

Effective Writing and Research in Information Technology (WRIT 2201, Section B)

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“With few exceptions, everything you’ve ever read in your entire life was written by somebody. It’s an obvious observation but becomes an impressive fact the more you think about it. Writers are far more prevalent than most people think, in that many key responsibilities and duties in life require good writing from folks who are not “writers” in the archetypal sense of the word.”

[Tomas Laurinavicius](#) THE BLOG 10/31/2016 02:39 pm ET Updated Dec 06, 2017

What will I be working on in this course?

Introduction: What makes writing work?	Week 1
<p>Search Engine Optimization Project: Research and describe technical information</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how a project proposal ‘works’ and use your understanding to write one for your project. • Learn advanced strategies to find, evaluate, cite, and collate sources of repair information for a vital piece of equipment. • Understand how information and document design make written information useful and easy for readers to find and follow. • Use your understanding to write an informative and factual introduction to your repair topic with hyperlinks and summary descriptions of repair resources. 	Weeks 2-4
<p>Fast Fix Repair Guide: Research and describe technical procedures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analyze client requirements for project proposals, evaluate and select potential repair topics and write a proposal for your project. • Understand how instructions ‘work’ to help readers carry out unfamiliar procedures. • Understand and apply appropriate techniques to illustrate your repair steps. • Understand how completeness, organization, accuracy and precision and compliance with stylistic conventions help readers understand how to carry out unfamiliar technical procedures. • Use your understanding to write and illustrate a repair guide aimed at repair novices. 	Weeks 5-8
<p>Course ePortfolio</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how eportfolios ‘work’ to demonstrate your capabilities, accomplishments and learning. • Select and organize appropriate content to plan the structure for your eportfolio website. • Use descriptions and explanations with illustrative examples to justify your claims about your capabilities and experiences. • Use information and document design principles to create an informative and easy to navigate website that describes your learning and outcomes during the course. 	Weeks 9-12

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Welcome

First and foremost, welcome to the course! Whether you are looking forward to strengthening your research and writing skills or you usually avoid courses with a lot of writing because you find writing (or writing in English) difficult, I hope that the course will be enjoyable and rewarding, and that you will be able to apply what you learn to your other courses and in your future career. I am looking forward to getting to know you and to working with you.

Overview

Don't worry – this course will not be like the English courses you may have taken in the past! It is designed to help you become more efficient, effective, and confident in researching and writing about technical problems and information.

You will learn by working on projects for the real world: a repair guide on a topic you choose and a 'device page' that will help people find repair information to keep vital medical and construction equipment working. Projects that meet an acceptable standard will be published on the [iFixit website](#)! Your third project will be a course eportfolio – the beginning of your own professional website - that helps you reflect on and demonstrate what you have learned about communicating technical information.

Class activities and weekly assignments help you to apply new skills and to develop your projects in small, manageable steps. The weekly assignments also allow you to earn your course grade in small increments spread across the course – there are no big tests or exams! – and provide you with lots of feedback you can use to improve your future work. Previous students say that the weekly assignments and feedback are very helpful, and that the workload is about the same as for other courses at this level. They also advise you to keep up with the work and to manage your time carefully.

Reading for the course includes information and guidelines from our community partner, iFixit.com, , material you will find and use while researching for your projects, and draft assignments written by your colleagues and occasional online resources. You do not need to buy a textbook.

How to reach me

I am here to help you. Please let me know if you have questions about the course or want to talk to me about your work or other concerns! If you have a quick question, comment, or suggestion during class, let me know!

Questions and concerns after class?

- You are always welcome to talk to me after class. I will stay for as long as you need me to – thank you for being patient if you need to wait for other students to finish.

- Email me at rosw@yorku.ca If you use email, please help me to prioritize your message by beginning the subject line with 'WRIT2201' and a few words to summarize the purpose of your email (e.g., 'Question about assignment x' or 'Can we meet to talk about y?').
- I will do my best to respond to your messages or emails within 24 hours on weekdays or on Mondays for any emails sent during the weekend.

Do you need a longer consultation or conversation?

