

Master of Science in Technical Communication

Policies & Procedures

Overview of the Program

Employers in all sectors consistently rank communication skills as being crucial to success and indicate an ongoing need for employees at all levels who can communicate effectively. However, today's ability to communicate effectively requires not only traditional verbal skills, but also facility with visual communication, with digital media, and with the tools used to create and produce communication.

The Master of Science in Technical Communication is designed to prepare students to communicate effectively in a 21st century information environment. The program teaches students how to design, produce, and manage print and digital texts, using traditional and developing technologies. Through a balance of theory and practice, the curriculum ensures that students develop the analytical abilities, technological expertise, and hands-on skills necessary for success as a technical communicator; likewise, the curriculum provides students with a comprehensive understanding of the professional, cultural, and ethical issues that shape the field. The program prepares students for technical communication positions in the private, public, and non-profit sectors and offers professionals the opportunity to further advance their careers. Students who complete the program will be accomplished writers, editors, designers, and researchers who are able to respond effectively to a range of audiences, issues, and communication situations.

Program Objectives

The goal of the MS in Technical Communication is to provide students with strengths in four key areas: rhetorical knowledge; critical thinking, analysis, and research; practices and processes of the field; and technology. More specifically, students who successfully complete the program should:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Recognize and understand the ways in which genres shape communication
- Understand the importance of user-centered design
- Analyze, articulate and respond to the needs of specific audiences and communication situations
- Apply conventions of genre and form appropriate to specific audiences and contexts

Critical Thinking, Analysis, and Research

- Understand a variety of theoretical approaches to technical communication
- Understand relationships among language, knowledge, and power
- Recognize, analyze, and understand the contexts within which language, information, and knowledge are produced, managed, organized, and disseminated
- Integrate previously held beliefs, assumptions, and knowledge with new information and the ideas of others
- Understand ideological perspectives regarding research methods and research design
- Read, interpret, and evaluate research studies
- Identify and apply appropriate methods for investigating particular research questions

Practices and Processes

- Develop flexible strategies for drafting, revising, and editing
- Demonstrate ability to communicate verbally and visually in multiple genres
- Understand the collaborative and social aspects of research, writing, and design processes
- Demonstrate awareness of community and cultural patterns in communication
- Demonstrate understanding of legal and ethical uses of information and technology

Technology

- Demonstrate a critical perspective of technology, its uses, users, and contexts
- Understand the role of technologies/media in accessing, managing, developing, and communicating information
- Choose appropriate technologies for presenting, organizing, and communicating information for a range of audiences, purposes, and genres
- Demonstrate ability to use a range of technologies for writing, editing, and designing
- Develop flexibility in adapting to new technologies

Program Requirements**Required Courses**

Required Core Courses (6 credit hours)		Credit Hrs
TWC505 should be taken in the semester immediately prior to taking TWC593 or TWC599		
TWC 504	Applied Rhetoric & Technical Communication	3
TWC 505	Research in Technical Communication	3
TWC506	Research Design & Development (applied project & thesis students)	3

Elective Courses (24 credits)

Electives (24 credit hours). Choose eight courses from the list below. Courses should be selected in consultation with the graduate advisor, program head, or committee. Other courses may be approved by the program head to fulfill elective requirements.		Credit Hrs
TWC 501	Fundamentals of Technical Communication Students who do not have previous technical communication coursework or relevant industry experience <i>must</i> take this course. The TC Graduate Advisor or TC Program Head must approve waiver of TWC 501 as a required course	3
TWC 511	Principles of Visual Communication	3
TWC 514	Visualizing Data & Information	3
TWC 521	Principles of Web Authoring	3
TWC 522	Social Media in the Workplace	3
TWC 531	Principles of Technical Editing	3
TWC 535	Global Issues in Technical Communication	3
TWC 543	Grant & Proposal Writing	3
TWC 544	User Experience	3

TWC 545	Content Management & Topic-Based Authoring	3
TWC 546	Technical and Scientific Reports	3
TWC 551	Copyright & Intellectual Property in the Electronic Age	3
TWC 552	Information in the Digital Age	3
TWC 553	Information Technology and American History	3
TWC 554	Information Technology and Culture	3
TWC584	Internship	3
TWC590	Reading and Conference (may only be taken with the student's committee chair in the semester prior to applied project/thesis hours)	
TWC 598	Special Topics (may be repeated for credit with different topics)	3

Culminating Experience Requirement

Capstone Requirement (<i>choose one of the following options</i>) <i>Capstone hours must be completed during the academic year, not in the summer</i> <i>TWC 593 and TWC 599 are C session 6-credit courses</i>		Credit Hrs
TWC 593	An applied project on a topic of relevance to the field and your career interests.	6
TWC 599	A thesis on a topic of relevance to the field and your career interests.	6
TWC596	Capstone	3

To meet continuous re-enrollment requirements, students who do not complete their applied project or thesis within the 6 required hours must enroll for 1 hour of TWC595 (continuing registration) until they have successfully defended and submitted their project/thesis.

