

# ENGL 308-0001: Technical Writing

## Northern Illinois University

*3 credit hours*  
*Fall 2024*

**Meeting days/times/room:**  
MW 11:00 AM – 12:15 PM  
Reavis Hall 209

**Instructor:**  
Professor Karrie Kaiser Lee  
(she / her)  
[kkaiserlee@NIU.edu](mailto:kkaiserlee@NIU.edu)

**Office:** Zulauf Hall 1007  
**In-person office hours:**  
Mondays 12:30-1:30 and by  
appointment.



**Academic catalog course description:** “Principles and strategies for planning, writing, and revising technical documents common in government, business, and industry (e.g., manuals, proposals, procedures, newsletters, brochures, specifications, memoranda, and formal reports). Topics include analysis of audience and purpose, simplifying complex information, document design, and project management.”

### Course Objectives

- Learn basic principles of successful professional, business, and technical communication.
- Acquire basic document design skills.
- Understand various genres of professional communication (such as memos, reports) and when and how to adapt these genres for different audiences and situations.
- Gain experience collaborating on workplace writing projects; examples of this include providing feedback on the work of others and completing group assignments.
- Practice successful professional workplace habits and behaviors (such as email etiquette, good time management).

## Learning Outcomes

**Writing:** Students will compose documents representing a variety of workplace genres (such as memos, email, reports, resumes).

**Textual analysis:** Students will conduct textual analyses on a variety of technical documents.

**Professional competence:** As students study and compose a variety of technical documents, they will be working towards attaining a level of competency sufficient for productive employment and advanced study.

## Course assessment

There are 1000 points available for the semester:

- **Employment / Internship Project 20% of final grade (200 points):**
  - Internship / job ad analysis 66.6 points
  - polished resume draft 66.6 points
  - project reflection 66.6 points
  
- **Recommendation Report Project, a group project investigating the potential impact of AI in your chosen field of study(accounting, the arts, nursing, engineering, etc.) 20% of final grade (200 points):**
  - group contract 40 points
  - group proposal 40 points
  - group draft of report 20 points
  - group presentation 40 points
  - group polished draft of report 60 points
  
- **Instructions Project – you will compose paper-based and multimedia instructions 25% of final grade (250 points):**
  - task proposal memo 83.3 points
  - polished draft, paper based instructions 83.3 points
  - multimedia instructions 83.3 points
  
- **Technical Description 5% of final grade (50 points):**
  - polished draft, Technical description 50 points
  
- **Smaller assignments, like homework, discussion boards, quizzes, reflections, first drafts of major projects, 30% of final grade (300 points):**
  - analyze a technical document 42.8 points
  - memos, letters, email quiz 42.8 points
  - resume draft 42.8 points
  - discussion board - group formation 42.8 points
  - recommendation report - group evaluation memo 42.8 points
  - instructions paper-based draft 42.8 points
  - technical description draft 42.8 points
  - End of semester reflection memo 42.8 points

**Extra credit:** Any extra credit opportunities will be available for everyone in the entire class, and will be announced in class and on Blackboard. There are no opportunities for extra credit on an individual basis.

## **Grading scale and criteria**

A 93% and 100%

A- 90% and less than 93%

B+ 87% and less than 90%

B 83% and less than 87%

B-80% and less than 83%

C+ 77% and less than 80%

C 73% and less than 77%

C-70% and less than 73%

D 60% and less than 70%

F 0% and less than 60%

Grades for projects are calculated on the same scale.

Any grade decimal numbers from .5 to .9 will be rounded up to the next whole number. Decimal numbers from .1 to .4 will remain at that whole number. For example, 82.2 would be a B-; a grade of 82.6 would be an A.

You will be provided a detailed description of each major project which will include specific evaluation criteria. Here are some general guidelines for grading criteria:

**A work** – outstanding; typically free of major grammatical errors (as is expected in workplace documents); closely follows concepts discussed in class for effective professional communication. Could function well in workplace environments.

**B work** – very good; may contain one or two grammatical errors; overlooks one concept for effective professional communication. Would function in workplace environments.

