

Salt Lake Community  
College

**English Department**  
**English 2100 Assessment Committee**  
Elisa Stone, MA, Associate Professor, Committee Chair  
Nathan Cole, MA, Assistant Professor  
Christine Seifert, PhD, Assistant Professor, Westminster College  
Daniel Westover, MA, MFA, PhD ABD, Instructor, SLCC

---

# Assessment Report: ENGL 2100

---

Introduction to Technical Writing



## Executive Summary

The following recommendation report presents the design, execution, results, and recommendations for SLCC's English 2100 (Introduction to Technical Writing) course assessment.

### Pre-Assessment

The committee, comprised of four experienced technical writing instructors, discussed and assembled evaluation criteria taken from the English Department learning outcomes for English 1010, 2010, and 2100 and the Academic Student Learning Outcomes for SLCC.

All English 2100 students in the Spring of 2007 were required to submit their Project Three portfolios for assessment purposes, although students were not held accountable for any assessment results.

The committee used a five-point scoring system to evaluate each student project according to seven different evaluative criteria (or traits) that students should be able to demonstrate at some level. Each student project was read by at least two committee members; scoring discrepancies were resolved by a third adjudicator.

### Assessment

The majority of students, 86%, achieved average, above average, or high levels of proficiency in meeting the selected traits. Only 14% of the student projects were below average, and no student work was wholly insufficient in meeting these same outcomes.

The committee determined that 85% of students are able to adapt to rhetorical situation and purpose while accounting for audience needs/expectations and genre possibilities/constraints at a high or above average level of competency.

The lowest trait scores were in the areas of higher order thinking, as well as document and visual design. Nevertheless, more than 60% of students were able to demonstrate these skills at a high or above average level of competency.

### Recommendations

Based on the assessment process, the committee recommends that future assessments include a trained instructional research expert to help design the assessment process. In addition, the committee notes that assessment was an extremely valuable experience for all of the instructors involved; as a result, each person agreed that collaborative portfolio evaluation would be a worthwhile activity to incorporate into the course design (pending funding for participants).

The committee also recommended that the English 2100 course committee determine new and effective ways for making students more responsible for reading and processing information at a higher cognitive level. The committee further suggests that English 2100 instructors focus more class time on visual rhetoric throughout the drafting process.

# Table of Contents

## Part 1: Pre-Assessment

- 1 Introduction
- 1 Background
- 1-3 Methodology

## Part 2: Assessment

- 4-7 Results
- 7 Discussion

## Part 3: Recommendations

- 8-9 Conclusions and Recommendations

## Appendices

- 10-11 Appendix A: English 1010/2010/2100 Student Learning Outcomes
- 12 Appendix B: SLCC Academic Student Learning Outcomes
- 13-14 Appendix C: English 2100 Project Three Assignment Guide

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to reveal the results of the English 2100 Assessment Committee's 2007 reading and evaluation of student projects. Included in the report are background information, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and recommendations.

## Background

New curriculum and a new, custom-published textbook have been in place for English 2100 since Fall Semester, 2005. In order to assess whether this new curriculum is meeting the course goals, the previously established English Department learning outcomes for English 1010, 2010, and 2100 (see Appendix A), and selected Academic Student Learning Outcomes for SLCC (see Appendix B), we determined to conduct an assessment of the students' final projects from Spring Semester, 2007 (see Appendix C).

## Methodology

### ***Project Design***

The committee conducted a holistic reading and scoring of 81 final course portfolios from all six sections of ENGL 2100, including four in-person sections and two Internet sections. Two instructors taught these sections; one taught two daytime sections, the other taught two daytime sections and two Internet sections. All readers have taught four or more sections of ENGL 2100. The assessment process was structured as followed:

- Students were informed of the assessment through a disclosure statement presented with the Project Three assignment guidelines. Their names were removed for anonymity, and they were held harmless for their scores--the assessment was conducted after final grades had been submitted.
- Each portfolio was reviewed by a minimum of two and a maximum of three readers.
- If the holistic scores differed, a third reader adjudicated.
- No readers reviewed their own students' projects.

#### **Disclosure Statement Given to Students**

Your section of English 2100 is part of an assessment project this year. The goal of this assessment is to determine how well the English 2100 curriculum helps students to achieve proficiency in selected course outcomes.

