

ENG 2311

Professional & Technical Writing

Rhetoric, documentation, usability, and evidence in professional practice

“Did it happen if no one wrote it down?”

This course treats writing as working equipment: a way to preserve observations, explain processes, support decisions, and make professional work usable by others.

This syllabus is organized around one practical principle: professional communication should allow another person to understand, evaluate, reproduce, or continue the work.

Course Description

English 2311 teaches the rhetorical principles and writing practices necessary for producing effective professional and technical communication, including correspondence, memoranda, instructions, documentation, proposals, and reports in a variety of professional contexts. Informed by current research in rhetoric and professional writing, the course uses workplace scenarios, case studies, simulations, and collaborative activities to help students analyze audience, purpose, voice, genre, and situation; collect and evaluate information; document observations and activities; conduct research; and produce accurate, ethical, and usable documents for government, business, industry, nonprofit, and public audiences. Students work with print and digital resources, handwritten and electronic records, visual documentation, collaborative files, and contemporary technologies, including the critical and accountable use of generative AI. Throughout the course, students distinguish observation from inference, allegation from established fact, and source information from conclusion while testing and revising documents so that other users can understand, evaluate, reproduce, or continue professional work.

Course-Specific Learning Goals

In addition to the department and university outcomes listed below, students completing this course should be able to:

- Document observations, activities, and decisions in a clear contemporaneous record.
- Distinguish direct observation and source information from inference, interpretation, allegation, and conclusion.
- Adapt content, voice, evidence, organization, and design to a specific professional audience and purpose.
- Produce instructions and operational documentation that another user can test, reproduce, or continue.
- Use research, visual information, and contemporary technologies - including generative AI - critically, ethically, and accountably.
- Revise professional documents in response to peer review, usability testing, and evidence.

Scenario-Based Learning

Some course activities use simulated workplace incidents, staged interactions, and role-played professional scenarios. Students will document these activities as though producing professional records. Scenario facts are fictional or instructional unless otherwise identified. The purpose is to practice accurate observation, documentation, transfer of information, and professional decision-making without confusing simulation with established fact.

Textbook, Reading Materials & Supplies

No textbook is required. All course readings and instructional materials will be provided through Blackboard.

Required Field Notebook(s)

Your field notebook must be:

- Blank/unlined or graph/grid ruled.
- Softcover, durable, and flexible enough to conform comfortably to a pocket or waistband.

- Not spiral-bound; staple binding is preferred.
- Small enough to remain on your person during class and field exercises.

Treat this notebook as equipment. In Public Safety and Emergency Management, a notebook and writing instrument are commonly considered part of everyday carry (EDC).

This is working equipment, not a journal. You will use it for contemporaneous observations, measurements, sketches, diagrams, timelines, interview notes, activity logs, and other forms of documentation. You should have it with you whenever you are participating in course activities.

You may use more than one pocket notebook during the semester. Number and date each volume and preserve all completed notebooks as one continuous professional record.

Required Pens / Pencils

- Blue ballpoint or gel-ink pens. Blue ink is commonly preferred for wet signatures and original handwritten documentation because it helps distinguish an original from a black-and-white reproduction or copy.
- Mechanical pencils are preferred. Make sure yours has an eraser.
- Carry more than one writing instrument. As the saying goes: “One is none. Two is one.”

Instructor Philosophy on the Use of Generative AI

In this course, students will examine generative artificial intelligence as a current technology used in professional and technical communication. Students will consider how AI can assist with research, document analysis, organization, revision, accessibility, and the communication of complex processes to specific audiences. Students may be asked to use AI to analyze professional documents, compare rhetorical strategies, identify logical or organizational inconsistencies, develop indexes or classifications, test alternative forms of presentation, and evaluate how AI-generated language affects accuracy, voice, credibility, and audience response.