The MSTC Program offers 3 options for the capstone experience: an applied project, a thesis, and a capstone course. You will discuss each option with the Graduate Advisor during advising sessions to help you choose the experience that is most appropriate for you and your professional goals.

Applied Project

An applied project should demonstrate your ability to apply knowledge and skills, use research methods appropriate to the field, and prepare a deliverable (document, website, etc.) that is effectively structured, written, and designed for its intended users and purposes. The applied project is appropriate for students who would like to complete the program with a large project that showcases their skills and knowledge as a technical communication practitioner.

The applied project will result in two documents:

Workplace Deliverable. The workplace deliverable is an information product that you are preparing for a specific audience, purpose, and context of use. It may be a document requested by an employer or client (real or hypothetical). The deliverable can take a variety of forms/genres, including a manual, report, online help system, website, grant proposal, training guide, etc. **The length of an applied project that is textual is 30 pages.** If your

workplace deliverable will be designed for digital use rather than print-based, consult with your committee chair about requirements for length.

Metacognitive Analysis. Accompanying the workplace deliverable will be an analysis of **approximately 30 pages** in which you discuss how your project—both the process and the workplace deliverable—demonstrates that you have applied what you have learned in the program. The workplace analysis should not repeat the content of the deliverable. Instead, the metacognitive analysis is a reflective document in which you articulate how the applied project demonstrates your growth as a technical communicator. If you're not sure what metacognition or reflective writing is (and isn't), watch these short videos:

- <https://youtu.be/X1xkFgHAWDO>
- <https://youtu.be/SntBj0FIApw>

Your analysis should discuss:

- a description of the workplace deliverable, its context (workplace and disciplinary), and goals
- a description of what happened: your experience developing the project
- an interpretation and analysis of the events experienced during the project
- an evaluation of the effectiveness of the project. The evaluation should cover both the evaluation of the deliverable but, equally or more importantly, it should evaluate the effectiveness of the processes used during the development, research, and composing stages
- a plan for the future in which you articulate how this project has helped you to grow as a technical communicator and how you will leverage your learning and experience for your future as a professional

Thesis

A thesis should demonstrate your ability to apply what you have learned in the program to a scholarly/academic research project. The thesis option is appropriate if you have interest in or intend to apply to doctoral programs or want to pursue research that is scholarly or empirical in nature, rather than a workplace deliverable.

The thesis is an in-depth document of **approximately 60-70 pages** that reflects original research on a specific topic within technical communication. It demonstrates that you can articulate research questions, identify methods appropriate for investigating those questions, apply the methods, and critically analyze and interpret the findings.

Capstone

In the capstone course, students will synthesize and reflect upon the concepts, skills, and knowledge they have gained in MSTC coursework. Students will also compose a professional portfolio to reflect their identity as a professional communicator and a metacognitive statement that reflects upon their experience in the MSTC Program in the context of

program outcomes

Program of Study (https://graduate.asu.edu/sites/default/files/How-to_iPOS.pdf)

The Graduate College requires all students to submit an electronic program of study (iPOS) that lists the courses you have taken and those you plan to take, identify your culminating experience, and identify your chair and committee members (or advisor for the capstone experience). The iPOS is completed online through myASU and can be revised as necessary.

The iPOS should be filed during your second semester in the program; it *must* be filed before you have completed 50% of the credits (18 credit hours) for the program.

You must meet with the MSTC graduate advisor after you are admitted to the program to discuss your plan of study and program requirements and should plan to continue to meet once/semester prior to registering for courses. You must meet with the MSTC graduate advisor before filing your iPOS for approval.

Please **do not** list a faculty member as your chair or committee member until you have obtained his/her consent to serve in that role. Your committee chair must be selected from the TC graduate faculty. Contact information for eligible graduate faculty is listed in the TWC Graduate Student site in Blackboard.

