Answers to Guide 13

* Technical Writing
  + Compare and contrast technical and general communication:
    - 5 rules of concise communication
      * Avoid the obvious – understand the audience’s technical level.
      * Avoid padding – the audience doesn’t benefit from elaborate prose.
      * Avoid redundant prepositional phrases – the combination of preposition with a noun phrase (i.e. use now instead of “at this point in time”)
      * Avoid verbosity – write short, succinct sentences.
      * Avoid pomposity – not the place for showing off linguistic abilities.
  + Be familiar with the range of genres associated with technical writing:
    - Online help and user manuals
    - Press releases, memos, business proposals, datasheets, product descriptions and specifications, white papers, resumes, job applications, etc.
    - Instructions and procedures: documents that help developers or end users operate or configure a device or program.
    - Proposals: describes the purposes of project, tasks to be performed, methods to complete, and cost.
    - Emails, letters, and memoranda: business.
    - Press releases: describes product’s functions and value to public.
    - Specifications: design outlines describing structure, parts, packaging, and delivery of object or process in details.
    - Descriptions: shorter explanations of procedures and processes that help readers understand how something works.
    - Resumes and job applications: used in professional setting to inform readers of the author’s credentials.
    - Technical reports: provides readers with information, instructions, and analysis on tasks.
    - Case study: published report about a person, group, or situation studied over time.
    - White papers: documents written for experts in a field and usually describes a solution to a technological or business challenge or problem.
    - Websites: web development tools and hypertext.
    - Datasheets: documents that summarize the features, key specifications, technical characteristics, and other important information about a product.
    - API guides: written for developers and describe the API.
  + Understand and be able to describe the importance of audience analysis, accuracy, and document layout for technical writing.
    - Audience analysis: need to be aware of audience’s existing knowledge about the material they are discussing as the knowledge base of the writer’s audience will determine the content and focus of a document.
    - Accuracy: must know what they are trying to communicate. The goal is to convey the message in an accurate and ethical manner. Repercussions if done incorrectly.
    - Document layout: must be readable otherwise poor design hampers reader comprehension. Stresses design choices like bullet points, font-size, and bold text. Images, diagrams, and videos are commonly employed as they explain easier than using text.
* Technical Writing Style
  + Be able to describe, recognize, and use the following grammatical constructions appropriately:
    - Active versus passive voice:
      * Active: clearly shows the actor in a situation. Standard for technical writing. Shorter and more interesting to read. We know who does what to whom. (They speak English)
      * Passive: obscures the actor, sometimes deliberately. Ambiguous and often leaves out important information. (English was spoken)
    - Present, past, and future tense:
      * Present: uses the base form of the verb (i.e. do open)
      * Past: subject + auxiliary verb + main verb (i.e. He did open)
      * Future: subject + auxiliary verb + main verb (i.e. He will open)
    - First, second, and third person:
      * First: I and We perspective.
      * Second: You perspective.
      * Third: He, She, It, They perspective.
    - Articles: use of “the”, “a”, “an”
  + Be able to describe, recognize, and use the following stylistic features:
    - Sentence length:
      * Long sentences tax the brain and make remembering information difficult. Keep sentences under 16 words. Split long sentences into two or more chunks.
      * Short sentences are simple sentences with only one clause. Evaluate to ensure it contains sufficient information.
    - Sematic ambiguity:
      * Do not write sentences that the reader may interpret in more than one way.
      * Use precise words as opposed to more general variants.
      * Provide enough detail to inform the reader.
      * Many words in English have multiple meanings – make clear which one is meant.
    - Application consistency:
      * Steps in a procedure or task follow the navigational structure of the application left to right, top-down.
      * Each step must include menu commands or dialog box and field names in the sentence.
      * Top-down method determines the “big picture” or global view of the application first and then defines features in detail.
    - Action verbs:
      * Most frequently used verbs in software are: Click, Double-click, Select, Type, and Press.
      * Make users aware of where they are in the application.
      * Define “what”, “where”, and “how” in each step of the task or procedures.
      * Describe menu items for the current task left to right, top-down.
  + Be able to compare and contrast the use of ordered and unordered lists and to use the appropriate punctuation for lists:
    - Use unordered (bulleted) lists when the audience doesn’t require that the information be in any particular order, such as in lists of features, options, and components.
    - Use ordered (numbered) lists when the audience needs the information in a particular order, or needs to refer to list items by number, such as in steps of a procedure, items on a check list, and requirements in a specification.
    - If the list is made of phrases, capitalize the first word of each list item. Do not end each list item with a comma or full-stop (period).
  + Know how to apply the general principles stated in the section on “clarity”.
    - Use active voice: works better than passive because it focuses sentences on the person or entity that performs the action
    - Be specific: use precise words as opposed to more general variants.
    - Eliminate useless jargon: avoid field specialist vocabulary; different meanings when applied to different fields.
    - Be positive: avoid phrases that contain negative elements as reader understands more readily when positive.
    - Avoid long noun constructions: clarify with a hyphen in between two nouns used as adjectives to avoid unwieldy phrases.
    - Don’t use euphemisms: say exactly what you want to say, don’t run away from writing the uncomfortable.
* I won’t hire people who use poor grammar
  + Know how to avoid Wiens’s pet peeves: its /it’s; to /two / too; there / their /they’re
    - As long as I’ve had enough coffee to activate my higher brain functions.
  + Know how to use/avoid the following constructions, referenced by Weins, appropriately:
    - Sentence-ending prepositions: ending a sentence with a preposition is a perfectly natural part of the structure of modern English. Sometimes it is awkward to organize a sentence in a way that avoids ending with one.
    - Split infinitives: occur when you put an adverb between “to” and a verb (i.e. You have to really watch him). Safest to avoid split infinitive in formal writing unless alternative wording seems clumsy or alters meaning of the sentence.
    - Double negatives: Uses two negative words in the same clause to express a single negative idea. Rules dictate that two negative elements cancel each other to give a positive statement. Avoid them in all but the most informal situations; use a single negative instead.
  + Does he have a valid point? Why or why not?
    - For his companies it makes sense that he would make this such a sticking point.
    - Otherwise, I think he takes it to an extreme if he’s making even the janitor he hires pass a grammar test meant for professional writers.
    - Personally, my grammar isn’t the best and I use Grammerly and other automated solutions to catch the worst of them.
* Legibility, readability, and comprehension – Writing for the web is different from writing for smart phone apps, but there are many similarities. Be sure to understand Nielsen’s points on:
  + His three basic criteria:
    - Legibility: lowest-level consideration in content usability. It is whether people are able to see, distinguish, and recognize the characters and words in your text. Determined by visual design or typography.
    - Readability: measures the complexity of the words and sentence structure in a piece of content. Complex sentence are harder to parse and read than simple ones. Reported as reading level needed to easily read the text.
    - Comprehension: measures whether a user can understand the intended meaning of a text and can draw the correct conclusions from the text.
  + The Flesch-Kincaid reading score:
    - Readability tests designed to indicate how difficult a passage in English is to understand. Two tests – the Flesch Reading Ease and the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level.
  + The inverted-pyramid writing style:
    - Start with the conclusion or an overview of the main point. People relate better to subsidiary points when they already know the basics.