**C work** – a few errors in grammar / spelling / mechanics that interfere with readers' understanding of the document, and/or tone / word choice is not appropriate for the document; as a result, writing may not function in most workplace environments.

**D work** – significant errors in grammar / spelling / mechanics / tone; does not take assignment seriously; does not follow any concepts of effective communication for any environment. Writing is inappropriate for the workplace.

**F work** – plagiarized or not submitted.

## Course Resources

Required readings will be provided or linked to on our course's Blackboard site.

## Professor Kaiser Lee's Course Policies for ENGL 308

**Attendance and punctuality:** Use this class to practice good workplace habits and plan on coming to every class session. This will serve you well in case you do encounter those unavoidable events – for example, illness, car trouble, or other emergencies – that might prevent you from attending class at some point in the semester. **Regular attendance and participation in class activities is expected and is crucial to passing this course. Students who miss more than four classes tend to fall behind and earn below-average grades.**

You may miss up to four classes with no penalty. (NIU athletes need to use these four absences for any away game situations.) There are no excused vs. unexcused absences. You don't have to explain why you were absent, so don't feel obligated to send an email explaining your absence.

If you do miss a class, you are still responsible for catching up on the lessons and information covered while you were away. You can do so by reviewing our Blackboard site, talking to a fellow class member before or after class, or stopping by during office hours with specific questions about the material. Do not send an email that just asks “did I miss anything?” (we will discuss why that is typically a weak communication move during Week 2.)

Why is attending class important? In-class activities and discussion are designed to help you with class projects. [Visit this page for more information on class attendance and participation hints.](#)

Do what you have to to be in your seat when class begins. This is excellent practice for the workplace, where punctuality is expected. I won't shame you if you come in late (better late than not at all, right?). A pattern of consistently arriving late is a bad habit.

**Late work, Make-up work:** It is vital for professional and technical writers to meet deadlines. Get ready for the workplace by taking project due dates seriously. If you're struggling with an assignment, it's better to turn in *something* by the due date to show you are trying and to let me know where you need help. Once an assignment is closed / unavailable, you will need to contact me to see if work can be made up for a reduced grade. Regular, consistent participation in class and engagement in course material throughout the semester is a requirement to pass.

**Extra credit:** Any extra credit opportunities will be announced in class. Extra credit cannot be arranged on an individual basis.

**Laptops:** You are encouraged to bring your laptops or tablets to class, especially on days we are working on projects. You may use your smart phones for this work, but they are often difficult to write with extensively.

**Smart Phones:** I am not outlawing the presence of smart phones because I want you to develop positive work habits alongside these devices. As you may have noted, I want you to think of our classroom as a professional environment. In the workplace, you would set your phone to vibrate or silent; you might use your smart phone to look up something related to a discussion you're having with coworkers about a project, but you would not start texting during an important meeting while your supervisor is making a presentation. I will point out when people are neglecting classwork in favor of electronic distractions. If the presence of these devices proves to be too much of a distraction, this policy may be revisited.

#### **Emailing your instructor**

- You can always email me directly (kkaiserlee@NIU.edu) without going through Blackboard. Keep this in mind if you can't access Blackboard or your SXU email.
- When you email me, please include a helpful subject line ("Question about ENGL308 employment project," not "question").
- The subject line should always include the course name/number as I teach multiple courses.
- Please identify yourself in your email as I have close to 100 students each semester.
- If you are writing to set up a meeting time outside of office hours, offer some times that you are available in your message.
- I discuss email etiquette early in the semester and I expect all emails to me will follow the lessons learned in class.

**TL; DR – Treat this class as you would a workplace. Do what you have to so that you attend every class session, and turn in your work, on time.**

**Use of AI in this class:** We will actually be studying the impact of AI as part of one of our major projects, so there likely will be times in this class when you need to engage with it.

