

# **TECHNICAL** WRITING for **READERS** and WRITERS

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## To my parents, to Patrick, and especially to Bill

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#### **Preface**

Technical Writing for Readers and Writers has two goals: to prepare students for the many writing tasks they will encounter in the workplace and to provide technical communication instructors with a flexible, comprehensive teaching tool. Beneath these two goals lies the foundation of this book—the belief that writing is more than simply putting words on paper or a computer screen and that students learn best to write by understanding their readers and by writing and revising. This book, therefore, contains numerous samples of student and workplace writing and dozens of exercises by which students can apply the principles of technical writing.

Technical writing, of course, goes far beyond reporting facts. Technical writing is a series of deliberate problem-solving activities—activities that require critical thinking. Before writers can effectively put words on a computer screen or report facts, they need to understand why they are writing, who is reading, and why the readers are reading. Without this information, a document will most likely fail to achieve its desired purpose. When writers know for what purpose and for whom they're writing, they have a better chance of communicating effectively.

Technical Writing for Readers and Writers presents principles designed to give students the tools and practice they need to respond effectively to varied writing situations. With these principles, students can determine the organization, layout, and content that will best meet the needs of readers.

#### ORGANIZATION OF THIS BOOK

In addition to a brief introduction to technical writing in Chapter 1, *Technical Writing for Readers and Writers* contains four major sections and three appendixes.

#### Part I: Understanding the Role of the Writer

Part I helps students to understand their roles as writers in the workplace. Chapter 2, "Understanding the Writing Process," treats technical writing as a problem-solving, analytical process. Students learn that the writing process is a dynamic, recursive process. Many students have trouble getting started writing, and Chapter 2 provides strategies to help them begin. In Chapter 3, "Understanding and Writing for Your Readers," students learn principles for examining workplace writing from several vantage points: that of the writer, the readers, and the workplace. In Chapter 4, "Readers, Writers, and Ethical Communication," students learn to consider the ethical dimensions of their communications. In Chapter 5, "Collaborating and the Writing Process," stu-

dents see how to adapt to the interpersonal challenges and opportunities of collaborative writing. This chapter also suggests ways for students to use electronic media to facilitate collaborative writing.

#### Part II: Knowing the Tools of the Writer

Part II presents principles students need to create effective, reader-oriented documents. In Chapter 6, "Gathering Information for Your Documents," students learn strategies for formulating research questions and exploring primary and secondary sources-including using research tools on the Internet and World Wide Web. This chapter includes information on documenting sources using APA style and MLA style. Chapter 7, "Structuring Information for Your Readers," presents techniques for organizing documents that readers can understand and use. In Chapter 8, "Writing Reader-Oriented Sentences and Paragraphs," and Chapter 9, "Using Reader-Oriented Language," students learn and practice style principles at the sentence, paragraph, and word levels. These principles provide students with strategies they can use to write clear, concise, reader-oriented documents. Chapter 10, "Designing Documents for Your Readers," and Chapter 11, "Creating Effective Visual Aids for Your Readers," demonstrate the rhetorical implications of document design and visual aids. These chapters give students "how-to" information that they can easily apply to their own documents and information. Finally, Chapter 12, "Preparing Front and End Matter," shows students how to prepare the elements required for formal reports-elements such as covers, title pages, tables of contents, and appendixes.

#### Part III: Producing Effective Documents for Your Readers

Part III applies earlier principles and tools to planning and writing various types of technical documents. Students learn to apply these principles and tools to proposals (Chapter 13), progress reports (Chapter 14), completion reports (Chapter 15), and instructions and manuals (Chapter 16). Students examine sample documents written by other students and workplace professionals. These documents include annotations that point out how the documents demonstrate the principles presented in the chapters.

#### Part IV: Writing Effective Correspondence for Your Readers

Part IV applies the text's principles and tools to letters, memos, e-mail, and job correspondence. In Chapter 17, "Writing Reader-Oriented Letters, Memos, and E-Mail," students learn rhetorical strategies, principles, and formats for writing correspondence that conveys what they intend and that meets the needs of the readers. In Chapter 18, "Writing Reader-Oriented Job Correspondence," students learn strategies for looking for jobs and for writing résumés, letters of application, and follow-up letters.

