Lecture No.2

There are three main steps that indicate the writing process in clear sense. The Prewriting, Writing and Rewriting are three main steps in the making of dynamic communication in concrete manner.

Prewriting

Examine your purpose
Determine your Goal
Consider your Audience
Gather your Data
Determine How the content will be provided----Communication channel

Writing

Organization
Formatting

Rewriting

Usability testing
Revisions techniques
How important in Proof reading?

1. Know Your Audience

All writing is writing to someone. With technical writing, this concept takes on a more literal sense than with, say, fiction. Always keep in mind that you are responsible for communicating ideas clearly and effectively to someone else in your writing. The audience, and their needs, can vary, and you need to be conscious of that. Moreover, every other tip on this list will in some way come back to this one.

To use the Pynchon example, if you are an expert on rockets and aeronautics, and you're writing to other experts about the advanced technical details of a new rocket, it is probably safe to assume a high level of prior knowledge, meaning you can avoid explaining basic concepts and use complex jargon (as long as it is clear). However, if you are the same expert writing a field manual for soldiers who will actually be firing the rocket, you may need to explain basic concepts and avoid complex jargon. You also need to consider what is necessary to include and what can be skipped over. In other words, with technical writing, you'll want to include only what your reader needs to know, while excluding any gratuitous detail.

2. Know the Style

Closely related to audience is style. What you are writing determines who you are writing to, and vice versa. Every style comes with different conventions, which you should understand and embrace in order to write effectively. Those conventions exist for a reason, which is to enable you to better reach your audience. The stylistic demands and purpose of a technical report differ widely from those of an instruction manual. The best way to understand these demands is to read. Find strong examples of the style you are working in and emulate their most effective qualities.

3. Know the Content

This should be a given, but you need to understand what you are writing about better than the audience for which you are writing. This does not mean you need to be a full-blown expert, but you need to know the ins and outs well enough that you can clearly explain it to someone else and anticipate any questions that might arise. Do research, take your time, take notes, and if you are not an expert, consult someone who is.

4. Outline, then Execute

Failure to plan is planning to fail. Before you dig in and start writing, outline your project. The outlining stage of writing gives you the opportunity to make sure that the document you are producing is laid out in a logical and functional way. Work on developing the skeleton of a clear structure, then work on filling in the skeleton with major and supporting points. Make sure it all logically follows. You'll save a lot of work by learning early in the process whether or not your plan is likely to work. After you have a plan in place, execute it.

5. Define Your Project and Stick to It

Part of planning and outlining your project is the task of defining the project itself. All of the above points should come into play. What are you writing? What is the ultimate goal? For whom are you writing? What are the stylistic requirements? Are you creating instructions, an assembly manual, a form letter? Take the time to sit down and define your project, then organize your writing process to serve that definition.

6. Simplify Your Language

There is a time and a place for elegant, dense prose; technical writing is not it. Do not take twists and turns. Write in the most direct fashion you can to get your message across clearly, leaving as little ambiguity as possible. Remember, you're not writing a mystery novel. There should be no plot twist or surprise ending. Don't go over your reader's head. Don't use unnecessarily complicated language. Get to the point.

7. Establish a Clear Structure

It's not just about what you say. It's how you present it. Your writing needs a clear structure. Don't just dump in a bunch of data and expect your reader to make sense of it. Think about your order of presentation. What needs to be explained first? How does the information need to be sequenced and paced? What needs more explanation, and what can do with less? Your

writing should present a clear path of development, smoothly transitioning from one point to the next without any major jumps or hiccups, and it should clearly emphasize the most crucial ideas.

8. Use Your Layout

Key to structure is layout. Layout isn't about being pretty. It's about being clear and understandable (though you should also never underestimate the value of being pretty). The best technical writers understand how to utilize layout techniques to make their message clear. Like a good magician (but without the deception), you want to lead the reader's eyes to your intended point of focus. Use layout techniques, such as bulleted/numbered lists, bolded keywords, and page breaks, to draw attention to and emphasize key points. People remember best what sticks out the most. Use this to your advantage.

9. Use Examples

Don't be totally theoretical in your writing. Be sure to use examples that not only clarify and describe what you are discussing, but present the topic in terms of a realistic scenario. These are especially useful when the information you have presented implies potential problems that might arise. For example (no pun intended), if you are writing a user manual for a commercial lawn mower, don't just say that an overly tight blade belt can lead to malfunction and damage. Provide an example of what a properly tightened blade should look and feel like, and what signs of malfunction look like. Better yet, combine your written example with a visual.

10. Incorporate Useful Visuals

Visuals and graphics can be wonderful tools when used right, and a major point of confusion when done improperly. Clearly marked visuals that show statistical trends or provide examples of how to perform a specific task, when balanced with well-developed writing, can make for extremely useful documents. Some things are just too difficult to explain without a visual example. Be careful, however, not to rely too heavily on visuals. Don't sacrifice clarity or cut corners in your writing in exchange for more visuals. You're not writing a picture book. Moreover, if it is a messy visual, it will cause more trouble than good.

11. Establish an Appropriate Voice

A big part of technical writing is establishing an appropriate voice. Most often you will be required to write from a neutral third-person perspective, although sometimes you may write from a slightly subjective first-person perspective. Regardless, technical writing (and the voice presenting it) is expected to be authoritative on the subject being presented. Be formal, and as objective as possible, but avoid sounding mechanical. Again, be aware of your audience and the style in which you are writing. Different audiences and styles demand different voices.

12. Avoid Time-Sensitive Claims

Most technical writing needs to be updated from time to time. Write your document to facilitate as little need for update as possible. Where applicable, avoid making time-sensitive claims, or delineating information that will become untrue or inaccurate as soon as a certain date comes to pass.

This, of course, is somewhat determined by style. If you are writing an annual, seasonal, or quarterly report, then almost all of the claims you make will be time-sensitive. That's expected. On the other hand, if you are writing a general reference article (like this one!) you can and should avoid making these sorts of claims. For example, if I said that we are waiting to see what happens to the technical writing profession in 2018 due to the danger of people being replaced by robots, that statement will be outdated as soon as 2019 comes around. This would create an unnecessary need for eventual updating. Keep your writing timeless and "evergreen" whenever possible.

13. Cite Your Sources

Where are you getting your information from? Does it come from a series of scientific studies? Perhaps you rely on statistics published by a federal agency? Are you drawing from an article, or a book? Strong writing incorporates reputable outside sources and accurately cites them. Don't borrow information from somewhere else and forget to cite it. That's plagiarism, and can be grounds for legal action. Learn how to cite and do so where appropriate.

14. Revise. Revise. Revise.

This applies to all forms of writing, and technical writing is no exception. Nothing is perfect the first time around; you need to revise, and then you need to revise again. This doesn't mean you can just run spell check and call it a day (although that is part of revision). You need to step away from a draft for a little bit, and return to it with a critical eye. What can be made clearer? What can be expanded on? What can be cut? Make sure your writing serves its purpose, and that it shows consistency. When in doubt, get a second opinion, then a third, and then a fourth. Also, don't underestimate the value of reading something out loud. This can do wonders for exposing and fixing unclear writing.

15. Study the Craft

Maybe you're a seasoned veteran of technical writing, or maybe you just fell into it. Regardless, you're never too good to learn a little more and grow as a writer. Reading about writing, and studying the craft, can keep you sharp.