The method of assessment will be a blind holistic reading of all copies of Project Three. Students will be held harmless in this assessment, which means that, regardless of the score any student's project receives, the student's final grade will remain unaffected. In fact, readers will not be reviewing the projects until after final grades are submitted.

- The assessment began with a norming session.

### ***Outcomes Measured***

The committee rated each project based upon the following traits, derived from both the SLCC Academic Student Learning Outcomes (ASLO) statement and the ENGL 1010/2010/2100 Outcome Statements for the Composition Sequence at SLCC. We selected the traits that could reasonably be demonstrated within the scope of English 2100's Project Three.

**Generally**, the outcomes selected from the SLCC Academic Student Learning Outcomes were the ability to:

- Acquire substantive knowledge in the discipline of their choice sufficient for further study, and/or demonstrate competencies required by employers to be hired and succeed in the workplace.
- Communicate effectively.
- Develop quantitative literacies necessary for their chosen field of study.
- Think critically.
- Develop the knowledge and skills to be civically engaged, and/or to work with others in a professional and constructive manner.

**Specifically**, the traits selected from the SLCC Academic Student Learning Outcomes statement and the ENGL 1010/2010/2100 Outcome Statements for the Composition Sequence at SLCC were the ability to:

Trait A: Adapt their writing effectively to a given rhetorical situation and purpose, taking into account audience needs and expectations, and genre possibilities and constraints.

Trait B: Write in various genres.

Trait C: Work proficiently within the formal conventions of various genres.

Trait D: Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work.

Trait E: Write with a minimum of surface errors.

Trait F: Organize and present ideas and information in writing according to standard usage.

Trait G: Use and interpret information represented as data, graphs, tables and schematics in a variety of disciplines.

Trait H: Demonstrate higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.

### ***Assessment Scale***

The committee created a five-point scale to be used as a rubric for our assessment project.

<b>Numeric Score (1-5)</b>	<b>Letter Grade Equivalent</b>	<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>
5	(A)	Students' writing exhibits all of the traits nearly all of the time.
4	(B)	Students' writing exhibits all of the traits, but they are lacking in a particular area.
3	(C)	Students' writing exhibits some or all of the traits with average competency.
2	(D)	Students' writing exhibits some of the traits with less than average competency.
1	(E)	Students' writing uniformly fails to exhibit the traits.

**Table 1: Assessment Rubric**

### ***Limitations of the Study***

Project Three portfolio as an assessment tool is necessarily a limited representation of our entire curriculum in English 2100. Prior assignments may illustrate other important traits or demonstrate more clearly students' ability to analyze and synthesize complex information, write in other genres, and proficiently use tables, graphs, charts, and organization.

Past assessment projects were facilitated by SLCC's Instructional Research Designer, who helped create criteria and collect and assess data. Without such a person available to us, we were consequently limited in our ability not only to parallel assessments in similar courses within our college, but also to incorporate a broader, even national, perspective of how other introductory technical writing courses are measured in a portfolio system.

After reviewing our assessment traits, we decided to cut the trait "Demonstrate effective problem solving" because we felt that it was not adequately measurable when assessing Project Three.

Assessment Outcomes

Results

The majority of students, 86%, achieved average, above average, or high levels of proficiency in meeting the selected ASLO and 1010/2010/2100 outcomes. No student work was wholly insufficient in meeting these same outcomes. Table 2 depicts the holistic numeric scores of the 81 portfolios evaluated. Chart 1 conveys the percentage breakdown by letter grade.

Numeric Score	Letter Grade Equivalent	Level of Proficiency	Number of Portfolios	Percentage
5	A	High	14	17
4	B	Above Average	34	42
3	C	Average	22	27
2	D	Below Average	11	14
1	E	Insufficient	0	0

Table 2: Holistic Data

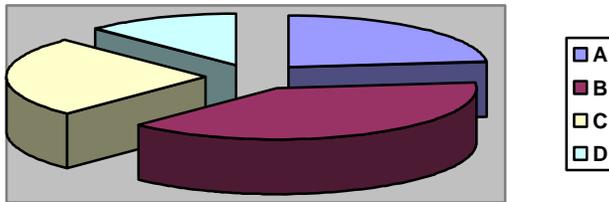


Chart 1: Holistic Breakdown (according to letter grade)

We selected seven traits that demonstrate competencies students should manifest in English 2100's Project Three. In every case, 60% or more of students received a score of 4 or 5 (above average or high proficiency) for each of the seven traits. No student work was wholly insufficient in demonstrating these traits. The following table depicts the scores of the 81 portfolios evaluated by individual traits.

