

Teaching Business and Technical Writing at UNLV

Purpose: This document provides information to prospective and current teachers and other interested parties on the policies and procedures for teaching business or technical writing in the Department of English at the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

The Department of English offers over 60 sections of Eng. 407A, Business Writing each year (including fall, spring, and summer sessions). The department also offers ~10 sections of Eng. 407B, Technical Writing annually. One-third of these courses are taught via Distance Education.

Most of the students enrolled in Business Writing are junior and senior business majors taking the course as a requirement. Other majors include hotel administration, English, communications, and education. Majors as diverse as architecture and nursing are required to take technical writing. Other majors who elect to take Technical Writing include engineering, science, and English.

The business and technical writing curriculum takes a socio-rhetorical approach that emphasizes writing in context and, following the research of Dias et al.,¹ aims to move students through a continuum of writing experiences ranging from less contextualized, hypothetical workplace simulations to more situated, more authentic client-based projects. Students learn principles of effective workplace writing by completing a series of problem-based writing tasks, including such assignments as the following:

- Write a business memo to the teacher about the student's background
- Write a solution to a realistic workplace problem (called a case study)
- Prepare a professional quality presentation (writing is used to script the presentation content and design a PowerPoint slideshow)
- Conduct research and write a report on a problem posed by a real organization

All sections of business and technical writing employ research-proven best practices for teaching writing at the post-secondary level.² All sections use student-centered, process-based methods of writing instruction. All non-Distance Education sections are offered in computer classrooms, and most sections use a Web-based textbook. All courses use a computer-based format because the Internet and other electronic modes of communication, such as e-mail and word processing software, have become an inseparable part of workplace communication.

Starting in the spring of 2004, the business writing program has also featured a group report writing contest each fall and spring semester that provides monetary awards for up to four teams of students and each team's instructor. Funds for the award are donated by Kendall/Hunt Publishing Co.

¹ Dias, Patrick, Aviva Freedman, Peter Medway, and Anthony Paré. *Worlds Apart: Acting and Writing in Academic and Workplace Contexts*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1999.

² See the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing" <<http://www.ncte.org/groups/cccc/positions/107680.htm>> and the CCCC "Statement on Teaching, Learning, and Assessing Writing in Digital Environments" <<http://www.ncte.org/groups/cccc/positions/115775.htm>>.

Benefits of Teaching Business or Technical Writing

- Class size limited to 24 students
- Students tend to be more cognitively and emotionally mature than students in lower-division courses
- Students generally understand that the courses will enhance their career skills and thus tend to be more motivated
- Teachers develop skills in teaching in a computer-assisted environment and using Internet-based teaching tools, which makes them more marketable if they choose to pursue a teaching career
- Teachers expand their knowledge of principles for effective workplace writing, which makes them more marketable if they choose to pursue freelance or full-time work in industry

Qualifications for Teaching Business or Technical Writing

GA

- Currently enrolled in MA or PhD English program
- Completed Eng. 791
- Record of teaching effectiveness at lower division
- Prior experience teaching in a computer-assisted environment desirable but not required
- Prior business or technical writing experience desirable but not required
- Willingness to adhere to standard curriculum
- Willingness to participate in program activities (e.g., preliminary training, pre-semester staff meetings, teacher and student assessment, etc.)

PTI

- Minimum MA in English or related area required
- Record of teaching effectiveness
- Prior business or technical writing experience required
- Experience teaching in a computer-assisted environment desirable but not required
- Willingness to adhere to standard curriculum
- Willingness to participate in program activities (e.g., preliminary training, pre-semester staff meetings, teacher and student assessment, etc.)

Staffing Policies

Teachers who have never taught business or technical writing before are generally

- Recruited in the spring to teach in the fall semester
- Because of the challenges of teaching in the five-week summer term, teachers new to business or technical writing do not teach their first time during a summer session

- Limited to one section the first semester teaching
- Expected to participate in a pre-semester orientation and weekly or bi-weekly follow up sessions that last until the teacher feels comfortable with the curriculum and technology, and no longer desires such sessions

Teachers who have taught business or technical writing before are generally

- Limited to no more than two sections per semester, unless vacancies are needed to be filled, in which case teachers are limited to no more than four sections per semester

Scheduling of business and writing sections is handled by the Director of Professional Writing. Most all other staffing concerns, such as contracts, Marlock key requests, office assignments, and other administrative issues, are coordinated by the Composition Office (Phone #54186).

Distance Education Staffing

Teaching writing-intensive, studio-based courses (i.e., hands-on learning) via distance format requires not only familiarity with the goals and methods of either the business or technical writing curriculum but also (1) familiarity with basic methods and technologies for delivering effective distance learning experiences and (2) knowledge and skill in adapting process-based writing pedagogies to methods suitable for effective distance learning.

