

## Theory and Research in Professional Communication

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**English 506 · TTh 12:40-2:00pm**

<http://eserver.org/506>

office hours: W 1:00-3:30, and by appt.

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### **Purposes and Objectives:**

This graduate course will study theoretical constructs and issues that inform workplace professional communication. Inherently a multi-disciplinary activity, professional communication draws on theories from fields as different as rhetoric and science, psychology and philosophy, sociology and linguistics. This term we will focus specifically on rhetoric, on the relationships between author, text and reader, and on philosophies of science and language as they apply to workplace practice. The purpose of this seminar is to explore relevant theories in sufficient depth and detail to do justice to their complexity, and, at the same time to examine their applicability to professional communication. Students will be expected to comprehend and challenge these theories on their own terms as well as to understand their value for the interpretation and transfer of information. Such understanding is crucial to intelligent decisions in professional practice; it allows the communicator to look beyond surface issues and see essential problems and possible solutions. Theoretical knowledge of the field distinguishes the professional from the practitioner.

The overarching objective of 506 is to show you "the ropes" as a newly participating member in the field, to introduce you to frameworks currently important to the discipline, and to help you join its ongoing conversation.

This semester, you will:

- analyze and discuss professional readings in the discipline
- engage in discussions of theory and practice with class members
- read and respond to case situations and materials based on reconstructions of actual occurrences in professional settings—academic and workplace
- participate in peer review of materials and manuscripts in-progress
- collaborate actively on a team project involving issues important to the theory and practice of professional communication
- write an article-length paper targeted toward a journal in the field

### **Course Plan**

Our approach will be to develop an understanding of the preeminent schools of theory that underlie contemporary American professional communication practice. One of the goals this term will be to evaluate each model for its adequacy in describing the communication process. By reading, comparing, contrasting and synthesizing the approaches of various theorists, students will over the term develop a theoretical methodology which will be elaborated in a final 'contribution' paper intended to contribute to current debates.

## Attendance

Because this class is based largely on class discussion of assigned readings, it is important that you attend class on a regular basis to keep up with our ongoing conversation. I understand that things come up during the semester, and therefore I allow three *unexcused* absences. Each absence beyond that will reduce your final grade significantly. More than six (6) absences during the semester will result in automatic failure.

## Bibliography

Required readings are available from the course website, in PDF form. Also, there will be a few photocopied handouts, as occasioned by class discussions.

## Meeting Deadlines

Meeting deadlines is a professional responsibility. Therefore, all written assignments must be submitted on the due date. You can receive an extension only if you meet two conditions: 1) contact me before the date on which the assignment is due to explain why you need an extension, and receive written (or e-mail) approval from me. Then 2) submit the assignment within one week after the scheduled due date. Using these procedures, you may submit one late assignment during the term without harming your grade.

## Religious Observance

In accordance with university policy, I have worked to avoid having graded assignments due on major religious holidays, but given the variety of such observances, it is often impossible to avoid all conflicts. If you have a conflict between a religious holiday and an assignment, please contact me in advance so that we can make appropriate arrangements.

## Grading

Participation will be graded not only on the quantity of contributions to in-class discussion but also to its quality: comments should attempt to build upon previous speakers' comments or topics whenever possible.

The papers and exam will be graded on a scale from 0-4. The three major assignments: the short paper, mid-term exam and final research paper, will be judged in one-tenth of a point increments, as follows:

4	Top-notch, excellent, extraordinary accomplishment. Really strong conception and execution. Minor tinkering at most needed to make this comparable to professional-quality work.
3	Very strong work. Everything in order, well conceived and well executed. Minor editing problems at most.
	NOTE: The differences between a 3 and a 4 have to do with a combination of originality, excellence, thoroughness, and attention to detail in execution. Although 4 grades may include comments on sentence level editing, doing this type of editing would not be sufficient to raise a 3 to a 4.