Table 3 shows the breakdown of numeric scores for each particular trait. Chart 3 graphically represents this breakdown.

Traits	Numeric Scores					Total Projects
	5	4	3	2	1	
	Number of Projects					Total Projects
Trait A: Adapt to rhetorical situation and purpose, accounting for audience needs/expectations, genre possibilities/constraints.	22	35	16	8	0	81
Trait B: Write in various genres.	36	33	11	1	0	81
Trait C: Work proficiently within formal conventions of various genres.	10	48	17	6	0	81
Trait D: Understand writing as open process permitting later invention, re-thinking, revision; write with a minimum of surface errors.	8	45	23	5	0	81
Trait E: Organize/present ideas/information in writing according to standard usage.	19	44	15	3	0	81
Trait F: Use and interpret information represented as data, graphs, tables, schematics in variety of disciplines.	13	38	21	8	1	81
Trait G: Demonstrate higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.	11	47	21	2	0	81

**Table 3: Traits Data**

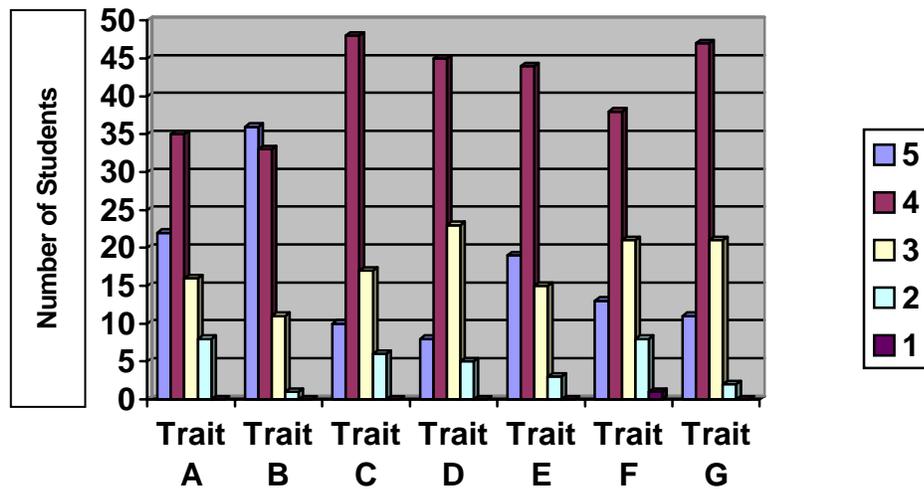


Chart 2: Individual Traits (according to numeric scores)

Students were the most successful with Trait B, where 85% scored high or above average proficiency. Students were least successful with Trait F, where 63% scored high or above average. Table 4 shows the total percentage of students who scored high above average numerical scores for each individual trait. (The percentages are indicated from highest to lowest.)

Traits	Percent of Students who Scored High or Above Average
Trait A: Adapt to rhetorical situation and purpose, accounting for audience needs/expectations, genre possibilities/constraints.	85%
Trait B: Write in various genres.	78%
Trait C: Work proficiently within formal conventions of various genres.	72%
Trait D: Understand writing as open process permitting later invention, re-thinking, revision; write with a minimum of surface errors.	72%
Trait E: Organize/present ideas/information in writing according to standard usage.	70%
Trait F: Use and interpret information represented as data, graphs, tables, schematics in variety of disciplines.	65%
Trait G: Demonstrate higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.	63%

Table 4: Traits Breakdown

## Ethnographic Data

During breaks from reading and assessing portfolios, we discussed our experiences with students. Most striking in our discussions was the extent to which our instructors of Technical Writing know their students as individuals and take an interest in each student's unique abilities, talents, life circumstances and concerns. Many stories emerged, including a father whose infant son had died during the term, and a mother who tragically lost her toddler daughter in an auto accident several years ago. We reviewed resources for students struggling with disabilities, mental illness, drug addiction, and alcoholism.

An interesting pattern we noted is that many of the students enrolled in Technical Writing are quite advanced in their careers; a number of them have graduate degrees and years of professional experience. They tend toward high proficiency with technology in general, and computer technology in particular. Some of them are striving to learn English as a second language; one student is a medical doctor in his native Korea. In keeping with general SLCC demographics, students enrolled in Technical Writing tend to be older than typical college freshman and sophomores.

