



**M.S. TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
STUDENT PROGRAM
HANDBOOK
2023-2024**

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<https://cisa.asu.edu/tech-comm>

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Master of Science in Technical Communication

1. 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.

1.1 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

2. Admission Requirements

The Master of Science in Technical Communication is open to applicants from any field. Students can begin the program in either fall or spring. Applicants must fulfill the requirements of both the Graduate College and the College of Integrative Sciences and Arts.

Applicants are eligible to apply to the program if they have earned a bachelor's or master's degree, in any field, from a regionally accredited institution.

Applicants must have a minimum of a 3.00 cumulative GPA (scale is 4.00 = "A") in the last 60 hours of their first bachelor's degree program, or applicants must have a minimum of a 3.00 cumulative GPA (scale is 4.00 = "A") in an applicable master's degree program.

All applicants must submit:

1. graduate admission application and application fee
2. official transcripts
3. statement of purpose
4. portfolio
5. three letters of recommendation
6. proof of English proficiency

Additional Application Information

An applicant whose native language is not English must provide proof of English proficiency regardless of their current residency. Since this degree requires a high degree of proficiency in English, an applicant whose native language is not English is expected to have one the following TOEFL scores: 100 internet-based or 250 computer-based.

All applicants must submit a written letter of application that includes a detailed statement of purpose as well as a portfolio of at least three documents that demonstrate the applicant's ability to write in a variety of genres. Portfolio documents can include both academic and professional writing for a range of

audiences and purposes and need not be in the area of technical communication. The portfolio should be 15 to 30 pages in length. The writing samples in the portfolio are evaluated using a rubric that considers several criteria, including a demonstration of the ability to focus on a specific purpose and to meet audience needs and show organization, clarity, mechanical soundness and overall effectiveness.

All applicants must submit three letters of reference, either academic or professional, that speak to the background and capabilities of the applicant.

3. Program Requirements

The MS in Technical Communication consists of 36 credit hours. Working with the faculty advisor for the MS Program, students will select a culminating experience upon completion of 12 hours of coursework.

	Thesis	Applied Project	Capstone
Required	12 hours - TWC 501, TWC 504, TWC 505, TWC 506	12 hours - TWC 501, TWC 504, TWC 505, TWC 506	9 hours - TWC 501, TWC 504, TWC 505
Electives	18 hours	18 hours	27 hours
Culminating Experience	6 hours (TWC 599)	6 hours (TWC 593)	3 hours (TWC 596)

3.1 Required Courses

Required Core Courses (6 credit hours)		Credit Hrs
If completing a thesis or applied project, TWC505 and TWC506 should be taken in the semester immediately prior to taking TWC593 or TWC599		
TWC 501	Fundamentals of Technical Communication – required	3
TWC 504	Applied Rhetoric & Technical Communication (all students)	3
TWC 505	Research in Technical Communication (all students)	3
TWC 506	Research Design & Development (applied project & thesis students)	3

3.2 Elective Courses

Electives. Choose courses from the list below. Courses should be selected in consultation with the graduate advisor(s) or thesis committee. Other courses may be approved by the program head to fulfill elective requirements.		Credit Hrs
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 536	Project Management in Technical Communication	3
TWC 543	Grant & Proposal Writing	3
TWC 544	User Experience	3
TWC 545	Content Strategy	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
TWC 584	Internship	3
TWC 598	Special Topics (may be repeated for credit with different topics)	3

3.3 Culminating Experience Requirement

Choose one of the following options) <i>Culminating Experience hours must be completed during the academic year, not in the summer, during the final semester of the plan of study</i> <i>TWC 593 and TWC 599 are C session 6-credit courses</i>		<u>Credit Hrs</u>
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 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) each semester (fall and spring) until they have successfully defended and submitted their project/thesis.

3.4 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 a capstone or 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.

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.

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 <https://provost.asu.edu/academic-integrity>.