The iPOS will be reviewed by the MSTC graduate advisor, who must approve it before you can register for thesis or applied project credit hours.

Satisfactory Academic Progress

All graduate students are expected to make systematic progress toward completion of their degree. The degree must be completed within six years. Satisfactory progress entails meeting all of the benchmarks and requirements set by ASU as well as those set by the program, including successfully completing and defending the thesis or applied project (see below). Students are required to maintain a minimum of a 3.00 GPA and must be continuously enrolled, as described below.

Maintain a minimum of 3.00 GPA on both the iPOS and Graduate GPAs. The iPOS GPA is calculated from all courses that appear on the approved iPOS. The Graduate GPA is calculated from all courses numbered 500 or higher that appear on the transcript, with the exception of courses counted toward an undergraduate degree at ASU (unless shared with a master's degree in an approved bachelor's/master's degree program); and courses identified as deficiencies in the original letter of admission.

If either GPA falls below 3.00, you must develop, with your advisor, an academic performance improvement plan that includes the conditions and timeframe for making satisfactory academic progress in the degree program. A student is considered to be on academic probation until the conditions specified in the academic performance improvement plan are met and both GPAs are above 3.00. If the student has not achieved the minimum cumulative graduate GPA of 3.0 by the end of the probationary period, the Director of the MSTC program will recommend to the Division of Graduate Studies that the student be withdrawn from the program. All coursework undertaken during this probationary period must be approved by the program Director prior to enrollment. Probationary students will not be permitted to register for the capstone project.

Grades below 2.00 (C) cannot be used to meet the requirements for a graduate degree. Additionally, a student who receives a grade of C (2.00) or below in a core (required) course must repeat the course in a regularly scheduled class the next time it is offered. Students will not be allowed to repeat a core course more than once. Failure to achieve a grade of B or above in a repeated core course will result in a recommendation to the Division of Graduate Studies that the student be withdrawn from the program.

Maintain continuously enrollment in the degree program. Failing to do so without a Graduate College-approved *Request to Maintain Continuous Enrollment* is considered to be lack of academic progress and may lead to automatic dismissal of the student from the degree program. Persistent “W” and “I” grades during multiple semesters on a plan of study or transcript may reflect lack of academic progress.

If you fail to satisfy the requirements of the program and/or the university, you may be dismissed from the program based on the Academic Unit’s recommendation to the Graduate College. The Vice Provost for Graduate Education makes the final determination.

Academic excellence is expected of all students doing graduate work. Upon recommendation from the Director of the MSTC program, the Division of Graduate Studies can withdraw a student who is not progressing satisfactorily. Students who have not met the program’s standards for satisfactory progress also have the option of voluntarily withdrawing from the program.

The highest standards of academic integrity are expected of all students; failure to meet these standards will result in expulsion from the program. The ASU academic integrity policy is available at www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/sta/sta104-01.html.

Professional Conduct and Reflective Practice

In addition to academic progress requirements, students must demonstrate professional conduct, responsibility, and growth through reflective practice. Failure to meet standards of professional conduct and responsibility may lead to Academic Probation or to a reduced or failing course grade. Egregious violations may result in a recommendation to the Graduate College that you be withdrawn from the MSTC Program. Students who are placed on Academic Probation will work with the MSTC Advisor or Program Head to develop a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP) for either one semester or one full academic year. To return to good standing, you must satisfactorily meet all criteria stated in the PIP. If all criteria are not met, a recommendation will be made to the Graduate College for dismissal.

Professional Conduct and Reflective Practice standards are:

- Relationships with colleagues that are characterized by collaboration and cooperation and willingness to learn from others
- Communication that is collegial, respectful and civil with peers; instructors; TC, CISA, and University personnel
- Adherence to the policies and procedures established by course instructors, advisors, TC Program and CISA personnel
- Seeking and using feedback to actively reflect and work on improving practices and behaviors

- Meeting deadlines set by course instructors, thesis/applied project committees, and University policies
- Participation in opportunities for professional development and application of new skills and knowledge

Appeal Process

You have the right to appeal a recommendation to the Graduate College that you have been withdrawn from the Program. Steps in the appeal process:

1. You receive a notice that a recommendation for withdrawal from the program is being made to the Graduate College
2. Within 10 days of receiving the notice, you may appeal in writing to the Dean of the College of Interdisciplinary Sciences and Arts. Failure to file within 10 days will result in an automatic denial of the appeal.

