

third edition

MODERN TECHNICAL WRITING

THEODORE A. SHERMAN

SIMON S. JOHNSON



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PREFACE

The third edition of *Modern Technical Writing* consists of four parts: *Technical Writing in General; Reports, Proposals, and Oral Presentation; Business Correspondence*; and a *Handbook of Fundamentals*. This is the same overall plan that was used in the first two editions, except that the material on oral presentation is entirely new and much of the rest has been updated or rewritten to keep abreast of current practices of the better writers in government, education, science, and industry.

The logic of this arrangement is that some of the various skills needed for technical writing can best be acquired if first studied separately and then put to use in the writing of reports and other longer pieces. The parts are written, however, in a manner that permits an instructor to take them up in a different order if he wishes.

Part I starts with a brief introductory chapter and then takes up Style and Organization, covering them in that order because skill or lack of skill in style affects all writing, while much technical writing is so short as to offer no problems of organization. These chapters are followed by one on Mechanics, covering matters of form that are peculiar to technical writing or else crop up in it with abnormal frequency.

The chapter on Special Problems, which follows, performs a dual function. It provides writing assignments that may be used while the

study of style, organization, and mechanics is still under way, and it explains ways of handling certain problems that may arise during the writing of reports, proposals, and other longer forms. We have also expanded the treatment of technical articles—recognizing the potential contribution of article writing to the career of the writer and the value of the article to science and technology.

In Part II, a change of emphasis at one point is reflected in the new title for Chapter 8, *Nonformal Reports—Their Variation in Form and Purpose*, which was formerly called *Special Types of Reports*. Though certain special types of reports are still discussed, additional emphasis is given to the fact that there does not exist any universally accepted set of types, under which all reports can be classified.

Two other extensive changes have been made in Part II: The chapter on *Proposals*, which first appeared in the second edition, has been rewritten and substantially expanded so as to cover that important subject more thoroughly. Also, an entirely new chapter, *Oral Presentation of Technical Information*, has been added. Though a study of this chapter is no substitute for training in public speaking, we believe that its recommendations can nevertheless be of substantial assistance to those who use this book on the numerous occasions when they will be called upon to present their ideas in person before a small group or a large audience.

Part III, *Business Correspondence*, remains largely as it was. It is important because, though not all letters, strictly speaking, are technical writing, those who do technical writing will find it necessary to write more and more letters as their careers continue. Consequently, they should be made aware of the difference between the skills called for in letter writing and those that they need in the other writing that their work involves. Of special interest to the student is the section on letters concerning employment, which has been altered to take into account a rapidly changing job market.

The *Handbook of Fundamentals* has been updated—usually by being liberalized. It is intended primarily for purposes of reference when a writer is doubtful about some matter that concerns correctness and effectiveness of writing in general. Its attitude, like that of the authors, is liberal; but in fairness to those who use it, some of the traditional taboos are pointed out because they may still be taken seriously by people whom those who use this book will address.

In all parts of the book new ideas have been added and changes have been made wherever close scrutiny revealed an opportunity to make the book more effective. The exercises are of the same kind used before, but consist of entirely new material except on a few occasions where something in the second edition brought out a point so well that no

satisfactory replacement could be obtained or devised. Also, the subjects for writing assignments are new except where they are broad enough to allow the student considerable freedom in utilizing material from his own special interests.

The specimens of various kinds of technical writing are almost entirely new, and in every case have been written recently enough to be in line with current practice. Particular pains were taken in obtaining reports and proposals to use as specimens. All of those included were written for actual use in government or industry, and are shown in facsimile to let students see an actual cross section of material produced by professional workers in fields they themselves may enter. No specimen is the product of professional technical writers and artists. On the contrary, they are the work of professional men who must write as part of their jobs but whose main occupation is not writing. Most of those who use this book will fall into that category.

