

CMPT 376: Technical Writing

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Chapter 1

Technical Writing: An Overview

1.1 What Is Technical Writing?

Technical writing is... how to write using "technical" words?

"Unclear writing is a social problem, but it often has private causes. Michael Crichton mentioned one: some writers plump up their prose, hoping that complicated sentences indicate deep thought. And when we want to hide the fact that we don't know what we're talking about, we typically throw up a tangle of abstract words in long, complex sentences." [Williams2014].

1.2 Examples of Technical Writing

1.3 Text Structure

Introduction

Body

Conclusion

How long should each section be?

Question phrasing the problem

Exposition explaining steps to solve problem

Answer restating the problem, the approach, and succinctly providing solution

1.4 From First Draft to Final Draft. And Back Again

TODO

1.5 Editing & Rewrites

Rewrite the following:

What beliefs do you believe in?

The analysis was analyzed.

The difficult experiment was completed with great difficulty.

Chapter 2

Words

2.1 Redundancy

TODO

2.2 Hedging

TODO

2.3 Nominalizations

TODO

2.4 Avoiding Pronouns

TODO

Which version is correct? Why?

When someone doesn't listen or is reasonable.

When someone doesn't listen or isn't reasonable.

2.5 Cohesion & Coherence

The following example is an extreme version of cohesion¹:

I am a teacher. The teacher was late for class. Class rhymes with grass.
The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence. But it wasn't.

¹<http://www.onestopenglish.com/support/ask-the-experts/methodology-questions/methodology-coherence-and-cohesion/154867.article>

2.6 Describing Cohesion & Coherence

Cohesion and coherence can be characterized using terms such as:

- Choppy
- Disorganized, scattered, unstructured
- Connected
- Arranged
- Clear
- Flowing, fluid
- Stilted

TODO

2.6.1 Cohesion

Cohesion is... TODO

Cohesion exists:

- within sentences
- between sentences
- explicitly mentioned characters or actions

TODO

2.6.2 Coherence

between sentences, paragraphs, chapters, sections, and whole document implicitly mentioned characters, actions, or information background knowledge

TODO

2.6.3 Monotony

Many rivers flow out to sea. They take the most direct route. They flow quickly down sides of the mountains. They flow more slowly on the flat terrain.

TODO

Chapter 3

Sentences

3.1 Starting Sentences with Conjunctions

In general, avoid discourse markers. Examples:

- In addition...
- Furthermore...
- However...
- Nevertheless...

Why? overused equivalent to clichés easy sign/trait of a poor writer
How to avoid? Make connections clear or explicit in the writing.

Chapter 4

Paragraphs

TODO

Chapter 5

Document

TODO

5.1 Introduction

TODO

5.2 Body

TODO

5.3 Conclusion

TODO

Chapter 6

Clarity & Concision

TODODefine Clarity

TODODefine Concision

TODOBeing able to explain subtle differences between fairly similar things is a skill/craft/art.

TODOA simple metric for your explanation: Four concepts (rain, hail, snow, clouds). A trivial explanation would require four sentences total (one for each term). A poor explanation would contain more sentences than concepts. The optimal explanation would be one sentence.

TODOexplaining subtle differences: quote, paraphrase, summary, elaboration, clarification

Chapter 7

Writing & Programming

TODO

Chapter 8

Style

Style can be characterized by invoking in the reader a desire to read every word.

Rhetorical situation

Audience

TODO

Chapter 9

Visualizations

TODO

spectrum of charts, table, graph, viz, etc

Bibliography

[Williams2014] Joseph M. Williams. 2014. *Style: Lessons in Clarity and Grace*. Pearson, 11 edition.