



# E 303: TECHNICAL WRITING

School of Literature and Languages  
Louisiana Tech University



## Call for Proposals Memo

**To:** Mr. Merchant's English 303 students  
**From:** Mr. David M. Merchant, English Instructor  
**Through:** Dr. William Birkin, Director of Research and Innovation  
**Subject:** Call for Proposals  
**Date:** March 12, 2020

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This is a call for proposals (CFP), often referred to as a Request For Proposals (RFP), from Mr. David Merchant's English 303 students to research an innovative opportunity, innovative solution or technology, or a policy addition or change related to their major or to a topic they are interested in.

### Summary

This topic will culminate in a white paper where they will present their findings and recommendation. While Mr. Merchant will be one of your main audiences for your white paper, you will have a real-world audience as well. You will not be required to submit your white paper to anyone except for Mr. Merchant; however, you are encouraged to submit your white paper to your real-world audience after the course is finished at the end of the quarter (again, you are not required to do so; you are only required to submit your white paper to Mr. Merchant).

It is human nature for most to pick the path of least resistance (such as writing as few pages as possible). While I hesitate to give arbitrary page lengths (a paper needs what a paper needs and no more and no less), **if your white paper is only six pages or fewer**, it has a great chance of **failing**. I expect white papers to be around 15 to 25 pages depending upon the needs of the topic (some topics need more visuals, some papers have surveys or interview transcripts to place in the abstracts, etc.) so pick a topic that requires some discussion. Most of the topics should not present a problem for writing a long enough white paper as long as you do due diligence in your research and writing.

Your proposal will be far shorter than a white paper, of course (usually around 4 to 5 pages) as you are "just" proposing to write on your topic. The purpose of your proposal is to explain your topic choice and how you *plan* to persuasively write a white paper on your chosen topic. More information on writing the proposal will follow a more detailed discussion on topics.

### Picking a Topic

Pick a topic relates to your major or one that you are interested in where you also have some knowledge about. You are encouraged (but not required) to pick one, if possible, that affects Louisiana Tech or Ruston. This can be something that affects a department within Tech or Tech as a whole (curriculum change, new policy or policy change; infrastructure issues; etc.) likewise,

Memo to: Mr. Merchant's English 303 students

Date: March 12, 2020

Page 2

this can be something that affects a part of the city (business or sector) or the city as a whole (improvements, new opportunities, policies, etc.).

The topic should also be one that is on a new or innovative approach, policy, solution, treatment, or opportunity or an older approach, policy, solution, treatment, or opportunity that was overlooked but should be reconsidered. You will be required to make a recommendation regarding your topic for the white paper (call to action, direction to go into, direction not to go into, opportunity recommendation, policy change, solution recommendation, etc.).

Keep in mind a recommendation can be positive or negative: for example, you can recommend that Louisiana Tech or the City of Ruston adopt a specific approach, policy, solution or to take advantage of a specific opportunity or you can recommend that they not adopt a specific approach, etc.

In general, topics can be about

- a new policy or changing a policy (for a company or school governance, or city, state, or federal government);
- a complex solution or technology that needs explaining (to a client, for example, so that they may start considering using it);
- an expensive solution (so the reader needs persuading);
- a misunderstood technology (which you want your reader to understand and why it is useful);
- an older, discarded, or under-used technology or solution that should be reconsidered (thus, would need to convince the reader that newer may not always be the best solution; this also includes either using the older technology or solution as is or updating it);
- one way of implementing a process, system, or technology (for a method your reader probably does not know about);
- how to perform a technical task (with the purpose of helping a potential client or customer to adopt or purchase the new technology or new software);
- a new direction for an organization or a program within the organization;
- a change in a program, change in a curriculum, to improve it;
- a new way to use a technology;
- a new improvement to a solution or technology;
- a new solution, technology, or way of doing something (that a client, for example, has not heard about and does not understand or know how this can help them or be of use to them); or
- a new opportunity to take advantage of.

**A recommendation can be a negative one:** for example, is there a fake or worthless treatment for a disease that you want to recommend the public to not use or the government (local or national) make some policy against?

## Formatting the Proposal

This memo will be written *to me through* Dr. William Birkin. Read that sentence again. It is a **critical error** to get that wrong as you are getting your audiences wrong. For example, if you use CC: instead of Through: for your supervisor, the memo does not go through your supervisor first; instead, they get it the same time as the primary audience and this can be a major problem with your supervisor as you just went over their head or otherwise bypassed them in the chain-of-command. "Through" allows that audience the chance to make comments to you about changes you need to make to the memo or to endorse your memo before it goes further.

See the *Merchant's Style Guide* about formatting memos. Change "Memo" to "White Paper Topic Memo" (without the quotation marks, but keep it Arial, size 20, red). In later page headers, use "Memo to Mr. David M. Merchant, English Instructor" (without the quotation marks). Writing in first person is acceptable in this memo; however, overuse can make you appear immodest.

## Organizing the Proposal

After a standard, *one*-sentence purpose statement, the body of an internal proposal requires the following sections (**each is a level-1 section**):

### Introduction

In one paragraph (two at most), identify and describe your proposed white paper topic and the purpose of your white paper. If you need to define specific terms, do so (keep your audience in mind).