These specimens were obtained from many sources, and those that are presented were chosen because they seemed best to represent what is being produced in the field. They are of various types and concern various fields. Geographically, they come from places as far apart as Alaska, Hawaii, and Brooklyn. They comprise only a small percentage of those received. Examples not included were also valuable in that they too were examined with care so that what the book says about reports and proposals would correspond with current practices. Also, they were a source of subject matter in devising exercises and assignments that would be most like what the student will be doing when he is on the job.

Throughout the book—in the text proper and in assignments, exercises, and specimens—material will be found that concerns subjects which have emerged as vital in recent years, not only to students, but to Americans generally. Ecology, pollution control, and energy sources are typical examples of these interests.

One further change that is directly apparent only on the title page but which is indirectly reflected elsewhere through the book is the addition of a second author. This addition permitted us to contact a great many more sources for examination and allowed us to state with greater confidence that the suggestions we provide the student to aid his writing are indeed current and enduring in the field.

In this respect, the number of persons who have been of service while revision was under way has been so great that listing all of them would be impractical, but a particular debt of gratitude is owed each of the following: Allen S. Janssen, Dean (Emeritus) of the College of Engineering, University of Idaho (who helped us to make the contacts that enabled us to obtain much of our material from outside sources); John Banks, President of the National Steel and Shipbuilding Company of

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Theodore A. Sherman

Simon S. Johnson

CONTENTS

PREFACE

xiii

Part I TECHNICAL WRITING IN GENERAL

1 - INTRODUCTION	3
2 EFFECTIVE STYLE	8
EFFECT OF DICATION ON STYLE	9
Avoidance of Stiff, Pompous Language, 9	
Avoidance of Needlessly Technical Language, 10	
Use of Concrete, Specific Language, 11	
EFFECT OF SENTENCE STRUCTURE ON STYLE	13
Sentence Length, 13	
<i>Avoidance of Excessive Length, 13</i>	
<i>Avoidance of Primer Style, 14</i>	
Simplicity and Directness, 15	
<i>Simplicity, 15 • Directness, 17</i>	
Precision, 18	
Choice Between Active and Passive Voice, 20	

CONCISENESS	21
Repetition, 22	
Wordy Phrases, 22	
Use of General Rather Than Specific Words, 22	
Needlessly Complicated Structure, 23	
Superconcentrated Style, 24	
FINAL COMMENT ON STYLE	24
EXERCISES	25
3 ORGANIZATION	30
THE PROCESS OF PREPARING AN OUTLINE	35
GIVING SUITABLE RANK TO YOUR POINTS	38
ARRANGEMENT OF POINTS	39
CHECKING AN OUTLINE FOR ERRORS	40
GENERAL SUGGESTIONS	41
Classification, 41	
Parallel Treatment of Similar Points, 42	
Avoidance of Undesirable Extremes, 42	
Logical Allotment of Space, 42	
Clearness in the Outline, 43	
Sentence or Topic Outlines, 43	
FINAL CHECK OF AN OUTLINE	44
EXERCISES	44
4 MECHANICS	51
MANUSCRIPT FORM	51
TECHNICAL STYLE	52
Use of Figures or Words for Numbers, 52	
<i>Numbers in Ordinary Style</i> , 52	
<i>Numbers in Technical Style</i> , 53	
Use of Abbreviations in Technical Style, 54	
HYPHENATION OF COMPOUND TERMS	56
THE DECIMAL SYSTEM OF NUMBERING HEADINGS	57
EQUATIONS	58
DOCUMENTATION	59
Footnotes, 59	
Alphabetical List of References, 63	
Numbered List of References, 65	
Footnotes Plus Bibliography, 66	
Final Comment on Documentation, 66	
EXERCISES	66