3.5 Academic Probation

If Graduate or iPOS GPA falls below 3.00, you must develop, with the MSTC program lead(s), 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 Graduate College that the student be withdrawn from the program. Probationary students will not be permitted to register for the thesis, or applied project hours.

3.6 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 Director of the School of Applied Professional Studies. Failure to file within 10 days will result in an automatic denial of the appeal.

3.7 Grade Disputes

If you disagree with a class grade you have received, you have a procedure to question and dispute it. The following steps must be followed by any student seeking to appeal a grade. (This process does not address academic integrity allegations, faculty misconduct or discrimination.) Student grade appeals must be processed in the regular semester immediately following the issuance of the grade in dispute (by commencement for fall or spring), regardless of whether the student is enrolled at the university.

There are two stages to the grade grievance process: the informal process and the formal process. Begin with the informal procedure. Write a thoughtful note and email to your instructor and explain your concerns. Refer to the syllabus and to the assignment descriptions. Express why you think that the grade is incorrect. Keep your note professional, cordial, and focused on the issue. The instructor will reply to your note with explanations.

If you still disagree, contact the director and explain your situation, your original note, and the instructor's responses. This will begin the [formal process to appeal](#).

4. Culminating Experiences

4.1 Applied Project

An applied project should demonstrate your ability to apply knowledge and skills, use research methods appropriate to the field, and prepare a workplace 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 researcher and technical communication practitioner.

The applied project will result in two documents:

Workplace Deliverable. The workplace deliverable is an information product that you are prepared for a specific audience, purpose, and context of use. It may be a document prepared for 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 and why you made the choices you did when composing the deliverable. 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** (summary) 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. Remember that the metacognitive statement is about your learning and growth as a technical communicator; your evaluation should be grounded in that context.
- 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

4.2 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.

4.3 Capstone Course

In the capstone course, students will synthesize and reflect upon the concepts, skills, and knowledge that 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

4.4 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.

5. Procedure for Theses and Applied Projects

The thesis and applied project options require 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 work, whether it is a thesis or an applied project.

1. **Select your graduate committee (3 members total).** Discussion about selecting an appropriate committee chair can occur with other faculty in the program or during advising email session. 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.**

2. **Develop your thesis or applied project proposal.** You will begin working on your proposal TWC506 and 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:

- research questions for the thesis or an explanation of the purpose of the applied project deliverable and the “problem” it solves or “need” it fulfills
- a brief literature review that provides context and outlines the key concepts underlying the project
- detailed explanation of research methods and planned analyses, including the specific steps to be performed
- timeline for completing the project

Proposal Approval. Once your chair indicates that the proposal is ready, send it to your committee members to discuss it 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 beginning of the first week you are enrolled in TWC593 or TWC599.

3. **Complete your research and draft your thesis/applied project documents.** Your proposal should provide a starting point for your thesis or your applied project, but you should expect to revise and expand the literature review and methodology sections 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 College Guidelines: <https://graduate.asu.edu/current-students/completing-your-degree/formatting-your-thesis-or-dissertation>.

4. **Schedule the defense for your thesis or applied project.** Be sure to allow time for revisions before the defense, and to 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 **10 working days** 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. This must be done at least **ten working days** prior to the actual defense. More information is available here: <https://graduate.asu.edu/current-students/completing-your-degree/about-your-defense>. *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. In person students must hold their defense on-campus. Virtual defenses are only allowed for ASUOnline students. 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 culminating project 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.**

6. 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 a student be withdrawn from the MSTC Program. Students who are placed on Academic Probation will work with the MSTC advisor(s) and/or program lead(s) to develop a Professional Improvement Plan (PIP) for either one semester or one full academic year. To return to good standing, the student 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
- Relationships, interactions, and discourse that respects and values diversity and inclusion for peers and all members of the technical communication and University communities
- 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

7. Unit, College, and University Procedures and Policies

7.1 Registration and Withdrawal

Students may email graduate advisor(s) to confirm enrollment and updates to iPOS as necessary.

