



UMass Dartmouth  
Fall 2025

## Syllabus

# ENL 620 Writing Computer-User Documentation

### Dr. Beardsley

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### Office Hours

In Person & Online  
Library, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, WMC

M 2:30 – 4:30 p.m.

T 10 – 11 a.m.

Th 1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

*Other hours upon request*

## Mondays

5 – 7:30 p.m.

Centennial Way

Room 3



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## Introduction

How do we research users in a way that incorporates empathy? We'll apply design thinking as a technique that professional writers use to research and interpret their audiences' needs to create user-centered documents. Working in teams, you'll write, design, and test documents. Your team will conduct a usability test to analyze print and online documents from a user's perspective.

## Course Description

The proliferation of computers has led to the rampant growth of documentation requirements and an increased demand for writers capable of addressing various audiences with clarity and precision. In this course, we will concentrate on documentation standards and guidelines, documentation management and control, and document preparation. Among the topics covered will be documentation requirements in the design, development and life cycle of a system; forms management and design considerations; software documentation requirements and the techniques used to prepare effective and efficient documents.

## Learning Outcomes

After taking this course, you'll be able to:

- Define usability studies and the role of professional communication in the field
- Use research methods to understand a text's audience, purpose, and context
- Develop criteria to evaluate a text's strengths and weaknesses for a specific audience, purpose, and context
- Analyze the results accurately and coherently in a written report

## Course Texts & Required Materials

- Clary-Lemon, J., Mueller, D. & Pantelides, K. (2022). [\*Try This: Research Methods for Writers.\*](#)
- Tham, Jason C. K. (Ed.). (2022). [\*Keywords in design thinking: A lexical primer for technical communicators & designers.\*](#)
- Other readings posted on Canvas
- [Discord](#)

## Assignment Overview

- Participation (10%)
- Research Proposal (15%)
- User Research (25%)
- Usability Study Plan (25%)
- Usability Report (25%)

## Attendance Policy

You will be allowed **two absences** this semester. For these two absences, I don't distinguish between excused and unexcused. These are your absences to do with what you wish—you don't need to explain yourself to me. Absences beyond two may significantly impact your ability to keep up with course material and your final grade. Please see me immediately if you need to make accommodations.

You'll also notice that, toward the end of the semester, when you're running your usability test, there are *Independent work* days. We will not meet in person on independent work days because you need the time to work with your team outside the classroom.

## How to Engage Texts and Prepare for Class

Please come to class each week ready to discuss the assigned texts. We all need to read and write to get the most out of this course. Therefore, I expect you to read/listen to/engage with all the material assigned for each week's discussion.

You'll annotate texts using Perusall. In your annotations, take notes on the following:

- Write down questions you have
- List and define key terms and theories, especially those that connect to rhetoric and professional writing
- Note how what you're reading each week connects to other texts we've engaged
- Consider how what you're reading contributes to the unit it's assigned in and how it might help you with your project
- Pay attention to how texts are written
  - What goes in the intro, lit review, methodology, body, and conclusion?
  - How is the text designed?
  - How are sources used to support claims?

Use your annotations as a starting place for completing in-class activities and beginning assignments.

## Office Hours

I hold office hours in person (Library, 2nd Floor, WMC) and virtually (Zoom). The Zoom link is posted on Canvas homepage.

Office hours are dedicated to meeting with students one-on-one or in small groups to discuss questions about the course material, unpack assignment prompts, brainstorm ideas, strategize for keeping up with coursework, develop research and writing skills, and get back on track if you've fallen behind. Even if you don't have any questions, please feel free to drop by and chat!

### Fall 2025 Office Hours

Mondays

2:30 – 4:30 p.m.

Tuesdays

10 – 11 a.m.

Thursdays

1:30 – 2:30 p.m.

*Other hours upon request.*

If my office hours conflict with your class or work schedule, use my [Student Meeting Bookings](#) page to find an alternative meeting time.

## Email & Discord Policy

I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, M – F, 9 AM – 5 PM. I do check my email after that and on the weekends, but not as frequently as I try to keep a work-life balance. Please take this response time into account when reaching out. **Additionally, I do not accept assignments via email.**

You can access the class server and learn more via the Discord Canvas page. I have Discord set up to notify me when someone posts, and it's the quickest way to ask me and the rest of the class a question. I encourage you to answer questions for each other.

