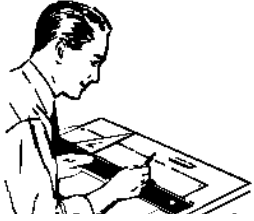


# USDA: Technical Writing

## Course Objectives:

There are three goals to the course:

- Invent, arrange, and present technical information according to a specific purpose and specific audience (in a specific context)
- Improve accuracy, clarity, and accessibility in writing
- Apply skills to “on-the-job” environments



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**Thom Haller**

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**Writing  
Training  
Info. architecture**

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**1725 Q St., NW #201  
Washington, DC  
20009**

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**202-328-THOM  
tehaller@infodn.com  
www.infodn.com**

## Course Audience:

The course is designed for adults who are working in the field of technical writing (and would like tips, tricks, and techniques to improve their writing) and those who are new to the field of technical communication.

## Course Philosophy:

Never consider yourself a failure; you can always serve as a bad example.

## Required Texts:

- *The Elements of Technical Writing*. (Pearsall, Allyn & Bacon), 1999- 2nd Edition..
- *On Writing Well: 6th Edition*. (Zinsser; Harper Collins), 1995.

## Recommended Texts:

- *Writing for the Web Workbook* (Info.Design, 2002)
- *Reporting Technical Information:8th Edition*. (Houp, Pearsall, Tebeaux; Allyn & Bacon), 1995
- *Procedure Writing: Principles and Practice* (Wieringa, Batelle Press) [Call them: 1-800-451-3543]
- *Prentice Hall Handbook for Writers:12th Edition*. (Kramer, Leggett & Mead; Prentice Hall), 1995. ...(or a similar handbook/grammar text).

## **PURCHASING TEXTBOOKS:**

USDA Bookstore (Check catalog for hours)  
*On Writing Well* available a bookstores throughout area.



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### Principles Followed

- Good writing develops from a process, which includes planning, drafting, and editing
- There is always a situation or need which requires a particular piece of technical writing, and the writer must write to fit it.
- The writer must anticipate the readers' needs, assumptions, and possible objections, and must write to these.
- The writer must organize and format his writing to allow the quickest and most efficient reading possible, so that the readers will be able to clearly understand the writer's ideas and information and act on the information to get a job done.

### Grading

Grading is based on completing assignments, thinking creatively (to see strategies for improving your writing), and attending classes.

### Assignments

Your course grade will depend on adequate completion of the following:

#### **Class Project (20%)**

You have the opportunity to work on a work-related project, or any project of your choosing that is directed at a specific audience to meet a specific purpose. If you do not have a work project you might consider one of the following:

- Summarize technical writing tips into a "job aid" you or a colleague can use.
- Construct a proposal for your organization requesting additional technical writing training (as a paid program or as "brown bags")
- Create something unique for your company. [Does your organization need a Style Guide, for example?]
- Create a final project of any sort that floats your boat (but think about the person who is **using** it ... review with Thom.)



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### **Portfolio (20%)**

The portfolio will be the compilation of all your papers written in class/written as homework. Your purpose in compiling a portfolio is to provide you an opportunity to set goals and look back at how you are meeting your goals.

My recommendation is that you keep the drafts, rework them incorporating my input or according to writing principles described in class. I prefer portfolios to be organized in a very structured way -- with tables of contents and descriptions/lessons learned for each paper.

Your portfolio is *due* the ninth week of class (I will not keep the portfolio... but I will meet with each student to discuss progress... and use the portfolio as a guide).

### **Midterm Conversation (15%)**

During Week 5 you'll have the opportunity to meet with the instructor (or instructors). During this time, you will present your portfolio and your rewrites. You should have a goals statement (and rewrite), a class summary (and rewrite), a document plan (and rewrite) and a "crap draft" of a class project.

### **Final Conversation (15%)**

On Week 9, you will present your portfolio and class project to the instructor(s). Be prepared to articulate why you have made the changes you have made in your document. You may also want to include a **draft** of your summary email so you can get feedback on making it clear and understandable.

### **Summary Email (20%)**

Within five days of our last class, send a summary email to Thom (tehaller@infodn.com). Describe how you have incorporated ideas discussed in class into your work and how you have accomplished (or are moving toward accomplishing) the goals you set at the beginning of the course.



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## Attendance (10%)

We prefer you attend classes because they will enable you to participate fully in the topic. We recognize adult learners often have work obligations. Don't fret absences but try to attend.