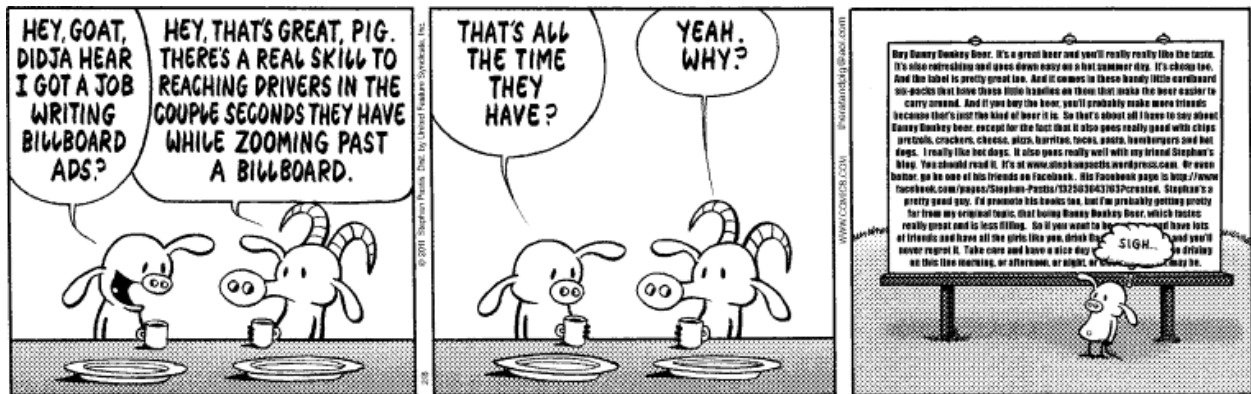
This is a writing class, designed to improve students' writing skills; the use of advanced automated tools (artificial intelligence or machine learning tools like ChatGPT or Dall-E 2) on assignments is counter to these aims and prohibited for use for the following:

- Writing entire documents, papers, sentences, or paragraphs.
- Misrepresenting an analysis of a document as one's own ideas.

- Impersonating you in classroom contexts, such as by using the tool to compose discussion board prompts assigned to you or content that you put into an online chat.
- Completing group work that your group has assigned to you, unless it is explicitly permitted in the assignment and mutually agreed upon that you may utilize the tool.

I may leave feedback on your writing that says something like, “this seems like it was written by an AI”. Please don’t take that as an accusation or that you are in danger of failing. It’s a chance for us to talk about what AI-generated writing sounds like vs. how humans use writing as one of the earliest tools we invented.

For more details, please see the separate document, “Prof Kaiser Lee’s AI Use Policy,” a separate document posted to our Blackboard site.



"Pearls Before Swine" comic by Stephan Pastis. Pig learns how the rhetorical situation works on billboards.

## Course Schedule

**Course Schedule Subject to Change:** Every attempt is made to provide an accurate overview of the course and its requirements in this syllabus. However, certain circumstances may make it necessary for me to modify the syllabus during the semester. I will announce any change to the syllabus as early as possible so that you can adjust your schedule.

Your health and safety are my number one priority. Please contact me if your physical health and/or mental wellbeing or other circumstances affect your ability to participate in this course. You never need to go into detail; just let me know you are having problems with attendance or need a due date extended, and we can go from there. I want to help you succeed in achieving your learning goals.

**Week 1 August 26 – 30**

- **M 8/26:** Ice-breakers (will try my best to make sure they are not cringe); technical / business / technical writing / communication: what's in a word? Complete information form for Prof KL.

**Homework:** review the syllabus and all related course information posted in Blackboard.

- **W 8/28:** The qualities of successful technical writing, and analysis of some examples.

**Homework:** Find an example of technical writing, and create a 3-5 slide presentation using Google Slides / Keynote / Powerpoint analyzing it. Due before class starts Wednesday.

**Week 2 September 2 – 6**

- **M 9/2:** No class – Labor Day
- **W 9/4:** Review of homework; intro to some common workplace genres.

**Homework:** review materials on common workplace genres and complete a short answer quiz. Review material on Employment / Internship Project.

**Week 3 September 9 – 13**

- **M 9/9:** Start of Employment / Internship Project; analyzing internship and job ads.

