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Writing in the Field

Technology is changing every 6 months, however, the writing conventions in the technology field never change, and neither does the perception of those writers. My college professor always told the same joke, “When a technology person steps in the elevator, everyone else steps out.” This rings true in writing as well, because technology people value complexity, intellectuality, and superiority in writing, which does not provide a user friendly interface for common interaction. The use of what some would call jargon would be thought of as a simple concept by a technology person, and if one did not understand that concept, they may feel less important or inadequate to hold the conversation. Even though writing from technology people is not user friendly, it provides an excellent structure for communication from within the field. Throughout this analytical essay, I will provide an in-depth look at the technology field’s values in writing and compare them to other fields, general business writing conventions, and my current values as a writer.

If a person views any document produced by someone in the technology field, it is easily observed that complexity is an important value. The documents produced are not complex in a way to purposely confuse the reader, but are the result of analyzing a problem or situation in such great detail that understanding the meaning will take an effort to comprehend. The value of complexity is most obvious in strategic assessments. A strategic assessment is a lengthy document produced by a writer in the technology field who analyzes the current state of a business, including their strengths, weaknesses, and possible solutions for improvement. A strategic assessment is a minimum 20 pages in length, however, most exceed 30 pages. Oliver Ray, an alumnus of the University of Louisville, wrote a strategic assessment about Restorative Justice Louisville, a local non-profit organization. By only looking at the surface level statistics of Ray’s strategic assessment, 40 pages and 12489 words, the reader can already sense the complexity within the document. At the beginning of the document, a table of content details every aspect of the assessment. This is then followed by several analytical paragraphs and charts that look at every detail of Restorative Justice Louisville. Again, I want to stress that the value of complexity is not one to try to confuse or overwhelm the reader. In fact, it is actually the opposite. If a person was trying to solve the technology problem at Restorative Justice Louisville without writing a strategic assessment, they would fail due to a lack of understanding of the true problem and its causes. Ray’s assessment clearly defines the problem, possible causes and proposed solutions to the problem which will allow anyone trying to solve this problem to have a clear blueprint. The amount of detail and intricacy has broken the main problem into smaller chunks, which may have increased the complexity, but allows for a greater understanding of the problem.

Throughout any document written by a person in the technology field, there will a great use of technological concepts that require a high intellectual capacity to completely understand. Over the years, the technology field has changed rapidly, but these concepts have remained nearly the same and so has the value of intellectuality. New people in the technology field usually learn these concepts by analyzing old business problems and trying to correctly apply the concept to that problem. In CIS410, at the University of Louisville, students learn these concepts by writing case reports. A case report is performed by first reading a case, which is a background story of a business that has a problem, and then the student tries to correctly apply a concept to that problem. The case report begins with analyzing the mission statement, generic strategy and organization structure of the business. Then the writer defines the problem, proposes several solutions and their impacts, and then finally chooses a solution they believe is correct for the business. Tara Nance, a recent graduate at the University of Louisville, applied the concept of Porter’s Five Forces in her case report analyzing a problem at Burlington Northern. Porter’s Five Forces is concept that determines the bargaining power of customers, suppliers, stakeholders, competition and new entrants ("Porter's Five Forces"). The value of intellectuality is most pronounced in the application of a concept such as Porter’s Five Forces. Using this concept, the writer is able to determine the core competencies of the business and power that an organization has. Not only does each force require an intense intellectual assessment, but determining the meaning of all five forces interacting with each other requires a great mental capacity. In Nance’s evaluation of Porter’s Five Forces in Burlington Northern, she assesses each force with great detail and cites every source she uses which proves that intellectuality is a very important value within her assessment. Nance wants the audience to know that her evaluation of Porter’s Five Forces has taken into account every detail within the case.

