TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

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A Reader-Centered Approach

Fourth Edition

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PAUL V. ANDERSON

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PAUL V. ANDERSON
Miami University

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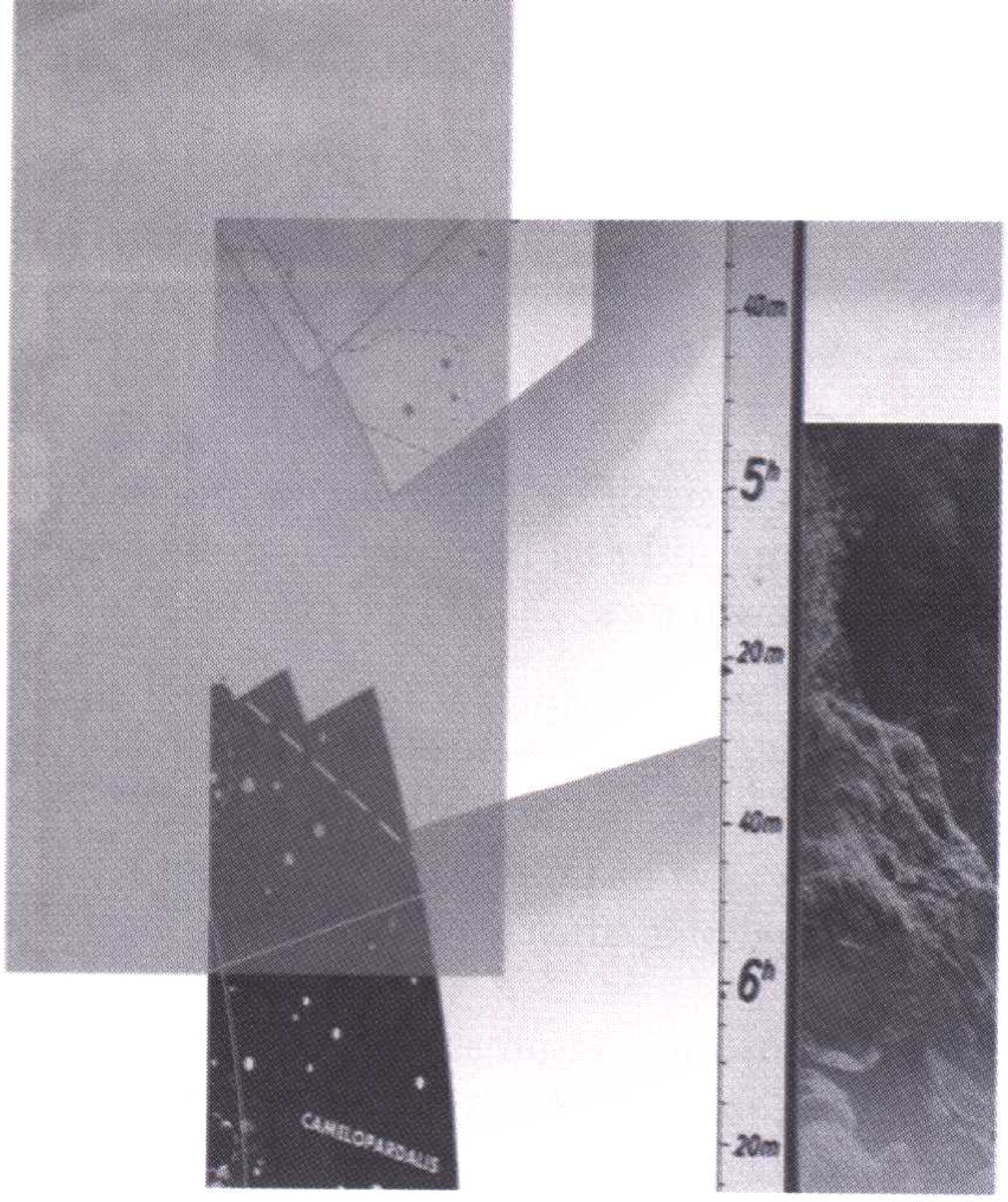

Preface

New features include an extensive Web site for instructors and students.

The world of technical communication has changed in dramatic and exciting ways since the appearance of this book's previous edition only four years ago. The explosive increase in use of the Internet is but one of several extraordinary events that have profoundly influenced the ways we communicate. Additionally, there have been substantial advances in the ways we think about and teach our subject. In creating this new edition of *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach,* I have introduced many innovations—including an extensive Web site for you and your students—that respond to these changes. At the same time, I've retained the book's distinctive strategies that, over the years, have proven successful for instructors and students alike.

READER-CENTERED APPROACH REMAINS

The reader-centered approach unifies all of the book's advice.

Most importantly, this remains a process-oriented textbook in which the central advice to students remains the same: think constantly about your readers—whether you are preparing messages that will be read on paper or viewed on a computer screen. As in earlier editions, every chapter, reference guide, and appendix conveys specific, useful advice built upon the hard-won insights that researchers have gained concerning the ways people read in the workplace.

