TECHNICAL CRISIS REPORT & INFOGRAPHIC

Due March 12

In your second project, you'll put your rhetorical analysis skills into practice by researching a technical communication crisis. Your focus is not the technical failure itself, but how the different stakeholders decided to communicate about the issue, as well as what we can learn from their missteps and/or successes.

You will submit:

1. A 6-8 page incident report (1,800-2,400 words)
2. A 1-page public-facing infographic
3. A 10-minute presentation

PROJECT GOALS

- **Rhetoric:** Analyze the impact of rhetorical choices concerning context, audience, purpose, organization, design, visuals, and language choices. Support your rhetorical analysis with evidence from the texts you analyzed.
- **Process:** Repurpose and revise written information for the visual and written mode of the poster and the oral and nonverbal mode of the poster presentation.
- **Professionalization:** Build skills relevant to conferences and team meetings, including synthesizing research and preparing informative presentations.
- **Design:** Develop a multimedia poster that uses data visualization and responds to genre expectations to guide audiences through a complex issue in a comprehensive and engaging way.

SELECTING A CRISIS

Choose a specific crisis (not a broad issue like "climate change) involving technology or science that required communication from multiple parties. Your crisis should focus on a particular event, company or location to make things manageable.

Don't attempt to cover the entire crisis. Instead, keep your research question manageable and specific by focusing on a clearly defined time window, stakeholder group, or communication channel. Your research question should be specific, such as:

- How did Crowdstrike communicate with Microsoft in the first 48 hours following the 2024 outage?

Possible starting points:

- Environmental disasters (e.g., BioLab plant fire in Conyers, GA)
- Debates around technology implementation (e.g., Operation Shield in Atlanta)
- Local climate change impacts (e.g., responses to urban heat in Atlanta)
- Cybersecurity failures (e.g., 2018 City of Atlanta ransomware attack)

RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

To research your issue, consider how you can employ *primary research* and *secondary research*.

SECONDARY RESEARCH

In your primary research, draw on **at least two** reliable, peer-reviewed articles or book chapters in order to effectively back up the conclusions you draw about technical communication.

Secondary sources will analyze, interpret, or contextualize the crisis. Use these sources to build your understanding of what happened and what experts in the field are saying about it, including existing research on communication practices surrounding the event. Possible secondary sources include:

- Online articles and news reports
- Peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters
- Industry or government reports

PRIMARY RESEARCH

You should use **at least two** primary sources to provide direct insight into the communication surrounding the crisis.

Primary sources are original communications produced during (or immediately after) the crisis by relevant stakeholders. Use these sources to rhetorically analyze the communication choices that were made, critically assessing whether those choices were effective or ineffective. Possible primary sources include:

- News reports written by people involved in the event or including quotes from those involved
- Press releases, press conferences, public statements or apology videos
- Crisis response technical documentation, FAQs, or webpages
- Internal memos or reports
- Social media posts from the time of the event
- Government emergency alerts, public safety notices, or congressional testimony

As you conduct research, keep the core questions of this assignment in mind: How did different stakeholders choose to communicate about this event? What were the impacts of those decisions? What can we learn from those choices as technical communicators?

PROJECT COMPONENTS

INCIDENT REPORT

PURPOSE

The purpose of an incident report is to explain a problem that occurred, why it occurred, and what the organization did in response. Your incident report should focus primarily on communication. Rather than digging into the technical reasons beyond a security breach, for instance, focus on what communications led up to the event, how communication failures may have contributed to the event, and how the organization used communication when responding to the incident. Your goal is to identify how communication can contribute to either the incident itself, or the subsequent response.

AUDIENCE

Tailor your report for an audience of technical specialists and relevant stakeholders. For instance, if you're reporting on a cybersecurity attack, imagine you are writing to an audience of company leadership, cybersecurity analysts, clients, and relevant government officials. Your audience will have working knowledge of cybersecurity

concepts, but you should focus primarily on impacts and ways the company can communicate more effectively with relevant stakeholders in the future.

