

English 314: Unit #1 Final Checklist

Submitting Your Assignment

The final draft of your Unit #1 project is due at the beginning of class on Thursday, February 4. To submit your assignment, please upload your files to the class website (make sure all of your file names contain your full name; e.g., “Quinn Warnick Unit 1.doc”) and bring a printed, stapled copy of your documents to class. Your completed assignment should consist of three files:

1. A short (1–1.5 page) **analysis memo** that explains the context and audience for your other documents, and describes and justifies the choices you made with regard to content, organization, and design. This memo should be written directly to your English 314 instructor.
2. A **glossary of terms** that are unique to your field or that have special meaning in your field. Your glossary should contain at least 20 terms, but it may contain more, if called for by the writing situation.
3. A **two-sided information sheet** (e.g., both sides of one sheet of paper) describing and explaining a technical product, process, or concept used regularly in your field. The information sheet should contain at least one new or adapted illustration.

Before You Submit Your Assignment

The following checklist will help you put the finishing touches on your Unit #1 project. Please note that these issues don’t supercede the evaluation criteria we developed as a class; they are included here to help you work through some minor issues that could detract from the overall effectiveness of your assignment.

- ☐ **Review Sample Documents.** Chapters 18 and 19 in the Johnson-Sheehan textbook contains excellent examples of definitions and descriptions. Specifically, see pp. 504, 505, 518–21, 534, and 537–38. If you are struggling to develop a particular section of your assignment, please review these five examples to see how other technical writers have tackled the problem.
- ☐ **Describe, Don’t Instruct.** Your information sheet should *describe* a product, process, or concept, not *instruct* the reader how to do perform a task. (Unit #2 is all about instructions.) Admittedly, the line between description and instruction can be blurry, so it’s OK if your document contains a few numbered steps; just make sure that you don’t skip the essential task of describing and explaining the product, process, or concept to your reader.
- ☐ **Use Strong Verbs.** When possible, eliminate instances of the passive voice and replace weak “be” verbs with strong, active verbs. Scan (or electronically search) your document for instances of “is,” “are,” “be,” “have been,” “was,” and “were.” You should not automatically replace these verbs (sometimes a “be” verb is appropriate, especially in a definition), but you should ask yourself, Can I restate this phrase using a stronger verb?
- ☐ **Enhance Document Design.** Your assignment doesn’t need to be fancy to be visually effective. A few simple guidelines will enhance the professional appearance of the documents: check to see if your headings are consistent throughout the document; make sure that all of your bulleted lists are indented the same amount from the left margin; align all of your illustrations to one margin or the other; use bold, italics, or color to draw attention to key terms; limit yourself to two font families (normally one serif font for the body text and one sans serif font for the headings); size your fonts between 10 and 12 points to ensure readability; add captions or callouts to your illustrations.
- ☐ **Provide Citations.** Your documents don’t need to include an MLA or APA works cited page, but they should give credit where credit is due. If you use definitions from a professional publication, provide a footnote or a parenthetical citation to make it clear to the reader that you are citing someone else’s work. If you downloaded an illustration from the manufacturer’s website, print the URL alongside the picture or in a footnote.
- ☐ **Clear Track Changes.** If you are using one of the drafts your classmates edited as your primary document, chances are that some of their comments and suggestions are still in the file. Please go through all of the changes they made and either “accept” or “reject” them in order to clear them out of the document. When I receive your final draft and turn on Track Changes on my computer, I should see a “clean” file, free from any comments and corrections that any of your reviewers made in the past.
- ☐ **Check Spelling and Grammar.** Microsoft Word has a built-in spell-check function, which you should run at least once. However, you will also need to carefully review your proposal for spelling errors that don’t get flagged by the software; remember, the fact that a word is in the dictionary does not mean it’s the word you intended to use. As for grammar, Word also has a grammar-check function, but it is notoriously inaccurate, and you should not trust it to make decisions for you. If you decide to use the grammar-check function, please do so as a means of identifying *potential* errors. You will then need to check a usage guide to determine if each “error” needs to be fixed.