#### **Appendixes**

Appendix A, "Creating Reader-Oriented Web Sites," provides guidelines to help students build an effective Web site. Appendix B, "Creating Listener-Oriented Oral Presentations," presents information on planning oral presentations and suggests strategies for delivering the presentations. Appendix C, "Review of Common Sentence Errors, Punctuation, and Mechanics," provides a convenient, brief handbook.

#### **FEATURES**

Technical Writing for Readers and Writers offers students five recurring features: computer technology icon, Worksheets, Case Studies, The Readers' Corner boxes, and Issues in Context boxes. The technology icon signals tips and information that help students use computer technology to streamline the writing process. The Worksheets appear at the end of each chapter and present questions that students can use as they write. The Case Studies allow students to apply the principles of a particular chapter in extended workplace scenarios. Several of these Case Studies give students the opportunity to practice collaborative writing. The Readers' Corner boxes present anecdotal information about technical writing—past, present, and future—and suggestions for students to follow when writing. Issues in Context boxes report on current research on the topics raised in each chapter or provide a bibliography for more in-depth information.

#### ANCILLARIES FOR TECHNICAL WRITING FOR READERS AND WRITERS

The following ancillaries accompany Technical Writing for Readers and Writers:

- Instructor's Resource Manual, which includes guidelines for teaching technical writing, transparency masters, and quizzes
- Instructor's Resource Disk, which includes an alternative table of contents, syllabi, and additional Case Studies

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#### SUGGESTIONS

If you have any comments or suggestions for improving this book, I'd enjoy hearing them. Please contact me at the Department of English at the University of North Texas, Denton, TX 76203. My phone number is (940) 565-2171, and my e-mail is sims@unt.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Brenda R. Sims

## **Brief Contents**

	1. Writing, the Workplace, and This Book	
Part I	UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF THE WRITER	13
	2. Understanding the Writing Process	13
	3. Understanding and Writing for Your Readers	34
	4. Readers, Writers, and Ethical Communication	54
	5. Collaborating and the Writing Process	72
Part II	KNOWING THE TOOLS OF THE WRITER	93
	6. Gathering Information for Your Documents	93
	7. Structuring Information for Your Readers	122
	8. Writing Reader-Oriented Sentences and Paragraphs	157
	9. Using Reader-Oriented Language	175
	10. Designing Documents for Your Readers	197
	11. Creating Effective Visual Aids for Your Readers	234
	12. Preparing Front and End Matter	279
Part III	PRODUCING EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR READERS	323
	13. Planning and Writing Reader-Oriented Proposals	323
	14. Planning and Writing Reader-Oriented Progress Reports	357
	15. Planning and Writing Reader-Oriented Completion Reports	373
	16. Planning and Writing User-Oriented Instructions and Manuals	403
Part IV	WRITING EFFECTIVE CORRESPONDENCE FOR YOUR READERS	433
	17. Writing Reader-Oriented Letters, Memos, and E-Mail	43
	18. Writing Reader-Oriented Job Correspondence	470
	Appendixes	503
	A. Creating Reader-Oriented Web Sites	50.
	B. Creating Listener-Oriented Oral Presentations	522
	C. Review of Common Sentence Errors, Punctuation, and Mechanics	53

### **Contents**

	Preface	xix
Chapter 1 Wr	iting, the Workplace, and This Book	1
	How Will Writing Impact Your Career?	2
	How Does the Workplace Affect What and How You Write?  Expectations of Your Company and Manager 3	3
	Issues in Context: Are You Ready to Be an Information Broker?	4
	Expectations of Your Readers 5 Time and Budget Limitations 5 Ethical Considerations 6 Collaborative Writing 6	
	THE READER'S CORNER: READING TIME	7
	What's Ahead in This Book?	8
	STANDING THE ROLE OF THE WRITER  derstanding the Writing Process	11 13
Gliapter 2 Uni		
	The Workplace and the Writing Process	14
	The Stages of the Writing Process  Analyzing the Writing Situation 17  Creating and Gathering Information 17	15
	THE READER'S CORNER: WRITING THE DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE	18
	Structuring the Information 19 Drafting the Document 20	
	Issues in Context: Staying Fit at the Keyboard	21
	Revising the Document 21 Editing and Proofreading the Document 22	