Procedure for Theses and Applied Projects

Each capstone option requires a committee made up of at least three faculty members, two of whom, including the chair, must be from the Technical Communication graduate faculty. Your committee will work with you to select an appropriate topic, supervise your progress, and evaluate your capstone project, whether it is a thesis or an applied project.

1. **Select your graduate committee (3 members total).** Discussion will begin about selecting an appropriate committee chair during advising sessions. Once you have decided on a chair, begin by asking him/her whether s/he is available and would be willing to serve on the committee. You will work most closely with the committee chair, and it is important that there is a good fit in terms of areas of interest and research. Once s/he has confirmed s/he will serve as chair, discuss selection of 2 additional committee members.

You are required to enter the committee information into myASU in order to set up your final plan of study (iPOS) for graduation. **Your iPOS must be submitted for approval by the TC Graduate Advisor by the completion of 18 credit hours to meet the Graduate College's 50% rule.** We must meet with the Graduate Advisor prior to registering for courses each semester to discuss course selections and potential committee chair/member selection.

2. **Develop your thesis or applied project proposal.** You will begin working on your proposal in TWC505 and TWC506 and then finalize it with your committee chair. The purpose of the proposal is to persuade your committee that you have a viable project and that you have worked out a plan for completing that project. The proposal should demonstrate that you have done enough background research to be able to articulate the value of the project as well as the methods you intend to use. It should include the following:
 - a literature review that provides context and outlines the key concepts underlying the project
 - research questions (or an explanation of the purpose of the applied project deliverable and the "problem" it solves or "need" it fulfills)

- detailed discussion of research methods and planned analyses
- timeline for completing the project

Proposal Approval. Once your chair indicates that the proposal is ready, send it to your committee members to discuss your proposal in order to get feedback from the committee and gain approval to move forward with the project.

To reasonably expect that you will complete your applied project/thesis within 15 weeks, you should plan to have a completed proposal to your committee by the end of the first week you are enrolled in TWC593.

3. **Complete your research and draft your thesis/applied project documents.** Your proposal should provide a starting point for your thesis or for the analysis of your applied project, but you should expect to revise and expand the literature review and methodology sections in particular as you get further into the project.

Work with your chair to establish deadlines for submitting drafts of your project/thesis. Your chair will decide when the project is ready to submit to the rest of the committee for their feedback and decision about whether you are ready to defend. You must work with your chair to ensure you are ready to defend in time to meet Graduate College deadlines for graduation. If you are writing a thesis, it must be formatted according to ASU Graduate Education Guidelines: <http://graduate.asu.edu/format>.

4. **Schedule the defense for your thesis or applied project.** Be sure to allow time for revisions before the defense, and keep track of all Graduate College requirements such as format, and review and submission deadlines.

You must have a complete draft of your thesis or applied project (deliverable and metacognitive analysis) to your chair at least two weeks before the final date to schedule a defense (see Graduate College deadlines).

If you are completing a thesis, the defense must also be officially scheduled via your MyASU website under the My Programs and Degree Progress “Defense” tab for ASU Graduate Education. This must be done at least ten working days prior to the actual defense. More information is available here: <http://graduate.asu.edu/>. *An Applied Project defense does not need to be scheduled via MyASU.*

5. **Defend your thesis or applied project.** During your defense, you will give a 15-20 minute professional presentation that reviews key aspects of your thesis or applied project. The presentation will be followed by a discussion of the project with your committee. All members of your committee must be present for the defense. You may participate virtually if you are not in the area geographically; however, you must arrange with your committee chair to schedule a room and webcast. Based on the merits of the project and the defense, the project will earn a Pass, Pass with Major Revisions, Pass with Minor Revisions, or Fail.

PLEASE NOTE that capstone credit hours (TWC 593 for the Applied Project; TWC 599 for the Thesis), including the final defense, must be completed during the academic year (August to May). **They cannot**

be completed during the summer.

Graduation

Graduate students are responsible for meeting all Graduate College deadlines for completion of requirements, as well as requirements of the TC Program. The Graduate College posts the deadlines for completing program requirements for graduation: <http://graduate.asu.edu/graddeadlines.html>. Students completing a thesis must refer to the deadline for thesis formatting, defense scheduling, and final submission. Applied projects follow the deadlines for the *culminating experience* on the Graduate College schedule.

PLEASE NOTE: Students will not be approved to attend graduation ceremonies unless *all* requirements are met by the deadlines set by Graduate College.

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