By following the book's easy-to-remember guidelines, your students can become confident, flexible, resourceful writers who know how to size up a situation and then plan and draft a communication that will achieve an outcome that they and their readers both desire.

EXPANDED COVERAGE OF COMPUTER AND INTERNET COMMUNICATION

Many of the innovations to this edition reflect the significant increase in the use of computers as a tool for creating communications and as a medium for presenting them to readers. Here are some of the major new topics.

New chapter on electronic communication.

- **Creating e-mail, Web pages, and Web sites.** A new chapter (Chapter 15) on creating computer-based communications provides up-to-date advice for using e-mail, creating Web pages, and constructing informational Web sites of the kind prepared in the workplace. To illustrate, I've included many fully annotated screen shots. For students new to Web design, the chapter describes the most commonly used HTML tags.
- **Preparing electronic resumes.** At many companies, resumes from job applicants are scanned first by computers, not people. Chapter 2 includes a new section that tells students how to create effective computer-scannable resumes, ASCII resumes, and Web resumes.

Guidance for Web research.

- **Conducting research on the Internet.** A new section in the reference guide on research methods leads students through the process of conducting Internet research. To help students use the Web effectively, the section also explains how search engines work. In addition, it includes a new discussion that helps students perform the tricky task of evaluating information found on the Web.
- **Creating on-line instructions.** A new section in Chapter 20 supplements the coverage concerning paper-based instructions with advice for creating instructions that will be used on-screen.

Advice for taking fuller advantage of word-processing programs.

- **Using advanced word-processing features.** Standard word-processing programs now include several features—some very little used—that can aid writers at various stages of the writing process. Chapter 4 includes a new discussion of word-processing aids for outlining; Chapter 12 incorporates new advice on using "styles" when creating page designs, and Chapter 13 includes an updated discussion of features that check grammar, analyze writing style, and automatically compare two drafts of a communication to identify the differences between them.
- **Using electronic library resources.** Libraries are now as much on-line as on-the-shelf. A new section in the reference guide on research methods teaches students to use electronic card catalog systems and discusses other resources available in wired libraries.

ADDITIONAL COVERAGE OF OTHER TOPICS

I've also made numerous improvements in other areas, many based on suggestions generously provided by instructors and by students.

- **Writing collaboratively.** A new chapter consolidates the book's advice for working on collaborative writing teams. (Chapter 17)

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- **Evaluating research results.** A new discussion helps students evaluate information they find through their research. (Chapter 6)
- **Citing sources.** A completely revised and updated appendix explains both the new MLA style and the current APA style. (Appendix B)
- **Designing pages and screens.** New guidelines for page design augment the already strong chapter on the visual design of technical communications. (Chapter 12)
- **Describing an object.** An expanded treatment of this important skill includes an extended example from the professional world. (Reference guide on organizational patterns)

Many sample documents.

In addition, a multitude of new, thoroughly annotated sample documents illustrate the practical application of the book's advice.

WEB SITE FOR INSTRUCTORS AND STUDENTS

Just as the Internet allows technical communication courses to move beyond classroom and library walls, so too has it allowed me to create a textbook that permits you and your students to move beyond its covers.

Located at http://english.harbrace.com/techw/anderson, the site offers the following for instructors:

- Complete instructor's manual.
- Sample syllabi created by faculty at a variety of colleges and universities.
- Additional exercises and cases.
- PowerPoint presentations that can be downloaded for use during class.
- Editable versions of various planning guides and checklists for distribution to students.
- An on-line forum where we instructors can exchange ideas, share teaching materials, answer one another's questions, and discuss issues of mutual interest.
- Links to other valuable sites.
- Bibliography of articles on technical communication and its teaching.

For students, the site offers:

Web site features for students.

- Career information and job-hunting tips.
- Links to Internet resources for projects.
- Additional sample documents.
- A forum for interacting with students at other schools.
- A chance to view outstanding work by other students and possibly display their own.

A printed instructor's manual is also available. Contact your Harcourt representative.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Separately available are two popular supplements, written especially to accompany this book:

- **Style and Usage Guide** by C. Gilbert Storms (Miami University, Ohio). If some or all of your students would benefit from extra study in this area, Dr. Storms' book provides a brief, inexpensive, and very effective supplement. Carefully coordinated with the textbook, it covers the points of grammar, punctuation, diction, and similar matters that most often puzzle technical-writing students. Where appropriate, it includes exercises.
- **Technical Writing Guide for Nonnative Speakers of English,** by Robert M. Brown (Oklahoma State University), H. Young Kim (Cornell University), and Rebecca L. Damron (Oklahoma State University). This second, brief supplement enables you to provide rhetorically based instruction for your students who are second-language speakers of English. Fully coordinated with the textbook, it extends well beyond sentence-level issues to help international students understand such matters as typical reader preferences in the United States, as well as the organizational principles, rhetorical strategies, and conventions about visual aids that prevail here. It also includes special discussions of collaborative writing and plagiarism that are addressed to students from other cultures. If your class mixes native and nonnative speakers, you can have both groups work with the same basic text, then use this supplement with those who were not born into our culture.