## Calendar

- Week 1: Basic Tenets of Technical Writing
- Week 2: Organization: Thesis & Structure
- Week 3: Clarity: Sentences & Paragraphs
- Week 4: Craft: Definitions & Descriptions
- Week 5: MidTerm Evaluation/Discussion
- Week 6: Task-Oriented Writing: Procedures, Job Aids, & Computer Documentation
- Week 7: Graphics, Typography, & Document Design
- Week 8: Writing Argument & Proposals
- Week 9: Final Examination/Discussion
- Week 10: Managing the Documentation Process/Using Automated Tools/Revisiting Goals/Course Evaluations

## Homework

- Homework readings will be assigned weekly. Additional in-class/homework writing assignments will be assigned at the discretion of the instructor. (Depending on class needs). **Collect your homework assignments in your portfolio.**

## For Week 2:

- *Rewriting.* Rewrite your paper on your goals for the class. Put it in your portfolio.
- *Writing:* Whoops. One of your classmates missed the first class and you must help her understand what she's missed. Using a clear writing style (as suggested by Zinsser, explain to her what she missed. You know she would appreciate synthesized information (she doesn't have time to read pages and pages of text).
- *Writing:* Decide on a class project. Build a DRAFT document plan. Identify your audience and their purpose for reading the document.
- *Discovery:* Find an example of technical or science writing you really like. Bring it to class. Be prepared to discuss why you like it.
- *Reading:* Pearsall—1-3, Zinsser— 1-9



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### For Week 3:

- *Rewriting:* Rewrite Week 2's assignment. Put both copies in portfolio.
- *Writing:* Work on class project. (consider this a "crap draft.") Write a memo to the instructor explaining why the structure of the document supports your audience (and their purpose).
- *Rewriting:* Revise your document plan based on feedback from Week 2
- *Discovery:* Find a piece of writing that you believe is either well-organized or is not well organized. Be prepared to describe why in class.
- *Reading:* Pearsall —4- 6; Zinsser—13-16; Prentice Hall Handbook —3,6 (optional)

### For Week 4:

- *Rewriting:* Revise class project. (Consider this your 1st draft). **Rewrite** memo to your instructor describing the structure of your class project.
- *Writing:* Think about clarity in your document. Write a memo to the instructor explaining strategies you are incorporating to make your document clearer (more understandable to your audience)
- *Discovery:* Find a piece of writing that includes a technical process or a technical description. Try to find one that incorporates definition and/or description. Is it understandable? How is it organized? Is it clear?
- *Reading:* Pearsall: Rest of book; Zinsser—8-12,

### For Week 5:

- *Writing:* Complete your Second Draft of your Class Project -- so you can discuss it with your instructor(s).
- *Discovery:* When you are not meeting with the instructors, you will chat with your colleagues about the topic area. Bring to class five questions about technical writing for discussion with your peers. Relate these questions to the work you do. Use this opportunity to get feedback from others. Put each question on a note card or a sticky note if possible.
- *Reading:* No new reading.

### **For Week 6:**

- *Rewriting.* Work on revisions to your class project.
- *Writing:* Explain the difference between describing a process, and writing a procedure? Why does this matter to the user? Add personal experience to make the piece more interesting to your reader. Have you ever felt confused when you were reading a process or completing a procedure?
- *Writing:* Write a procedure to help someone tie a shoe. Put this in your portfolio.
- *Discovery:* Find an example of a procedure you thought helped you out and one that did not.
- *Reading:* No new reading.

### **For Week 7:**

- *Rewriting.* Look at your portfolio. Can you find any old writing that you think you could now improve? Can you improve them visually? Are you meeting your writing goals?
- *Rewriting.* Rewrite previous class assignments to add to portfolio
- *Writing:* No NEW Writing.
- *Discovery:* Find an example of technical communication that you find visually “accessible” and one where you cannot find and use information.
- *Reading:* The Non-designer’s Design Book (optional)

### **For Week 8:**

- *Rewriting.* Review/Rewrite previous assignments in portfolio. Work on your class project.
- *Writing:* Write an argument in which you explain that professional (workplace) writers benefit (or do not benefit) from taking a technical writing course. (Think about why you constructed it the way you did).
- *Discovery:* Bring a list of arguments you read or heard during the previous week.
- *Reading:* No new reading..

### For Week 9:

- **Final:** Complete the FINAL draft of your class project and your portfolio to show to your instructors and your colleagues.
- *Reading:* No New Reading.

### For Week 10:

- **Final Final:** Make any changes identified during Week 9, to your portfolio and your class project. Be prepared to spend a few minutes with “show and tell” --- show us your project and tell us your story of reshaping it to better meet your audience’s needs.
- *Writing:* Summarize your adventures and discoveries from the class in a memo for your instructors. Revisit your goals and reflect on your progress toward meeting those goals. Have your goals changed any? Have your perceptions changed any? How will your new knowledge from this class affect the work you do on the job?
- *Discussion:* Be prepared to discuss good and bad examples of managing the documentation process.