5	SPECIAL PROBLEMS	72
	DEFINITIONS	72
	The Sentence Definition, 72	
	The Expanded Definition, 73	
	Point of view in a Definition, 75	
	The Effect of Purpose on Definitions, 77	
	General Suggestions, 78	
	TECHNICAL DESCRIPTIONS	79
	Description of the Object as a Whole, 82	
	Description of the Functional Parts, 84	
	The Conclusion, 84	
	Adaptation to the Reader and Occasion, 84	
	General Suggestions, 84	
	EXPLANATION OF A PROCESS	85
	The Introduction, 86	
	The Overall Picture, 86	
	The Explanation of Successive Steps, 87	
	The Conclusion, 88	
	Explaining a Process Performed by Machinery, 89	
	Explanation of a Natural Process, 90	
	INSTRUCTIONS	92
	Introductory Material, 92	
	How Much to Include, 93	
	Use of Numbers and Other Mechanical Devices, 93	
	Special Elements, 94	
	Style and Tone, 95	
	Conclusion, 95	
	ANALYSIS	97
	TECHNICAL ARTICLES	101
	Scope and Importance, 101	
	Finding Subjects for Articles, 103	
	Adapting the Article to the Periodical, 105	
	Writing the Article, 106	
	Benefits of Writing Articles, 107	
	Example of a Technical Article, 107	
	EXERCISES	116
	ASSIGNMENTS	118
6	TABLES AND FIGURES	122
	TABLES	122
	FIGURES	126
	Bar Charts, 129	

Graphs—Curves, 130	
The Pie Diagram, 132	
Organization Charts and Flow Sheets, 133	
Photographs, 135	
Diagrams and Drawings, 135	

ASSIGNMENTS	137
-------------	-----

Part II

REPORTS, PROPOSALS, AND ORAL PRESENTATION

7	REPORTS—DEFINITION, IMPORTANCE, AND QUALITIES	141
	DEFINITION	141
	IMPORTANCE	142
	DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL AND SCHOOL REPORTS	142
	QUALITIES TO STRIVE FOR IN REPORTS	143
	Self-Sufficiency, 143	
	Interest, 144	
	Thoroughness, 145	
	Omission of Unnecessary Material, 146	
	Freedom from Bias, 147	
	Objectivity, 147	
	Restraint, 148	
	Appropriate Degree of Impersonality and Formality, 148	
	Avoidance of Chronological Order, 152	
	Consideration of Emotional Factors, 153	
	EXERCISES	154
8	NONFORMAL REPORTS—THEIR VARIATION IN FORM AND PURPOSE	156
	REPORTS MADE BY FILLING IN A BLANK FORM	157
	REPORTS IN THE FORM OF LETTERS	157
	REPORTS IN THE FORM OF MEMORANDA	158
	PROGRESS AND STATUS REPORTS	159
	THE PERIODIC REPORT	160
	THE LABORATORY REPORT	161
	FORMAL AND SEMIFORMAL REPORTS	162
	REPORTS THAT FIT INTO NO CLASSIFICATION	163
	SPECIMENS OF NONFORMAL REPORTS	164
	1. Report on a Blank Form, 166	
	2. Report in the Form of a Memorandum, 168	
	3. Report in the Form of a Memorandum, 170	

4. Report in the Form of a Memorandum, 172	
5. Report in the Form of a Letter, 172	
6. Periodic Report, 178	
7. Laboratory Report under a Memorandum Heading, 180	
8. Report in the Form of a Memorandum, 184	
9. Progress (or Status) Report, 188	
ASSIGNMENTS	190
9 SPECIAL ELEMENTS IN REPORTS	194
THE COVERING MEMORANDUM	195
THE TITLE PAGE	196
THE TABLE OF CONTENTS	198
USE OF HEADINGS	199
The Value of Headings, 199	
Form for Headings of Different Ranks, 200	
Phrasology of Headings, 202	
General Suggestions, 204	
SUMMARIES AND ABSTRACTS	204
THE INTRODUCTION	208
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	209
THE APPENDIX	212
FINAL COMMENT ON SPECIAL ELEMENTS	213
EXERCISES	213
10 PROCEDURE IN WRITING A REPORT	215
ANALYZING THE JOB	216
MAKING A TENTATIVE PLAN OR OUTLINE	217
GATHERING INFORMATION	218
Reports Written on the Job, 218	
Reports in a Writing Course, 219	
INTERPRETING THE FACTS GATHERED	220
MAKING THE DETAILED OUTLINE	222
PLANNING THE USE OF TABLES AND FIGURES	223
WRITING THE FIRST DRAFT	223
REVISION	225
CARING FOR FINAL DETAILS	226
ASSIGNMENTS	226
11 FORMAL AND SEMIFORMAL REPORTS	229
DESCRIPTION OF FORMAL AND SEMIFORMAL REPORTS	229
ARRANGEMENTS OF THE PARTS	231
COMPONENT PARTS—ADDITIONAL COMMENT	232
Letter of Transmittal, 232	

