Technical Writing for Readers and Writers

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TECHNICAL WRITING *for* READERS *and* WRITERS

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To my parents, to Patrick,

and especially to Bill

Preface

*T*echnical *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

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several reviewers helped to shape and reshape this book. They have enriched this book, and I am grateful to them: **Rita J. Bova,** Columbus State University; **Norbert Elliot,** Institute of Technology, Newark, New Jersey; **Joanna Freeman,** Pittsburgh State University; **Peter H. Goodrich,** Northern Michigan University; **D'Wayne Hodgin,** University of Idaho; **Johndan Johnson-Eilola,** Purdue University; **Dan Jones,** University of Central Florida; **Rebecca Kamm,** Northeast Iowa Community College; **Olivia Mason,** Milwaukee School of Engineering; **Mary Massirer,** Baylor University; **Carolyn R. Miller,** North

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.

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