]**
- Conduct research appropriate to workplace problem solving, such as literature review, evaluation of online resources, interview, and site inspection. **[CLO 2]**
- Interpret research findings with understanding of ethical and human implications. **[CLO 3]**
- Use conventions of various workplace genres, such as proposals, instructions, correspondence, reports, and slide decks, with understanding of how the genre conventions can be used as heuristics and as principles of arrangement. **[CLO 4]**
- Collaborate with classmates in planning, researching, writing, revising, and presenting information. **[CLO 5]**
- Apply principles of effective visual design for print and electronic presentation, including hierarchical, chronological, and spatial arrangements. **[CLO 6]**
- Identify and apply the principles of effective style in the composing of usable, reader-centered written communications. **[CLO 7]**



Principles of Community

This course adheres to the the [Virginia Tech Principles of Community](#):

- We affirm the inherent dignity and value of every person and strive to maintain a climate for work and learning based on mutual respect and understanding.
- We affirm the right of each person to express thoughts and opinions freely.
- We encourage open expression within a climate of civility, sensitivity, and mutual respect.
- We affirm the value of human diversity because it enriches our lives and the University. We acknowledge and respect our differences while affirming our common humanity.
- We reject all forms of prejudice and discrimination, including those based on age, color, disability, gender, national origin, political affiliation, race, religion, sexual orientation, and veteran status. We take individual and collective responsibility for helping to eliminate bias and discrimination and for increasing our own understanding of these issues through education, training, and interaction with others.
- We pledge our collective commitment to these principles in the spirit of the Virginia Tech motto of *Ut Prosim* (That I May Serve).

Privacy

Please be aware of these privacy policies:

- **Canvas:** <https://www.instructure.com/policies/privacy/>
- **Zoom:** <https://zoom.us/privacy>
- **FERPA:** Student educational records are protected by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). These rights apply to all students age 18 and above, and it may benefit you to know your FERPA rights so that you can best protect your own educational records. Please visit the [Office of the University Registrar's Privacy Page](#) for more information.

Program Assessment

The Department of English may use your written work in its assessment of its teaching and learning goals. In such cases, your name will be removed and your work assessed anonymously. Your work will not be shared with any individual outside of the department. It will be used strictly to help the department offer students the best possible academic experience.



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Religious Holidays & Events

If the due date for any work in the course coincides with a religious holiday that you celebrate, take the time to mark the holiday. The grace period should cover any time away from your work. You can contact me if we need to come up with a special plan for your holiday.



Technology

You need a working, reliable computer and Internet access that will allow the use of Canvas course site tools, Zoom, Kaltura, and any online resources provided. If you need assistance with your computer technology, check with the [Customer Support Center \(4Help\)](#).

You are not required to purchase any special software, but you will need access to a word processor and a slide show program. Microsoft Office products, namely Word and PowerPoint, or Google Drive products, specifically Docs and Slides, will fulfill these requirements.

As part of your online course experience, you can expect to utilize a variety of technologies:

- Communicate via Canvas Inbox, including sending attachments.
- Navigate the World Wide Web using a Web browser such as Chrome or Firefox.
- Use office applications such as Microsoft Office (or similar) to create documents.
- Be willing to learn how to communicate using a discussion board and upload assignments to a classroom Canvas site.
- Be comfortable uploading and downloading saved files.
- Have easy, reliable access to the Internet.
- Navigate Canvas, including using the Inbox component within Canvas.



Mobile Access Disclaimer

Though Canvas provides a mobile app which works well for the majority of course content, the course site is still best viewed via a desktop or laptop computer running a complete operating system, as opposed to a tablet or smartphone. Some interactive course elements may not be viewed via mobile devices, and it is certainly not recommended that you attempt to complete assignments or take graded quizzes or tests via mobile devices.



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