- If you would like to discuss your work or other concerns in more detail, please let me know and we'll arrange an appointment on Zoom, in person, or by phone at a time that works for both of us.

How to contact our partners at iFixit

- Email any questions and project work to techwriting@ifixit.com

N.B. Whenever you contact iFixit (e.g., submitting Project Milestones, informing them of changes to your Project) you must:

- Include your team tag and the purpose of the email in the subject line.
- cc your email to me and to all members of your team.

Diversity and accessibility

I want all of you to have equitable opportunities to participate and to succeed in this course. It is important for everyone in this course to feel respected and that their learning is well-supported, by myself and by all members of the class. I encourage you to share your thoughts, ideas and suggestions, and to allow your colleagues the same opportunity to communicate theirs. I appreciate and encourage your suggestions for ways to improve the effectiveness and experience of the course for yourself or other students or student groups: your ideas may benefit everyone. and will strengthen our readiness to learn, teach and work in a diverse society.

Please let me know as soon as possible if you have documented requirements for accommodations to help you participate fully in the course work and/or if you have difficulty accessing a computer or internet connection for class sessions. I will respect your privacy and confidentiality and will work with you toward changes to help you succeed. The accommodations you need will often benefit other members of the class.

If you think that you may need accommodations but do not have documentation, please contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (416 736 5755) as soon as possible.

For multilingual students

If you feel more comfortable using another language and find that communicating in English is challenging, I want you to know that I understand that it can take much longer to read and write in another language, and that I respect the extra time and effort you are putting into your studies. I also want to reassure you that the more that you practice reading and writing in English, especially in the area you are studying or working, the stronger your skills for communicating in that area will become. (We all must learn the specialized ways that language is used in fields that are new to us!) I am confident that your effort in this course will pay off: many students in similar situations have told me that they use skills learned in the course to write in English more easily, and that by the end of the course they feel more confident about their ability to communicate in English. Many of those students also did very well in the course!

Why am I taking a writing course now that generative AI tools are available?

Yes, some writing can be outsourced to generative AI tools, but they can't generate a lot of the kinds of writing that professionals use. The point of this course is that *professionals often use research and writing as tools in their own thinking and problem solving, as well as to communicate in situations where AI tools do not perform well – communicating about current, often unique, situations, problems, progress, and solutions. Your own abilities to research and communicate effectively will still have a vital role in your academic and professional success!*

The research and writing capabilities you learn in the course will also help you to use generative AI tools more effectively- to find out when AI tools can be helpful and how to use them more effectively. Strengthening your own research and writing capabilities will help you to write better prompts, to critically assess the accuracy of information in AI generated text (e.g., avoiding misinformation and AI-generated 'hallucinations'); and to critically assess and improve the appropriateness of AI-generated text for specific situations and readers. For these reasons, ***you are expected to complete all course writing activities and assignments yourself, i.e., without using AI-generated text.***

If I specifically ask you to explore the use of an AI tool as part of an assignment, you must indicate that you have done so by using quotation marks (if you use the text without paraphrasing it), as well as naming the AI tool with the date and prompts used to generate the material.

Detailed information about the course

- Class sessions are on Tuesday evenings, 7-10 pm in DB 009. We'll use a lot of our time together to do things that we can't do alone. Expect to do things like brainstorming, sharing and organizing ideas, finding and analyzing examples, and giving and receiving feedback on drafts of your work in progress. The activities will help you to gain new understanding and to practice skills you need to complete the course projects. For this reason, your attendance and participation in class activities are required.
- Links and materials you need each week will be posted in the course website.

What will I learn?

As an ITEC professional, your work is at the intersection of research, writing and technology. You will use research and writing to understand and solve technological problems and to communicate your work and solutions to others. Your work in this course will help you become more effective, independent, and confident in your ability to research and to write effectively for your courses and professional work.

More specifically, you will build fundamental research and technical writing capabilities that are required to clearly describe and document IT-related problems and solutions. You will develop these capabilities by working on projects that require research into, and clear descriptions of, real world technical problems and procedures and by creating an ePortfolio to demonstrate and reflect critically on your development as a researcher/writer.

