Final Project

The Final Project (FP) provides students with opportunities to demonstrate their technical communications skills as they are applied to a specific situation, one that may be actual or similar to a “real life” project. The FP may be either collaborative (groups of two to four students) or individual in nature. The parameters of this project are left open-ended purposefully in order to encourage students to find or develop projects of interest that relate to their fields of study, eventual careers, or current jobs. A group of students may work collaboratively to produce a training or instruction manual, for example. Others may decide to form a “company” and produce a variety of tech comm documents showcasing a number of skills. For example, two or three students majoring in business and marketing might invent their own company (a micro-brewery or supplier of tee-shirts, for instance) and produce a number of professional documents that demonstrate tech comm skills relevant to that venture. One possibility for individual final projects is the planning of a personal web page, which might include your résumé, examples of your work, and other content relevant to self-marketing.

Whether it is collaborative or individual in nature, the FP must be

- **Appropriate in scope.** That is, it must either include a range of tech comm genres or be substantial enough to showcase a variety of tech comm skills. What makes a final project appropriate in scope? Generating a sales/solicitation letter for the Douglas County Historical Society, for example, would not be substantial enough to fulfill project requirements, since it would demonstrate competence in just one of the many tech comm genres. A new or revised training manual for society volunteers, however, would be an appropriately substantial project. A combination of the manual and letter would demonstrate tech comm skills in using at least two major genres and in addressing different audiences, as well as the ability to make good use of graphics and design elements.

- **Content-based.** A major portion of the project must be written text.

- **Incorporate graphics and design elements.** The use of graphics and design elements will be relative to the overall nature of the project.

- **Make use of appropriate research.** As for graphics and design elements, the specific nature of the project will determine the amount of research necessary for its successful completion. Depending on the project, research can take a variety of forms: printed materials (books, articles, and so forth); Internet sources (which must be approved by the Instructor); interviews; and more.

- **Substantially original in purpose, scope, and content.** The FP must not represent a spliced-together collection of excerpts from already-existing sources, for example.

- **Represent work produced specifically for this class.** That is, “carry-over” work from another class is prohibited by University, departmental, and course policy.

- **Be approved by the Instructor.**
Although the FP is due the last full week of class, students will begin work on it much earlier and in conjunction with other assignments for this course. With that in mind, students will need to choose appropriate FP projects early. Contact the Instructor as soon as possible (e-mail, office hours) to discuss and brainstorm ideas. Bear in mind the fact that in the past a number of students in this course have been recruited and hired based, in part, on the quality and strength of their projects.

**SCHEDULE**

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<tr>
<td>M 17 Apr</td>
<td>FP Proposal draft due for Peer Review (10 pts.) *</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 19</td>
<td>Revised FP Proposal due (25 pts.)</td>
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<td>M 24</td>
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<td>FP Oral Presentation Memo (20 pts.)</td>
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<td>M 1, W 3, M 8 May</td>
<td>Final Project Oral Presentations (50 pts.); Final Projects due (100 pts.)</td>
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* Students working in groups must bring to peer review sessions one copy of the document for each member of the group. Failure to do so will count as an absence (see Course Guide).

**EXPLANATION OF COMPONENTS**

I. **Revised FP Proposal**

The Revised FP Proposal should be in the form of a two-page memo (addressed to the Instructor) followed by a one-page Task Schedule. The memo should be divided clearly into the following sections:

- **Summary:** Description of your proposed idea for the project; major elements of the project; scope of the project;
- **Background:** Clear statement of members’ experience and knowledge of the subject matter;
- **Audience:** Description of the project’s targeted readers; the reader’s background and knowledge (education; professional experience; attitude toward the subject; cultural characteristics; potential use of the document; physical environment in which the project will be used);
- **Purpose of Project:** Explanation of what the project is intended to accomplish;
- **Project Description:** Explanation of how you will gather information; resources that you intend to use (human, print, electronic); equipment and facilities you plan to use in designing and writing the project.
II. FP Progress Report

The Progress Report is an informative document that, in two pages of text and a current Task Schedule, updates the Instructor on your work. The Task Schedule will outline your timeline for completing the project. (In preparing this document, review relevant portions of chapters 17 and 18 in Markel.) So that it is useful and informative, the Progress Report should make use of the following components:

- Memo format and conventions;
- Appropriate headings;
- Updated graphic representation of your Task Schedule (including those that have been completed as well as those that remain to be finished).

