

Technical Communication: Requisites and Responses

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Many technical communicators regard themselves as technical writers. Many others, however, incorporate, or concentrate on communication techniques other than writing, including editing, indexing, graphic design, video scripting and production, and instructional design.

Technical communication is a broad field and includes any form of communication that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics: Communicating about technical or specialized topics, such as computer applications, medical procedures, or environmental regulations. Communicating by using technology, such as web pages, help files, or social media sites. Providing instructions about how to do something, regardless of how technical the task is or even if technology is used to create or distribute that communication.

Technical communication is a method of researching and creating information about technical processes or products directed to an audience through media. The information must be relevant to the intended audience. Technical communicators often work collaboratively to create products (deliverables) for various media, including paper, video, and the Internet. Deliverables include online help, user manuals, technical manuals, White papers, specifications, process and procedure manuals, industrial videos, reference cards, data sheets, journal articles, patents, training, business papers, and technical reports. Technical domains can be of any kind, including the soft and hard sciences, high technology including computers and software, consumer electronics, and business processes and practices. The origin of technical communication has been variously attributed to Ancient Greece, The Renaissance, and the mid 20th Century. However, a clear trend towards the professional field can be seen from the First World War on, growing out of the need for technology-based documentation in the military, manufacturing, electronic and aerospace industries.

Defining technical communication

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What's the difference between technical communication and technical writing?

Technical communication and technical writing are basically the same thing. Technical communication is a newer term that describes a field that is growing to include additional skills such as information design, user experience design and instructional design. Both fields share the same goal of creating clear and organized content that helps users to achieve specific goals.

Technical communication skills

The field of technical communication encompasses a number of related disciplines that include:

- Information design
- Technical writing
- Technical editing
- Instructional design
- User experience design
- Document design

What do technical writers do?

As a technical writer, you are expected to be able to:

- Determine the needs of the audience
- Organize the structure of technical documents
- Write information that meets the needs of the audience
- Write so that users can easily find and understand information

- Use page elements such as tables, lists, and headings appropriately
- Edit and proofread to produce documents without grammar or typographical errors

Technical writers interpret the thoughts and ideas of engineers, programmers, and marketing managers by translating complex concepts and procedures into simple English. As a technical writer, you are a technical “interpreter” since you must:

Know two “languages” intimately and understand their cultures. If you don’t understand computers, computer jargon, and the culture of computer programmers, you can never understand a complex computer application well enough to explain it. If you don’t know the things that challenge novice computer users, you can’t effectively explain tasks like installation or configuration.

Be accurate since mistakes can be costly or even dangerous. You don’t want to miss a step when writing emergency procedures for a nuclear reactor.

Understand the audience. If you can’t understand the audience and interpret their needs, you will never produce the document they need or want.

The technical writing process can be divided into five steps:

1. Determine purpose and audience
2. Collect information
3. Organize and outline information
4. Write the first draft
5. Revise and edit

Seven Characteristics of Technical Communication

- Addresses particular readers.
- Helps readers solve problems.
- Reflects an organization's goals and culture.
- Is produced collaboratively.

- Uses design to increase readability.
- Consists of words or graphics or both.
- Is produced using high-tech tools.

Goals of Document Design

- To make a good impression on readers.
- To help readers understand the structure and hierarchy of the information.
- To help readers find the information they need.
- To help readers understand the information.
- To help readers remember the information.

Uses of Technical Writing

With understanding the characteristics of technical writing, you can better comprehend how this type of writing is used. Technical writing is found everywhere. There are a variety of different types of writing which use a technical style.

For example, instructions of all sorts are a perfect example of technical writing.

When you open up an instruction manual, as the reader, the goal is to be informed about the product so that you can use it as efficiently as possible.

Lab reports are another example of technical writing. The main purpose of a lab report is to explain the occurrences in a lab so that others will be able to gain information.

Driving directions can be considered a type of technical writing as the goal is to clearly and efficiently provide instructions on how to go from point A to point B.

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