2	Average, but missing some components. No glaring conceptual or execution problems, but nothing particularly outstanding in either department. Topic or problem may be somewhat limited, or execution may be less than optimal.
1	Acceptable, but below average work. Either conception, execution or both definitely need to be improved.
0	Not of acceptable quality.

Short writing assignments and supporting work for main assignments will be graded on a  $\checkmark$ ,  $\checkmark+$ , and  $\checkmark-$  basis, which will equate to a 3, 4 and 2 respectively.

Your final grade for the course will be determined using the following breakdown:

Participation	20 %
Weekly Analysis of Readings	10 %
First Paper	20 %
Mid-Term Exam	25 %
Final Paper	25 %
	100 %

### **Appointments, Conferences and Communication**

I will be glad to meet you during scheduled office hours, before or after class, or by appointment to discuss your work in the course and any questions and concerns you may have in relation to it. I'm also available to answer questions via e-mail or phone. An e-mail message is often the easiest way to be sure you reach me or that I will be in the office when you drop by. You can get in touch with me in a number of ways:

- come to office hours: Ross 433
- send me e-mail: gsauer@iastate.edu
- call me at my office: (515) 294-3085
- leave a note in my English Department mailbox (Ross 206)
- call me at my cell phone: (515) 441-1461

If you have an important question or problem during the evening, or on a weekend, particularly when an assignment is due, I don't mind your calling me on my cell phone as long as you call between 9:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m. and not during dinner (5:00 to 7:00 p).

### **Accountability and Plagiarism**

In your academic and professional career, you will often draw on work done by others. You are expected to do so, but you are always required to give due credit to the person(s) whose words, thoughts, ideas or phrases you are using. Presenting someone else's work as your own is never acceptable. Any assignment including non-documented material from another source will receive a failing grade. A second instance will mean failure in the course and may result in further disciplinary action.

**Week I: January 11/13**

**Course Introduction: The Professional View of Technical Communication**

Introduction to the course: themes and topics.

Discussion of the history of TC and its relationship to theory.

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Orwell, George [Eric Blair]. 'Politics and the English Language.' 1946. (website)

Shannon, Claude and Warren Weaver. Selections from *The Mathematical Theory of Communications*. 1949. (website)

**Week II: January 18/20**

**Cold War Theories of Technical Communication**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Kuhn, Thomas S. Selections from *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 1962. (website)

Ong, Walter J, S.J. 'The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction.' 1975. (website)

Whitburn, Merill, et al. 'The Plain Style in Scientific and Technical Writing.' 1978. (website)

Gibson, Walker. 'Authors, Speakers, Readers, and Mock Readers.' 1950. (website)

**Week III: January 25/27**

**Views of Writers (and their Implications)/Views of Audience (and their Implications)**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Miller, Carolyn R. 'A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing.' 1979. (website)

Coney, Mary B. 'Contemporary Views of Audience: A Rhetorical Perspective.' 1987. (website)

Goodwin, David. 'Emplotting the Reader: Motivation and Technical Documentation.' 1991. (website)

**Week IV: February 1/3**

**Technical Writing and Discourse Communities**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Lanham, Richard. *Revising Business Prose*. 1984. (website: streaming video)

Fish, Stanley. Selections from *Doing What Comes Naturally*. 'Change.' 1989. (website)

Zappen, James P. 'The Discourse Community in Scientific and Technical Communication.' 1989. (website)

**Week V: February 8/10**

**Disciplinary: The Making of Knowledge, Representation, and Nature of Truth**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Charney, Davida. 'Empiricism is not a Four-Letter Word.' 1996. (handout)

Moore, Patrick. 'Instrumental Discourse is as Humanistic as Rhetoric.' (and subsequent commentary) 1996. (website)

Zappen, James P. 'Rhetoric and Technical Communication: An Argument for Historical and Political Pluralism.' 1987. (website)

**Week VI: February 15/17**

**Theories of Writing**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Redish, Janice. 'Understanding Readers.' 1993. (website)

First paper due.

