LMC 3403: Tactical Technical Communication

## COURSE INFORMATION

**Course Title** LMC 3403- Tactical Technical Communication
**Section**: C1, C14
**Credits** 3 credits
**Semester and Academic Year** Fall 2026

## INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

**Instructor** Dori Coblentz
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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to workplace document genres to develop visual and verbal skills in critical analysis and document development.

## COURSE THEME

Tactical Technical Communication examines how organizations develop recognizable voices and reasoning styles, and how those patterns shape decisions, productive and workplace communication. “Tactical” in this class means the practical, creative moves that people use to navigate constraints and act within complex systems.

Students practice audience analysis, evidence use, and information design to support professional decision-making. Major projects include analyzing and replicating a company’s communication practices, conducting an ethnography of a user community, and producing video-based presentations.

## 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.

| Category | Outcomes |
|---|---|
| **Rhetoric** Rhetoric focuses on available means of persuasion, considering the synergy of factors such as context, audience, purpose, role, argument, organization, design, visuals, and conventions of language. | • Fashion artifacts that address the exigencies of diverse contexts, exhibiting effective persuasive strategies, tact, and sensitivity to theoretical, ethical and legal concerns.<br>• Collect, craft, and present technical information in ways that convey a clear purpose to a specific audience. |
| **Process** Processes for communication—for example, creating, planning, drafting, designing, rehearsing, revising, presenting, publishing—are recursive, not linear. Learning productive processes is as important as creating products. | • Construct, select, craft, revise, and repurpose information to reflect individual, cultural, and/or organizational values.<br>• Collaborate on artifacts that meet the needs of the specific audiences. |
| **Modes and Media** Activities and assignments should use a variety of modes and media—written, oral, visual, electronic, and nonverbal—singly and in combination. The context and culture of multimodality and multimedia are critical. | • Create WOVEN (Written, Oral, Visual, Electronic, and Nonverbal) artifacts— such as memos, emails, proposals, reports, instructions, manuals, websites, and short and long presentations— that display strategic uses of generic and stylistic conventions. |
| **Design** Documents and other artifacts should arrange visual elements according to consistent, efficient, and effective principles. | • Use theories and principles of document design to create and present accessible, comprehensible, and usable artifacts. |

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|---|---|
| | • Integrate graphics to achieve maximum clarity in print documents, presentation slides, websites, and other artifacts. |

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

You do not need to purchase a single, comprehensive textbook. All required readings will be available via Canvas, the library, or free online sources.
Readings available via Canvas or library access:

- *White Space is Not Your Enemy* (Lupton & Phillips): selected chapter: "What is Design?"
- Robin Williams, *The Non-Designer's Design Book*: selected chapters on contrast, repetition, alignment, proximity
- Colin Bryar and Bill Carr, *Working Backwards*: Amazon six-pager chapter
- Nancy Duarte, *slide:ology*: selected chapters (accessed via O'Reilly online with GT credentials)
- Kerry Patterson et al., *Crucial Conversations:* Chs. 1 and 7 (accessed free via GT library)
- Selected articles on professional and technical communication, including Kimball's "Tactical Technical Communication" and short pieces on research methods, accessibility, and ethics

GRADING POLICY

Assignments in this class are scaffolded, or broken into multiple smaller portions that build upon each other. At any given time, you can expect to be working on one group project, one individual project, and your weekly readings and module activities.

DESCRIPTION OF GRADED COMPONENTS

**Writing Labs** (**10%)**

Short, focused practice activities tied to each class session. For example, analyzing a vendor document for audience and tone, drafting a gap statement, or diagnosing whether a Pecha Kucha headline is a topic or an assertion. Labs are low-stakes and graded mainly on thoughtful completion and engagement with the prompt, not polish. They are designed to prepare you for the larger projects.

**Collaboration & Engagement** (**10%)**

This grade reflects how you show up in class and in your team: contributing to in-class discussions and activities, participating in peer review, and acting as a responsible teammate on long-term projects. I use a combination of in-class participation, peer review

work, and periodic confidential peer feedback to determine this score. Attendance penalties are deducted from this category for more than four unexcused absences.

**Invent Your Client  (Group Project 25%)**

In this multi-stage group project, you'll simulate an assigned company and build a mock AI "client" that embodies that organization's voice, values, and reasoning style. You'll reverse-engineer the company's public documents, identify its patterns of argument and risk posture, and then create artifacts that "speak in that voice."

**Vendor Voice Portfolio (5%)**

A curated set of 8–12 public documents (press releases, blog posts, docs, etc.) with short contextualizing paragraphs that explain what each artifact reveals about the company's style, values, and assumptions about its audiences.

**Client World & AI Profile (10%)**

A report that maps how your client frames problems and solutions, defines key stakeholders, and evaluates evidence. You'll then translate those patterns into an AI "profile" your team will use later as a simulated reviewer.

**Pitch Studio & AI-Supported Revision (10%)**

You'll test your AI "client" by having it respond to draft pitch materials, then revise your work based on that feedback. You'll submit the revised artifacts plus a brief explanation of how you used (and sometimes resisted) AI suggestions in light of what you know about the client.