Overall, the course will help you to:

1. *Extend your understanding of 'research' and 'writing' as concepts and processes.*
2. *Expand your repertoire of research/writing processes, skills and tools.*
3. *Analyze and respond to specific research and writing tasks accurately and effectively.*
4. *Read critically and analytically to understand how genres and specific texts are constructed to meet the needs of their audience and to achieve their purpose.*
5. *Apply the knowledge and skills described above to produce a repair guide and technical information about a medical device on behalf of a client organization, and a course ePortfolio that documents and reflects on your capabilities.*
6. *Contribute constructively to academic discussions and work collaboratively with colleagues.*

7. *Use appropriate processes and criteria for self- and peer-assessment and to develop your work and your capabilities.*

Topics and skills:

Research knowledge, skills, and processes	Writing knowledge, skills, and processes
Clarifying information needs and formulating problems or research questions	Clarify user information needs and characteristics
Use advanced search tools and strategies (appropriate choice of search engines and databases, constructing search terms with use of thesaurus, synonyms, Boolean operators, limit terms)	Use appropriate writing processes, tools & strategies, including citation and markup conventions, substantive revision & editing skills and tools
Critical evaluation of information and information sources	Critically analyze and apply your understanding of writing in genres commonly used in ITEC
Analytical reading	Usability testing and constructive feedback
Organization and management of information and sources (bibliographic management tools, citation conventions and tools, topic scoping, use of concept mapping)	Organize content and use your understanding of genre and document design to make information easy to find and follow (genre awareness, search engine optimization, design principles, production of accessible documents, visual communication, structured content and wiki syntax)
Integration, analysis and synthesis of information for insights and understanding	Integration, analysis and synthesis of information for insights and understanding

Other Professional Capabilities:

- Critical awareness of ethical, social, and cultural issues in communication
- Project and time management
- Collaboration

How will the course help me to achieve these goals?

Learning and teaching

We don't write writing, we write something—a proposal, an argument, a description, a judgement, a directive—that we hope will have an effect....' ([Anthony Paré](#))

The course is designed for you to learn as you work on meaningful writing projects that will be useful to real people. Your work and learning will be integrated across class sessions and assignments, so your work in both settings is important and will contribute to your overall success in the course. Class activities and weekly assignments help you build skills and develop your projects in small steps, similar to the [iterative](#) or [agile](#) development models used in many software and business projects. In a typical week, you will participate in activities that challenge you to:

- find, read, and critically evaluate technical and other information;
- learn about and use new tools and strategies for research and writing;
- share ideas with colleagues in the class;
- reflect on what you are learning;
- write and revise drafts, and
- give and receive feedback on your own and your colleagues' work in progress.

Course projects

The projects include independent work (researching, drafting, and revising components of each project) and collaboration with class colleagues (user-testing and providing constructive feedback) so that your finished work meets the requirements for potential publication on the iFixit website or the beginning of your own professional website. You will be able to use your work from all three projects to demonstrate your capabilities to future employers.

SEO Writing Project

Effective problem solving and writing are based on a foundation of high quality (relevant, credible, accurate) information. When we communicate information to help people solve their problems, the information must be easy to find and to follow. The SEO project helps you build skills for locating and evaluating information, summarizing technical information, and organizing content, and to learn how to write so that your material is easy for readers to find online. Your work will contribute to an [initiative](#) to create a database of repair information for vital medical and construction equipment. To find out more about the SEO Project, check out the [SEO Writing Project Roadmap](#). *Add learning objectives here and to slides introducing topics during the course.*

Fast Fix Instruction Project

Academic and professional writing often involves describing procedures – reporting on how we executed a method, task, or process, or giving instructions to help other people carry out procedures and tasks. The Fast Fix project introduces you to research and writing skills used for describing technical procedures; you will

research and write a repair guide for something of your choice. To find out more, take a look at the [Overview of the Fast Fix Project](#).

