

**TCOM2030 – Research Methods in  
Technical Communication  
Spring 2013 - 3 credit hours  
Section 001: M/W, 11-12:15 PM  
Room J132**

**Instructor Information:**

Dr. Laura Beth Daws \* ldaws@spsu.edu (**the best way to reach me!**) \* educate.spsu.edu/ldaws  
**Twitter:** @lbdaws \* **Office phone:** 678-915-7208 (voice only) **Cell (voice/text & preferred phone number):** 678-250-DAWS (3297). *NOTE: this is a Google Voice number that I will respond to regularly on weekdays from 8 am-5 pm. Voicemails and texts received before/after that will be handled on the next business day.*

**Office Hours:** J318. Mondays & Wednesdays, 1:30-3:30; Tuesdays & Thursdays, 10-11. Other times by appointment. *(Please come by anytime my door is open if you have questions, concerns or just to say “hi!” If you need advising or have a more serious issue for which you need my undivided attention, though, please schedule an appointment with me. That way, you get priority in my schedule!)*

**Textbook:** Davies, M. B. (2007). Doing a successful research project using quantitative or qualitative methods. New York: Palgrave.

**Additional readings:** You can expect additional readings in the form of websites, online articles and journal articles to be supplied throughout the semester via Desire2Learn.

**Course Description as stated in the SPSU Catalog:**

Research in Technical Communication provides an introduction to research methods used by practitioners and scholars in technical communication. Students explore the relationship between theory and research and learn how to design and carry out empirical studies using both quantitative and qualitative methods. Emphasis is placed on the research methods used in workplace settings to design user-centered information products and to test their usefulness and usability.

**Learning Outcomes/Course Objectives**

Students will be able to:

- conduct advanced Internet research;
- understand the research phase of the user-centered design process;
- plan and conduct various forms of user research; and
- communicate research findings.

**Attendance Policy:**

Attendance is expected each class period. If you must miss class due to an excused absence (illness with doctor's note, death in the immediate family with written verification, car accident

with police report, etc.), you may turn in your work late with no penalty (see more details under “Late Work” below). Under no circumstances, excused or unexcused, may you make up the in-class participation points.

I start class on time every day. If you arrive to class late or leave early more than 3 times, each subsequent tardy or early leave from class will result in a 5 point deduction from your participation grade.

### **Late Work and Makeup Presentations:**

Don't say I didn't warn you: I'm a stickler for turning things in on time. **I do not accept late work**, except in the case of a documented excused absence (doctor's appointment with note, death in the family with written verification, car accident with accident report, etc.). If you have an excused absence, you may **email me your written work within 24 hours** as verification that you completed the assignment and then turn in a physical copy of the work to be graded, along with the written verification of your excuse, **by the next class period**.

Written assignments are due at the beginning of class. Written assignments must be typed. **Assignments turned in after class has started will be subject to a 10% grade penalty**. I do not accept assignments after the class period in which the assignment was due, except in cases of an excused absence. I do not accept emailed assignments, except in cases of an excused absence.

### **SPSU Honor Code:**

As a member of the Southern Polytechnic State University community of scholars, I understand that my actions are not only a reflection on myself, but also a reflection on the University and the larger body of scholars of which it is a part. Acting unethically, no matter how minor the offense, will be detrimental to my academic progress and self-image. It will also adversely affect all students, faculty, staff, the reputation of this University, and the value of the degrees it awards. Whether on campus or online, I understand that it is not only my personal responsibility, but also a duty to the entire SPSU community that I act in a manner consistent with the highest level of academic integrity. Therefore, I promise that as a member of the Southern Polytechnic State University community, I will not participate in any form of academic misconduct. I also understand that it is my responsibility to hold others to these same standards by addressing actions that deviate from the University-wide commitment to working, living, and learning in an environment conducive to a quality education. Thus, I affirm and adopt this honor code of Southern Polytechnic State University.