CONCLUSION

In sum, I feel particularly proud of this new edition of *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach.* I think you and your students will find it informative, useful, and fun.

Please share your ideas with me.

My work on this edition has emphasized for me even more forcefully than before the extent to which every book is truly a collaborative effort. I've benefited from many forms of assistance, especially the advice of instructors and students who have graciously shared their ideas with me. I invite you to join the on-line forums at the book's Web site, and I assure you that I will read your contributions with interest. In addition, please feel welcome to contact me directly at any of the following addresses:

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Writing a textbook is truly a collaborative effort to which numerous people make substantial contributions. I take great pleasure in this opportunity to thank the many persons who generously furnished advice and assistance while I was working on this fourth edition of *Technical Communication: A Reader-Centered Approach.*

At the top of my list are sixteen students at Iowa State University, who sent me thoughtful notes in which they identified the features of the third edition that they wanted me to retain and suggested innovations that they'd like to see me introduce in the fourth edition. Among the innovations emerging from their suggestions are the marginal annotations used throughout the chapters to highlight key points and provide easy access for readers who want to review particular points. These students are Dave Anstrom, Paula M. Culberton, Mojiboha T. Fasehune, Steve Groen, Eric Hillary, Scott W. Holtorf, I-Shin Hsu, John Eric Kurniawan, Ben Koch, Jake J. Kerber, Seung Lee, Bee-Hui Lim, Andrew Pospisal, Todd G. Shedeck, Jacob Wacker, and Yee Lam Wong.

I also gained much valuable advice from the following faculty who were willing to steal some time from the wonderful 1997 CCCC conference in Phoenix in order to participate in a sometimes irreverent focus group concerning this edition. They are Patricia Jenkins, University of Alaska-Anchorage; Johndan Johnson-Eilola, Purdue University; Dan Jones, University of Central Florida; Louise Rehling, San Francisco State University; Stuart Selber, Texas Tech University; and Diane Svoboda, Mesa Community College.

Equally helpful were the extensive, thoughtful written reviews of the third edition and of my preliminary plans for the fourth edition by the following individuals: Marcella Clark, Kansas State University; Anthony Flinn, Eastern Washington University; Roger Friedmann, Kansas State University; Judy Hakola, University of Maine; Sharon Irvin, Florida Institute of Technology; Judy Kaufman, Eastern Washington University; Nick Lilly, Tarleton State University; Walter Loscutoff, California State University-Fresco; Ronald Smith, University of Northern Alabama; Margaret Walters, University of Houston-Clear Lake; and Irene Ward, Kansas State University.

As I crystallized my plans for this edition and began drafting chapters, I benefited greatly from the insightful assistance and counsel of Mark Gallaher. I am also grateful to David Bruce, who has written and e-mailed many times over the years to share suggestions he has developed while teaching with the various editions of this book at Ohio University.

Much of my most valuable assistance has come from right here at Miami University. My technical communication colleagues—Jennie Dautermann, Bob Johnson, Jean Lutz, and Gil Storms—have been a fountain of inspiration and good counsel, both when they offered direct advice and when they shared their own teaching strategies and ideas. Many Miami staff members have also assisted me. Within the English department, these include Kathy Fox, Jackie Kearns, Trudi Nixon, and Leta Roberson. Among library staff, these include Belinda Barr, Lisa Santucci, and Bill Wortman. In our Computing and Information Services Department, they include Barbara Edwards and Gail Johnson.

In addition to drawing on the published research cited in the reference list, I garnered good ideas for this edition by examining the thoughtful work of several other researchers who have written textbooks in technical communication, including Deborah C. Andrews, Rebecca E. Burnett; Kenneth W. Houp, Thomas E. Pearsall, and Beth Tebeaux; Jimmy Killingsworth; and John M. Lannon; and Mike Markel. Deserving special mention for the help it gave me recasting the chapter on page design is Robin Williams' *The Non-Designer's Design Book* (Berkeley, CA: Peachpit Press, 1994).

While working on this edition, I have been blessed with the support of a wonderfully talented group at Harcourt. I am particularly grateful to Julie McBurney, who has very skillfully coordinated the many individuals and groups who worked on this project with me. I am also grateful to Linda Beaupré, who has brought the book's cover and interior designs to a new level. In addition, I want to thank Diane Drexler for the care she has devoted to the book, Matt Ball for his long hours and enthusiasm, and Kathy Ferguson for her flawless management of its production. I also want to thank Steven T. Jordan, John P. Meyers, and Karl Yambert for helping me formulate plans for this edition.

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PAUL V. ANDERSON

Oxford, Ohio

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