## Discussion

Having reviewed the data, we discovered that our students are generally proficient in awareness of audience and rhetorical conventions, organizing ideas and information, and higher-order thinking. We attribute this success to a variety of factors:

- The curriculum is based on a cultural context approach to technical writing emphasizing rhetorical principles.
- Genres are a major emphasis in the curriculum design and pedagogy of both the course and the particular project we assessed; as a result the majority of students are succeeding in writing within genres of technical communication.
- A process-based approach to writing enables students to effectively organize, revise, and present ideas for a specific audience.
- Gathering, evaluating and synthesizing information through individual work, collaboration, and class discussion enabled students to exhibit higher-order thinking.

Students were less proficient in demonstrating effective document design, incorporating clear graphical representation of data, and eliminating surface errors. We attribute this lesser proficiency to the following factors:

- Despite being emphasized as each genre of writing is introduced, document design and graphics are often an afterthought for students, considered near the end of the drafting process, rather than throughout each stage of the writing process, including invention.
- Surface errors are an ongoing problem in any writing class. Although this issue is addressed repeatedly in class, it takes time for beginning writers to completely eradicate error from their prose. We also feel students are not attentive enough to written language in general, and assigned reading in particular. There is no formal assessment of reading in class.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Although we did not have the assistance of an institutional research specialist, we found assessment to be a worthwhile opportunity for evaluating both the course in general and individual student progress. We invite others to participate in this method of evaluation in order to accomplish these purposes.

A valuable result—perhaps the *most* valuable—was the experience of intensive collaboration and synergy, which allowed each of us to reflect upon our own teaching practices and philosophies. Among other topics related to the teaching and learning of writing, we discussed the benefits of making civic engagement a part of the classroom climate and encouraging students to be active rhetoricians.

### ***Assessment Design Recommendations***

- Evaluate surface errors as a separate trait apart from other traits such as revision.
- Ensure that Internet and in-person sections have the same assignment requirements for Project Three.
- Strive for consistent expectations across sections regarding assignment descriptions and stages of the writing process.
- Change the scoring system to allow for half-scores (e.g., allow the ability to give 4.5, rather than being forced to choose only between giving a 4 or giving a 5). This would enable us to parallel the general college scale of differentiating between an A, A-, B+, B, B- and so forth.
- Maintain consistency between the holistic score and the trait score so that the trait score adds up to the same letter grade equivalent as the holistic score.
- Pending future funding, establish a portfolio grading system evaluated by periodic assessment projects such as this one.

### ***Specific Recommendations for Emphasis in English 2100***

- Emphasize using and interpreting information represented as data, graphs, tables, and schematics at all stages of the writing process.
- Encourage more revision, or evidence thereof, in Internet classes through multiple draft submissions and required reflection assignments.

- Emphasize student awareness of the impact surface errors have on their professional ethos, including the relationship between careful reading and surface error reduction.
- Consider ways to make students more accountable for completing and applying required reading assignments.
- Increase rhetorical awareness in general through various assignments and class components.

## Appendix A: English 1010/2010/2100 Learning Outcomes

### English 1010/2010/2100 Outcomes

Below are the outcome statements for the Composition Sequence at Salt Lake Community College. First are the Overarching Goals for the Composition Sequence at SLCC, closely based on the *WPA Statement of Outcomes for First Year Writing Instruction*. These outcomes represent the overarching goals for writing courses at SLCC. Following these outcomes are the course specific outcomes for English 1010 and 2010/2100. It is expected that students in 2010/2100 are proficient in all of the English 1010 outcomes as well.

#### OVERARCHING GOALS FOR COMPOSITION SEQUENCE AT SLCC

By the end of the Composition Sequence at SLCC, students should be able to:

Rhetorical Knowledge

- Respond appropriately to different kinds of rhetorical situations
- Focus on a purpose
- Respond to the needs of different audiences
- Understand how genres shape reading and writing
- Adopt appropriate voice, tone and diction.
- Use conventions of format and structure appropriate to the rhetorical situation.

#### Critical Thinking, Reading and Writing

- Understand writing assignments as consisting of multiple tasks, including finding, evaluating, analyzing and synthesizing appropriate primary and secondary sources
- Use writing and reading for inquiry, learning, thinking and communicating
- Integrate their own ideas with those of others
- Understand the various relationships among language, knowledge and power.