Students will learn accountability for their AI use. When an assignment permits or requires generative AI, students must preserve and submit relevant prompts, identify the platform or model used, describe how the output contributed to the work, and verify all factual claims, quotations, citations, calculations, and interpretations. AI-generated output is not considered a reliable source by itself and may not be cited as evidence unless the assignment specifically requires analysis of the output. Students remain responsible for every claim, omission, rhetorical choice, and error in the final document.

Students may not use AI to invent experiences, qualifications, observations, interview responses, field notes, evidence, sources, data, or other information represented as factual. Students may not submit AI-generated writing as their own without the disclosure, analysis, and revision required by the assignment.

Students must also protect confidential, private, proprietary, legally restricted, or personally identifying information. Such material may not be entered into a public generative-AI system. Scenario materials must be treated according to the instructor’s directions, even when based on public records.

Acceptable AI use will vary by assignment. Each assignment may designate AI use as required, permitted with disclosure, limited to specific functions, or prohibited. When uncertain, students are responsible for asking before using AI. Failure to disclose material AI assistance, fabrication of prompts or sources, or submission of unverified AI-generated content may be treated as an academic-integrity violation.

Course AI permission

For purposes of this course, the AI designation provided with each assignment and the policy above constitute the instructor permissions referenced in the Academic Integrity policy.

Learning Outcomes & Marketable Skills

Course Learning Outcomes

- Interpret and analyze texts for various audiences.
- Develop persuasive strategies.
- Strengthen collaborative writing skills.
- Experiment with writing and multimedia in the genres of technical and professional writing.

Marketable Skills

- Students will communicate effectively in writing and speaking.
- Students will use different research strategies to address problems and develop ideas that engage a variety of perspectives.
- Students will recognize how social and cultural contexts shape meaning and language.

English (Undergraduate) Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to construct documents that demonstrate unity, organization, coherence, and development, and are grammatically correct.
2. Students will be able to analyze and interpret literary works by applying principles of critical thinking, literary criticism, or theoretical engagement.
3. Students will be able to produce researched documents that demonstrate the ability to locate a variety of credible sources, employ them effectively through quotations and paraphrases, integrate them smoothly into the writer's own prose, and document them correctly using the style appropriate to the document.

The Course Promotes Skills in These Areas

The Writing Process

Developing and understanding various strategies for planning, researching, drafting, revising, and editing documents that respond effectively and ethically to professional situations and audiences.

Writing in Context

Analyzing professional cultures, social contexts, and audiences to determine how they shape the purposes and forms of writing, including persuasion, organizational communication, and public discourse.

Research

Understanding and using various research methods to produce professional documents, including analyzing professional contexts, assessing and using information resources, and determining how media and technologies affect and are affected by users and readers.

Technology

Developing strategies for using and adapting communication technologies to manage projects and produce informative and usable professional documents.

Document Design

Learning to argue with visual data and implementing principles of format, layout, and design in professional documents that meet multiple user and reader needs.

Course Policies

Attendance

More than six (6) unexcused absences will result in the student being dropped from the course with a failing grade. Absences resulting from required school activities, direct personal emergencies, or health issues will be excused, but you must notify the instructor within one week of the absence and make up any class work in a timely manner.

Deadlines

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments will be turned in at the beginning of class on their due dates. Late work without previous arrangement with the instructor will only be accepted upon demonstration of extenuating circumstances.

Blackboard

If you confront technical issues that interfere with your ability to use Blackboard, contact the LTAC (Lobo Technology Assistance Center) at 432-837-8888 or techassist.sulross.edu.

Document Retention

Do not discard course records during the semester. Preserve field notebooks, drafts, peer-review notes, source notes, research records, AI prompts and output when applicable, usability findings, and submitted versions of major documents. These materials document how your work developed and may be used for revision, reflection, portfolio assembly, or verification of process.

Student Support & University Policies

Accommodating Students with Disabilities and Counseling Services

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. Students seeking accessibility/accommodations services must contact SRSU's Accessibility Services Director Ronnie Harris, LPC, Counselor, at 432-837-8203 or ronnie.harris@sulross.edu. Counseling Services is located on the first floor of Ferguson Hall, room 112, and the mailing address is P.O. Box C122, Sul Ross State University, Alpine, Texas 79832.

