

Welcome Letter

What follows in this packet are the materials I used in running this project. I encourage you to edit these as is useful for your course and institutional context. However, in a separate document, I have also provided templates for completely inventing your own mystery game.

This document begins by providing the prompt I used to generate the documents because it includes important course and class contexts that may be useful in your adaptation or understanding of these materials.

I then provide the solution document that lays out both the process and a breakdown of each important clue in each document. The actual documents referenced here are included in the Student Case Files.

Lastly, I have copied the assignment overview to encourage edits, especially to the reflective deliverable. On the final page, I have included a helpful chart from Suzan Last's [Technical Writing Essentials](#) that my students and I use as a starting point for genre conventions. This is also an important piece of the reflective deliverable as currently written.

Happy Investigating!

Prompt

"I am an educator planning a mystery-solving activity for my students, inspired by the Hunt A Killer board games. I want the main action to take place in a company devoted to nuclear semiotics. The company is a team of scientists and technical writers whose job is to design signage and documentation that can convey information about hazardous material (such as nuclear waste) well into the future, traversing language and time barriers. The company should experience some mystery, and my students must solve it by analyzing technical documents. The ultimate goal is for my students to get experience exploring, analyzing, and synthesizing technical documents and solving the mystery. You are to create these fake documents, which should all incorporate critical clues about the mystery and a red herring clue to test students' analysis skills.

Here are the details about the course to take into account while designing.

- My class has 16 students and meets twice weekly for 1 hour and 30 minutes each time.
- I have allotted 2 weeks for this project (so 4 total meetings), and most of their analysis should be during class time.
- You will design documents that are standard to technical writing and writers, paying attention to each document's most typical genre conventions.
- Please incorporate red herrings into the documents and keep an appropriate complexity level for sophomore-level college students who are interested in writing but come from various disciplinary backgrounds.
- The main objective is to introduce students to technical writing genres and styles while practicing critical thinking and attention to detail.
- I would like you to generate the following content, the most important of which are the complete documents examples:
 - Setting, Plot, and Characters: Provide a detailed plot and setting for the mystery and explain all characters in the form of personnel files. I will use this information to introduce the students, so please leave out any critical clues or spoilers.
 - Session Outline: Outline the 4 class sessions, specifying objectives, activities, and documents to be introduced. Emphasize interaction and immersion into the mystery.
 - Complete Document Examples: Create detailed examples of each document adhering to best practices in Technical and Professional Communication. Each

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document should include critical clues and red herrings embedded within its content.

- Physical Items: Suggest physical items to enhance the activity, mirroring the Hunt a Killer board game emphasis on physical items.
- Final Solution: Provide the solution to the mystery and explain the key clues students should focus on. Please format the content clearly, and make sure each document type is realistic and relevant to the new setting/theme."

Solution Document

Through careful analysis, it becomes clear that John Smith was the perpetrator. He tampered with the data to sabotage the project and used Dr. Chen's access card to enter the lab at 2:00 AM. The motive was professional jealousy and fear of Dr. Harper exposing his incompetence. John's familiarity with the equipment and procedures, as well as his presence during the security breach, incriminate him.

Steps to Conclusion

1. **Analyze Meeting Minutes:** Recognize the pattern of security concerns.
2. **Examine Project Plan:** Understand the roles and responsibilities.
3. **Review White Paper:** Identify the critical nature of data accuracy.
4. **Study User Manual:** Note the specific knowledge required for tampering.
5. **Evaluate Data Set Test Results:** Link inconsistencies to potential sabotage.
6. **Scrutinize Emails:** Correlate communications with security breaches.
7. **Dissect Security Incident Report:** Focus on the misuse of access cards.
8. **Check Access Logs:** Track movements and identify suspicious activity.
9. **Consider Interview Transcript:** Identify who had the means, motive, and opportunity.

By connecting these dots, the investigation reveals John Smith's guilt and motives, leading to the resolution of Dr. Harper's murder.

Critical Clues & Red Herrings

1. **Personnel Files**
 - **Clue:** John's degree in computer science and mentions of his ambitious personality
 - **Inference:** He may have been able to duplicate or spoof Dr. Chen's security card. His ambition could be a motive.
 - **Red Herring:** All other information is just to throw them off, but info about Laura's personality could lead them to think she is violent.
2. **Meeting Minutes:**
 - **Clue:** Discussion of security concerns and unauthorized access attempts.
 - **Inference:** Security breaches were a significant issue and could be related to the murder.
 - **Red Herring:** John Smith's concern about personal safety.
 - **Inference:** This could be misinterpreted as a motive, but it's a distraction.

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3. Project Plan:

- **Clue:** Detailed responsibilities and tasks of each team member.
 - **Inference:** Understanding each member's role helps identify potential motives and opportunities.
- **Red Herring:** Broad allocation of tasks that could implicate anyone.
 - **Inference:** Without specific context, it can mislead the investigation.

4. White Paper:

- **Clue:** Emphasis on the critical nature of the project and the importance of data accuracy.
 - **Inference:** Any tampering or anomalies could have serious consequences, suggesting a motive.
- **Red Herring:** General emphasis on project importance.
 - **Inference:** While true, it doesn't directly link to the murder.

5. User Manual:

- **Clue:** Detailed installation procedures and equipment handling.
 - **Inference:** Knowledge of this could indicate who had access to specific tools and locations.
- **Red Herring:** Detailed equipment instructions.
 - **Inference:** This can distract from the actual clues about who used the equipment.