Course ePortfolio Project

Your Course ePortfolio integrates the work you have done during the course: the contents, writing and presentation demonstrate and reflect on your learning and accomplishments during the course. The project will challenge you to strengthen and expand the capabilities introduced earlier in the course, and to understand and apply principles for communicating information on the web. This culminating, digital project requires you to integrate and demonstrate course learning outcomes including genre awareness, writing in/with multimedia, and document design, as well as research/writing processes and skills. Preparing your ePortfolio will also provide you with a foundation of skills and material for writing future job applications and interviews. Some students have told me that their ePortfolio helped them to get a job, and professionals in technical fields often use ePortfolios to demonstrate their skills and experience to potential clients, and to record and reflect on their professional work to plan for future professional development.

User-testing with Kritik

Previous students have told me that getting immediate feedback on drafts from user-testing, and seeing examples of other students' work, is very helpful for their learning in the course. We will use [Kritik](#), an engaging and gamified platform, to sharpen your analytical and communication skills and to facilitate the logistics of user-testing so that you can make your work as effective as possible (i.e. feedforward). Previous students have told me that the experience of giving and receiving user-testing feedback on drafts helped them learn valuable skills for the future and to improve their projects.

You will receive an email invitation to join our course activities in Kritik and will need to create your account: we will do this in late September. The email will be sent to your York University email account, and you must use your York email to sign up for Kritik. (If you wish, you can provide Kritik with your phone number, and they will send you SMS reminders of upcoming deadlines.) Information and support for using Kritik is available from the [Kritik help center](#).

What will I need to read?

- Readings will include materials that *you* identify through research for your projects, drafts of work written by your colleagues and online resources that I will assign for class activities or assignments.
- Other online resources that are useful for research and writing will be shared through the course website.

How will I be evaluated?

The course is designed to integrate your learning across class sessions and assignments, so your work in both settings is important and will contribute to your overall success in the course. The evaluation scheme recognizes your work as follows:

In-class contributions (5%)

Class sessions introduce and help you practice new concepts and skills and build in time for user testing and giving feedback on your work in progress. *You are therefore required to attend and contribute to activities in class sessions.*¹

Skill- and project-building assignments (60%)

These short assignments help you to practice and reflect on what you learn in class by applying it to your independent projects. They will help you to accomplish the course projects efficiently and allow you to receive feedback to improve your subsequent work. Typical assignment activities include developing and revising parts of your projects, reporting on your progress, and reflecting on your work and learning. They are assigned after each class and are due by the start of the following class so that you can participate in user-testing and use what you learn to make your work as effective as possible.

Your work on these assignments will contribute to your grade as follows:

1. eClass-based assignments. 5 marks for each assignment, cumulatively contributes up to 25% of your course grade. These assignments will be submitted to eClass.
2. Kritik-based assignments. 7 marks for each assignment cumulatively contributes up to 35% to your course grade. These assignments will be submitted to Kritik and user-testing feedback for these assignments will be given in writing during class time. *The extra marks for these assignments give credit for the work of user-testing and giving feedback to colleagues.*
 - The extra weight for Kritik-based assignments recognizes your contribution of written comments. You will upload the draft you wrote for your assignment, analyze and provide written comments on drafts written by your colleagues, and receive feedback from them on how helpful your comments are. You will also receive feedback on your draft from your colleagues in the class. (Your work and feedback will be anonymous for Kritik activities.) Your mark for Kritik assignments is calculated using a formula that reflects the quality of your draft, and the accuracy and quality of your feedback.

¹ If you come to class but arrive late and/or leave early and/or you do not participate in scheduled activities, you will not receive a mark for class contributions.

Final versions of projects

Marks recognize your successful fulfillment of project requirements and your effective use of feedback to improve draft versions of your work.

Please note that the schedule and weightings below are provisional and may be adjusted if unforeseen circumstances arise.

Activity	Weight (%)	Due date
Contributions to class activities and resources	5	Weekly
Skill- and project-building assignments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • eClass-based (5 x 5% = 25 marks overall) • Kritik-based – grade reflects the quality of drafts and of participation in user-testing (35 marks overall) 	60	Weekly
Final versions of course projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SEO Device Information Page • Fast Fix Repair Guide • Course ePortfolio 	5 10 20	17 October 14 November 5 December

To demonstrate that you have attained the learning outcomes expected for this course and achieve a passing grade, you must complete and pass ALL evaluation components.

