

Ethics of Technical Communication

Ethical communication is an honest expression of ideas about any product or service and considers the needs of both the customer and the business.

Legal

Focusing on liability, negligence and consumer protection laws

Practical

Dishonest technical communication backfires and can cause company to lose sales and suffer legal expenses

Ethical

Written to promote customer welfare and avoiding deceiving the end user

Legalities

Trust your instincts and laws

Laws are written to protect customers,
company and employee

When in doubt about the community
impact, seek legal counsel

Practicalities

As a technical communicator, your goal is candor (truthful, State the facts)

“Good ethics is good business”

Ethicalities

Legality

Honesty

Confidentiality

Quality

Fairness

Professionalism

Ethicalities

Use language and visuals with precision

Prefer simple, direct expression of ideas

Respect the work of colleagues, knowing that a communication problem may have more than one solution

Strive continually to improve my professional competence

Satisfy the audience's need for information, not my own need for self-expression

Hold myself responsible for how well my audience understands my message

Promote a climate that encourages the exercise of professional judgment and that attracts talented individuals to careers in technical communication

Prefer simple, direct expression of ideas

Use simple direct language

Legally binding *and* easy to understand

Aid communication by using simple words and direct expression of ideas

Satisfy the audience's need for information, not my own for self-expression

A document might be considered poetic in its sentence structure and sophisticated in word usage, but it **does not communicate what audience needs.**

Company owned electronic communication should **not** be used for personal reasons and on company time.

Metered mail should **not** be abused

Hold myself responsible for How Well My Audience Understands my message

Place the audience first

Use simple words and syntax

Always remember to **not confuse, frustrate or mislead your audience**

It is unethical to forget that **your writing can frustrate people and even endanger them**

Liability Laws

Liability laws are for keeping your audience safe

These cover injuries (accidents or exposure to hazardous materials)



Caused by faulty construction or dangerous products

Liability Laws: Warn the audience

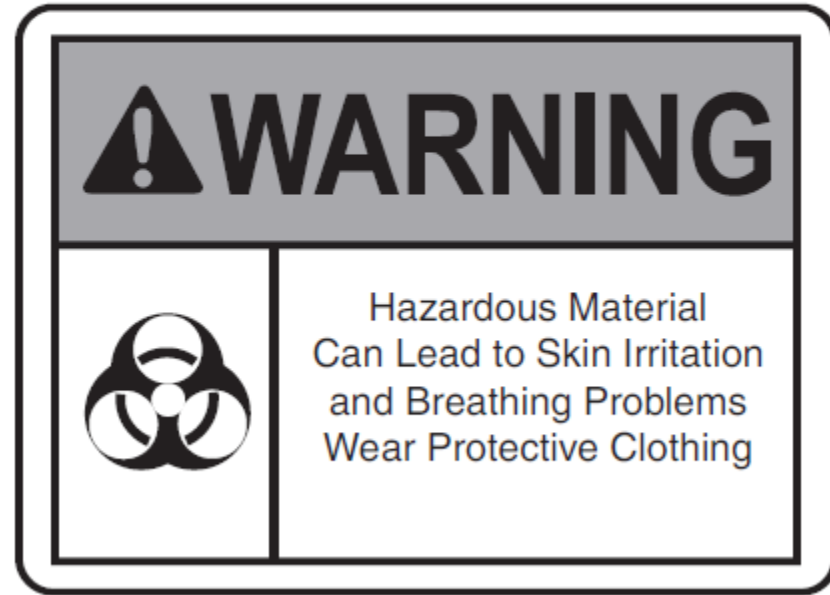
Provide clear instructions for use of product

Warn users about potential risks

Ensure that the warning is clearly and concisely stated.

Ensure that the warning is brought to the user's attention through **headings, color and illustrations.**

FIGURE 3.6 Illustration of a Warning to Prevent Liability Problems



Respect the Work of Colleagues

You must ethically consider confidentiality and courtesy when working with the internet or any private electronic network.

Confidentiality

The 1974 Privacy Act

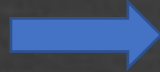
Allows “individuals to control information about themselves and to prevent its use without consent”

The Electronic Communication Privacy Act

Applies all federal wiretap laws to electronic communication, states that email messages can be disclosed only “with consent of the senders or recipients”

Courtesy

Avoid “Flaming”



Writing discourteous message that seeks to criticize their ability, plans or ideas

Common courtesy and respect is ethical

Professional Competence

Avoid plagiarizing

Professional courtesy

Respect for another's right to
confidentiality

A sense of responsibility of one's work

The ability to write clearly and precisely

The Ethics of International Property Laws

Copyright Laws

Trademark Laws

Boilerplate Content

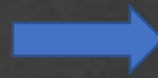
Copyright Laws



Plagiarism: Stealing another writer's words, ideas or images

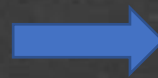
Copyrights protect original authorship
fixed in tangible form

Give the other author credit



You could lose customers, damage your
reputation and lose capital investments

Borrowing from existing internet site
without credit is copyright infringement



The Copyright Act allows the owner of Web
material to stop infringement and obtain
damages and attorney fees

Trademark Laws

Company's name, logo, symbol, design or image that identifies the company; or combinations of these elements.



TM (unregistered trademark)



SM (unregistered service mark)



® (registered trademark)

Boilerplate Content

Communicators commonly perform a variety... of composing activities that could be considered plagiarism in the context of the classroom in the workplace



Boilerplate information- templates and text that has been used before



Write collaboratively



Existing designs and layouts



Cut paste and repurpose corporate content

You need to sometimes cite content already used by your company

Guidelines for Protecting Intellectual Property

Assume that information is covered under copyright and trademark protection

Obtain permission for use from the original creator of graphics or text

Cite the source of your information

Create your own graphics and text

Copyright any information you create

Place a copyright notice at the bottom of your Web site
(Johnson 17)

Ethical Dilemma: Questions to Ask



Does the company have a policy regarding the situation?

Have you discussed the situation with your boss?

Have you met with director of human resources for guidance?

Does your company have an ombudsman who provides support or training?

What do your colleagues say about the situation?

Do you belong to a professional organization with published policies regarding ethical behavior?

Ethical Dilemma: Questions to Ask



Do you have a moral authority with whom you can confer?

How has your organization dealt with similar situation in the past?

Does your company have a way to communicate anonymously about ethical issues, such as drop box or secure email address?

Has your company offered training about ethical behavior in the workplace?



Strategies

Define the problem

Determine your audience

Maximize values; minimize problems

Consider the big picture

Write your text



Use precise language and visuals

Use simple words and sentences

Satisfy the audience's needs for your content, not your own need for self expression

Take responsibility for your content, remembering that real people will follow your instructions or make decisions based on your text.

Respect your colleagues' confidentiality, be courteous and abide by copyright laws.

Promoting professionalism and good judgment.

Sources

- Technical Communication: Process and Product (7th ed.) Chapter 2