**Tactical Technical Communication Ethnography (Individual 25%)**

This project asks you to investigate how technical communication really works in a user-help ecosystem you choose — for example, a modding subreddit, Discord server, comment threads on how-to videos, or GitHub issues. You'll observe who talks, what formats they use, how help succeeds or fails, and where communication breaks down.

**User Community Report (5%)**

A 4–5 page descriptive analysis of your chosen community: key participants, recurring problems, formats, norms, and assumptions about what users already know.

**Gap Analysis & Design Brief (10%)**

Building on your report, you'll identify a specific audience, task, and failure point in the current help system, then write a brief that defines the gap and proposes a targeted intervention under realistic constraints.

**Technical Tutorial Video (10%)**

A 3–6 minute tutorial (or comparable help artifact) designed to address the gap you identified. You'll be evaluated on clarity, audience fit, organization, and how well the

tutorial responds to the real needs of the community you studied. Submit as a link (YouTube, Google Drive, or Vimeo) — not a file upload.

**Mini Ethics Pecha Kucha (Individual 15%)**

You'll deliver a 10-slide, 20-seconds-per-slide Pecha Kucha (3:20 total) that makes a tactical ethics argument anchored in a concrete artifact — an interface, help doc, PR claim, moderation rule, GitHub thread, etc. Your job is to name the tactical move, the constraints, the stakeholders, and how the situation distributes risk and labor, then propose a realistic alternative and explain the tradeoffs. The format forces clarity: simple slides, tight timing, and a strong through-line.

**Slide Deck & Design Rationale (5%)**

Prior to recording, submit your slide deck as a PDF along with a short note explaining key design decisions.

**Video Performance (7.5%)**

You'll be assessed on pacing, clarity, engagement, and how well you adapt to the timed slide changes. Submit as a link, not a file upload. Your video must include captions or a transcript.

**Performance & Process Reflection (2.5%)**

After presenting, you'll reflect on what worked, what didn't, and how you might adapt your presentation strategies for future technical and professional contexts.

**Independent Work Sessions (5%)**

The semester includes two structured Independent Work Sessions. On IWS days, instead of coming to class in person, you'll complete a guided task that pushes a major project forward (for example: drafting and reviewing pieces of your client AI profile). IWS assignments are graded on thoughtful completion and will be clearly labeled in Canvas so you know exactly what to submit.

**Final Synthesis & Reflective Memo (10%)**

In a 1200–1500 word memo, you'll look back at your work across the semester and analyze how your understanding of professional and technical communication has changed. You'll revisit your Week 1 self-assessment, choose representative artifacts from your major projects and labs, and explain what they show about your growth in areas like research, audience awareness, design, and tactical use of tools (including AI). Graded on depth of insight, use of concrete examples, and clear, professional writing.

**Grade Breakdown**

Assignments in this class are scaffolded, or broken into multiple smaller portions that build upon each other. At any given time, you can expect to be working on one group project, one individual project, and your weekly readings and in-class activities.

**Grade Breakdown:**

| Component | Weight |
|---|---|
| **Writing Labs** | 10% |
| **Collaboration & Engagement** | 10% |
| **Independent Work Sessions (IWS)** | 5% |
| **Invent Your Client (Group Project) — 25%** | |
| Vendor Voice Portfolio | 5% |
| Client World & AI Profile | 10% |
| Pitch Studio & AI-Supported Revision | 10% |
| **Tactical Technical Communication Ethnography — 25%** | |
| User Community Report | 5% |
| Gap Analysis & Design Brief | 10% |
| Technical Tutorial Video (submitted as a link) | 10% |
| **Mini Ethics Pecha Kucha — 15%** | |
| Slide Deck & Design Rationale (PDF) | 5% |
| Video Performance (submitted as a link) | 7.5% |
| Performance & Process Reflection | 2.5% |
| **Final Synthesis & Reflective Memo** | 10% |
| **TOTAL** | **100%** |

COURSE POLICIES

## Attendance and Participation

Attendance is an essential part of this course because much of our work happens through in-class activities, workshops, and collaboration with your project team. Your attendance contributes to your Collaboration and Engagement (10%) grade.

You may miss up to four class sessions for any reason, with no documentation or explanation required. These absences are meant to cover common situations such as minor illness, scheduling conflicts, travel delays, or personal obligations. After your fourth absence, each additional absence will result in a 2% deduction from your final course grade, applied through the Collaboration and Engagement category.

In addition to the four standard absences, I may approve up to two additional absences for professional reasons such as job interviews, career fairs, or graduate school interviews. These must be communicated in advance when possible.

If you experience a situation that significantly affects your ability to attend class over time (e.g., extended illness or ongoing personal circumstances), please contact the Dean of Students. I will work with you in coordination with that office to determine appropriate accommodations.
In-class work (including writing labs and collaboration and engagement labs) is designed to be completed in class and cannot be made up for attendance credit. However, you are

encouraged to complete missed work asynchronously to stay on track. I will drop the lowest four lab grades, which helps account for occasional absences. Completing work asynchronously may support your learning and lab grade, but does not replace attendance.