CONTENTS	vii
001111111	,

	Strategies to Help You Get Started  Brainstorming 23  Outlining 24  A Start Draft 25	22
	Conclusion	26
	Worksheet for Understanding the Writing Process  Exercises	28 30
	Case Study: Boosting Attendance at Red Apple Days	31
Chapter 3 U	nderstanding and Writing for Your Readers	34
The second second	Principle 1: Determine Your Purpose for Writing	35
	Principle 2: Identify Your Readers  Are Your Readers Internal or External? 36  What Do Your Readers Know About the Subject? 38	36
	Issues in Context: How Do Readers Read?	44
	Will More Than One Person or Group Read Your Document? 44	
	Principle 3: Determine Your Readers' Purpose, Needs, and Preferences Think About Readers' Purpose for Reading 45 Consider Readers' Physical Surroundings and Time Constraints 46 Consider Readers' Preferences 47	45
	Principle 4: Analyze Your Readers' Attitudes  Analyze Readers' Attitudes About the Subject 48	48
	The Reader's Corner: How We Read	49
	Analyze Readers' Attitudes Toward You and Your Company 50	
	Conclusion	50
	Worksheet for Identifying Your Readers	51
	Exercises	52
	Case Study: Informing Students About Financial Aid	53
Chapter 4 R	eaders, Writers, and Ethical Communication	54
	Principle 1: Determine What Course of Action the Ethical Viewpoints Suggest  Is the Communication Honest and Truthful? 57	55
	Are You Acting in the Best Interests of the Company, the Public, and Yourself? 57	

	You in Ethical Dilemmas	58
	What If Everybody Acted in This Way? 59 Are You Willing to Take Responsibility for the Action or Communication Publicly and Privately? 59 Does the Action or Communication Violate Anyone's Rights? Are You Treating Similar Situations Similarly? 60	
	Principle 2: Avoid Unethical Manipulating of Words and Visuals  Create Honest Impressions 63  Avoid Imprecise Language 63  Include All the Information That Readers Need or Have a Right to Know 64  Make Sure That All the Information Is Correct and Accurate 64  Avoid Deemphasizing Important Information or Emphasizing Misleading Information 64  Avoid "No Fault" Writing 64	60
	The Reader's Corner: Are Words Enough?	65
	Principle 3: Take the Ethical Stance	65
	Conclusion	67
	Worksheet for Ethical Communication	67
	Exercises  Confirm to the tent of the tent	69
	Case Study: Understanding an Ethical Dilemma	71
Chapter 5 (	Collaborating and the Writing Process	72
	Collaborative Writing in the Workplace Collaborating When Writing for Others 73 Collaborating as a Team Member 74	73
	The Reader's Corner: The Author Myth	75
	Principle 1: Collaborate to Analyze the Writing Situation and Plan the Document  Analyzing the Writing Situation as a Team 76 Gathering Information as a Team 77 Structuring the Document and Establishing Design and Style Guidelines 77 Setting a Schedule and Deciding How the Team Will Communicate 78	75
	Principle 2: Use Electronic Media to Collaborate When Drafting, Revising, and Editing Using Word-Processing Software 79 Using Electronic Media to Exchange Drafts 80 Using Desktop Publishing Software 81	79

	Principle 3: Collaborate Effectively	82
	Encouraging Team Members to Share Their Ideas 82	
	Listening Intently and Respectfully 82 Sharing Information Willingly and Asking Others to Share Their Ideas 83	
	Issues in Context: Collaborating Over the Internet	84
	Disagreeing and Criticizing Respectfully 8.5	
	Being Open to Criticism of Your Ideas and Writing 85	
	Conclusion	86
	Worksheet for Successful Collaboration	86
	Exercises	87
	Case Study: A Public Relations Problem at Big Lake	88
Part II KNOW	VING THE TOOLS OF THE WRITER	93
Chapter 6 Ga	thering Information for Your Documents	95
	Principle 1: Plan Your Research to Suit Your Purpose	96
	Principle 2: Select Appropriate Primary Research Techniques Interview to Gather Information 97	97
	Issues in Context: The Library of the Future	99
	Send Questionnaires 100 Using Other Primary Techniques 102	
	Principle 3: Select Appropriate Secondary Research Techniques Using Library Tools 104 Using Internet Tools 110	104
	The Reader's Corner: Internet Research	111
	Locating Specific Internet and Web Sites 112	
	Principle 4: Document Your Sources	113
	APA-Style Documentation 116 MLA-Style Documentation 117	
	Conclusion	118
	Worksheet for Gathering Information for Your Documents	113
	Exercises	120
	Case Study: Discovering Job Prospects in Your Field	12:

Ch <b>apter 7 Str</b> uctur	ing Information for Your Readers	122
	Readers and Your Documents	123
	Principle 1: Decide How to Structure Your Document Use the Standard Patterns of Organization 128	125
	THE READER'S CORNER: STRUCTURING WEB SITES	131
	Consider Your Readers 138	
	Issues in Context: Structure Makes a Difference	140
	Consider the Organizational Context 140	
	Principle 2: Prepare an Outline  An Informal Outline 141  A Formal Outline 141	141
	Principle 3: Tell Readers What You Are Writing About Use Overviews to Introduce Readers to Your Document 145 Use Topic Sentences to Tell Readers Your Topic 148	145
	Principle 4: Use Headings to Show the Structure of Your Document Write Informative Headings 150 Write Grammatically Parallel Headings 151	149
	Conclusion	152
	Worksheet for Structuring Your Documents	153
	Exercises	155
Chapter 8 Writing	Reader-Oriented Sentences and Paragraphs	157
	THE READER'S CORNER: READER-ORIENTED POETRY	159
	Focus on Actors and Actions	159
	Principle 1: Make the Actors the Subjects of Your Sentences Use People as Subjects Whenever Possible 161 Generally, Use the Active Voice 161 Occasionally, Use the Passive Voice 163	160
	Principle 2: Put the Action in Verbs  Identify Sentences in Which the Verb Does Not Express the Action 164  Keep the Actor and the Action Together 165	163
	Principle 3: Emphasize the Important Information in Your Sentences	165

Put the Most Important Information at the End 165	
Issues in Context: How Are Your Editing Skills?	166
Use Visual Cues to Emphasize Important Information 167	
Principle 4: Tie Your Sentences Together  Put Old Information Near the Beginning of a Sentence 167  Use Topics to Tie Sentences Together 168  Use Transitions 169  Repeat or Restate Key Words or Phrases 170	167
Conclusion	171
Worksheet for Writing Reader-Oriented Sentences and Paragraphs	171
Exercises	173
Principle 1: Use Specific and Unambiguous Language Using Specific Language 176 Using Unambiguous Language 177	175 176
Issues in Context: Localizing Documents for International Readers	178
Principle 2: Use Only the Words Your Readers Need Eliminating Redundancy 179 Eliminating Unnecessary Words 181	179
Principle 3: Use Simple Words	183
Principle 4: Use Positive Language	184
Principle 5: Use Technical Terminology Consistently and Appropriately	186
Principle 6: Use Gender-Free Language	187
A Special Note: Language and International Readers	189
THE READER'S CORNER: ARTIFICIAL LANGUAGES	190
Conclusion	192
Worksheet for Using Reader-Oriented Language	192
Exercises	194
Case Study: Changing Old Habits	196
	Use Visual Cues to Emphasize Important Information 167  Principle 4: Tie Your Sentences Together Put Old Information Near the Beginning of a Sentence 167 Use Topics to Tie Sentences Together 168 Use Transitions 169 Repeat or Restate Key Words or Phrases 170  Conclusion  Worksheet for Writing Reader-Oriented Sentences and Paragraphs Exercises  Reader-Oriented Language Principle 1: Use Specific and Unambiguous Language Using Specific Language 176 Using Unambiguous Language 177 ISSUES IN CONTEXT: LOCALIZING DOCUMENTS FOR INTERNATIONAL READERS Principle 2: Use Only the Words Your Readers Need Eliminating Redundancy 179 Eliminating Unnecessary Words 181 Principle 3: Use Simple Words Principle 4: Use Positive Language Principle 5: Use Technical Terminology Consistently and Appropriately Principle 6: Use Gender-Free Language A Special Note: Language and International Readers The Reader's Corner: Artificial Language Conclusion Worksheet for Using Reader-Oriented Language Exercises

