



# TECHNICAL WRITING FOR CS

**CS 260: Technical Communication for Computer Science**  
**Tues Thurs 11:00am-12:15pm (Section 1), EnGeo 2208**

## **Course Information and Catalog Description:**

CS 260. 3 credits. An introduction to the process of planning, researching, producing, and revising technical documents attuned to specific audiences in the computing industry. Document forms studied include definitions, correspondence, descriptions, specifications, instructions, proposals, reports, resumes, and plans.

## **Instructor Information**

Name: Julie M. Sorge Way

Email: sorgewjm@jmu.edu

Office Hours: Wed 10:40am to 1:40pm (in Keezell 412)

## **Contacting the Instructor**

Please use email whenever possible. My office phone number is 568-1642 for use if needed during office hours, but please email me rather than leaving a voicemail. In all your communication with professors, it is important to identify yourself, your class, and your question clearly and communicate professionally. The “Conversations” feature in Canvas works in a pinch, but email is preferred.

## **Course Content**

Technical communication is the task that consumes the largest share of a computing professional’s time on the job, and employers consistently ask that Computer Science graduates have more training and practice communicating both verbally and in writing. This course aims to develop your knowledge about technical communication and your skill writing technical documents that computing professionals use most.

## **Course Goals**

The overall goal of this course is for you to learn to communicate well as a computing professional and to practice doing so, improving your skills. You will learn that good technical writing involves a process that begins with understanding the characteristics of the document to be produced and the audience that will use it, moves on to collecting information for inclusion in the document, organizing the document for ease of understanding and references, writing the document in clear and lucid prose, and finally examining and improving the document and delivering it to its users. You will also learn about documents that are common in computing, and the characteristics and conventions that govern the form of these documents.

More specifically, by the end of this course you will be able to

1. Discover and state the purposes of a document. (Chapter 1 and 2)
2. Identify readers and describe reader characteristics as a basis for deciding how to write to them. (Chapters 2 and 3)
3. Pursue the technical writing process in accord with ethical and legal codes of behavior. (Chapter 4)
4. Demonstrate good professional work and teamwork habits. (Chapter 5)
5. Understand the writing task and obtain data and information through observation, interviews, document studies, product studies, and formal and informal discussions. (Chapters 6, 7, 8)
6. Write grammatically correct, stylistically pleasing, and diverse sentences. (Chapters 6 and 11)
7. Write sentences free of punctuation and spelling errors. (No specific chapter, see Handbook)
8. Write coherent, unified, and complete paragraphs. (Chapter 10)
9. Display the organization of their documents using introductory, transitional, and closing statements, headings, and effective page design. (Chapters 10 and 13)
10. Design and use tables, graphs, and technical illustrations. (Chapter 12)
11. Evaluate documents using either a team inspection or individual active review process. (Chapter 14 on Usability Testing)
12. Learn details for writing memoranda (Chapter 15).
13. Learn details for writing formal emails and instant messages (Chapter 16).
14. Learn details for writing workplace letters (Chapter 17).
15. Learn details for writing technical résumés (Chapter 18).
16. Organize and write documents essential to software development, including requirements and design specifications, project plans, test plans, user instructions, and user reference materials. (Chapters 20 and 21)
17. Learn details for writing proposals (Chapter 24).
18. Compose and deliver effective oral presentations. (Chapter 25)

### **Required Texts**

1. *Technical Communication*, 13th Edition. John M. Lannon and Laura J. Gurak, Longman, 2013. ISBN 9780321899972 (Please note that although a newer edition exists, this class will continue to use the 13<sup>th</sup> edition cited here.)

### **Attendance and Participation**

Classroom attendance is required at all times. I expect your full attention in this class. To that end, please do not use smartphones and laptops during class unless we have made prior arrangements for a specific reason. Use of devices other than for specified classwork will count as a partial absence. Attendance is required because your in-class work builds toward each project, and group work counts toward your final grade. If you accrue more than four absences, your final course grade drops by one letter per absence. (For example, with a final tabulated grade of B-, but five absences, a student earns a final grade of C-. Even an A grade would become an F with 8 absences.) The “percentage” you may see in Canvas is not your Attendance grade. See me early on with questions. Let me know if you are experiencing an emergency or severe illness. Whenever possible, let me know ahead of time if you will miss class. Email is fine. If you are late to class it is YOUR responsibility to make sure I have marked you as late (partial absence) and not absent (full absence).