### **In Case Of Emergency, Weather Crises, Impending Apocalypse, Zombie Attacks, etc.**

If you haven't done so already, please sign up for Hornet Alert by going to [www.spsu.edu/hornetalert](http://www.spsu.edu/hornetalert). This is SPSU's way of communicating with you in the event of a crisis/emergency that impacts campus (such as class cancellations due to weather). If I have to miss class unexpectedly (it RARELY happens), I will alert you via Desire2Learn – so it's not a bad idea to check in there before class starts. Oh, and in case of a zombie apocalypse... aim for their heads.

**Classroom Policies:**

- Part of my job is to help you learn how to communicate in a variety of contexts. You should treat every written communication to me as a chance to practice professional written communication skills, and I expect you to adhere to standard conventions of grammar, spelling and language when writing to me. **I will ask you to correct grammar, spelling and punctuation in your emails just like I would correct them in a written assignment.** This is a class in communication, after all, and I'd hate to know you left my class thinking it was acceptable to contact potential employers, bosses, or other professionals with sloppy emails!
- Texting during class is rude and distracting; if you must communicate via cell phone during class hours, please walk out of the room to do so. Do not be surprised if I ask you to leave class after you've been caught texting in my class on more than one occasion.
- If you would like to use a laptop or tablet to take notes in this course, that's fine – as long as you disable your wireless connectivity so you won't be tempted to browse the Internet during class time or use the technological device to distract others. I reserve the right to ask you to cease use of electronic note taking devices if they become distracting to yourself or others.
- Class discussions should facilitate an open exchange of ideas. Debates should be healthy, and each individual should be respectful of others' opinions. Hate speech, or racist, sexist, ageist, or homophobic comments are not allowed.
- All written assignments must be printed on plain white 8.5" x 11" paper, using a computer/word processor and printer. Please **staple** all assignments that are two or more pages in length (do NOT dog-ear, fold corners, use paperclips or other binding methods). Unless I specify otherwise in class, hand-written assignments will not be accepted.
- I am happy to talk with you about any grade you earn in this course. However, please wait 24 hours before approaching me with questions about grades on speeches.
- **Plagiarism can result in failure of the course.** In this class, you are rewarded for correctly citing information, and severely punished for failing to credit where your ideas came from. If you are ever uncertain, ask me ahead of time.

**ADA Procedures:** Southern Polytechnic State University is committed to providing an educational environment that is accessible to all students. In accordance with this policy, students in need of accommodations due to a disability should contact the ATTIC (Student Center 1<sup>st</sup> floor, extension 7361) for verification and determination of reasonable accommodations as soon as possible after admission to the University, or at the beginning of each semester. More information is available at <http://www.spsu.edu/attic/index.htm>.

**Grades:**

Grades will be posted to the gradebook in Desire2Learn for you to access and review at any time. However, I recommend that you keep a record of your grades here as well.

<b>Written Work: 550 points</b>	<b>MAX VALUE</b>
Response papers (10 x 25 points each)	250
Source analysis	50
Thematic/content analysis	75
Competitive analysis	75
Midterm exam	50
Final exam	50

<b>Performance Work: 250 points</b>	
Class participation	100
Final project presentations	50
Presentation of source analysis	25
Presentation of thematic/content analysis	25
Presentation of competitive analysis	50

**Grade Scale:** 800 points maximum. A=720-800 points. B= 640-719 points. C= 560-639 points. D= 480-559 points. F= 479 points and below.

### **Short Description of Assignments**

*Detailed grading rubrics will be provided before assignments are due.*

**Response papers** – throughout the semester, you’ll do ten 250 word response papers. Five are due before midterm, and five will be due after midterm. Papers should be written in response to a prompt I provide you at least one week before the due date.

**In-class participation:** Class participation will be measured based on the quantity and quality of your comments, discussions and questions raised during our regular class meetings. You must be present in order to earn participation points!