Students are required to follow College and University procedures and understand all policies related to

withdrawing from courses.

Students may request a medical/compassionate withdrawal when medical or other emergency situation prevents him/her from completing courses. Information on the process for requesting medical/compassionate withdrawal can be found on the CISA website (<https://cisa.asu.edu/content/medicalcompassionate-withdrawal-instructions>).

Students who plan to withdraw from the MS degree program, should notify the MSTC advisor and complete and submit the Voluntary Withdrawal Form (<https://students.asu.edu/voluntary-withdrawal-form>).

7.2 Transferring Courses from Other Programs or the TC Graduate Certificate

Students may request transfer credit for graduate-level (500-level or higher) electives taken in other ASU programs to count towards electives in the MSTC Programs. Students may request up to 12 transfer credits with grades of a “B” or better. Students who are enrolled in the Technical Communication graduate certificate may transfer all 18 credit hours to the MS degree after they are admitted.

Students who wish to take a course in another degree program must submit a syllabus and assignment list for the course to the MSTC advisor for approval by the MSTC Program Lead. The student will be notified after the course is approved.

7.3 Continuous Enrollment

Once admitted to a graduate degree program, students must be registered for a minimum of one graduate credit hour (500-level or above) each Fall and Spring semester during all phases of their graduate education, to maintain continuous enrollment in the degree program.

Graduate students planning to discontinue registration for a semester or more must submit a **Leave of Absence** request via the iPOS system **before** the anticipated semester of non-registration. Students may request to maintain continuous enrollment without course registration for a maximum of two semesters during their entire program. Failing to do so without a Graduate College-approved **Leave of Absence** is considered to be a lack of academic progress and will lead to automatic discontinuation of the student from the degree program.

Students should contact their adviser as soon as possible if they will not be able to meet continuous enrollment.

If a student withdraws from all of their courses in a Spring or Fall semester, this is considered a break in their continuous enrollment. To rectify this, students should contact the Graduate Course Coordinator and make arrangements to ensure they maintain continuous enrollment, prior to the end of the given semester from which they have completely withdrawn.

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 university, you will need to re-apply to the program as you will be discontinued and unable to enroll.

7.3a Maximum Time Limit

All work toward a master's degree must be completed within six (6) consecutive years per ABOR policy.

7.4 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 until graduation.

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. Ideally, you will complete this once you have earned 12 credit hours and decided upon a culminating experience.

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 Canvas.

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.

7.5 Title IX.

ASU prohibits all forms of discrimination, harassment and retaliation. To view ASU's policy please see <https://www.asu.edu/aad/manuals/acd/acd401.html>.

Title IX protects individuals from discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity operated by recipients of federal financial assistance. As required by Title IX, ASU does not discriminate on the basis of sex in the education programs or activities that we operate, including in admission and employment. Inquiries concerning the application of Title IX may be referred to the Title IX Coordinator or to the U.S. Department of Education, Assistant Secretary, or both. Contact titleixcoordinator@asu.edu or 480-965-0696 for more information. Office located at 1120 S. Cady Mall, INTDSB 284. For information on making a report please go to www.asu.edu/reportit/.

8. University Resources

[Graduate College Policies & Procedures](#)

[Graduate College Formatting Instructions \(thesis\)](#)

[ASU Graduate & Professional Student Association](#)

[ASU Libraries](#)

[ASU Graduate Writing Centers](#)

[ASU Student Services](#)

[ASU Student Accessibility and Inclusive Learning Services](#)

[College of Integrative Sciences & Arts](#)

[MSTC Graduate Student Site \(Canvas\)](#)

[Polytechnic Campus](#)

9. Contacts

Graduate Course Coordinators

Christopher Biro

Christine Quintero

SAPSGrad@asu.edu

Program Manager

Erica Peters

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Faculty Program Co-Leads

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