Counseling

Sul Ross has partnered with TimelyCare, where all SR students will have access to nine free counseling sessions. You can learn more about this 24/7/365 support by visiting [TimelyCare/SRSU](https://www.timelycare.com/sulross). The SR Counseling and Accessibility Services office will continue to offer in-person counseling in Ferguson Hall room 112 (Alpine campus) and telehealth Zoom sessions for remote students and RGC students.

Library Services

The Bryan Wildenthal Memorial Library and Archives of the Big Bend in Alpine offer free resources and services to the entire SRSU community. Access and borrow books, articles, and more through library.sulross.edu. Off-campus access requires logging in with your LoboID and password. Librarians can be reached in person, by email at srsulibrary@sulross.edu, or by phone at 432-837-8123.

Public libraries and many academic and special libraries also welcome the general public for study. SRSU TexShare Cardholders can access additional resources at participating libraries across Texas. Learn more through the SRSU library website or ask a librarian.

Tutoring at the English Department's Online Writing Center

The English Department provides tutoring through Blackboard Collaborate. Extra credit may be assigned for major assignments that receive feedback from tutors in the English Department's Online Writing Center.

Lobo Den Tutoring Center

The Lobo Den Tutoring Center offers free tutoring support in Writing, Math, Science, and other subjects.

- Drop-in and scheduled appointments are available.
- Hours of operation: Monday-Friday, 8:00 AM-5:00 PM.
- Location: BWML Room 128.
- For information or appointments: tutoring@sulross.edu or 432-837-8726.
- Tutor.com provides free 24/7 online tutoring in more than 200 subjects and is available through Blackboard.

Academic Integrity

Students in this class are expected to demonstrate scholarly behavior and academic honesty in the use of intellectual property. Students should submit work that is their own and avoid behaviors that violate academic integrity, such as turning in work as original that was used in whole or part for another course and/or professor; turning in another person's work as one's own; copying from professional works or internet sites without citation; or collaborating on a course assignment, examination, or quiz when collaboration is forbidden. Students should also avoid using open AI sources unless permission is expressly given for an assignment or course. Violations of academic integrity can result in failing assignments, failing a class, and/or more serious university consequences. These behaviors also erode the value of college degrees and higher education overall.

Classroom Climate of Respect

This class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and the open discussion of ideas. All of us must help create and sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others. We must learn how to probe, oppose, and disagree without resorting to intimidation, harassment, or personal attack. No one is entitled to harass, belittle, or discriminate against another on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, national origin, or sexual preference. We will not be silenced by the difficulty of fruitfully discussing politically sensitive issues.

Incompletes

Incompletes will only be granted if there is a valid reason why the student is unable to complete the course work due to health, accident, or family emergency and at least 50% of the course assignments are completed.

Assignments

We will do a lot of writing. Because our focus is professional and technical writing within a Public Safety/Emergency Management context, written products will routinely receive peer review and debrief. We will focus considerably on prewriting and note-taking activities and produce polished emails, texts, memoranda, reports of activity, and documents that report processes another person can reproduce or continue.

We will also discuss and document our use of AI in open-source analysis and other assignment-specific professional tasks.

Assignment Overview

Component	Purpose	Weight
Writing Prompts	Short observational and rhetorical documentation completed primarily in the field notebook.	5%
Professional Engagement	Preparation, notebook use, peer review, presentation, group/scenario work, and follow-up communication.	15%
Professional Identity Portfolio	Targeted professional materials for a real employment opportunity.	25%
Reproducible Task Documentation	Operational/technical documentation plus usability testing and report.	25%
Evidence-Based Decision Support: Grant Proposal	Research-based proposal supporting organizational decision-making.	30%

Grading Philosophy

The goal of this course is for you to become a more confident and proficient writer. Grades reflect the quality, usability, accuracy, rhetorical effectiveness, revision, and professional accountability demonstrated in your work. Engagement and participation matter because professional writing develops through observation, discussion, testing, review, and revision; effort alone, however, does not substitute for a usable final document.

