

An Informative Overview of Technical Writing

Definition

A quick, informal survey of 10 non-technical majors at Weber State University revealed that only four individuals had heard of the term ‘technical writing’. In summation, these four individuals thought technical writing consisted of “writing instructions”. While technical writing can involve the formation of instruction manuals, it is not limited to such a narrow scope. The Society of Technical Communication broadly defines technical writing as “any form of communication that shows one or more of the following qualities:

- Communicating *about technical or specialized topics*, such as computer applications, medical procedures, or environmental regulations.
- Communicating *by using technology*, such as web pages, help files, or social media sites.
- Providing *instructions about how to do something*, regardless of how technical the task is or even if technology is used to create or distribute that communication.

Simply put, technical writing creates the connection between a user (audience) and a topic; it translates specific information to a broad (or specialized) audience through text based communication.

History

Technical writing has been a known concept for many years. The earliest known forms of technical writing were written by Aristotle (384-322 BC). Archaeologists discovered a dictionary of philosophical terms and a summary of “Doctrines of Pythagoras”. Other technical documents followed those of Aristotle, from Geoffrey Chaucer to Isaac Newton.

Examples

The following are some examples of technical documents that a technical writer might produce:

- User manuals
- Standard Operating Procedures (SOP)
- Installation guides
- Help files
- Business plans
- Release notes

Though a large portion of technical documents are for informative purposes, technical writing can include marketing documents, such as press releases, articles, and proposals.

Careers

Aspiring technical writers should have the following skills: writing, the ability to work with technical information, research, critical thinking, and a teamwork mindset. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, technical writing jobs will grow 7% from 2019 to 2029. A Bachelor's degree is typically required to work as a technical writer. An engineering or science background is helpful but not required. In 2019, the media annual wage for technical writers was \$72,850.

Conclusion

Technical writing is a broad term that centers around the communication of technical information to an audience. It has an essential role in workplace environments and is constantly evolving with technology. Further resources about technical writing are listed below.

Additional Resources:

- Society for Technical Communication: <https://www.stc.org/>
- Technical writer article:
<https://medium.com/technical-writing-is-easy/technical-writing-everything-you-need-to-know-about-being-a-tech-writer-a4cff97c568>
- Northeastern University blog post:
<https://www.northeastern.edu/graduate/blog/what-is-technical-writing/>
- Guide book:
https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Insider_s_Guide_to_Technical_Writing/RpuNDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=0

Search Suggestions:

- What is technical writing?
- Technical writing terms
- How to be a technical writer
- Technical writing tools and software
- How to break into technical writing

Sources

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