apter to Designing Documents for Your Readers	197
How Design Makes Documents More Readable	198
Principle 1: Consider the Design As You Plan Your Documents	198
Principle 2: Choose Design Elements to Motivate Readers to Read An Engaging, Appropriate Cover 203 Appropriate Binding 203 Good-Quality Paper 203 Consistent Page Layout 204	202
Principle 3: Choose Design Elements to Help Readers Locate	
Information  Document-Level Locating Devices 205  Chapter- or Division-Level Locating Devices 206  Page- and Screen-Level Locating Devices 207	205
Issues in Context: Using Color to Structure Information	210
Principle 4: Choose Design Elements to Help Readers Read Your Documents	211
Appropriate Typefaces 212 Appropriate Type Sizes for Text and Headings 212 Appropriate Type Styles 213	
THE READER'S CORNER: TYPOGRAPHY	214
Unjustified Text and Ragged Right Margins 215	
Conclusion	216
Worksheet for Designing Reader-Oriented Documents	216
Exercises	218
Case Study: A "Disastrous" Design	230
pter 11 Creating Effective Visual Aids for Your Readers	234
Principle 1: Look for Areas Where Visual Aids Will Help You Communicate	235
Show How to Follow Instructions or Explain a Process 237 Show What Something Looks Like 237 Show and Summarize Relationships Among Data 239 Emphasize and Reinforce Information 241 Show How Something Is Organized 242 Simplify Complicated Concepts, Discussions, Processes, or Data 242 Add Interest to a Document 243	

	Use Simple, Uncluttered Visual Aids 245 Give Each Visual Aid a Number and a Specific Title 246 Consider Whether International Readers Will Use the Visual Aids 248	245
	Principle 3: Select the Appropriate Visual Aid  Bar Graphs 249  Diagrams 251  Drawings 251  Flow Charts 254	248
	THE READER'S CORNER: VISUAL AIDS IN SPACE  Line Graphs 257 Organizational Charts 260 Photographs 261 Pictographs 263 Pie Charts 264 Tables 265	257
	Principle 4: Integrate Visual Aids into the Text Introduce and Refer to Each Visual Aid by Number 268 Tell Readers What Is Important About Each Visual Aid 269 Place Each Visual Aid As Close As Possible to Its Text Discussion 269	268
	Issues in Context: The International Language of Graphics	270
	Principle 5: Use Computer Software to Create Professional-Looking Visual Aids	271
	Conclusion: Ethics and Visual Aids	272
	Worksheet for Creating and Using Effective Visual Aids	273
	Exercises	275
Chapter 12 Prepa	rring Front and End Matter	279
	Principle 1: Prepare the Front Matter Letter of Transmittal 281 Cover 283	280
	THE READER'S CORNER: THE FIRST "COVERS"  Title Page 284  Table of Contents 290  List of Illustrations 293  Abstract and Executive Summary 294	283

	Principle 2: Prepare the End Matter	298
	Works Cited or List of References 298	
	Glossary 298 List of Abbreviations or Symbols 300 Appendixes 300	
	Issues in Context: What Will Front and End Matter	
	LOOK LIKE IN THE COMING CENTURY?	301
	Principle 3: Number the Pages	301
	Conclusion	304
	Worksheet for Preparing Front and End Matter	304
	Exercises	306
Part III PROD	UCING EFFECTIVE DOCUMENTS FOR YOUR READERS	323
Chapter 13 P	anning and Writing Reader-Oriented Proposals	325
चान पूर्वा	Principle 1: Find Out About the Readers of Your Proposals	329
	Principle 2: Prepare to Answer Readers' Questions	330
	THE READER'S CORNER: PRESIDENTIAL PROPOSALS	332
	Principle 3: Consider the Conventional Elements of Proposals  Summary 335  Description of the Proposed Project 336  Qualifications 340	334
	ISSUES IN CONTEXT: THE FUTURE OF PROPOSALS	341
	Budget 342 Conclusion 342	
	Two Sample Proposals	343
	Worksheet for Planning Your Proposals	343
	Exercises	355
	Case Study: Working for the Community	356
Chapter 14 Pl	anning and Writing Reader-Oriented Progress Reports	357
	Principle 1: Find Out About the Readers of Your Progress Reports	358
	Principle 2: Prepare to Answer Readers' Ouestions	359