#### Processes

- Understand writing as an open process that permits writers to use later invention and re-thinking to revise their work
- Be aware that it usually takes multiple drafts to create and complete a successful text.
- Develop flexible strategies for generating, revising, editing, and proof-reading
- Learn to balance the advantages of relying on others with the responsibility of doing their part
- Learn to critique their own and others' works
- Use a variety of technologies to address a range of audiences.
- 

#### Conventions

- Develop knowledge of genre conventions
- Practice appropriate means of documenting their work
- Control such surface features as syntax, grammar, punctuation and spelling

## **ENGLISH 1010 OUTCOMES**

By the end of English 1010, students should be able to:

- Recognize rhetorical strategies, including purpose, audience and genre in a variety of texts.
- Make rhetorical decisions for specific audiences, emphasizing informed college audiences.
- Adapt their voice, tone and diction to specific audiences.
- Engage with multiple texts using writing strategies such as summary, analysis, and synthesis.
- Use their own perspectives to respond to texts in a thoughtful and critical manner.
- Effectively incorporate other texts into their own writing as they develop their analyses and arguments.
- Utilize a variety of writing strategies (invention, revision, drafting) to manage assignments effectively.
- Describe the strengths and weaknesses of their own writing processes.
- Critically and substantially revise their own writing.
- Provide useful feedback to peers' writing and make effective decisions about how to use peer feedback for their own writing.
- Utilize traditional and electronic mediums to communicate effectively with their peers and instructors.
- Understand all writing situations include conventions that must be addressed to write effectively.
- Understand the concepts of appropriate citation strategies and know how to correctly use such strategies in their writing.
- Be critical readers of their own writing in order to control the surface features of their writing.

## **ENGLISH 2010/2100 OUTCOMES**

By the end of English 2010/2100, students should be able to:

- Analyze both academic and other writing situations.
- Write in various genres.
- Adapt their writing effectively to a given rhetorical situation and purpose, taking into account audience needs and expectations, and genre possibilities and constraints.
- Research, conceptualize rhetorically, and make rhetorical decisions within virtual writing environments.
- Make a presentation of a project.
- Analyze various genres to identify different rhetorical elements such as argument, language, context, etc.
- Read for underlying assumptions that support various arguments and positions.
- Adapt the conventions of argument to a variety of genres.
- Write with an awareness of the ethical dimensions of writing.
- Make effective and practical writing decisions that take into account the ways writing circulates in society.
- Adapt their processes to a variety of genres.
- Manage multi-stage, multi-dimensional writing tasks.
- Use the collaborative dimensions of writing to best meet their own writing purposes.
- Work proficiently within the formal conventions of various genres.
- Design and format documents according to conventions.
- Document sources appropriately for a given genre or discourse.
- Alter and adapt the formal conventions of various genres as needed for new writing situations.
- Write with a minimum of surface error.

## Appendix B: SLCC Academic Student Learning Outcomes

<b>Student Learning Outcomes</b>
<b>Upon successful completion of any program at SLCC, students:</b>
<b>1. Acquire substantive knowledge in the discipline of their choice sufficient for further study, and/or demonstrate competencies required by employers to be hired and succeed in the workplace.</b>
<b>2. Communicate effectively.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Develop critical literacies—reading, writing, speaking, listening—that they can apply in various contexts.</li> <li>B. Organize and present ideas and information orally and in writing according to standard usage.</li> <li>C. Understand and use the elements of effective communication in interpersonal, small group, and mass settings.</li> <li>D. Gather and analyze information and communicate effectively using technology, library resources, and other media.</li> </ul>
<b>3. Develop quantitative literacies necessary for their chosen field of study.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Approach practical problems by choosing and applying appropriate mathematical techniques.</li> <li>B. Use and interpret information represented as data, graphs, tables, and schematics in a variety of disciplines.</li> <li>C. Apply mathematical theory, concepts and methods of inquiry appropriate to program-specific problems.</li> </ul>
<b>4. Think Critically.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Reason effectively using available evidence, and are aware that knowledge is dynamic and builds on new evidence and alternative perspectives.</li> <li>B. Demonstrate effective problem solving.</li> <li>C. Engage in creative thinking, expression, and application.</li> <li>D. Engage in reflective thinking and expression.</li> <li>E. Demonstrate higher-order skills such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation.</li> <li>F. Make connections across disciplines.</li> <li>G. Apply scientific methods to the inquiry process.</li> </ul>
<b>5. Develop the knowledge and skills to be civically engaged, and/or to work with others in a professional and constructive manner.</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A. Understand the natural, political, historical, social and economic underpinnings of the local, national, and global communities to which they belong.</li> <li>B. Develop the awareness of both civil rights and civil responsibilities for individual and collective action in a democracy.</li> <li>C. Engage in service-learning for community building and an enhanced academic experience.</li> <li>D. Develop the awareness and skills to take leadership roles in classrooms, the broader college, and the community.</li> <li>E. Engage in principled and vigorous dialogue.</li> <li>F. Interact competently across cultures.</li> <li>G. Understand and appreciate human differences.</li> <li>H. Understand and act on standards of professionalism and civility, including the requirements of the SLCC Student Code.</li> </ul>

