

Tactical Technical Communication

Last Updated: Mon, 01/05/2026

Course prefix: LMC

Course number: 3403

Section: CS4, CS9, and CS1

CRN (you may add up to five):

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Instructor First Name: Dorothea

Instructor Last Name: Coblenz

Semester: Spring

Academic year: 2026

Course description:

Tactical Technical Communication looks at how companies construct recognizable voices and reasoning styles and how those patterns influence engineering decisions, product narratives, and everyday workplace communication. In this course, “tactical” means the practical, creative moves people make when they have to work around constraints, negotiate power, or get things done inside complex systems. You'll practice rhetorical invention (the process of identifying the audiences, constraints, and persuasive resources available in a situation) by analyzing a single company's “signature” approach to evidence, risk, design, and decision-making, and by creating WOVEN (Written, Oral, Visual, Electronic, Nonverbal) artifacts that reflect those patterns. You'll also conduct an ethnography of a real discourse community to observe how tactical technical communication works on the ground. During the semester, you'll also practice practical workplace skills such as document design, accessibility compliance, procedures writing, heuristic evaluation and usability testing, code review, conflict resolution, and more.

Course learning outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, you should be able to...

- Analyze real-world professional and technical communication (PTC) situations by identifying audiences, stakeholders, constraints, and risks in organizations and user communities
- Frame communication problems upstream (before drafting) by mapping information flows, articulating purpose, and deciding what success looks like for different stakeholders and audiences

- Design WOVEN artifacts (documents, presentations, videos, and other media) whose structure, style, and visual design help readers make decisions, complete tasks, and coordinate work under constraints.
- Conduct and report basic technical communication research, including ethnographic observation of user-help ecosystems, simple usability testing, and heuristic evaluation.

Reflect on your own communication practice and tool use (including generative AI) and articulate how your choices distribute visibility, authority, risk, and labor - and how you can design for accessibility and ethical impact

Required course materials:

Course texts. **No purchase required** (excerpts and chapters posted on Canvas or provided via library access)

- White Space is Not Your Enemy
- Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book*
- Colin Bryar and Bill Carr, *Working Backwards* (
- Selected articles and book chapters on professional and technical communication (including Miles Kimball's "Tactical Technical Communication" and short pieces on research methods, accessibility, and ethics)
- *Technical Communication* by Mike Markel and Stuart A. Selber. Chapter excerpts posted on Canvas

You do not need to purchase a single, comprehensive textbook. All required readings will be available via Canvas, the library, or free online sources. However, the book store has ordered copies of *Technical Communication* (Markel and Selber) and I recommend it as a helpful reference if you want a physical handbook to keep using after the course.

Grading policy:

This course is built to feel like a low-stakes lab for high-stakes skills. Each week, you'll move through a Canvas module that combines short readings, writing labs, and project work. Your main responsibilities are to keep up with the weekly flow, communicate early when something gets in the way, and participate as a reliable teammate on group projects. I expect you to do your own thinking and writing on individual assignments, to use tools (including AI) transparently and responsibly, and to honor the Georgia Tech Honor Code. In return, I commit to being clear about expectations, offering a built-in grace window on deadlines, and working with you when life circumstances or observances conflict with course timelines. The more you let me know what you need, the better I can help you succeed in the course.

Your final grade will be assigned as a letter grade according to the following scale:

Letter Grade

Percentage

A

90-100%

B

80-89%

C

70-79%

D

60-69%

F

0-59%

Attendance policy:

Attendance and participation are essential to success in courses in the Writing and Communication Program. Because of this, you are expected to attend class in person. Not attending a scheduled class session in-person results in an absence.

There may be times when you cannot or should not attend class, such as if you are not feeling well or have family responsibilities. Therefore, this course allows a specified number of absences without penalty, regardless of reason. After that, penalties accrue. Exceptions are allowed for Institute-approved absences (for example, those documented by the Registrar) and situations such as hospitalization or family emergencies (documented by the Office of the Dean of Students). Students may miss a total of four (4) classes over the course of the semester without penalty. Each additional absence after the allotted number **deducts 2% from a student's final grade.**

For students with professional obligations such as career fairs and interviews, I will extend up to two additional professional absences.

Academic honesty/integrity statement:

Students are expected to maintain the highest standards of academic integrity. All work submitted must be original and properly cited. Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of academic dishonesty will result in immediate consequences as outlined in the university's academic integrity policy.