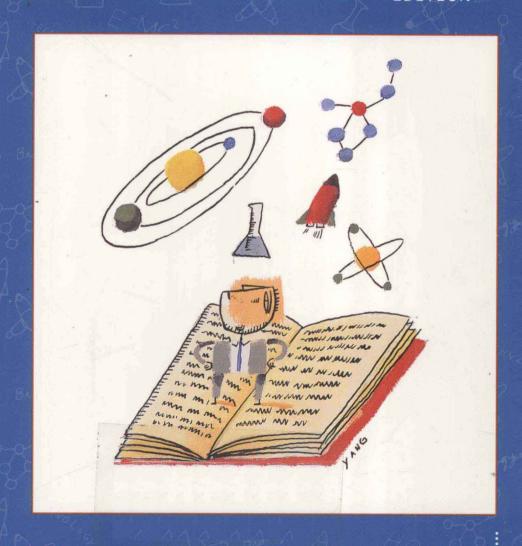# WRITING FOR THE TECHNICAL PROFESSIONS SECOND EDITION

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KRISTIN R. WOOLEVER

Writing for the Technical Professions

Second Edition

Kristin R. Woolever

Antioch University Seattle

Preface

In recent years I have heard increasingly from students and faculty involved in technical communication courses that the textbooks they encounter don't correspond to real-world situations and requirements, that they don't present information in an accessible, concise, and applicable manner. And, as most of us in higher education are increasingly aware, today's students want and need to bring their education directly to bear on the professions they enter. In the first edition of *Writing for the Technical Professions,* I paid special attention to the real-world context in which technical communication is carried out and to the types of books actually used by professionals on the job. Contemporary technical communication takes place in fast-paced industry environments, is often conducted by teams of collaborators, relies increasingly on electronic media, intersects with significant ethical and legal issues, and is highly global in concept. This edition focuses even more specifically on the electronic workplace, issues in international and cross-cultural communication, document usability testing, and the ethical dimensions of writing online media.

The second edition also retains its real-world approach to communication in the technical workplace, emphasizing the problem-solving techniques for writing tasks that technical professionals encounter on a daily basis. Although the primary audience of this book is students majoring in technical and science disciplines, it is also useful for working professionals in these areas. In the apt words of one of my colleagues, those practices are in their ideal form "informed, uncluttered, thoughtful, and useful"—and in content, approach, and tone this book endeavors to meet those standards. It is intended as a comprehensive but concise primary text for introductory technical communication courses, and its hands-on, pragmatic approach to writing makes it a useful reference tool that students may well want to take with them into subsequent advanced courses and into the work world itself.

Changes to this edition focus on several areas that reflect the changing nature of the workplace:

- Expanded coverage of issues and techniques in the electronic work environment: collaborating electronically, designing Web pages, considering ethical issues for the Web, and developing computer-aided presentations. The expanded information is threaded throughout the book, but Part Three: "Special Focuses" especially highlights techniques related to the electronic workplace.
- Strategies for researching online and evaluating Internet resources. Chapter 2 features new and updated strategies for using the Internet as a research tool.
- Increased attention to international communication and techniques for writing effectively in a global workplace. This edition weaves more strategies for dealing with cross-cultural communication throughout the text. In

addition, a section entitled Tips for International Communication appears at the end of every chapter.

- Expanded information on usability testing and the techniques for testing hardcopy and electronic documents. Chapter 7 highlights usability testing for hardcopy documents, and Chapter 12 adds strategies for testing online media.
- Varied examples and sample documents from scientific and technical disciplines, including the health professions.
- Increased attention to ethics and liability issues relevant to technical communication. This information begins in Chapter 1 with a section on considering the ethical dimensions of a technical communication project and threads through the rest of the book: plagiarism in Chapter 2, the ethics of style in Chapter 5, and the ethical presentation of statistics and visual information in Chapter 10. Chapters 15 and 16 are devoted entirely to ethics and liability.
- A newly added feature entitled Profiles in Practice looks at working technical professionals who speak about their own experiences writing on the job. These profiles appear in all chapters of the book.

In addition, related topics have been consolidated to save readers from having to flip between chapters too frequently.

