



VG501 Introduction to Graduate Technical Communication

Section 2

Fall 2021

Tuesdays/Thursdays 2:00–3:40pm (Weeks 6–13)

East Lower Hall Room 204

Instructor: Nathaniel T. Murray, Ph.D.

Contact: nathaniel.murray@sjtu.edu.cn

Office hours: Wednesdays 11:00am–2:00pm

Office: Long Bin Building 441A

Teaching Assistant: TBA

Contact: TBA

Office hour location: TBA

Office hour time: TBA

Course Description

This course provides a practical introduction to technical communication in the engineering disciplines, with specific focus on preparing graduate students for the writing demands of theses and dissertations, as well as academic journal publication. Key areas of focus will include:

- Problem-need-solution analysis for technical project design
- Technical abstracts, their required sections, and keywords for database indexing
- Creating charts and diagrams that are appropriate for the variables being analyzed
- Analyzing visual data, with signaling words appropriate for the type of data represented
- Literature reviews, to identify research gaps and provide justification for your research

Course Structure

The class will be broken down into three groups: A, B, and C. Each week will have one 45-minute lecture and three 45-minute seminars: the lecture involving the whole class where new material is introduced, and each seminar involving one of the three groups where that material is practiced.

Course Policies

Attendance: Students will be expected to attend every class meeting. You will receive full credit for attendance if you arrive on time, half credit if you arrive 15 minutes late, and zero credit if you arrive after the halfway break. Of course, I understand that illnesses and family emergencies may occur. A medically-related absence must involve an illness or injury. Routine health and dental checkups do not count. If the reason is serious and you give me advance notice with appropriate documentation, I am willing to work with you on how to best make up assignments. If you have an immediate emergency and are unable to inform me of your absence before class, then please inform me as soon after class as you can. But if you miss a class and then wait for days or weeks to inform me of the reason, then I cannot excuse your absence. Bad weather is not an excuse to miss class, unless the school cancels classes.

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Attendance will be taken by printed sign-in sheet at the start of each class. You may only sign for yourself. Signing for another student will be treated as a serious violation of academic conduct, both for the one who signed and for the one whose name was signed.

Attendance in person is mandatory if you are on campus. Online attendance is only for those who are stuck outside of China or who have documented approval from the JI Graduate Office to remain off campus during this semester. In-person students may only attend a class online if they have an excused absence for that day. Online students may attend asynchronously, if the class time is between 12:00am and 8:00am in the time zone where the student is located.

Work, research, internships, and extracurricular activities are not valid reasons for missing class in person. You are responsible for arranging your schedule in a way that will allow you to meet all of your semester's time commitments.

In-Class Participation: Students will be expected to participate actively in class. You are not allowed to put your head down, use your smartphone, or do anything that is non-class related, except during the halfway break. Repeat violations will result, at my discretion, in a deduction of participation points or confiscation of the smartphone until class is finished. I am extremely strict about class participation, in order to maximize the quality of the learning environment for all students.

In-class assignments will count for participation credit and will usually not be graded for content; they are meant to give you a chance to practice the writing skills I teach you, before you are graded on them for real in the homework. However, in order for it to count for credit, you must submit the assignment immediately at the time that I ask for it, and I need to see that you have made efforts to get as far on the assignment as you could. You must also be in attendance that day for your in-class assignments to count for participation credit. Students who attend asynchronously should submit the in-class assignments within 24 hours of the recorded lecture becoming available.

Assignments: Due dates, closing date, and grading criteria will be clearly specified for each assignment. It is your responsibility to check that an assignment has been successfully submitted through the Canvas system. If I do not receive it on my end, then it cannot be counted for credit, even if you believe you had submitted it on time. If you are having trouble submitting an assignment due to technical difficulties with the submission portal, please contact IT to get their help in resolving the issue. Do not just send me the assignment directly by e-mail, unless I make an exception. You are entirely responsible for ensuring that your assignment is submitted successfully, on time, and in the correct submission portal.

Points will also be deducted if your assignment is submitted in a manner or format that does not follow the submission instructions. This strictness is intended to prepare you for professional life, where you must learn to follow the varying submission requirements of journals, government agencies, and private/nonprofit institutions, or risk your manuscript getting delayed or rejected.



Assignments submitted late without valid justification will have points deducted at my discretion, with an automatic 0 and no submissions accepted after the closing date. If you have an immediate emergency and will be unable to submit an assignment in a timely manner, you need to inform me as early as possible and before the deadline. If you wait until after the deadline passes to inform me, then I must deduct points, and after the closing date I cannot accept the submission. Do not come to me at the end of the semester asking for the chance to make up work because you need to pass this course in order to graduate. I know that you need to pass this course in order to graduate. The time to do the work is during the semester, not at the end of it. If you inform me of problems in advance with appropriate documentation, I am always willing to work with you.

Food: Tea, water, and sodas are permitted as long as they are in a covered bottle or thermos. Packaged snacks are also permitted, as long as they do not distract you or anyone else from class. Lunches, dinners, or any kind of cooked food are not permitted. Eat before or after class. Alcohol is strictly prohibited.

Smoking: I should not have to say this, but students have attempted to smoke in class before. Any kind of smoking or vaping, no matter what kind of cigarette or e-cigarette, is strictly prohibited. Please respect the health of your classmates and of the environment.