### **Adding and Dropping the Course**

Students are responsible for adding and dropping courses on time via myMadison. For dates, see <http://www.jmu.edu/registrar/>

### **Academic Honesty**

You are expected to comply with the JMU Honor Code as stated in the Student Handbook and available from the Honor Council Web site <http://www.jmu.edu/honor/code.shtml>. Consulting with other students about problems and solutions is not a violation of the honor code, provided that the ultimate work turned in for an assignment is your own. This means that everything written down and turned in for an individual assignment must come from your head, not someone else's. If in doubt about whether something is allowed, ask me. We will use TurnItIn via Canvas. Plagiarized work receives a grade of zero and will be reported to the university.

### **Disability Accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, you should contact the Office of Disability Services (Wilson Hall, Room 107, [www.jmu.edu/ods](http://www.jmu.edu/ods), 540-568-6705) if you have not previously done so. Disability Services will provide you with an Access Plan Letter that will verify your need for services and make recommendations for accommodations to be used in the classroom. Once you have shown me this letter, we will sit down and review the course requirements, your disability characteristics, and your requested accommodations to develop an individualized plan appropriate for this course.

### **Religious Observation Accommodations**

If you cannot satisfy a requirement of the course for religious reasons you must let me know at least two weeks in advance. In some cases you will be required to make up the requirement; in other cases the requirement may be waived with suitable adjustment in grading criteria.

### **Inclement Weather Policy**

This class will operate in accord with JMU's cancellation policy online.

### **Methods of Evaluation**

Class assignments will be in four main forms:

1. Papers (50%). These will be of various lengths and genres relevant to your future career. You will submit final drafts of all through "Assignments" on Canvas, and also graded in-class peer workshops on Papers 3-7 drafts.
2. In-class or take-home quizzes and journals (25%) These will be short and of various kinds. Some could be oral. On all class days, quizzes and in-class work that count toward this grade category are possible – these cannot be made up if you miss class. Class participation is also included as part of this score.
3. Oral presentation/group project (10%) This will come at the end of the course, a chance for you to work with a group as you will do quite often in most computer science careers.
4. Final Portfolio (15%) This is a collection of most of the writing assignments from the semester. In addition to revising your best work from the term, you will be writing an addendum to each piece describing the changes you made based on your improvement over the semester.

### **Missed and Late Assignment Policy**

Do not turn in assignments late. Since writing assignments are only available on Canvas until their due dates, late work cannot be submitted. If you are extremely ill and communicate with me before the deadline, exceptions might be made.

## Writing For This Class:

Over the course of this term, you will develop the following pieces of writing. For each major piece, you will have feedback on drafts, in-class time developing your work with feedback from your instructor and your peers, and the chance to revise for a final portfolio.

<b>Growth Mindset Journal Entries (12 total essays)</b>	Twelve essays in response to brief articles about growth mindset, in which you will write reflectively about yourself and your own thinking and writing
<b>Paper 1: Cover Letter</b>	Cover Letter – Learning impeccable formatting for self-presentation as well as the need to balance self-confidence and persuasion with a humble and likeable tone
<b>Paper 2: Unwelcome Memo</b>	Memo – Persuading workplace colleagues to make a much-needed and important but inconvenient change in some aspect of your team protocol
<b>Paper 3: Multi-Faceted Issue Report</b>	Report – Gathering information on a complex issue affecting workplace strategy, considering competing needs from multiple levels of hierarchal corporate administration
<b>Paper 4: Requirements Specifications</b>	Software Requirements Specifications – Describing a high-stakes client project using clear and effective language to make sure your project is making effective use of everyone’s time and meeting or exceeding client expectations.
<b>Paper 5: Instructions and Procedures</b>	Policies and Procedures / Instructions – Considering the needs of users of various technical proficiencies, writing clear and understandable instructions, testing usability
<b>Paper 6: Proposal</b>	Team Project Proposal – Collaborating with team members to create a persuasive pitch for a new product and writing effectively in support of this pitch for stakeholders
<b>Paper 7: Final Portfolio</b>	Final Portfolio – A detailed, 14-part portfolio offering a revised, polished example of your excellent written communication that you can take with you into your future career.

