



FEATURE



Technicalities of Technical Writing

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Technical writers translate, organize, and present complex information in the form of user guides so that any person can easily understand and use that information. Depending on the needs of the audience and the product, the type and form of the document that is produced varies.

Technical writing has wide applications in diverse fields: computers, medicine, manufacturing, finance, telecom, aviation, robotics, consumer electronics, and biotechnology, among others. It would be a mistake to believe that technical writing is only about written words and illustrations; today, in fact, many other avenues have opened up for technical writers to write for multimedia companies, online help systems, and websites.

Depending on their work profiles, professionals in technical writing hold titles such as technical writer, usability specialist, documentation manager, technical editor, information developer, technical illustrator, and web designer.

Features of Technical Writing

As with any form of writing, technical communication is meaningless if it fails to translate and convey technical ideas in messages audiences can understand. Just as in other forms of writing, a technical writer's failure to analyze the needs of his or her audiences and the objectives of particular documents can defeat the purpose of technical writing. In spite of this and other similarities, though, technical writing differs from other writing in some aspects :

- Technical writing is highly structured.
- Formal language is used.
- Sentences are usually shorter, and messages are easier to infer.
- Depending on the audience, documents sometimes extensively include sketches, tables, charts, and diagrams.
- Documents maintain balances between theories and their applications.
- Writers work closely with designers and illustrators.
- Documents intended for the general public place greater emphasis on "layman's language" than documents meant for the technically skilled.

Work Conditions

- **Working as a Single Technical Writer in a Department**

In this case, one is responsible for entire documentation projects from

the planning stage through delivery. It is the technical writer's duty to evaluate products and analyze customer requirements. In addition to writing, he/she designs templates for books in the documentation suite and ensures documents' testing before their deliveries. He/she also advises the design team on the usability of the products.

- **Working as Part of a Writing Team**

Writing teams may be comprised of as few as two writers or as many as two hundred writers. Inexperienced technical writers get more opportunities to work in large teams than in small teams. The advantage of working in larger teams is that they use tried-and-tested project policies and procedures. The disadvantage is that initially, experienced writers on the team closely monitor new recruits' work and often direct them to rewrite documents more than once.

Newly appointed technical writers start out using desktop publishing software, interviewing subject-matter experts (SMEs), researching glossary terms, and organizing



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information. With experience, they are assigned to difficult documents and are allowed to design simple and/or complex templates.

- **Working as a Freelance Technical Writer**

Freelancers have to complete assigned tasks within specified periods. Payments are based on negotiated hourly rates or flat rates. Rates are never static and depend largely on writers' experiences, abilities, and market conditions. Renewal of contracts is unpredictable and depends on many factors ranging from performance to personal rapport and the market.

The continuing expansion of scientific and technical information and the need to communicate it to many audiences will increase job opportunities for technical writers. The field of technical writing is open to not only professional communicators but also to the technical workforce. Many computers programmers, lab technicians, research scientists, and engineers also do quite well in the field.

On the Net:

Become a Great Technical Writer Even If You Are Not a Great Writer
www.docsymmetry.com/career-in-technical-writing.html

A Career in Technical Writing-What Can You Expect?
www.docsymmetry.com/career-in-technical-writing.html

Interested In Technical Communication?
www.stc.org/membership/interestedTC01.asp

Technical Writing - Career Outlook For Technical Writers To 2010
www.klariti.com/business-writing/Career-Outlook-Technical-Writer.shtml

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