

## Alumna Nora Potrafka Works as a Content Strategy Analyst at Mastercard



Even before the Fall 2017 semester began, Nora (Dunn) Potrafka chose English as a major because she loved communication and thought it might prepare her to be a writer or editor. A few weeks later, though, a conversation with her assigned advisor, Dr. Dan Reardon, led her to reconsider this choice.

“He encouraged me to take Introduction to Technical Communication,” Potrafka said. “He told me that tech com would bridge my love for technology and science with my communication and social skills. I enrolled in the course and, by mid-semester, decided to switch majors. I’ve stayed in tech com ever since.”

Both degree programs—the Bachelor of Arts in English and the Bachelor of Science in Technical Communication—were part of the Department of

English and Technical Communication (ETC), so she spent the next five years taking ETC courses and working with ETC faculty.

Potrafka graduated with a BS in Technical Communication in Spring 2021, with minors in business, communication studies, and marketing. One year later, she completed a Master of Science in Technical Communication after following the department’s graduate track pathway that allowed double-counting nine credit hours toward the BS and the MS.

### **Extracurriculars**

Outside the classroom, Potrafka balanced work with a wide range of campus activities. She worked as the ETC department’s front desk receptionist throughout

her undergraduate years. In that role, she coordinated with faculty to ensure syllabi were submitted on time, occasionally assisted with research projects, and answered questions from walk-in visitors.

She was also a member of Chi Omega, served on the executive board of Ignite Campus Ministry, participated in S&T's design groups, and attended one of the university's speech and debate competitions as an observer.

### Mastercard

"Dr. Wright also shaped my path," she said. "He encouraged me to apply to Mastercard. I ended up there because of his encouragement." As she prepared to graduate, Potrafka applied for two positions in the Content Strategy and Design department in Mastercard's Global Customer Delivery & Care Division. She received a callback for one of them.

The application process involved three interviews: one with HR, one with staff in the department, and one with the hiring manager. They also requested multiple samples of work, which Potrafka selected from her technical communication courses. Her preparation showed, and she was offered the position.

Shortly after graduation, Potrafka began working as a Content Strategy Analyst at Mastercard. More specifically, she is an embedded writer. An embedded writer "means that I am dedicated to a specific program at Mastercard. Each program has different products that launch within Mastercard," Potrafka explained. The program she supports is not publicly disclosed. Her work "is to know enough about the program and the relationships between product and engineering to make those connections." Being an embedded writer also requires adaptability. "You have to be flexible and willing to ask questions, learn, and do research on your own."

Her day-to-day work varies considerably. "Every day looks different," she said. "Some days, I don't write at all because I'm in meetings from eight to four. Other days, I block out my calendar and write nonstop. I

create everything from user guides and release notes to announcements and API documentation. I've even helped launch a new testing platform, where I gave input on usability and standards."

She has also taken on responsibilities she didn't anticipate. One of her biggest surprises since joining Mastercard has been becoming the Content Strategy and Design team's software expert. "I didn't realize I'd be taking on a more technical role. I thought I'd be in more of a support role, but it's opened up many learning opportunities for me. And I've really enjoyed that."



### Future Plans and Goals

Since starting at Mastercard, Potrafka has remained in the same content strategy role. Although she enjoys the work, she hopes to move into product development one day, guiding a product through its early planning stages, overseeing its development, and preparing it for release to customers. That role would involve working across the full development process and ensuring that customer needs are represented at each stage.

She also hopes to author a novel. "I have a storyline in my head that I've been crafting for about a year and a half now. At some point I'll write it down and it may become published. It's definitely my creative outlet."

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Nora Potrafka (shown here on Mastercard's campus in O'Fallon, Missouri) encourages students to stay current with technological advancements and to learn a coding language. She believes that foundation carries well into any technical environment.

## Advice for Students

Potrafka has advice for current ETC students. “[W]riting is a tool that sharpens over time. You become a better communicator through practice, through doing it and sitting down and having other people read it and edit it.”

She also cautions them not to take feedback personally. “Editing is harsh, and everybody has an opinion and that’s sometimes hard to take. Your opinions are always going to be different from whoever’s reading your piece of work. It’s part of our human nature. We read things differently and we have different life experiences, but in technical communication writing, it’s all facts.”

She strongly recommends that technical communication students keep up with technology

trends and learn a coding language. “Whether it’s XML, CSS, HTML, or JavaScript, having that foundation helps. The syntax may not be the same, but there’s some translation that matches up. It’s knowledge that you can take to any job.”

## Staying Connected to S&T

Potrafka lives in St. Louis now and still finds S&T alumni everywhere. “There are so many S&T alumni at Mastercard. I can usually find one wherever I turn in St. Louis. My director even knows Dr. Wright. It’s neat to see those connections continue in unexpected ways.”

She hopes to strengthen those ties one day. “Maybe I’ll return for a career fair or help other students the way my professors helped me. It’s exciting to think about giving back.”