Organization, Content, and Access

Writing for the Technical Professions has been organized into three parts: (1) Basic Tools, (2) Professional Applications, and (3) Special Focuses. Readers can access the information at any point, depending on the amount of detail wanted, and instructors can sequence the chapters in a variety of ways, depending on their course objectives. Part One explores in depth the tools that students need for developing rhetorical strategies and techniques useful in most forms of technical writing; its five chapters cover planning, researching, organizing, designing, and editing documents. Part Two puts these techniques to use in chapters that discuss specific types of professional applications: memos, letters, e-mail, instructions, descriptions and summaries, abstracts, reports, proposals, online media, and professional presentations. Part Three focuses on areas of critical interest to students and practitioners working in contemporary technical industries: collaborating in writing teams, managing writing projects, considering ethical and liability issues, and finding a job. A concise guide at the end of the book will help writers solve troublesome grammar and punctuation problems.

The Introduction offers an elaborated discussion of the content and organization of *Writing for the Technical Professions* and how to navigate them; see pages 1–7.

Features

Emphasis on critical thinking and rhetorical context: Technical communicators must develop a wide range of skills, among them problem solving and critical thinking, the ability to apply viable, effective, intelligently determined strategies and understandings to communications situations. These pages are filled with practical advice on understanding audience, purpose, and situation and on putting that understanding into practice in writing specific types of technical documents. When writers know how to size up a rhetorical context, they can then take control of various communication tasks and make informed choices from the rhetorical options available to them.

Task-oriented strategies for handling real-world situations in technical communication: Specific strategies, in easily accessed and comprehended guideline form—including expanded attention to ethical and legal issues that may arise—are given for planning, drafting, designing, and editing technical documents and for engaging with other writers collaboratively. Students can go directly to these guidelines when they are writing, rather than having to search through pages of dense prose looking for concrete advice.

A direct, collegial style that speaks to technical students and practitioners in terms they understand: This book addresses students as aspiring professionals, in language that is to the point, lively, and reflective of the language of the technical professions.

Substantive, real-world examples and sample documents: Throughout the text, discussions and strategies are extensively illustrated with examples taken from real documents from such disciplines as engineering, the health sciences, software design, and biotechnology. Each chapter in Part Two features a section of annotated technical documents, positioned at the end of the chapter for easy reference; **more than twenty documents are included in these reference sections and others appear throughout the book.** Because most of these documents are not abridged, students get an accurate sense of the scope, tone, and style of professional technical writing, as well as a look at the everyday work of many technical disciplines.

Recurrent focus on the electronic workplace: Chapter 12 discusses the characteristics and types of online media and approaches to writing and designing online documents (including online help, hypertext, and Web pages) at length. Substantive discussions of electronic research (including evaluating Internet sources), electronic job searches (including electronic resumes), and other computer-related issues appear in pertinent sections of the book. A new feature in this edition is the discussion in Chapter 16 about the evolving intellectual property law as it applies to researching and writing online.

Emphasis on project management and collaboration: Chapter 14 presents not only techniques for collaborating on classroom projects but also the professional ways and means of collaborating (including individual roles, project teams, and project phases), and the role and responsibilities of project managers (including scheduling, tracking, conducting meetings, and negotiating differences).

Acknowledgment of the technical communicator's responsibility to attend to issues of ethics and legality: Technological developments increasingly affect matters of individual, environmental, corporate, and global well-being, and those who work in the technical professions must be able to understand the ethical and legal implications of decisions and actions and of the language that conveys them. Chapters 15 and 16 highlight the kinds of ethical and legal dilemmas that individuals may face in the course of doing their jobs in the technical professions and suggest ways for assessing appropriate responses.

International communication: Each chapter underscores the increasingly global nature of technical communication. "Tips for International Communication" appears at the end of every chapter, and examples pertaining to global communication are threaded throughout the text. Among the subjects discussed are translation glossaries, techniques for establishing cultural schemata, international style guidelines, use of color and icons, international business ethics, cross-cultural collaboration, and development of Websites for international audiences.

Style, grammar, and punctuation troubleshooting: Chapter 5 sets out the essential elements of good technical style, with discussions and examples of emphasis, clarity, conciseness, transitions, pacing, sentence length, and nonsexist language. "A Quick Guide to Grammar and Punctuation" at the end of the text takes up specific conventions and usages that often cause particular difficulty or ambiguity in technical communication and offers useful, easily accessed advice about parallel structures, lists, verb tenses, commas, semicolons, and hyphens.