ORGANIZATION

Although reports take different forms and follow different organizational schemes based based on company guidelines, we'll use a professional report structure (similar to the official Crowdstrike incident report). *Word counts are a guideline, not a requirement.*

- **Title:** Can be placed on a separate title page or at the top of the document.
- **Executive Summary (150-200 words):** Provide a brief overview of the crisis, your research methods, findings, and recommendations. If your audience read just the executive summary, they should understand the main points of the report.
- **Background (300-400 words):** Establish the timeline, key actors, and communication focus. Don't recount the entire crisis—focus on the details relevant to your communication research question.
- **Methods (250-400 words):** Explain how you investigated the communication practices surrounding your chosen crisis. Outline the kinds of sources you drew on, and how you analyzed them. The methods section is a key way to build credibility so that your audience trusts your findings.
- **Findings (700-1,000 words):** Provide a breakdown of what you discovered through your research. The findings section should answer the research question that you established in your initial proposal. All in all, what role did communication play in contributing to this crisis or the organization's response?
- **Implications and Recommendations (300-500 words):** Offer takeaways for your audience. Make concrete recommendations that would help technical workers communicate across areas of expertise and with clients to either prevent such incidents from happening, or better guide users in the case they do occur.
- **References:** Include in-text citations throughout your report, as well as a list of your references at the end of the report. Use APA formatting for your citations, or contact me for approval to use a different style (such as IEEE).

FORMAT

Make sure to follow these formatting guidelines when preparing your report:

- **Length**: 6-8 pages, or approximately 1,800 to 2,400 words

- **Page layout**: 1" margins, include page numbers in the header or footer
- **Spacing**: Single-spaced, left-align paragraphs without indenting, and include one space between paragraphs
- **Headers**: Include headers with consistent formatting styles for each major section (summary, background, methods, findings, implications, and references). You can also use sub-headers to help break up these major sections
- **Bullets and numbered lists**: While not required, numbered lists and bullets are a good way to organize information and keep the report concise

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more advice on writing an effective incident report, use the section on "Writing Incident Reports" in Chapter 17 of your *Technical Communication* textbook, or this guide from *Mindful Technical Writing*.

INFOGRAPHIC

For the second part of the project, you'll create a one-page infographic that breaks down the crisis, your findings, and their wider implications.

AUDIENCE & PURPOSE

While your report was aimed at specialists and relevant stakeholders, your infographic should be pitched at a wider, public audience. Think carefully about who might benefit from learning about the research you've conducted, and how you can make your findings relevant to people outside of computer science. For instance, you might explain a cybersecurity attack and how it impacted users' data privacy, along with steps they can take to secure their data in the future. Your goal is to explain the technical details of what happened in a concise and accessible way, while making it relevant to your audience's everyday lives.

DESIGN & GRAPHICS

The design of your infographic should fit your research question and findings. Your infographic should tell a complete story. Make sure to include in-text and end citations in your infographics (you can use superscript numbers or numbers in brackets to save space, as well as a QR code that links to your complete source list).

Make sure to incorporate visuals that help to break down your chosen issue, such as images sourced from news reports on the issue, graphs that illustrate public opinion, quotes or screenshots of example communications, diagrams that break down the different stakeholder groups, or timelines that convey relevant history.

RESOURCES

Here are different tools that you can use to create your infographic:

- Adobe Illustrator: Available in the Green Computing Zone on the 3rd floor of the Price Gilbert library. Steep learning curve, but more options for customization.
- Adobe Express: A paired-down Adobe design tool with built-in templates and graphics, available for free with a school email.
- Canva: Template-based all-in-one design tool. Frequently a top choice because it's an easy-to-use drag and drop interface. Just ensure that you're choosing the design that works best for your purpose and audience, rather than adhering too closely to an existing template.
- Microsoft PowerPoint: You're likely already familiar with PowerPoint, so it's an easy way to combine images, diagrams, and text. Not as many template options, but you can import additional assets and layouts, and change slide size as you need, plus it's easy for presenting.
- Piktochart: An online free visual editor designed for infographics. Easy to get started using the templates, but some templates aren't as customizable.