## Brief Assignment Descriptions

Assignment sheets and rubrics will be available on Canvas, but here are some short descriptions to give you a course overview:

### *Participation*

Actively engaging in class and with your team is essential to honing your professional writing and communication skills. Each week, you can expect to have conversations with classmates via Perusal and in class activities. All assignments are designed to reinforce concepts and build toward final projects—they aren't just busy work.

### *Unit 1: Research Proposal (10%)*

**600–750 words, excluding references**

The first major assignment tasks you with establishing your usability team, proposing the topic you'll spend the semester studying, and entering the conversation about your wicked problem.

### *Unit 2: User Research (25%)*

**User Research Summary: 500–600 words, excluding references**

#### **3 User Personas**

Understanding the diverse people connected to your wicked problem is essential as you begin to plan a usability test. You'll conduct user research via interviews, surveys, and general online research to understand their needs and write a user research summary. Using what you learned, you'll create three user personas to represent different users and how they might navigate your wicked problem.

### *Unit 3: Usability Study Plan (25%)*

**~2,000 words, excluding references**

Usability study plans provide the play-by-play steps you'll take to run your usability test. You'll describe the specifics for the usability test, articulating what you're doing and why.

### *Unit 4: Usability Report*

**~3,500 words, excluding references**

The semester concludes with a usability report where you provide the results of your usability test.

# Campus Academic Policies & Student Resources

## Workload and Class Planning Policies

### Credit Hour Standard

UMassD, in alignment with [federal regulations](#) and regional accreditation standards, sets expectations for the amount of work required to earn one academic credit. One credit hour is an amount of work that reasonably approximates not less than:

- (1) One hour of classroom or direct faculty instruction and a minimum of two hours of out-of-class student work each week for approximately fifteen weeks (includes exam week) for one semester, or the equivalent amount of work over a different amount of time.
- (2) At least an equivalent amount of work as required in paragraph (1) of this definition for other academic activities as established by the institution, including laboratory work, internships, practica, studio work, and other academic work leading to the award of credit hours.

For a regular 3-credit class, 3 hours per week of in-class work and 6 hours per week of out-of-class work are required.

### Academic Calendar

The [Academic Calendar](#) provides important planning information for students, faculty, staff and departments, such as class start dates, deadlines for adding, dropping or auditing a class, holidays schedule and the final exam schedule.

- Last day to withdraw listed in calendar
- [Final exam schedule](#)

## Academic Policies

### Academic Integrity

All UMass Dartmouth students are expected to maintain high standards of academic integrity and scholarly practice. A high standard of academic integrity promotes the pursuit of truth and learning and respect for the intellectual accomplishments of others. These are values that are fundamental to the mission of this University. Such values are undermined by academic dishonesty.

The University does not tolerate academic dishonesty of any variety, whether as a result of a failure to understand required academic and scholarly procedure, or as an act of intentional dishonesty. All students should read and understand the University's [Academic Integrity Policy](#), which can also be found in the [Undergraduate Catalog](#).

A student found responsible for academic dishonesty is subject to severe disciplinary action, which may include dismissal from the University.

### **Student Behavior**

Students are expected to follow the [Student Code of Conduct](#) within the classroom settings.

Faculty may ask students to leave if the faculty member(s) determine(s) that the code of conduct has been violated and a student is creating an environment that is unsafe or not conducive to learning.

### **Course Withdrawal**

View the academic calendar (above) to see the last day to withdraw each semester. The following information is from the undergraduate catalog:

Students may withdraw from courses through the end of the tenth week of classes of the semester via COIN, at the Student Service Center. Once processed, a grade of W will be recorded on the transcript. Grades of W do not affect a student's GPA, but may impact financial aid [Satisfactory Academic Progress requirements](#). Students who fail to complete this process by the withdrawal deadline will be ineligible for withdrawal and will be graded appropriately by the faculty.

- Students may independently withdraw from a maximum of 18 cumulative credits. The college dean or designee must approve withdrawal requests above 18 and up to 24 credits. After a student has exceeded 18 credits of withdrawals during his or her academic career, the student's college dean or designee must approve any further withdrawal requests, up to 24 credits. Students with more than 24 withdrawal credits are subject to dismissal from the University by the college. Withdrawal credits granted through an approved Medical Leave of Absence do not apply toward the 18 or 24 credit maximum.