For example, perhaps your local high school still collects work from students by hand, resulting in inefficiencies in documentation and even in teaching and learning. You feel that a learning management system (LMS) would help this problem. You would mention this topic in this section of the memo. You could write something like the following:

The adoption of an LMS will help teachers organize work submitted by students, give students an electronic method of submitting their work, and allow parents to track students' progress.

### Current Situation

In two to three paragraphs, briefly describe the reasons you think this problem or opportunity is important. You want to show your primary audience that you are fully aware of why the problem or opportunity is important to investigate (answering the "why should we care" question).

For example, if the problem is that your local high school still collects work from students by hand, resulting in inefficiencies in documentation and even in teaching and learning, you would give some of the impacts of this problem. You might cite a statistic on the number of pieces of homework that were lost last year because of this problem.

### **Proposed Approach, Change, Opportunity, Policy, or Solution**

In one or two paragraphs (no more than two), describe an alternative solution (solutions) or approach (approaches) to the problem/situation/opportunity you are describing, as appropriate. Title as appropriate: Proposed Solution, Proposed Solutions, Proposed Approach, or Proposed Approaches.

For example, your local high school does not use a learning management system (LMS). Briefly describe what an LMS is (in general—do not choose a specific LMS yet, save that for the white paper). Then briefly discuss how an LMS will make the school more efficient (what makes this solution a good one?). The use of the LMS would be an example of a preliminary or proposed idea.

Of course, if your topic is about a specific solution or approach, as in a particular policy change or an innovation that creates its own area of business and is the only example of that new area, then you will naturally mention that specific solution or approach.

### **Potential Objections or Obstacles**

In one to three (at most) paragraphs, discuss any potential objections or obstacles to your solution or approach. In the white paper, you will need to show that your recommendation is feasible (doable). Of course, you may not yet know of any or of all the objections or obstacles as you have not finished your research. You will just briefly discuss as this is a preliminary determination, plus this is a proposal where you propose to fully discuss your topic and recommendation—you are not writing a white paper right now, you are proposing to write one and letting your audience know what it will cover to help convince them to let you write the full one.

If there are no objections or obstacles that you have found or can think of potentially existing, you can state that you have not yet found any but that you will continue to look for any as you continue researching the topic.

For example, your high school has not adopted an LMS and you have preliminarily determined that some objections and obstacles are costs, lack of awareness, and faculty fears (fears there will not be any training or support).

### **Audience Analysis**

In one to three (at most) paragraphs, identify the audiences for your white paper. Use your textbook, Chapter 4 (especially the checklist on pages 76 to 77) and pages 298 to 299, to help you explain your possible audiences. You do not need to address everything on the checklist. Your primary audience would be the primary decision-maker who would approve your documents and take action based on them. Who are possible stakeholders and/or others interested in this project?

For example, if you are going to write a white paper showing the advantages of using an LMS for your high school, your primary audience might be the principal of the high school. Possible stakeholders would be the school board and perhaps parents of the students attending the school.

You can write to a real-world audience. For example, if you are writing about an opportunity involving Louisiana Tech, your primary audience might be the university president, Dr. Guice. If your topic involves the city of Ruston, your audience might be the mayor, Mr. Ronny Walker. For example, if your primary audience is Mayor Walker, you would state to me (Mr. David M. Merchant) in your proposal that you propose writing a white paper to Mayor Walker. Sometimes the audience for a white paper is a general audience. For example, a white paper arguing against the *Common Core Standards* in schools could be an advocacy white paper to a very general audience—parents, teachers, administrators, and others.

“But you say write the proposal to you, through Dr. William Birkin.” Again, while you are writing to me, through Dr. Birkin, we may not be your primary audience; we may be “just” the gatekeepers/supervisor audience.

### **Experience/Qualifications**

You must be able to convince your primary audience that you are capable of writing this paper. In rhetorical terms, this section is where you develop your ethos (prove your credibility).

In one or two paragraphs, briefly describe any knowledge or experiences you already have or research you have done on this topic; you can also include, as a first paragraph, why you are interested in the topic followed then by a second paragraph where you show how you are qualified to write a white paper on the topic (experience, relevant courses, skills, etc.)

For example, if you are going to write a white paper showing the advantages of using an LMS for your high school, you might write about the fact that you are a teacher in the school and that you have experienced inefficiencies because of the current system. Or you were a student at the high school and experienced the inefficiencies that way. You might mention that you have talked to others about the situation. You might note an article or two you have read on the topic (for example, “I read two articles in the July 2018 issue of *Education Technology* that discussed...”).

### **Methods**

The methods section, usually just one paragraph, is essentially a context of research:

- Everyone will do a literature review using books, journals, or trustworthy web sites.
- Will you do interviews? You do not have to interview anyone, but if you do, you need to have a transcript of the discussion; you do not need to include any pleasantries or off-topic parts in the transcript. Also, make sure the person knows you will be transcribing the interview. You will need to include the interview in an appendix in your white paper.
- Will you analyze case studies or do surveys? Most will not need to, but if it will help your white paper be more persuasive, then you should do so.
- Where will you do your research? For example, are you using Prescott Memorial Library's databases and physical holdings? You can use more than one library.