I track attendance by using the Canvas Roll Call feature. This feature automatically generates a percentage grade, but that grade cannot be configured to account for the four allowed absences before any penalty is applied. You should check your attendance for the number of absences and tardies recorded total, but not the percentage score assigned.

**Academic Integrity**

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review Georgia Tech's Honor Code and the student Code of Conduct. Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

**Accommodations for Students with Disabilities**

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

**Student-Faculty Expectations Agreement**

At Georgia Tech, we believe that it is important to strive for an atmosphere of mutual respect, acknowledgement, and responsibility between faculty members and the student body. The Student-Faculty Expectations articulate some basic expectations that you can have of me and that I have of you. In the end, simple respect for knowledge, hard work, and cordial interactions will help build the environment we seek. Therefore, I encourage you to remain committed to the ideals of Georgia Tech while in this class.

**Collaboration and Group Work**

You are encouraged to talk with classmates about ideas, readings, and examples. You are required to do your own thinking and writing on individual assignments. For group projects, you are expected to contribute meaningfully and not leave teammates carrying your share of the work. Any use of outside tools or help (including generative AI) must support your learning, not replace it. If you're ever unsure whether a type of help is okay, ask me first.

For the Invent Your Client sequence and other team deliverables, you are expected to show up to scheduled meetings, take responsibility for specific pieces of the work, be honest with your team about your progress and capacity, and participate in joint decisions about tools, AI use, and division of labor. I use confidential peer feedback plus observable activity (Canvas, version history, etc.) to adjust individual grades within group projects if needed.

Georgia Tech aims to cultivate a community based on trust, academic integrity, and honor. Students are expected to act according to the highest ethical standards. Review Georgia Tech's Honor Code and the student Code of Conduct.

Any student suspected of cheating or plagiarism on a quiz, exam, or assignment will be reported to the Office of Student Integrity, who will investigate the incident and identify the appropriate penalty for violations.

In this course, the Honor Code means:

- Do not share or reuse assignments from other students or past semesters
- Do not submit work (human- or AI-generated) that you did not substantially plan, shape, and revise yourself
- Be transparent about help you receive from people, from AI tools, or from other resources

If you're unsure whether something is okay, email me and ask. I'd much rather clarify in advance than handle an Honor Code case later.

**AI Policy**

In this course, I assume that writing is already collaborative and tool-mediated. You learn from other people's sentences, from style guides, from Stack Overflow, and now from GenAI tools. I don't expect your writing to be "purely individual." I do expect you to take intellectual responsibility for anything you submit under your name. That means you should be able to explain your choices, defend your claims, and recognize the limits and risks of any AI-generated material that plays a part in your composition process.

A useful way to think about GenAI in your writing is friction. Some tasks are low-friction (quick drafting, brainstorming, summarizing), and some require high-friction work (judgment, tradeoffs, interpretation, ethical reasoning). GenAI can help in low-friction phases, but it can also make the work feel "handled" before you've built traction.

Our program's AI guidelines emphasize responsibility and transparency. For major assignments, I'll ask you to include a process note describing how you used (or chose not to use) GenAI in your process. Think of this as a log of your workflow, not a confession. I'm interested in what roles these tools played: Did they help you articulate a problem? Organize a knotty conceptual field? I am less interested in the hard line between "your writing" and "machine writing" on a line-by-line level.

**Course Completion**

Failure to complete any component of the course, including projects, assignments, and stages of projects or assignments, may result in failure of the course, as determined by the instructor of the course in consultation with the Director of the Writing and Communication Program.

**Syllabus Modifications**

This syllabus may be modified as the semester progresses to meet course outcomes and address the needs of members of the class.

## Other Course Policies

### Late and Missing Work: the 48-Hour Flex Window

All major assignments and labs are due Wednesdays by 11:59 p.m. Eastern unless otherwise noted on Canvas. Because this is an asynchronous course and many of you are juggling jobs, family, and interviews, I build in some flexibility by default.

- 0–48 hours after the deadline: No late penalty. I treat the work as on time. (Example: due Wednesday 11:59 p.m., anything submitted by Friday 11:59 p.m. is fine.)
- More than 48 hours late: A 10% deduction from the assignment grade unless we have made prior arrangements.
- More than 7 days late: Work may no longer be accepted unless you've contacted me and we've agreed on a plan. Very late work also risks falling out of sync with group projects and feedback cycles.

### Extensions and Extenuating Circumstances

Life happens. I am happy to work with you when you participate in an approved Institute activity, observe a religious holiday, have a significant illness or health-related issue, face a serious family or personal emergency, or travel for job interviews. Email me as soon as you reasonably can, preferably before the deadline. Use a short, clear subject line (e.g., "Extension request – Gap Analysis"). You do not need to share personal details; a brief explanation and a proposed new date are enough.

For group assignments (the Invent Your Client sequence), deadlines matter for your teammates as well as for you. If you know you will miss a milestone, tell your group and me as early as possible so the team can adjust.