For more resources on creating effective infographics, see "Educator's blueprint: A how-to guide for creating a high-quality infographic" by Gottlieb et al., or the University of Toronto library guide Introduction to Infographics.

PRESENTATION

After you've drafted and finalized your poster, I'll ask each pair to present their findings. Keep your audience—fellow technical communication students—in mind when you present. Focus on what you learned about technical communication through analyzing how others handled communication of a complex issue.

You'll each have 10 minutes to present. I'll project your poster, so consider how you can use nonverbal communication and zoom in on relevant sections to support your oral

presentation. Each person in the pair team should have a speaking role in the presentation, but how you divide that role (splitting the presentation in half or going back-and-forth) is up to you.

PROCESS & PROJECT TIMELINE

	Tasks	***Key Dates***
Stage 1	Choose the crisis you will investigate and conduct research, collecting relevant texts and identifying stakeholders	**February 19:** Partner agreement & proposal due **February 26:** Primary and secondary source map due
Stage 2	Draft your report and mock-up your infographic, revising based on peer feedback	**March 5:** Report draft and infographic mock-up due
Stage 3	Finalize your poster and present it to the class	**March 12:** Major Project 2 final due, infographic presentations **March 17:** Second day of infographic presentations

GENERATIVE AI GUIDANCE

Use the following table as guidance for uses of AI that are accepted, okay but discouraged, and against our class policy.

🟢 Acceptable AI Uses	🟡 Okay AI Uses (Take Caution)	🔴 Against AI Policy
• Uploading a draft of your report and asking for feedback or help creating a reverse outline • Suggest keywords, journals, or types of primary sources related to your issue to aid research	• Brainstorming technical crisis ideas (this can be a helpful starting point, but be aware that AI tools tend to recite the same generic crises that may not be as interesting to your field) • Finding primary and secondary sources (AI tools can hallucinate sources and do not have access to many databases, could lead to biased searches) • Helping you create an infographic template or	• Generating a first draft of your report or infographic • Copy/pasting any AI output • Creating diagrams or visuals using AI image generators • Reporting inaccurate information or

• Create a model infographic that you critique	organization (one of the goals of the assignment is to build your visual design skills and tell a unique story through your infographic design) • Summarizing texts or analyzing primary sources (you are still responsible for fully reading and understanding your sources) • Generating an outline (make sure your report follows the required organization, and is the result of your own thinking) • Grammar checks and sentence-level suggestions (ensure you know the reasons behind these suggestions and make your writing voice your own)	citing hallucinated sources due to reliance on AI output

ASSESSMENT

	3 (Complete)	2 (Needs improvement)	1 (Incomplete)
Report	You submitted a 6-8 page incident report focused on communication around a specific technical or scientific crisis that includes a title, executive summary, background, methods, findings, implications & recommendations and references	Your report is slightly (less than a full page) under the required length, or deviates from focusing on communication. All required sections are included, but one or more sections may not follow the expectations outlined under the Organization section above.	You did not submit a report, the topic is too broad and doesn't focus on a specific event or communication, your report is more than a page under the required length, or you are missing one of the required sections

Infographic	You submitted a 1-page infographic with multiple visuals that makes your report findings legible to a public audience.	Your infographic only contains two visuals, leaving more room to convey information through design, or there are a few discrepancies between the information presented in your report and your infographic.	You're missing an infographic, your infographic does not have a clear purpose or audience, or your infographic is only text without visuals.
Sources	Your findings are clearly backed up by at least 2 peer-reviewed articles or chapters, and at least 2 primary sources that are cited using both in-text parentheticals and full citations in the references.	You have at least 2 peer-reviewed and at least 2 primary sources, but are lacking in-text citations for one source.	You've incorporated fewer than 2 peer-reviewed sources, fewer than 2 primary sources, or only have end citations and lack in-text citations in the report and infographic.
Presentation	You and your partner presented for 10 minutes, breaking down what technical communicators can learn from your research, and you shared speaking responsibilities equally.	Your presentation was closer to 7-8 minutes, or one partner spoke significantly more than the other.	You did not present your poster, did not break down what technical communicators can learn from your research, or one person took on most of the speaking responsibilities.