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A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing

Carolyn R. Miller's "*A Humanistic Rationale for Technical Writing*" offers an argument that challenges traditional views of technical writing as a neutral, skill-based endeavor. Instead, she frames it as a social practice. One of the article's central questions is what it means to teach students to conform to workplace conventions. Miller shows concerns about teaching technical writing solely as a set of procedures or formats, which risks turning students into passive reproducers of institutional norms. That might cause them to unintentionally learn to accept anything and even reinforce the existing cultural and power structures in professional settings without critique.

Miller advocates for a more humanistic approach that encourages students to reflect critically on the values and ideologies in technical documents and professional practices. This approach aligns with discussions in our course about the purpose of communication, not just to inform, but to influence and shape people. In technical writing, where the audience is often internal to an organization or part of a specialized field, understanding the community's norms, and expectations becomes crucial. Miller distinguishes between merely learning skills, such as how to write a memo, and understanding the context in which those skills are applied. This understanding includes the social roles of writer and reader, the ethics of communication, and the implications of technology and language.

By writing technical documents, individuals help define problems and offer solutions. This element makes technical writing a powerful tool. This means that it does not just reflect reality, it helps construct it. From this perspective, teaching technical writing should go beyond mechanics and emphasize rhetorical awareness, critical thinking, and ethical responsibility.