### **Closing**

See the *Style Guide*, section 7, page 23, for more information on memo closing sections.

## References

The References section is just the next section in the memo. *It does not start on its own page unless by coincidence* (the closing section finishes at the bottom of the previous page). Use **MLA 8** for formatting your references except each reference item should be single-spaced with double-spacing only between items (double-spaced means a blank line between two typed lines). Items **must** be in alphabetical order (not in alphabetical order is a critical error).

Any referenced information used in your document is best summarized or paraphrased. Keep quoting to a minimum. Make sure your reference section(s) includes all references used (whether quoted from or not) for all sections of your document.

There is no excuse not to get the references right. Your textbook has an entire section devoted to MLA 8. Your *TECHnical Writing Course Manual* has information and examples. The example memos I put up on Moodle have example references. My Writing Help page has online resources and tools for creating MLA 8 references: <[davidmmerchant.com/writing-help/](http://davidmmerchant.com/writing-help/)>.

## Websites Reporting on Innovations in Engineering, Science, & Technology

Here are some good websites for finding the latest advancements, alternative solutions, and innovations to a variety of issues and problems. This list is, of course, not exhaustive nor does this list mean you do not need to use the library's resources (physical holdings and online databases and indexes). I fully expect you to use Prescott Memorial Library's resources, especially for researching your topic in more depth after you have decided upon a topic.

- *Big Ideas & Innovation*. <[www.linkedin.com/channels/big\\_ideas\\_and\\_innovation](http://www.linkedin.com/channels/big_ideas_and_innovation)>
- *Build Tomorrow: Marvels of Engineering*. <[www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/09/specials/build-tomorrow/](http://www.cnn.com/interactive/2014/09/specials/build-tomorrow/)>
- *CNN Tech*. <[www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/tomorrow-transformed/](http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/tomorrow-transformed/)>
- *Discover Magazine*. <[discovermagazine.com/](http://discovermagazine.com/)>
- *EurekaAlert! Science News*—From the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS). Science agencies on EurekaAlert!: U.S. Department of Energy, U.S. National Institutes of Health, U.S. National Science Foundation. <[eurekaalert.org/](http://eurekaalert.org/)>
- *Futurist*—Building the Future Together. <[futurism.com/](http://futurism.com/)>
- *In the Pipeline*:—Daily reflections on chemistry and industrial research. <[pipeline.corante.com/](http://pipeline.corante.com/)>
- *MIT Technology Review*. <[www.technologyreview.com/](http://www.technologyreview.com/)>
- *Now. The Intersection of Technology, Innovation & Creativity*—by Northrop Gruman. <[now.northropgrumman.com/](http://now.northropgrumman.com/)>
- *Neuroscience News*. <[neurosciencenews.com](http://neurosciencenews.com)>
- *Phys.org*—News and Articles on Science and Technology. <[phys.org/](http://phys.org/)>
- *Popular Science*. <[www.popsci.com/](http://www.popsci.com/)>
- *ScienceAlert*—Established in 2004 with the aim of sharing knowledge and promoting science. <[www.sciencealert.com/](http://www.sciencealert.com/)>
- *Science News*. <[www.sciencenews.org/](http://www.sciencenews.org/)>

Memo to: Mr. Merchant's English 303 students

Date: March 12, 2020

Page 7

- *Scientific American*—Mind & Brain. <[www.scientificamerican.com/mind-and-brain/](http://www.scientificamerican.com/mind-and-brain/)>
- *Scientific American*. <[www.scientificamerican.com/](http://www.scientificamerican.com/)>
- *SciTech Daily*—Science, Space and Technology News. <[scitechdaily.com/](http://scitechdaily.com/)>

Also, I have many Pinterest boards covering science and technology which may help you find information for your topics: <[www.pinterest.com/davidmmerchant/](http://www.pinterest.com/davidmmerchant/)>. You are, of course, not obligated to check—many of the pins come from the above sources.

## Final Notes

When researching your topic, keep in mind the following (even if you do not need some of the following for your proposal, you will need it for your definition and white paper assignments): You will need to discuss the background of the issue, opportunity, or a problem related to your topic; the importance of the issue, opportunity, or problem; the needs of your reader (what does a good solution need); your approach, direction, policy, solution, or technology that you are promoting (your topic) and how it addresses the issue, opportunity, or problem, any obstacles or opposition to your topic (with solutions to dealing with obstacles or opposition) or otherwise a discussion on whether your topic is feasible. You may also need to discuss how to transition to the innovation or any future direction or long-term focus.

## Closing

I look forward to reading your proposals. If you have questions, please contact me via email or the course Moodle page (forum or messaging service). Do not forget to do your assigned readings. Again, *Merchant's Style Guide* and *Merchant's English Usage Guide for Technical Writers* are located at [davidmmerchant.com/](http://davidmmerchant.com/).