English as a Second Language (ESL) advice: The Quick Guide also features a section of guidelines focusing on grammatical conventions that regularly cause difficulty for technical communicators whose first language is not English.

Profiles: Interspersed throughout the book are Profiles in Practice, brief discussions with technical professionals who share their perspectives on communication in the workplace. This new feature helps students to see the real-world importance and application of the techniques discussed in the text.

Quick reviews: Each chapter concludes with a bulleted list summarizing its main topics and instructional points; these checklists function as a quick reference feature.

Individual and collaborative exercises: Each chapter includes a brief set of exercises, some designed for writers working individually, some for writers collaborating on a project. These exercises focus on reinforcing the tenets established by the chapter and, for the most part, ask students to work with documents and texts that they have been developing in the classroom or on the job.

Supplements

Instructor's Manual: *Writing for the Technical Professions* is accompanied by a comprehensive Instructor's Manual written by Rachel Spilka, of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. The manual's primary focus is twofold: (1) it reinforces the text's emphasis on purpose and audience in differing contexts, with attention to the implications of writers' choices; and (2) it reinforces the text's

flexible approach by illustrating multiple ways that instructors can build a course around it. The manual contains many useful features:

- Major writing assignments, with evaluation criteria
- Ideas for integrating technology into the course
- Ideas for teaching international communication
- Instructions for creating syllabi
- Instructions for using portfolio assessment
- Ideas for creating a collaborative, workshop approach to teaching technical communication
- Student writing samples
- Teaching materials for photocopying
- Glossary of terms
- Bibliography of technical communication resources

Website: A companion Website <http://www.ablongman.com/woolever> for *Writing for the Technical Professions* includes the following:

- A description of the text
- Chapter-by-chapter guide to the text
- Additional full-length technical documents to supplement and update those in the text
- Discussions of applications and trends in electronic communication
- Updates on technical professions
- Links to Websites for technical communication and technical professions

Researching Online, Fifth Edition, by David Munger and Shireen Campbell of Davidson College, gives students detailed, step-by-step instructions and models for performing electronic searches; for using e-mail, listservs, newsgroups, and Web-based real-time discussion tools to do research; and for assessing the validity of electronic sources.

The Literacy Library Series *(Public Literacy,* by Elizabeth Ervin; *Workplace Literacy,* by Rachel Spilka; and *Academic Literacy,* by Stacia Neeley) offers additional models and instruction for writing for each of these three different contexts.

Visual Communication, Second Edition, by Susan Hilligoss and Tharon Howard of Clemson University, features practical discussions of space, type, organization, pattern, graphic elements, and visuals, along with planning worksheets, design samples, and exercises.

Take Note! is a complete research information-management tool for students working on projects that require the use of outside sources. The cross-platform CD-ROM integrates note taking, outlining, and bibliography management into one easy-to-use package.

Course Compass is a nationally hosted, interactive online course management system powered by BlackBoard. This easy-to-use and customizable program enables professors to tailor content and functionality to meet individual course needs. Every CourseCompass course includes a range of pre-loaded content such as testing and assessment questions, chapter-level objectives, chapter summaries, illustrations, web activities and the complete text in electronic form—all designed to help students master core course objectives. For more information, or to see a demo, visit www.coursecompass.com.

The Longman ExerciseZone and Plagiarism Tutorial CD-ROM is a cross-platform CD-ROM that offers two interactive resources in one. "Exercise Zone" has over 2,500 exercises in ten topic areas of grammar, style, and punctuation with a diagnostic test to help students identify the areas where they need the most practice. The "Plagiarism Tutorial" includes a series of modules which allow students to explore issues of plagiarism, with advice, self-scoring tests, and sample papers to help them learn to avoid and recognize plagiarism.

Daedalus Online <http://daedalus.pearsoned.com> is the next generation of the highly regarded Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE), uniting writing pedagogy with the inherently cooperative tools of the Web. Students can explore online resources, participate in real-time conferences, and use "Invent" and "Respond" prompts to develop their ideas and collaborate with their peers. *Daedalus Online*'s online course management tools also enable instructors to effortlessly create and post assignments, link them to online educational resources, tie lessons to a specific textbook, and customize materials for their classroom.

Acknowledgments

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Kristin R. Woolever

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