Table of Contents, 234	
Introduction, 237	
STYLE IN A FORMAL REPORT	239
THE EFFICIENCY OF FORMAL REPORTS	240
SPECIMEN FORMAL REPORT	242
ASSIGNMENTS	260
12 PROPOSALS	261
CONVINCING THE READER	262
KINDS OF PROPOSALS	263
Research, 263	
Research and Development, 264	
Sales, 264	
Planning, 265	
CONTENTS	265
INFORMAL PROPOSALS	266
Problem, 266	
Proposed Solution, 267	
Statement of Request, 267	
FORMAL PROPOSALS	267
Front Matter, 268	
<i>Letter of Transmittal</i> , 268	
<i>Cover Sheet/Title Page</i> , 268	
<i>Summary or Abstract</i> , 268	
<i>Table of Contents</i> , 268 • <i>Statement of Request</i> , 268	
Body, 269	
<i>Statement of the Problem</i> , 269 • <i>Background</i> , 269	
<i>Scope</i> , 269 • <i>Methodology</i> , 269 • <i>Facilities</i> , 270	
<i>Personnel</i> , 270 • <i>Advantages and Disadvantages</i> , 270	
<i>Duration</i> , 271 • <i>Costs</i> , 271 • <i>Reports</i> , 271	
EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS	271
SPECIMEN PROPOSAL	274
ASSIGNMENTS	300
13 ORAL PRESENTATION OF TECHNICAL INFORMATION	300
PREPARATION	302
Audience Adaptation, 303	
Arrangement of Material, 304	
Preparing Notes, 305	
LANGUAGE	306
Standard English and Dialects, 307	
Formal versus Informal Style, 308	
Personal versus Impersonal Style, 309	

	Variety, 309	
DELIVERY		309
	General Suggestions, 310	
	Transitions, 311	
	Visual Aids, 311	
SPEAKING TO A LARGER AUDIENCE		312
	The Opening Moments, 313	
	Speed, 313	
	Articulation, 314	
	Use of a Prepared Text, 314	
	Oratorical Style, 315	
ATTITUDE		316
ASSIGNMENTS		316
Part III		
BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE		
14	GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE	321
	CORRECT FORM IN BUSINESS LETTERS	322
	Identification of Parts of the Letter, 322	
	Miscellaneous Mechanical Details, 322	
	Stationery, 322	
	Placement of the Letter on the Page, 322	
	Spacing within the Letter, 323	
	Systems of Indentation and Punctuation, 323	
	Form for Individual Parts of the Letter, 326	
	The Heading, 326 • The Inside Address, 327	
	The Salutation, 327 • The Complimentary Close, 330	
	The Signature, 330 • The Attention Line, 331	
	The Subject Line, 332	
	Stenographic References, Enclosures, Postscripts, 332	
	Additional Pages, 333	
	Abbreviation, Capitalization, and Numbers, 333	
	Abbreviation, 333 • Capitalization, 334	
	Use of Figures or Words for Numbers, 334	
THE SUBSTANCE OF LETTERS		334
	Standards of Neatness, Correctness, and Accuracy, 335	
	Language in Business Letters, 336	
	Sentences in Business Letters, 336	
	Paragraphs in Business Letters, 337	
	Beginnings of Letters, 337	
	Endings of Letters, 338	