In the workplace, no one outside of the technology field wants to be stuck in a room alone with a technology person due to the value of superiority in the technology field. The use of jargon and technical terms used in technical writing are used to portray intellectuality, but there is also the hidden agenda of being displayed as more competent than other fields. This is most prevalent in technology person’s resume. Dhwani Shah, an engineer in the Master’s program at the University of Louisville, has a resume that displays the pretentious attitude that is abundant in the technology field. If a person outside the technology field examined Shah’s resume, they may not understand the meaning of several terms used. Underneath the job experience section at GE Appliances and Lighting, Shah wrote, “Implemented a program in Python to filter and clean the main EM BOM database for a stable Windchill connection”. Analyzing this statement from a person outside the technology field’s perspective, one would not understand the meaning of the statement as a whole, nor most of the terms used within it. Shah uses the acronym EM BOM without explaining its meaning implying that the reader should already know the meaning, which is a perfect example of the value of superiority in the technology field since few people will actually know the true meaning of the acronym. The use of this acronym is not only to show superiority over someone outside of the technology field, but also to show superiority of those within the field. When another person in the field reads that statement in Shah’s resume, they automatically feel that Shah knows more about something than they do. Even though they don’t even know what EM BOM means in the first place. This tactic is used purposely, because a recruiter in the field may also feel that Shah has knowledge in something that other applicants do not, giving Shah a better chance of receiving the position.

After analyzing the technology field artifacts, it can be seen that writing conventions in the technology field are very similar to the general business writing conventions. Appropriate organization, ethos, and a professional tone are some of the general business writing conventions and the technology field mirrors these conventions. Since writing in the technology field is business oriented, it is no surprise that the conventions are nearly identical. However, the technology field takes business writing conventions to the most extreme which is what separates it from other fields.

Organization is greatly important to the success in the clarity of the message in the business document ("Welcome to the Purdue OWL"). In Ray’s strategic assessment, there was an extreme importance on the organization of the document, which was emphasized by the detail table of contents and visually appealing layout. Ray also displayed organization through the use of a glossary, allowing the reader to easily look up complex terms used in the assessment.

Ethos, or how the writer’s credibility is established, enhances the effectiveness of the writer’s ability to make persuade the reader into believing their message ("Ethos - Writing Commons"). Nance’s case report displayed an almost excessive amount of credibility through her constant citations of sources to back up her claims. She also implemented several concepts such as Porter’s Five Forces and the Theory of Constraints, which are both widely known concepts in the technology field, furthering her source of credibility and enhancing her ability to persuade the audience into believing her claims.

Tone, defined as the attitude or emotion toward the subject matter, can be the determining factor of the strength in connection between the writer’s message and the reader ("How to use tone in your writing"). The tone of Shah’s resume, even though pretentious at times, was professional and formal. Anyone viewing his resume would concur that Shah places a strong importance on how he presents his experience through his use of intellectual vocabulary.

As a Computer Information System’s major and a web developer at CBS, I have become accustomed to the writing conventions of the technology field. My values in writing are complexity, intellectuality, and superiority, which directly match with the values in the technology field. Even though my values mimic those in the technology field, I feel that I lack the creativeness in writing that other fields possess. My writing follows the same strict format of thesis, body and conclusion, lacking any sort of creative or individual aspect. My current values and skillset in technical writing may be adequate in the technology field, but I think that if I incorporate the value of creativity, I can produce writing that stands out from others in the technology field. For example, Dr. Barker, a Computer Information System’s professor at the University of Louisville, believes that a resume should contain bold headings, centered content and provide a detailed list of everything you have ever accomplished. I feel that these conventions produce a resume that is not only dull and visually unappealing, but also an exact replica of the person’s resume sitting beside you. By applying the value of creativity, I think that a person can create a resume that engages the viewer, and makes a better use of white space, which allows them to possibly have a greater chance of being selected for a position. At this point in my writing career, I feel adequate in my ability to write in the technology field, but I think I can further my abilities and break the mold of technical writing by allowing myself to embrace creativity.

In summary, the technology field strongly values complexity, intellectuality, and superiority which allows the field to succeed in internal communication, but causes it to lack in external communication. By taking general business writing conventions to the extreme, the technology field is able to produce documents with appropriate organization, excessive amounts of ethos, and a clear professional tone. Using these values, writers in the technology field are able to go past the conventional limit of analysis and solve problems that could only be achieved through an in-depth understanding of the problem. However, communication with other fields results in confusion, not because of a lack of detail, but because of the value of superiority. I have adapted well to the conventions in the technology field, but I don’t think those conventions are perfect. I feel that the technology field is creative in innovation and development, but the creativity within writing is lacking substantially. As I move forward in my writing career, I will try to incorporate the use of creativity to separate myself from others in the field. I have never liked trying to be like anyone else, and in the future I want my writing to reflect that.

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