

The nature of technical writing



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What is Technical Writing?

Technical writing communicates specific and factual information to a defined audience for a defined purpose. The information is technical in nature, and this is what makes technical writing different from other types of writing. Broadly, that audience includes technical readers, managerial readers, or even, at times, general readers. The purpose is to inform, instruct, describe, explain, or otherwise document scientific or industrial processes and mechanisms.

Purposes of Technical Writing.

1. To inform It is written to make another person understand or to do something. It is designed to fulfill a need to tell and a need to know.
2. To analyze events and their implications It will explain how certain systems failed. This system may include education, socioeconomic, political and the needed change.
3. To persuade and influence decisions It will show how a business or an industry succeeds.

Technical writing is ideally characterized by the maintenance of impartiality and objectivity, by extreme care to convey information accurately and concisely and by the absence of any attempt to arouse emotions.

Basic Principles of Technical Writing.

1. Understanding the Reader The technical writer should know how to adapt his writings and terminologies of the type of the intended audience or

readers. Difficult technical terms used must be carefully defined so that the reader will easily understand the information being presented. If the reader fails to understand what he reads, the writer fails in his mission. The technical writers should know how important his readers are. The target readers help the writer to know what to write about and how to write it.

2. Knowing the Purpose of Each Technical Report The technical paper must be organized around a central theme. The reader should understand the main purpose after reading the paper. The purpose maybe is to describe a thing, to report on a specific problem or project, or to analyze and solve a problem.

3. Knowing the Subject Matter A technical writer must have a thorough knowledge of the subject he is to write about. If the report is on the result of a technical experiment, the writer who writes the report should explain what the problem is all about, what causes the problem and how the problem is solved.

4. Writing Objectively A good technical writer must emphasize the facts and the data. The impersonal style is basic to an effective technical writer. He represents facts, figures and statistics skillfully woven around the subject matter or central theme and written in an impersonal manner.

5. Using Correct Format The format and style of a report attract the attention of the readers first. Companies require neatly-typed communications, reports and project proposals and feasibility studies. The current trends require that such communication be computerized or typed.

6. Adopting Ethical Standards A technical writer should undertake comprehensive research work; accumulate the required data through interviews, surveys, referrals and related publications. He must have to present facts and figures as gathered and required, using only those that are pertinent to the report. A good technical writer also acknowledges the help he receives from others and cites sources of reference materials.

Effective Technical Writing.

1) Write Clear Sentences Follow these guidelines for writing sentences which will be clear to the readers. I. Keep the Main Idea on Top Place the sentence's main idea, the subject, first. The subject makes the rest of the sentence accessible. Readers therefore orient themselves and they are able to interact with the subsequent discussion.

II. Use Normal Word Order The normal word order in English is subject-verb-object. This order makes it easier to read as it reveals the topic first and the structures the idea. This order produces sentences which are clear to the readers and do not cause any confusion.

III. Use Active Voice Active voice emphasizes performer of the function and not the receiver. Active voice helps the reader follow the meaning quickly as it is sticking to subject-verb-object pattern. When the subject acts, the verb is in the active voice. When the subject is acted upon, the verb is in the passive voice. Use passive voice sparingly and when it is absolutely required.

IV. Use Parallelism Use similar structures for similar elements.

V. Repeat for Emphasis Repeat key words for emphasis so that the reader has better recall. Read the following example.

Provide Transitions Connect sentences by using words that signal a sequence or pattern. Sequence: first, second, next. Addition: and, further. Contrast: but, however, nevertheless.

VI. Avoid Wordiness Generally, concise expressions are more effective than verbosity. Eliminate all repetitions, subordinate clauses etc. to make the writing compact and pointed.

VII. Avoid Redundancy Redundancies are words that say the same content. Conciseness is achieved by saying anything only once. In the following examples, what is bracketed may be omitted for conciseness.

2) Choose a Tone Now you can prepare clear, effective documents. Your documents are easy to read. However, we are assuming that the writer and reader are equal and unemotional. Hence it is important to control 'tone'. The 'tone' can communicate as much as the content of the message. Consider some possible 'tones' depending on the situation.

1. The forceful tone implies that the writer is in command. This is appropriate when the writer addresses subordinates. While writing forcefully, Use the active voice. Use imperatives. Clearly indicate that you are responsible.

For example: I have decided to introduce Performance Appraisal System forthwith in our organization.

2. When the reader has more power than the writer, use passive voice. For example: The instructions to implement the new Evaluation System has been complied with.

3. The personal tone implies that reader and writer are equal. For example: David thanks for your suggestion about maintenance routine. It has given good results.

4. The impersonal tone is employed when the writer is not important and the situation is neutral. For example: A proposal to introduce quality circle has been made.

3) Use Positive Words and Verbs A sure way to involve your audience is to sprinkle positive words and positive verbs throughout your text. Positive words and verbs convince the reader the benefits of your subject matter.

4) Tune to the Audience Tuning to the audience is the key for effectiveness of your document with the reader. Remember the following points. Not all your readers will understand acronyms and abbreviations. Readers need glossaries. Provide extended definitions for technical terms. As multiple audiences have different levels of technical knowledge, choose carefully the amount of technical content in your document. Show your reader how he or she will benefit from your document.