	Need of Planning before Writing, 339	
	Arrangement of Material in Letters, 340	
	Negative, Neutral, and Positive Approach, 341	
	Tone, 343	
	The "You Attitude," 344	
	Good Will in Business Letters, 344	
	EXERCISES	346
15	SPECIAL TYPES OF LETTERS	353
	INVITATIONS	353
	LETTERS GIVING INSTRUCTIONS	355
	INQUIRIES AND ANSWERS TO INQUIRIES	358
	Letters of Inquiry, 358	
	Answers to Inquiries, 361	
	COMPLAINTS AND ADJUSTMENTS	363
	Complaints, 363	
	Answers to Complaints and to Requests for Adjustments, 365	
	<i>Answers to Complaints Not Involving Adjustments, 365</i>	
	<i>Letters Refusing to Make Adjustments, 367</i>	
	<i>Letters Granting Adjustments, 369</i>	
	LETTERS URGING ACTION	370
	FORM LETTERS	372
	ASSIGNMENTS	374
16	LETTERS CONCERNING EMPLOYMENT	378
	THE CONVENTIONAL LETTER OF APPLICATION	379
	The Opening, 379	
	The Central Section, 379	
	<i>Education, 380 • Experience, 380</i>	
	<i>Personal Information, 380 • References, 380</i>	
	The Ending, 381	
	The Use of a Resumé, 382	
	LETTERS FOLLOWING INTERVIEWS	382
	GENERAL SUGGESTIONS	384
	Neatness, 384	
	The "You Attitude," 384	
	Objectivity, 385	
	Tone, 385	
	Excessive Use of "I," 386	
	Discussion of Salary Expected, 386	
	Making Sure All Questions Are Answered, 386	
	Seeing Things as the Reader Sees Them, 387	

SPECIMEN LETTERS OF APPLICATION	387
ASSIGNMENTS	392

Part IV HANDBOOK OF FUNDAMENTALS

PARAGRAPHS	397
General Comment, 397	
Length of Paragraphs, 398	
Paragraphs of Isolated Statement, 398	
CORRECTNESS IN STANDARD USAGE	399
Case of Nouns and Pronouns, 399	
Agreement of Verb and Its Subject, 402	
Agreement of Pronouns with Antecedents, 403	
Agreement of a Demonstrative Adjective with Its Object, 406	
Adjectives and Adverbs—General Comment, 406	
UNITY AND COHERENCE IN THE SENTENCE	409
Unity of Thought, 409	
Unity of Structure, 410	
<i>Fragment Treated as a Sentence, 410</i>	
<i>The Comma Splice, 411</i>	
Coherence, 412	
PUNCTUATION	420
The Period, 420	
The Comma, 421	
<i>Commas Used to Set off, 421 • Commas Used to Separate, 423 • Commas Used Arbitrarily, 424</i>	
The Semicolon, 425	
The Question Mark, 426	
The Exclamation Point, 427	
The Colon, 427	
The Dash, 427	
Quotation Marks, 428	
Quotation Marks in Relation to Other Punctuation, 429	
The Apostrophe, 430	
Parenthesis, 431	
Brackets, 431	
The Hyphen, 431	
CAPITALIZATION	432
ITALICS	434
ABBREVIATIONS	435

SPELLING	436
The Rules, 437	
Pairs of Words That May Be Confused, 440	
Words Misspelled Because of Pronunciation, 440	
GLOSSARY OF STANDARD USAGE	442
EXPLANATION OF GRAMMATICAL TERMS	450
APPENDICES	461
A ABBREVIATIONS FOR SCIENTIFIC AND ENGINEERING TERMS	463
B HELPFUL PUBLICATIONS FOR TECHNICAL WRITERS	468
INDEX	471