Writing Prompts

Complete all prompts by hand in your course notebook unless otherwise directed.

Professional Accountability Log

Maintain a semester-long record of the date, start and end time, duration, and type of work completed for this course, including class activities, research, drafting, revision, group work, and scenario participation. At midterm and the end of the semester, use the log to prepare a brief hours-worked report and submit it

to the instructor by professional email. The report should summarize time by activity and identify any significant differences in workload or productivity.

Ten-Minute Sensory Observation

Spend ten uninterrupted minutes documenting a place, event, or activity using all relevant and safely available senses. Record only what you can directly observe. Clearly distinguish observation from interpretation, assumption, or inference. These notes may later be used to prepare a formal incident, scene, or activity description.

Vehicle or Equipment Use Log

Maintain a log of vehicle trips or the use of another approved form of transportation or equipment. Record the date, purpose category, beginning and ending mileage or duration, and any relevant condition, maintenance, or operational issue. Do not include private addresses or unnecessary personal information. Use the notes to prepare a concise use report submitted by professional email.

Reproducible Instructions

Write detailed instructions for preparing a sandwich of your choice. Identify the intended user, required materials, sequence of steps, warnings or limitations, and conditions for successful completion. Another student will follow the instructions without oral clarification. Record any errors, omissions, or ambiguities revealed during testing and revise the instructions accordingly.

Objective Interaction Record

Write a third-person, present-tense account of an instructor-approved or staged interaction. Record observable actions, sequence, direct quotations when possible, and relevant setting details. Separate direct observation from inference and avoid assigning motives or emotions that cannot be verified.

Description and Review of a Meal

Document the last meal you ate in third-person present tense. First, provide an objective description of the meal's appearance, arrangement, ingredients, texture, aroma, and setting. Then provide a brief evaluative review for a clearly identified audience. Include an original visual and explain whether it functions as evidence, illustration, or persuasion.

Social Media Rhetorical Analysis

Using social media posts, identify the intended audience, primary claim, rhetorical appeals, visual framing, emotional language, assumptions, omissions, and any weak or misleading reasoning. Distinguish formal logical flaws from unsupported claims or manipulative presentation. Verify significant factual claims using credible sources and include citations. Do not use private accounts or reproduce unnecessary identifying information.

Open-Ended Interview Questions

Write ten open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narrative information from a subject-matter expert in a field that interests you. Alternatively, prepare questions for several people who attended the same event. Use the five Ws and one H - who, what, when, where, why, and how - without making the questions leading, accusatory, compound, or overly broad. Organize the questions in a logical sequence and include at least two possible follow-up questions.

Visual Design Analysis

Photograph a public flyer or poster on campus. Using third-person present tense and active voice, objectively analyze its intended audience, purpose, visual hierarchy, contrast, alignment, proximity, repetition, typography, image-text relationship, reading path, accessibility, source credibility, and call to action. Do not photograph materials containing protected or unnecessary personal information.

Redaction and Incomplete Information

Using instructor-provided professional documents containing redactions, omissions, or incomplete information, analyze how readers construct meaning from context. For each conclusion, identify whether it is explicitly stated, strongly supported, reasonably inferred, merely possible, or unknowable from the available record. Explain how missing information affects credibility, interpretation, and professional decision-making. Do not present inference as established fact.

In-Class Participation & Professional Engagement

Active participation is essential to developing the ability to communicate in professional and technical settings. Participation includes preparation, attentive note-taking, relevant contributions to discussion, professional collaboration, peer review, oral presentation, and accountable follow-up.

Extemporaneous Presentation

Each student will deliver at least one three-minute extemporaneous presentation during the semester. The instructor will assign a topic previously addressed in class and provide limited preparation time. Students must organize the presentation using the course template and communicate the information clearly, concisely, and professionally. The presentation may be delivered from brief handwritten notes but not from a prepared script.