**Project 1: Source analysis.** For this project, you will provide a source analysis of 5-6 websites. Your goal will be to write your own definition for a broad concept based on information contained in those websites you analyze (terms to define may include “cool,” “awkward,” “trendy,” “popular,” “snarky,” “intellectual,” “viral,” etc.). You will choose the word and sources to analyze. Your work will be presented as a 3 page report and will be shared with the class. As part of this assignment, you will create a reference page that supplies the web-based sources you used in developing your definition.

**Project 2: Thematic/content analysis.** For this project, you will select one corporation that has a website, Twitter feed and Facebook page, and analyze each of them for consistency of message and branding. You will also be expected to discover three common themes that each of the websites/social media sites communicate. This project will test your knowledge of sampling procedures and will give you experience with thematic and content analysis.

**Project 3: Competitive analysis.** Your final project in this class will test your ability to apply sampling procedures, conduct quantitative and qualitative research, and analyze the results of that research. This will be a team project in which you will work in pairs. You will choose one broad industry in which you have some interest (example: food). Select 4 individual businesses' websites from that field (example: McDonald's, Burger King, Chick-fil-A, and Wendy's) and provide a written report (minimum 4 pages) that compares the differences in the websites' overall usability, accessibility, and themes in content. For this project, you will rely on 3 different methodologies (at least one quantitative and one qualitative) to obtain results.

### Tentative Class Schedule

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading (complete before class)</b>	<b>Due At Beginning of Class</b>
Jan 7	Syllabus, Intro to Course, discussion of assignments	
Jan 9	Chapter 1: intro to quant & qual research	
Jan 14	Outside readings in quant & qual	<b>Response paper 1 due</b>
Jan 16	Chapter 2: Research questions & methodologies	
Jan 21	NO SCHOOL – MLK Holiday	
Jan 23	Chapter 3: Literature reviews, clarifying ideas Include outside reading of lit review	<b>Response paper 2 due</b>
Jan 28	Source analysis discussion	<b>Project 1: Source Analysis Paper &amp; Presentation</b>
Jan 30	Chapter 5: Surveys, Chapter 6: Questionnaires	
Feb 4	Lab day: creating surveys & questionnaires for online delivery	<b>Response paper 3 due</b>
Feb 6	Chapter 4: Sampling	
Feb 11	Sampling continued	<b>Response paper 4 due</b>
Feb 13	Thematic Analysis and Content Analysis	
Feb 18	Thematic Analysis/Content Analysis continued	<b>Response paper 5 due</b>
Feb 20	Midterm Exam!	<b>MIDTERM EXAM!</b>
Feb 21	<i>Midterm Grades Available!</i>	
Feb 25	Chapter 7: Survey Interviewing (quant and qual)	<b>Response paper 6 due</b>
Feb 26	<b>WITHDRAWAL DATE – last day to w/d!</b>	
Feb 27	Presentations of thematic/content analysis	<b>Project 2: Thematic/content analysis due</b>
Mar 5-7	<b>SPRING BREAK – NO SCHOOL!</b>	
Mar 11	Chapter 8: Analyzing survey data	<b>Response paper 7 due</b>
Mar 13	Analyzing survey data continued	
Mar 18	Chapter 9: intro to qualitative research	
Mar 20	Chapter 10: qualitative sampling	<b>Response paper 8 due</b>
Mar 25	Lab day: sampling of websites for Project 3	

Mar 27	Case Studies	<b>Response paper 9 due</b>
Apr 1	Chapter 11: focus groups	
Apr 3	Chapter 11: ethnography	
Apr 8	Chapter 12: Analyzing qualitative data	<b>Response paper 10 due</b>
Apr 10	Analyzing qualitative data continued	
Apr 15	Chapter 13: writing your report	
Apr 17	Lab Day: final project presentation prep	
Apr 22	Market research presentations	<b>Presentations</b>
Apr 24	Market research presentations	<b>Presentations</b>
Apr 29	Final exam review/last discussion	

**Final Exam** will take place during the university's official final exam date/time, TBA.