6. Data Set Test Results:

- **Clue:** Inconsistencies in test results, particularly samples S006, S008, and S013.
 - **Inference:** Someone tampered with the data, possibly to sabotage the project or hide their tracks.
- **Red Herring:** Multiple sample failures.
 - **Inference:** Not all failures are due to tampering; some are genuine.

7. Emails:

- **Clue:** Communication about equipment calibration issues and security breaches.
 - **Inference:** Points to ongoing problems that could be linked to the murder.
- **Red Herring:** Routine communications about equipment.
 - **Inference:** These could be seen as more significant than they are.

8. Security Incident Report:

- **Clue:** Unauthorized access at 2:00 AM using Dr. Chen's card.
 - **Inference:** Indicates a potential setup or misuse of Dr. Chen's access card.
- **Red Herring:** Focus on the access card used.
 - **Inference:** It's crucial but not the sole focus of the investigation.

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9. Access Logs:

- **Clue:** Detailed records of who accessed the lab and when.
 - **Inference:** Tracks movements and identifies inconsistencies, such as using Dr. Chen's card at odd hours.
- **Red Herring:** Frequent access by team members.
 - **Inference:** Regular access logs could be misinterpreted.

10. Interview Transcript with Dr. Chen:

- **Clue:** Dr. Chen's account of his activities and concerns about data anomalies. & his admission to dinner with John the night of the incident.
- **Inference:** Suggests Dr. Chen was being framed and highlights other potential suspects. This also provides John with the opportunity to snag the ID card.
- **Red Herring:** Dr. Chen's concern about data anomalies.
 - **Inference:** Could falsely point to him as the suspect.

Assignment Overview

Student Investigation Letter

Hello Investigator,

Today, we are embarking on an exciting and challenging mystery-solving activity inspired by the Hunt A Killer board games. The setting of our mystery is the Institute for Nuclear Semiotics (INS). This research facility is dedicated to creating signs and documentation to convey information about hazardous nuclear materials to future generations, ensuring safety and comprehension across language and cultural barriers.

The main character in our story, Dr. Evelyn Harper, a leading expert in nuclear semiotics, has been murdered. This incident coincides with a critical project milestone related to a new signage system and a mysterious hooded figure caught on security footage. Your task, as investigators, is to determine what happened to Dr. Harper and uncover any underlying issues within the project.

You will start by forming groups of four and analyzing the initial set of documents, which includes meeting minutes, a project plan, and a white paper. These documents will provide the background and context needed to begin your investigation.

As you progress through the sessions, you will receive additional documents such as user manuals, technological specifications, data sets, emails, security incident reports, access logs, and a security camera still image. Pay close attention to the details, as some documents contain critical clues while others may serve as red herrings designed to mislead you.

Remember, communication and collaboration within your group are key. Share your findings, discuss your theories, and piece together the puzzle. By the end of this activity, you will not only have solved the mystery but also gained valuable experience in exploring, analyzing, and synthesizing technical documents.

Happy Investigating!

Deliverables Breakdown

You will submit two deliverables for this project: a solution to the mystery that answers our major questions and an informative reflection.

The Solution

- For this portion of the project, all I need from you is a paragraph answer for each of the big questions. You will be graded only partially on how accurate your deduction is but mostly on how well you support your answers with evidence and reasoning.
- Please answer the following questions:
- Who killed Dr. Harper? What evidence do you have that leads you to believe that?
- Don't forget to establish motive, means, and opportunity.
- What went wrong with the project? What evidence do you have that leads you to believe that?
- Who is the mysterious hooded figure? What evidence do you have that leads you to believe that?

The Reflection

- Your job here is to reflect deeply on this game's impact on your learning. This is where most of your grade for this project will come from. Please answer all of the questions listed below. Stellar reflections do so by uniting answers under a common umbrella point instead of simply answering them in a row as they are listed.
- Please answer the following questions:
 - How did this game reinforce what you already knew about technical documents/writing before entering the course?
 - How did this game challenge your previous understanding of technical documents/writing?
 - What documents did you find most enjoyable to analyze? Why?
 - What documents did you find most challenging to analyze? Why?
 - What was your process for identifying critical clues and distinguishing them from the red herrings?
 - How did this mystery game enhance your understanding of the role of technical writing in real-world contexts? You may discuss high-stakes situations like nuclear safety, but you can also think about more everyday applications of technical writing.

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- Return to one of the documents in the packet and explain how it specifically meets the definition of technical writing we have been working on. Use the chart below as a point of comparison.

Conventions of Technical Writing Chart

TABLE 1.1.2 Conventions of technical writing

| Criteria | Technical Writing |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Purpose | To communicate technical and specialized information in a clear, accessible, usable manner to people who need to use it to make decisions, perform processes, or support company goals. |
| Audience | Varied, but can include fellow employees such as subordinates, colleagues, managers, and executives, as well as clients and other stakeholders, the general public, and even readers within the legal system. |
| Writing Style | Concise, clear, plain, and direct language; may include specialized terminology; typically uses short sentences and paragraphs; uses active voice; makes purpose immediately clear. |
| Tone | Business/professional in tone, which falls between formal and informal; may use first person or second person if appropriate; courteous and constructive. |
| Structure | Highly structured; short paragraphs; clear transitions and structural cues (headings and sub-headings) to move the reader directly and logically through the document. |
| Format/Formatting | Can be in electronic, visual, or printed formats; may be long (reports) or short (emails, letters, memos); often uses style guides to describe required formatting features; uses headings, lists, figures and tables. |
| Other Features | Typically objective and neutral; ideas are evidence-based and data-driven; descriptors are precise and quantitative whenever possible. |

Table from [Technical Writing Essentials](#) by Suzan Last, licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

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