Professional Notebook

Students must maintain a handwritten course record using the required pocket field notebook(s). Entries should document lectures, discussions, peer reviews, scenario activities, and other assigned work and should include the date, topic or activity, important information, questions, observations, and relevant follow-up actions.

The notebook represents a contemporaneous professional record. In many workplace settings, an activity that is not documented may be difficult to verify, report, or reconstruct later. Students will use their notes to prepare professional documents and communications throughout the semester. Notebooks will be reviewed periodically and submitted as part of the final course portfolio. Approved accommodations or alternative note-taking methods will be honored.

Professional Follow-Up Communication

Students may be required to use their handwritten notes to prepare concise professional emails documenting discussions, peer-review findings, decisions, assignments, or follow-up actions. Unless otherwise directed, peer-review emails should be sent to the writer and copied to the instructor. Students should not send class-wide messages or disclose private information without a specific professional purpose. These communications should accurately memorialize what occurred, distinguish observations from conclusions, and identify any action requested or recommended.

Peer Review & Workshop

Professional documents are commonly reviewed by coworkers before they are submitted to supervisors, clients, agencies, or other decision-makers. The class will therefore use a structured peer-review and workshop process. Peer review should address the document rather than judge the individual who wrote it. Comments must be supported by specific features of the document and by the needs of its intended audience.

- Audience and purpose
- Clarity and accuracy
- Organization and emphasis
- Evidence and source use
- Tone and professional voice
- Visual design
- Usability
- Whether the requested action or conclusion is clear

Avoid vague or personal comments such as “You did this badly.” Instead, identify the document feature and explain its effect. Example: “The second paragraph introduces a conclusion before presenting the supporting evidence.” Direct suggestions are acceptable when they remain focused on the document. Example: “Consider defining the technical term before using it in the recommendation.”

Turn-Based Review Procedure (Debrief Feedback Model)

4. Each reviewer will speak in turn.
5. Reviewers should take notes throughout the discussion.
6. Do not repeat a point that has already been adequately addressed.
7. A reviewer who has nothing substantive to add may pass.
8. The writer will listen and take notes without defending or explaining the document during the initial review.
9. After all reviewers have spoken, the writer may ask for clarification, discuss editorial options, or correct a material misunderstanding.
10. Reviewers may be required to memorialize their recommendations in a professional email to the writer, copied to the instructor.
11. The writer is not required to accept every recommendation but remains responsible for evaluating the feedback and making deliberate revision decisions.

Participation Evaluation

The 15% Professional Engagement grade is based on evidence of:

- Preparation for class activities
- Consistent and useful notebook entries
- Attentive listening
- Relevant contributions to discussions
- Completion of the extemporaneous presentation
- Professional participation in group and scenario activities
- Specific, rhetorically supported peer-review comments
- Accurate follow-up communication
- Respectful and ethical professional conduct

Participation is measured by the quality and accountability of engagement, not simply by attendance or how often a student speaks.

Major Projects

1. Professional Identity Portfolio

Research an employment opportunity in your field of study and produce a targeted professional portfolio that includes a résumé, cover letter, professional biography, and qualifications paragraph. Assignment-specific AI use will be documented and evaluated as part of the professional process.

25%

2. Reproducible Task Documentation Project

Document a professional or technical process by producing an operational/technical plan or brief that enables another person or team to perform the task successfully. Test the document with an intended user and produce a usability report/debrief evaluating the effectiveness of the instructions. These documents will mirror operational or pre-incident plans.

25%

3. Evidence-Based Decision Support Project: Grant Proposal

Research an issue relevant to your field of study and produce a grant proposal that presents evidence, defines an organizational need, evaluates possible responses, and supports evidence-based organizational decision-making.

30%

The through-line of the course is simple: observe carefully, write it down, test whether another person can use it, and revise until the document does the work it is supposed to do.