Electronic devices: Because you will be doing a lot of writing during class, you will be expected to bring a laptop, tablet, or other electronic device with a large enough screen and keyboard that you can write and submit assignments without difficulty. It is not acceptable to do your in-class work on a smartphone. Also, please ensure that the device is fully charged before class. An empty battery is not an acceptable excuse for lack of class participation. Bring a spare battery, extension cord, or backup device. It is your responsibility to ensure that this requirement is met. In addition, electronic devices are to be used only for class-related activities such as writing exercises, note-taking, and internet research when required for a class activity. Classwork and homework may not be handwritten.

Security: It is forbidden to give course materials or login data (usernames, passwords, meeting IDs, etc.), without my express permission, to anyone who is not enrolled in the course this semester. Course materials may never be given to anyone outside the JI. You may not share your classwork or homework with anyone—enrolled in the class or not—until the semester is over. And even then, classwork and homework may never be shared outside the JI or posted anywhere on the internet or social media. Please help keep the JI's information secure.

Honor code: Your work for this class must be written entirely by you, and only by you. No one else may contribute to its writing, editing, or proofreading. Your work should also be written for a given assignment. This means that no previously-written work can be used, in whole or in part, even if you were the one who wrote it. This applies equally to graphics and all other work you do for the course. It also applies to wording that appears similar across multiple sources. It will not be considered an acceptable excuse to claim that a certain phrase or sentence can be used unchanged because many other sources use it. You will still be expected to paraphrase the source text so that it is sufficiently your own wording.

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As graduate students, you can and should build on your previous research when writing a paper or article. However, this applies to the ideas, not the words. The article you write for this course must be completely original. It is strictly forbidden to reuse any of your previous work, whether published in a journal or written for another class or written for any other purpose, as text in the article. Otherwise, it will be unfair if some of the students take the time to write something original while others reuse what they have previously written. If you reference any of your previous work, it should be for the purpose of expanding on it with new and original ideas. This policy will be strictly enforced, in order to prepare you for professional life where this kind of academic practice will be expected.

Moreover, you can and should collaborate with colleagues and faculty advisers when conducting and reporting on your graduate research. However, for this course, you must be the sole author of all the work that you do.

If a violation occurs, I might decide (at my own discretion) to give a warning, to give a partial or complete deduction on the assignment, or to report the violation to the Honor Council—or some combination of all three of these, based on the frequency and severity of the violations. Please review the [2019 JI Undergraduate Student Handbook](#) for further information:

- “It is dishonorable for students to receive credit for work that is not the result of their own efforts” (p. 40).
- “It is a violation of the Honor Code for students to submit, as their own, work that is not the result of their own labor and thoughts. This applies, in particular, to ideas, expressions or work obtained from other students as well as from books, the internet, and other sources. The failure to properly credit ideas, expressions or work from others is considered plagiarism” (p. 41).
- “Plagiarism is taken extremely seriously at JI. A student is required to follow the rules of citation and attribution as set down by the instructor. The following list includes some specific examples of plagiarism:
 - Use of any passage of three words or longer from another source without proper attribution.
 - Use of any phrase of three words or more “must be enclosed in quotation marks” (as seen in this example).
 - Use of material from an uncredited source, making very minor changes (like word order or verb tense) to avoid the three-word rule. Inclusion of facts, data, ideas or theories originally thought of by someone else, without giving that person (organization, etc.) credit.
 - Paraphrasing of ideas or theories without crediting the original thinker.” (p. 41)

Course Grading

There will be no exams; those do not work in a writing class. You will be graded by portfolio assessment, meaning based on the various projects you complete throughout the semester.



Grading Scale

100 – 98	A+	82 – 80	B-
97 – 93	A	79 – 77	C+
92 – 90	A-	76 – 73	C
89 – 87	B+	72 – 70	C-
86 – 83	B	60 – 69	D

Grade Distribution

Project #1: Literature Review	25%
Project #2: Diagram and Analysis	25%
Homework and Assignments	30%
Attendance and Participation	20%

Week 6

Tu 10/19 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 10/21 – 2:00-2:45 Group B	Scientific Article Sections
Tu 10/19 – 2:55-3:40 Group A	Th 10/21 – 2:55-3:40 Group C	

Week 7

Tu 10/26 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 10/28 – 2:00-2:45 Group C	Citation Formatting
Tu 10/26 – 2:55-3:40 Group B	Th 10/28 – 2:55-3:40 Group A	

Week 8

Tu 11/2 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 11/4 – 2:00-2:45 Group A	Technical Abstracts
Tu 11/2 – 2:55-3:40 Group C	Th 11/4 – 2:55-3:40 Group B	

Week 9

Tu 11/9 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 11/11 – 2:00-2:45 Group B	Technical Language
Tu 11/9 – 2:55-3:40 Group A	Th 11/11 – 2:55-3:40 Group C	

Week 10

Tu 11/16 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 11/18 – 2:00-2:45 Group C	Literature Reviews
Tu 11/16 – 2:55-3:40 Group B	Th 11/18 – 2:55-3:40 Group A	

Week 11

Tu 11/23 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 11/25 – 2:00-2:45 Group A	Creating Diagrams
Tu 11/23 – 2:55-3:40 Group C	Th 11/25 – 2:55-3:40 Group B	

Week 12

Tu 11/30 – 2:00-2:45 Lecture	Th 12/2 – 2:00-2:45 Group B	Reporting Visual Data
Tu 11/30 – 2:55-3:40 Group A	Th 12/2 – 2:55-3:40 Group C	

Week 13

Individual Writing Conferences		
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