- Students who withdraw from all courses during the semester shall be deemed to have withdrawn from the University and will be subject to this policy and the readmission procedures of the University.

## Withdrawal from the University

Students withdrawing or taking a leave of absence from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth are required to submit a written notification of withdrawal.

The Student Leave of Absence/Withdrawal Form may be obtained at the [Registrar's Student Forms](#) page. The last date of attendance will be the date indicated on the form or the date of the last documented academically related activity, whichever is earlier.

For additional information: [Withdrawal Policy](#)

## Incompletes

According to both the [Undergraduate Catalog and Graduate Catalog](#), an incomplete may be given only in exceptional circumstances at the instructor's discretion. The student must be passing at the time of the request or be sufficiently close to passing. If the work is not completed within one year of the recording of the incomplete grade (I), the grade will become an F(I).

## Grade Appeal Process

Academic Advising: Grades

Students should be advised that grade appeals need to be filed by specific dates in order for appeals to be heard. For the fall semester, grade appeals are due by the Monday of the second week in January. For the spring semester, grade appeals are due by the Monday of the last full week of May. Information about what can be appealed, who to file a grade appeal with, and what the grade appeal process entails can be found at: [Grade Appeal](#).

## Accommodations and Support Policies

### Accommodations for Documented Disabilities

In accordance with University policy, if you have a documented disability and require accommodations to obtain equal access in a course, please meet with the course instructor at the beginning of the semester and provide the appropriate paperwork from

the [Center for Access and Success](#). The necessary paperwork is obtained when you bring proper documentation to the Center, which is located in Pine Dale Hall, Room 7136, 508-999-8711.

### **Emotional Health, Violence, Sexual Harassment, and Title IX**

The purpose of a University is to disseminate information, as well as to explore a universe of ideas, to encourage diverse perspectives and robust expression, and to foster the development of critical and analytical thinking skills. In many classes, students and faculty examine and analyze challenging and controversial topics.

If a topic covered in this class triggers post-traumatic stress or other emotional distress, please discuss the matter with the professor, or seek out confidential resources available from the [Counseling Center](#), 508-999-8648 or - 8650, or the Victim Advocate in the [Center for Women, Gender and Sexuality](#), 508-910-4584. In an emergency, contact the Department of Public Safety at 508-999-9191 24 hrs./day.

UMass Dartmouth, following national guidance from the Office of Civil Rights, requires that faculty follow UMass Dartmouth policy as a "mandated reporter" of any disclosure of sexual harassment, abuse, and/or violence shared with the faculty member in person and/or via email. These disclosures include, but are not limited to, reports of sexual assault, relational abuse, relational/domestic violence, and stalking. While faculty are often able to help students locate appropriate channels of assistance on campus, disclosure by the student to the faculty member requires that the faculty member inform the University's Title IX Coordinator in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at 508-999-8008 to help ensure that the student's safety and welfare are being addressed, even if the student requests that the disclosure not be shared.

For confidential counseling support and assistance: [Sexual Violence Awareness](#)

### **Canvas**

Technical support for Canvas is available 24/7:

- Students can submit a request at [IT Help](#) or call the Student Help desk at 508-999-8900 during normal business hours (Mon-Fri 9:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. EST).
- During off-hours, weekends, and holidays, technical assistance is available for students at the [Help Center](#).
- Support information for all other UMass Dartmouth technologies can be found here: [Online Support](#).

## Tutoring Support Services

If you are having difficulty with a class, please:

- Contact the instructor directly using the contact information listed on the syllabus.
- Contact the [Writing and Multiliteracy Center](#) for help with writing and communication projects. Library, 2nd Floor.
- Contact the STEM Learning Lab for support with science, engineering, math, and business assignments. Science and Engineering building, Room 217, 508-999-8718

## Career Planning

The Career Center offers an array of resources to help students make career decisions and ultimately launch their careers.

- Visit the [Career Center website](#) and connect with the Center on social media
- Visit the Center during walk-ins from 1–4 pm, Monday through Friday, or make an appointment via [Handshake](#)
- Explore the [Career Center's online resources](#) available via the portal
- Contact the Career Center, MacLean Campus, Suite 001: [career@umassd.edu](mailto:career@umassd.edu) or 508-999-8658