The audience for this document is primarily the Instructor; you may consider me a “supervisor” of sorts, one who has assigned you this task and now wishes to know the status of the project.

III. FP Oral Presentation (50 points possible)

Because of scheduling constraints, presentations should not exceed fifteen minutes for groups, ten minutes for individual projects (excluding time for questions). The goal of the presentation is for you to present to the class your FP and discuss the rhetorical decisions that you made in creating it. Focus on the documents you are creating rather than on the subject of those documents. Specifically, the presentation should respond to the following criteria:

- **Type:** Extemporaneous presentation (while some scripting is acceptable, the presentation shouldn’t be scripted in its entirety);

- **Purposes:** The presentation has two main purposes:

  — *Informational:* Explain the need that exists for your FP and describe the rhetorical decisions that you chose to meet that need;

  — *Persuasive:* Convince—and show—your audience that you have effectively met that need. Remember: Simply *stating* that you have done something does not mean that you actually have done it.

- **Content:** To address the two purposes, consider questions such as the following: What is the existing need for this project? How did you determine that need? How did you meet that need? What content-based decisions did you make as you were meeting the need? (For example, what were the reasons for *including* or *excluding* content, and why?)
• **Audience:** The audience includes your classmates and Instructor—people who are generally knowledgeable about technical communication but are unfamiliar with the specific context of your project. If your project focuses on a genre that we haven’t explicitly studied, you should provide some background information to clarify clearly the context of the project.

• **Graphics:** Include any graphics that will be useful to demonstrate your process and product, especially those that show the evolution of your project through drafts or from the original version: computer presentations; transparencies; Power Point; posters; and so forth. (Review Markel’s chapter 22 for additional ideas.) If you will need access to media for your presentation, please advise the Instructor as soon as you can.

**Note:** For collaborative projects, the oral presentation must be divided fairly among members of the group; that is, one or two members should not dominate the presentation. Further, unless there is a legitimate and compelling reason for missing the presentation, a member of a group who is absent will receive no points for this component of the project. The performances of group members will be scored individually.

### IV. Final Project Package (150 total points possible)

A complete FP package includes the following materials: Revised FP Proposal (25 points possible); FP Progress Report (25 points possible); “hard” documents that comprise the FP itself (100 points possible). Materials should be arranged systematically in a folder (file, expandable, or pocket-style) or manila envelope clearly labeled with your name(s).

**Note:** All members of a group project will receive the same grade unless special circumstances apply—reliable evidence that a member has not contributed fairly, for example.

**REMARKS ON THE WEB PAGE AS A FINAL PROJECT**

Even if it contains graphics, animation, or sound clips, the web page that you design as a personal site, or that your group plans as a major feature of its project, must heavily emphasize content (as opposed to “entertainment”). That is, whether the page is individual or collaborative in nature, its main purpose must be to disseminate information. Careful planning is a key reason for the success or failure of any website, and your plans for the site should include detailed, written analysis of its **purpose**, intended **audience**, **design elements**, and **maintenance**. Toward that end, be sure to review Markel’s chapter 21 before and during the planning of the site, always keeping in mind his revision checklist.

Some advanced students may wish to have a version of the site “up and running,” perhaps even launched, but that is not a requirement for making a web site a key feature of your FP. More important is your planning of the site. A hard-copy report—one that provides analysis of the site’s purpose, audience, design, and maintenance plans, and a **screen-by-screen paper text** of your plans (showing all content, links, proposed use of graphics, and so forth)—must be submitted as a primary document for the FP, even if the site is viewable on screen.

If you anticipate making a web site part of your FP, arrange to consult with the Instructor as soon as possible to brainstorm ideas, define and clarify requirements, and so forth. Keep in mind as well how you will use your plans (or actual site) in the oral presentation on the project.