**Homework:** locate an appropriate internship or job ad for our project, and complete your analysis of it using the provided form. Your internship/job must be approved for the project.

- **W 9/11:** Resumes part 1: Making the document skimmable and scannable.

**Homework:** Complete readings assigned on resumes(design, layout, overall readability, keywords); find another internship or job if need be.

**Week 4 September 16 – 20**

- **M 9/16:** Resumes part 2: Writing good resume entries; whole-class critique of resume examples to prepare for resume workshop.

**Homework:** Complete assigned readings and a draft of your resume; submit the draft to Blackboard and bring at least two printed copies to class Wednesday.

- **W 9/18:** Resume workshop in class.

**Homework:** Begin refining and revising your resume draft.

**Week 5 September 23 – 27**

- **M 9/23:** TBA (resume work) [Writing day?]
- **W 9/25:** Career Services presentation

**Homework:** Employment / Internship Project and reflection due at the end of this week.

**Week 6 September 30 – October 4**

- **M 9/30:** Start of Recommendation Report Project; discussion – why do group projects tend to suck? How can we avoid that? Some online / digital group collaboration tools.

**Homework:** Review Rec Report assignment description; begin forming groups via discussion board.

- **W 10/2:** Finalize group formation; primary and secondary research refresher; project management

**Homework:** Groups complete group contracts and begin work on proposals

**Week 7      October 7 – 11**

- M 10/7: Contents and organization of a report; some examples; instructor meets with groups to review contracts and discuss proposals

**Homework:** Revise contracts if needed; finish proposals

- W 10/9: Document Design; possibly time in class for group work; proposals due soon!

**Homework:** Complete and submit proposals and respond to instructor concerns if needed.

**Week 8      October 14 – 18**

- M 10/14: Presentations, or, why Power Point sucks

**Homework:** Continue gathering data for your reports.

- W 10/16: TBA

**Homework:** continue gathering data for your reports.

**Week 9      October 21 – 25**

- M 10/21: Another look at report drafting and organization

**Homework:** First draft of reports are due before the start of class Wednesday

- W 10/23: Groups meet with instructor to review report drafts and discuss presentations.

**Homework:** Revise report drafts and complete presentation materials.

**Week 10      October 28 – November 1**

- M 10/28: Group presentations

- W 10/30: Group presentations

**Homework:** Finished draft of report due, along with individual group evaluation.

**Week 11      November 4 – 8**

- M 11/4: Start of Instructions Project; good and not-so-good tasks for this assignment.

**Homework:** Review Instructions Project description and begin considering your chosen task for your project.

- W 11/6: Breaking a task down into steps; a review of a draft of instructions.

**Homework:** Instructions Task Proposal memo due.

**Week 12      November 11 – 15**

- M 11/11: Document design refresher; taking the task into consideration when designing paper-based instructions.

**Homework:** Review instructor's feedback on task proposal and revise proposal if needed. Begin writing paper-based instructions.

- W 11/13: Multimedia instructions – how to use PowerPoint to make a video; Tik-Tok's impact on how-to videos.

**Homework:** finish and submit draft of paper-based instructions.

**Week 13      November 18 – 22**

- M 11/18: Technical descriptions

**Homework:** complete assigned readings on and begin writing draft of technical description



- W 11/20: A critique of a technical description draft.

**Homework:** Continue work on instructions and technical description projects; complete a draft of your technical description project, submit to Blackboard and bring at least two paper copies to class Monday.

**Week 14 November 25 – 29**

- M 11/25: Workshop drafts of technical descriptions.
- W 11/27: No class – Thanksgiving break

**Homework:** Revise drafts of paper-based instructions and technical descriptions and begin / continue work on video instructions.

**Week 15 December 2 – 6**

- M 12/2: Semester review fun and games.

**Homework:** Keep working on your projects!

- W 12/4: Meet with instructor on projects.

Technical description project due at the end of this week. Complete instructor evaluation by this week.

**Finals Week – December 9 – 14.**

**Classes do not meet. Finished draft of paper-based instructions and multimedia instructions due this week.**