Exam Preparation Session.

**Week VII: February 22/24**

**Theories of Writing**

Mid-Term Exam

Introduction to and discussion of the final paper assignment.

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Coney, Mary B. 'Technical Readers and Their Rhetorical Roles.' 1992. (website)

Bazerman, Charles. 'Writing Well, Scientifically and Rhetorically.' 1988. (website)

Cooper, Marilyn and Michael Holzman. Selections from *Writing as Social Action*. ('Introduction' and 'The Ecology of Writing'). 1986. (website)

**Week VIII: March 1/3**

**1980s Scientific Rhetorical Theory**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Bazerman, Charles. 'Writing Well, Scientifically and Rhetorically.' 1988. (website)

Cooper, Marilyn and Michael Holzman. Selections from *Writing as Social Action*. ('Introduction' and 'The Ecology of Writing'). 1986. (website)

Nelkin, Dorothy. 'The Public Relations of Science.' 1987. (website)

**Week IX: March 8/10**  
**Postmodern Responses**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Lyotard, Jean-François. Selections from *The Postmodern Condition*. 1984. (website)  
Bolter, Jay David and Richard Grusin. Selections from *Remediation: 'Immediacy, Hypermediacy and Remediation.'* 1999. (website)

**Week X: Spring Break**

No assignments due.

**Week XI: March 22/24**  
**Rhetoric Revisited**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Miller, Carolyn R. 'Technology as A Form of Consciousness.' (website)  
Farkas, David K. 'The Logical and Rhetorical Construction of Procedural Discourse.' 1999. (website)

*FURTHER READINGS:*

Coney, Mary B. 'Designing (for) Ourselves and (for) Others.' 2000. (website: streaming audio)

**Week XII: March 29/31**  
**Genre and Disciplinarity**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

Bawarshi, Anis. "The Genre Function." *College English* 62 (January 2000): 335-360.  
Fleming, David. "Rhetoric as a Course of Study." *College English* 61 (Nov. 1998): 169-191. (website)  
Bakhtin, M.M. "The Problem of Speech Genres," in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Trans. Vern W. McGee. Eds. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986. 60-102.

**Week XIII:  
Institutional Contexts**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

- Porter, James E., Patricia Sullivan, Stuart Blythe, Jeffrey T. Grabill, and Libby Miles.  
"Institutional Critique: A Rhetorical Methodology for Change." CCC 51:4 (June 2000): 610-641. (website)
- Aronowitz, Stanley. Selections from *The Knowledge Factory: Dismantling the Corporate University and Creating True Higher Learning*. Boston: Beacon P, 2000. (website)

**Week XIV:  
Women, Increasingly Important in Workplace Communication**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

- Flynn, Elizabeth. *Feminism Beyond Modernism*. Carbondale: SIUP, 2002. HQ1190 F593 2002 ISBN 0809324342
- Selections from Faludi, Susan. *Backlash: The Undeclared War on American Women*.
- Fraser, Nancy. *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*. U Minnesota P, 1989. HM24 F732 0-8166-1777-5
- Lay, Mary M. "The Value of Gender Studies to Professional Communication Research." JBTC 8 (Jan. 1994): 58-90.

**Week XV:  
Nonacademic Praxis**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

- Selections from Bourdieu, Pierre. *Distinction*. (website)
- Blyler, Nancy. "Research in Professional Communication: A Post-Process Perspective." *Post-Process Theory*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1999. 65-79. (website)

**Week XVI:  
Final Review**

*ASSIGNED READINGS:*

None. Discussion and collaborative editing/revision.

**Week XVII: Finals Week**

Final papers due.