Note: The overall grading scheme for the course conforms to the system described in the [Policy on York University Grading Schemes](#). (Note that the policy has been updated from the old 9.0 scheme to a 4.0 scheme which simplifies conversions to GPA.) Final course grades may be adjusted to conform to Program or Faculty grades distribution profiles.

How do I submit my assignments?

- Please submit all your assignments via the course website or Kritik, as directed in the assignment instructions. It works best for all of us if your work is submitted online – please do not email me your work!
- Submit your assignments as Word, Google Doc or Office Libre files unless the assignment instructions ask you to do otherwise. (It is more difficult to add comments to PDF documents, so please *do not submit work in PDF format.*)
- When you upload your assignment, please make sure that the file name is as follows: First name Second name Assignment #. You should use your preferred

name as your first name. For example, if I were submitting work for the first assignment, the file name would be: Ros Woodhouse 1.

- Please be professional - *let me know as soon as possible if you have a reason for requesting an extension or submitting a specific assignment after the deadline stated in the course outline. Please remember that I schedule time for grading and feedback and that I cannot always respond quickly to work which arrives late.*

Is there a penalty for late assignments?

- Yes! It is important to keep up with the work on the course. The activities and timing of the assignments are planned carefully to help you to accomplish the course objectives efficiently and for you to receive feedback in time to use it to improve your subsequent work. Late assignments are counterproductive for you and unfair to other students who submit their work on time. Let me know if you have a valid reason for requesting an extension. Otherwise, late assignments will be subject to a penalty of 1% of the course grade for each day after the stated due date.

How will my work be graded?

The focus of the course is on communicating information that will be useful to real readers. The following criteria describe the aspects of what makes such communication effective. I will use the criteria to assess whether your work is ready for readers as it is and to identify aspects that still need work. You can use the criteria to assess your own work and identify how what you need to do to make it even better. The information will help you to identify the kinds of strategies you need to focus on to improve your future work:

Evaluation criteria	Explanation and tips
<i>Did you complete all the instructions and tasks?</i>	<p><i>Fulfilling this criterion is a basic threshold for acceptable academic and professional work²! Completing assignment requirements requires attention to detail. Leaving out parts of an assignment or not following instructions accurately is like throwing marks away!</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure you read instructions and questions carefully and check that you have completed all parts of the assignment and addressed all its requirements accurately

² In professional situations, lack of attention to details of task requirements is a common reason for rejecting applications or proposals, for failed projects and products, and for firing employees!

before you submit your work! You may find it helpful to copy and paste instructions into your answer with enough space to insert your answers, and/or to translate information from instructions and directions into checklists to make it easier to see and confirm that you have followed all requirements.

Is the content adequate and useful?

Is your information relevant, trustworthy (from good sources or your own thoughtful analysis), complete, and described in appropriate detail?

- Is the information you provide relevant to, and appropriate for, the purpose and readers you are writing for?
- If you are answering questions, think about your material and writing carefully: this means working through material systematically and thoughtfully rather than relying on the first idea or two that you come up with!
- If you are working on drafts or revisions of your projects, make sure you have followed guidelines carefully and provided all the information a reader would need.

Is your material organized so that information is easy to find and follow?

Is your information (concepts, points, details etc.) structured effectively so that it 'flows' from one issue, step, point or example to the next?

- Are ideas, points etc. organized in a meaningful and logical sequence that is clear and makes sense to readers, or according to requirements specified by iFixit or the conventions of a specific genre?
- Have you designed your document using layout, fonts, and other design principles so your information is clear, easy to find and follow, and looks professional?
- Are the connections between your ideas or points explained clearly?

Is your information clear, concise and unambiguous?

- Are your sentences easy to understand and do they say what you intended to say?
- Have you used visual information and practical examples to help convey or illustrate information and ideas?
- Have you removed words that don't add to the meaning of your information?

Have you demonstrated that you are aware of ethical, social and cultural expectations and conventions for professional / academic writing?