**CS 260 Course Schedule – Spring**  
**Tues Thurs 11:00am-12:15pm (Section 1), EnGeo 2208**

<b>Week</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Topics, Reading, and Assignments Due</b>
1	T 1/9	Welcome, overview, expectations, intro to the textbook Grammar Pretest in class
	Th 1/11	Purposes of a document and Cover Letter / Writing Assignment 1 Discussion Quiz/Discussion of Ch 1 & 2 and p. 391-398 (section from Ch. 17 on “Application Letters”) Journal 1 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
2	T 1/16	Writing Assignment 1 Due on Canvas before class time Identifying the reader; Ethical and legal considerations Quiz/Discussion of Ch 1, 2, 3, 4
	Th 1/18	Quiz/Discussion of Ch 14 on Memos (also Ch. 2, 3, 4) Writing Assignment 2 Discussion Journal 2 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
3	T 1/23	Bring a printed copy of your current resume with you to class. Aimee Straight (from JMU Career and Academic Planning) speaks to class re: Career Fair Mistakes and Resume Planning
	Th 1/25	Writing Assignment 2 Due on Canvas before class time Quiz/Discussion of Ch 5 Journal 3 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
4	T 1/30	Discussion of Writing Assignment 3 Quiz/Discussion of Ch 6
	Th 2/1	The writing task Quiz/Discussion of Ch 6, 11 Journal 4 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
5	T 2/6	ASSESSMENT DAY NO CLASS
	Th 2/8	Career Fair prep discussion and resume review in class – Bring a draft of your improved resume
6	T 2/13	Instead of a class meeting today: Attend the JMU Career Fair, which runs from 11-3 on both Feb 13 & 14. (You may attend on either day at a time that suits your schedule. Be sure to go to the LinkedIn Photo Booth for proof of attendance.)
	Th 2/15	Writing good sentences. Punctuation and spelling. Quiz/Discussion of Ch 6, 11 Journal 5 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
7	T 2/20	Ch 7 Take Home Quiz due

		Quiz/Discussion of Ch 6, 7, 8
	Th 2/22	Further work on Writing Assignment 3 in class Quiz/Discussino of Ch 21 & 22 on Informal and Formal Reports Journal 6 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
8	T 2/27	Workshop of Writing Assignment 3 (bring 2 printed copies, be punctual)
	Th 3/1	Writing Assignment 3 Due on Canvas by 5pm Bring the packet of completed workshop materials from last class, stapled, with you to turn in before class begins. Final draft is due via Canvas. Library presentation from Kelly Giles in class
9	T 3/6	Spring Break – No classes meet
	Th 3/8	Spring Break – No classes meet
10	T 3/13	Read handout on writing SRS documents Quiz/Discussion of Ch 18 on technical definitions Journal 7 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
	Th 3/15	Requirements specifications discussion in class Quiz/Discussion of Ch 19 Further discussion of SRS documents (bring handout)
11	T 3/20	Further discussion of SRS documents Quiz/Discussion of Ch 18, 19, SRS Handout
	Th 3/22	Organizing documents Quiz/Discussion of Ch 10, 13 Journal 8 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
12	T 3/27	Workshop of Writing Assignment 4 (bring 2 printed copies, be punctual)
	Th 3/29	Writing Assignment 4 Due Bring the packet of completed workshop materials from last class, stapled, with you to turn in before class begins. Final draft is due via Canvas. Begin discussion of Writing Assignment 5 Journal 9 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
13	T 4/3	Paper 5 discussion Quiz/Discussion of workplace letters (Ch. 16)
	Th 4/5	Paper 5 Continued Quiz/Discussion of workplace letters (Ch. 16) and Designing and using tables, graphs and illustrations (Ch. 12) Journal 10 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
14	T 4/10	Paper 5 Continued Quiz/Discussion of writing instructions and procedures (Ch. 20) Journal 11

		due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest)
	Th 4/12	Workshop of Writing Assignment 5 (bring 2 printed copies, be punctual)
15	T 4/17	<p>Writing Assignment 5 Due  Bring the packet of completed workshop materials from last class, stapled, with you to turn in before class begins. Final draft is due via Canvas.</p> <p>Discussion of Writing Assignment 6  Quiz/Discussion Ch 23 (proposals) and 24 (presentations)  Journal 12 due by the end of the week on Canvas (Sunday 11pm at the latest) (Lowest single journal score will be dropped when calculating final grades.)</p>
	Th 4/19	<p>Quiz/Discussion of Ch 19 (manual), Ch 26 (social media), 23, 24  Final preparations for presentation/WA6 with groups</p>
16	T 4/24	Group Presentations in class
	Th 4/26	<p>Group Presentations in class  Last things  Last day to turn in group Writing Assignment 6 materials on Canvas by 5pm</p>
Final	Thurs 5/3 10:00am	<p>Thursday, May 3 at 10:00am is the deadline:  Final Portfolio Due as described on Canvas.  May be completed early.  No extensions. Late papers receive a score of zero.  See assignment on Canvas for specific submission details.  No classroom meeting, no formal exam.</p>