Therefore, teachers for Distance Education sections of business and technical writing are recruited by the Director of Professional Writing based on their prior record of teaching effectiveness and demonstrated aptitude for teaching with technology. Because it takes several semesters to develop expertise in teaching process-based methods via the Web, teachers of Distance Education sections generally teach more than two sections per semester, with teaching assignments made on a basis of one's demonstrated teaching effectiveness and "seniority" in terms of experience teaching via Distance Education format.

Teachers who have taught business or technical writing at least once and who are interested in the opportunity to teach Distance Education classes should consult the Director of Professional Writing.

Curriculum Policies

- All teachers are expected to not alter course objectives and adhere to the standard curriculum for either business or technical writing, particularly teachers who have never taught business or technical writing before
- Teachers who have taught business or technical writing at least one semester and are familiar with the objectives and methods of either course are encouraged to seek ways to adjust the standard curriculum to suit their individual teaching styles
- All teachers who have taught at least one semester are encouraged to modify (1) the selection and sequence of assignments and (2) grading policies such as attendance, revision, and exams, so long as any changes are made in light of course objectives and methods and made in a good faith effort to ensure or enhance the likelihood that course objectives are met

- Teachers wishing to make modifications to the standard curriculum are encouraged to discuss any changes with the Director of Professional Writing to ascertain if such changes are appropriate in light of course objectives and methods
- Teachers wishing to use unapproved assignments and texts must seek the prior consent of the Director of Professional Writing

Textbook Policies

- Teachers who have never taught business or technical writing before are required to use the online textbook approved for both courses, *Business and Technical Writing WebCOM* (Kendall/Hunt)
- Teachers who have taught business or technical writing before are encouraged but not required to use the approved online textbook, *Business and Technical Writing WebCOM*
- Other textbooks approved for use in business and technical writing include the following:
 - *Professional Writing Online*, by Sullivan, Porter, Johnson-Eilola (Longman)
 - *Technical Communication*, by Lannon (Longman)
 - *Technical Communication*, by Markel (Bedford)
 - *Writing That Works*, by Oliu, Brusaw, Alred (Bedford)
- Any teachers who desire to use a textbook other than *Business and Technical Writing WebCOM* must consult with the Director of Professional Writing prior to using the text and may be asked to submit a written statement explaining why they believe the text is appropriate and will achieve the objectives of either course
- The use of unapproved texts requires the prior consent of the Director of Professional Writing

Curriculum Development & Publishing Opportunities

The business and technical writing courses at UNLV are one of only a handful of programs in the country using one source for both online content delivery and course management. This source is the standard text, *Business and Technical Writing WebCOM*, published by Kendall/Hunt publishing. The textbook's technology, which was first developed in conversation with Kendall/Hunt for exclusive use in UNLV's business writing classes in fall 2001, has subsequently been adopted by several other schools, in a variety of disciplines. The online textbook not only helps achieve curricular goals for both courses, but was conceived from the start as a way to foster the professionalization of program teachers.³

The textbook is conceived as a continual "work in progress." Teachers who see ways to (1) enhance the content and pedagogical apparatus of the textbook and (2) make "public" teaching materials that they have developed independently can, with the guidance of the Director of

³ See "Technology as a Site of Praxis: The Role of Assessment in Professional Writing Program Design" by Jeffery Jablonski and Ed Nagelhout in *Assessment in Technical and Professional Communication*. Eds. Jo Allen and Margaret Hundleby. (forthcoming from SUNY Press.)

Professional Writing, write curriculum materials such as background readings, assignments, teaching guides, and other materials. If the materials are accepted by the Director and published in the textbook, the contributor will be paid a fee (typically between \$50-100) and earn a publishing credit. Presumably, the contributors also become better business or technical writing teachers through the process of researching, planning, and writing the materials.

Recent contributions by program teachers include the following:

- “Writing Collaboratively: Part I, Working as a Team” by Constance Pruss (PhD Creative Writing)
- “Writing Collaboratively: Part II, Document Production” by Jenny Toups (MFA)
- “A Business *Faux Pas* Case” by Jeny Bania (MFA)
- “The Scanner Slip-Up Case” by Kelle Schillaci (MFA) and Anish Dave (MFA)
- “Insurance Fraud at Medtech Case” by Heather Lusty (PhD)

How to Apply

If you are interested in teaching business or technical writing submit a brief letter/e-mail of interest that describes your qualifications and attach a copy of your resume or vita. If you have any questions, contact the Director of Professional Writing, Dr. Jeff Jablonski (phone: #50947, e-mail: jablonsk@unlv.nevada.edu).

The best time to apply to teach is in late fall or early spring, for assignment the following fall semester.

The Director will ask to meet with you as part of the selection process.