- Have you used appropriate proofreading tools and strategies to identify and address potential grammar and vocabulary issues that make it hard for your intended readers to understand your content?
- Have you written/illustrated using your own words and images (unless specifically directed otherwise)?
- Have you cited the sources of ideas, information and images used in your writing and provided references using appropriate guidelines for the context and type of writing?
- Have you followed relevant guidelines for markup of visual material?
- Is your document or website accessible for diverse readers?
- Are your tone and design choices appropriate for the purpose and kind of reader you are writing for?

What do I need to do to succeed in this course?

At the end of the course, I always ask students what advice they would give to future students (you!). The most frequent recommendations are to:

- Read and follow instructions carefully.
- Ask me if you have any questions about the assignments.
- Keep up with the work!
- Put effort into the assignments because it pays off later.
- Use the opportunities to talk to colleagues in breakout rooms and class sessions to get comfortable with speaking up in public.

It's great advice that will help you to succeed in this course and in your other endeavours!

Where to go for academic and personal support

We all need support at times, and it is smart and helpful to use the resources available to help us. Let me know if I can help you find appropriate support.

Academic Resources at York

[Learning Commons](#)

- Drop-in appointments and workshops for writing, research (library), learning skills and career services, at 2nd Floor, Scott Library.

[Writing Centre](#) 416 736 2100 ext. 55134

The Writing Centre provides one-to-one tutoring, writing workshops, online resources, and an accessibility specialist for those with academic accommodations. [Register online](#) and book an appointment for a one-to-one tutoring session and to be notified about upcoming workshops.

[ESL Open Learning Services](#) 416 736 2100 ext. 22940

- Work with a language tutor, drop-in for quick questions, use learning resources, sign up for workshops, small group language learning and movie nights.

Personal Resources and Support at York

[Accessibility Services](#) 416 736 5755

- Services for students with learning, mental health, physical, sensory and medical disabilities.

[Student Counselling and Development](#) 416 736 5297

- Services include personal development workshops, personal counselling and crisis intervention.

Good 2 Talk 1 866 9255454

- Confidential, one-time counselling, referrals, and information for Ontario postsecondary students.

[Sexual Violence Response Office](#) 416 736 5211

- Support, services and accommodations if you or someone you know has experienced sexual violence.

Sources of emergency financial support for York students

Unanticipated events can impact the income that you and your family depend on for living and university expenses. If this happens to you and your family, emergency funding may be available:

- Complete the [Student Financial Profile](#) with Student Financial Services in case there are any awards or bursaries that you could be considered for.
- Apply for short term, emergency funding through [LA&PS Emergency Bursaries](#)
- Check options for aid, scholarships, awards, bursaries, and work study programs listed on the pages of [Student Financial Services](#).

Academic policies and information

Official University deadlines

- The last date to drop a Winter Term course without receiving a grade is November 8.
- The Course Withdrawal Period is November 9 - December 5. (Withdrawal, recorded as 'W' on your transcript, does not affect your GPA or count towards required credits for your degree.)
- The official last date to submit work for the Fall Term is December 5.
- For more information, see the sections on add, drop and financial deadlines at [Undergraduate Fall/Winter 2023-2024 Important dates](#).

York University Academic Policies

Academic policies relating to academic honesty, standards, grades, appeals, and student conduct and responsibilities are available at <https://secretariat-policies.info.yorku.ca/>

Academic Honesty

- Your assignments are designed to help you to develop and practice research and writing skills, so it is imperative that you do your own writing.
- All our work must be based on (and demonstrate our awareness of) core academic and professional values and practices – honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. You demonstrate these values when you use your own words and images to convey your material and when you give appropriate attributions for sources you draw on or incorporate into your work. *If you submit an assignment that uses material (ideas, text, images etc.) from other sources without giving credit to those sources, you will not receive a grade for the assignment.*
- You may not upload or copy any of the materials used in this course to other websites or share them with people outside the course.
- To protect your own privacy and that of other class members, you may not upload full or partial recordings of class sessions to other websites or share them with people outside the course.