# Course Schedule

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
<b>1</b>	Jan. 11 <sup>th</sup> Introductions; Syllabus Review  <b>Next Class:</b> Orwell 1946 (PDF) Shannon and Weaver 1949 (PDF)	Jan. 13 <sup>th</sup> Discussion of the history of TC and its relationship to theory  <b>Next Week:</b> Kuhn (PDF) Whitburn et al. (PDF)
<b>2</b>	Jan. 18 <sup>th</sup> Legal Writing, Cold War Theories of Professional Communication  <b>Next Class:</b> Gibson 1950 (PDF)	Jan. 20 <sup>th</sup> Views of Writers (and their Implications)/Views of Audience (and their Implications)  <b>Next Week:</b> Miller 1979 (PDF)
<b>3</b>	Jan. 25 <sup>th</sup> Discourse Communities I  <b>Next Class:</b> Fish 1989 (PDF) Zappen 1989 (PDF)	<b>Jan. 27<sup>th</sup></b> Discourse Communities II: Empiricism  <b>Next Week:</b> Ong 1975 (PDF)
<b>4</b>	Feb. 1 <sup>st</sup> Reader-Response Rhetorics I  <b>Next Class:</b> Goodwin 1991 (PDF)	Feb. 3 <sup>rd</sup> Reader-Response Rhetorics II  <b>Next Week:</b> Charney 1996 (PDF) Moore 1996 (PDF)
<b>5</b>	Feb. 8 <sup>th</sup> 90s Empiricism I  <b>Next Class:</b> Redish 1993 (PDF)	<b>Feb. 10<sup>th</sup></b> 90s Empiricism II  <b>Next Week:</b> Bazerman 1988 (PDF)

Week	Tuesday	Thursday
<b>6</b>	Feb. 15th First Paper Due  <b>Next Class:</b> Brown, pp. 1-34	Feb. 17th <i>Rhetorical Analysis Due</i> <b>Limits of Information</b>  <b>Next Week:</b> Brown, pp. 35-90
<b>7</b>	Feb. 22nd Virtual Agency Telecommuting  <b>Next Class:</b> Brown, pp. 91- 172	Feb. 24th Social Practice Information and Learning  <b>Next Week:</b> Brown, pp. 173 - 205
<b>8</b>	March 1st Organizational Knowledge Computer Networks Persistence of Print  <b>Next Class:</b> Brown, pp. 207 - 252	March 3rd Social Aspects of Learning Distance Education Beyond Information  <b>Next Week:</b> No Readings Research proposals due
<b>9</b>	March 8th <i>Research proposals due</i> In-class technobiographies  <b>Next Class:</b> Stoll, pp. 1-52 Winner's web site	March 10th <b>Education and Computer Literacy</b>  After Break: Stoll, pp. 53-140
<b>10</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>	
<b>11</b>	March 22nd Technomyth Busting  <b>Next Class:</b> Stoll, pp. 141-214	March 24th More Contrariness  <b>Next Week:</b> Lane, pp. 1-78
<b>12</b>	March 29th Surveillance, Jobs, & Identity  <b>Next Class:</b> Lane, pp. 79-124	March 31st Government and Employers  <b>Next Week:</b> Lane, pp. 127-210

Week	Monday	Wednesday
<b>13</b>	April 5th Technology, Biology, & Privacy  <b>Next Class:</b> Lane, pp. 213-278	April 7th <b>Privacy &amp; Employee's Rights</b>  <b>Next Class:</b> No Reading Work on Research Papers
<b>14</b>	April 12th <i>In-class workshop on papers</i>  <b>Next Class:</b> Lessing, pp. 1-48	April 14th <b>Digital public commons</b> Technology layers  <b>Next Week:</b> Lessing, pp. 49-142
<b>15</b>	April 19th <b>History of Copyright            Layers &amp; Distribution</b>  <b>Next Class:</b> Lessing, pp. 143-217	April 21st Copyright and Digital Controls  <b>Next Week:</b> Lessing, pp. 218-268
<b>16</b>	April 26th Alternatives and the Future of Ideas  <b>Next Class:</b> Bring in draft of research paper	April 28th <b>In-class peer response            and revision workshop</b>
<b>17</b>	<b>Finals Week</b> Research paper due during final exam period: To Be Announced	