## Appendix C: English 2100 Project Three Assignment Guide

### Project Three: Creating a Professional Portfolio

*Audience:* Future employer or college/scholarship application committee

*Purpose:* To create a portfolio presenting samples of your technical writing skills in various genres, providing a sophisticated career packet for job or school applications.

*Format:* Project includes **cover/application letter**; **table of contents** listing your three writing samples, each followed by a paragraph providing its title, audience, purpose, and objectives; sample 1 (**technical definition**); sample 2 (**technical description**); sample 3 (**sample of your choice**); and a **resume**.

*Length:* 6-8 pages

*Research:* No formal research citation system needed. For a basic understanding of how technical writing portfolios are presented, see p. 431-435, or go to a reliable search engine such as Google.com and type "technical writing portfolio."

*Advice:* This project should help you leave this class with a career packet for use in job or future college program applications. As always, your success will depend upon your level of investment in the writing process.

*Topic:* It is common for novice technical writers trying to land a job to be asked for a portfolio sampling their best writing. Portfolios are common to many professions, so creating one gives you an upper hand in the job market. When choosing your samples of writing, two of the three *must* come from your work in this class. One sample may be taken from work you've created in this class, another class, your workplace, or elsewhere. You might want to structure your samples around a common theme. For example, if you want to be an architect, all three of your samples could relate to architecture. Your writing samples should demonstrate your ability to structure documents according to format expectations, to incorporate visual design elements, and to write in a style and tone appropriate for your audience. Your portfolio should be carefully edited so that grammar mistakes don't undermine your credibility. If you've already written a resume prior to taking this course, use this opportunity to update your work based on the information in the text, or to put your resume in a different format.

The following writing samples must be included in your portfolio:

- One to two page technical definition
- One to two page technical description
- One page sample technical document of your choice\*

\*Note that samples are typically brief excerpts, not entire documents.

#### *Service-Learning Option*

Service learning is performing work for a non-profit organization in exchange for classroom assignments. In this class, you can do service learning projects in exchange for up to two of the three projects. You would still do all reading, written assignments, and peer group assignments, but would substitute 6-8 pages (or the equivalent, taking design elements into consideration) of service writing for the 6-8 pages of this project. You would be required to write a 1-3 page reflection letter or memo that would count toward the page requirement. If you are interested in service learning, contact the instructor for information about how to find

projects. Please note that you'll need to start early on service projects in order to make them correspond with class deadlines.

DUE DATES:

*Draft* \_\_\_\_\_

*Revision Day* \_\_\_\_\_

*Final Draft* \_\_\_\_\_

*Submit the following in a folder:*

- Rough Draft
- Peer Comments
- Final Draft
- In-class writing completed on the due date

**\*Please note the syllabus policy on late work: no late assignments or projects will be accepted after the final day of class!**

### **Reading and Out-of-Class Homework Assignments for Project Three**

1. Due \_\_\_\_\_ Read Ch. 7, p. 162-189 to help you write your examples for the final project. Read Ch. 17, Technical Definitions, p. 484-508. Do Individual Project 4 p. 509. This will become your first example for Project Three.
2. Due \_\_\_\_\_ Read Ch. 18, Technical Descriptions, p. 514-542. Do either Project 2, 3, or 4, p. 542-543. This will become your second example for Project Three. Also, Read Ch. 15, Starting Your Career, p. 406-440.
3. Due \_\_\_\_\_ Read Ch. 10, p. 264-286 to help you edit final project. Do Project 2, p. 441. This will become the final piece of Project Three.