



TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION - ONE STORY

Leah Pope

WHO AM I?



Leah Pope

Software Engineer

Birmingham, Alabama Area · 213 connections

[Sign in to Connect](#)



[Numbers Place Inc](#)



[George Mason University](#)

About

Software Engineer with 20 years of experience in providing technical solutions to a variety of Federal Government customers. Master's Degree in Software Engineering with a dual emphasis in Software Design and Software Project Management. Bachelor's Degree in English with a Technical Communication minor.

YES... I'M IN THE RIGHT CLASSROOM



Leah Pope

Software Engineer

Birmingham, Alabama Area · 213 connections

[Sign in to Connect](#)



[Numbers Place Inc](#)



[George Mason University](#)

About

Software Engineer with 20 years of experience in providing technical solutions to a variety of Federal Government customers. Master's Degree in Software Engineering with a dual emphasis in Software Design and Software Project Management. Bachelor's Degree in English with a Technical Communication minor.

ENGLISH MAJORS UNITE!



ENGLISH MAJORS UNITE!

- 1st Generation College student from rural West Central Alabama
- Knew I wanted to Major in English but how to make a living afterwards
- Author? — Journalist? — Teacher? — Law?
- English Major/ Technical Communication Minor seemed like a good bet

“

Technical communication applies to a wide variety of audiences in any industry (for example, business, engineering, healthcare, manufacturing, medicine, professional services, technology, etc.).

Technical Communication Body of Knowledge website

<https://www.tcbok.org/wiki/about-tc/definition-technical-communication/>

MAJOR MOVES



MAJOR MOVES

- After college and working as a Writer/Editor in Montgomery, moved to the Washington DC area
- First Technical Communication related job as the role of Data Management Specialist
- Worked for a small defense contractor that built hardware/software systems for US Navy submarines and surface ships
- Government Contract required several documents to be delivered along with the hardware/software systems

MAJOR MOVES

- LOTS of documents...
 - System/Subsystem Design Description
 - Software Requirements Specification
 - Software Test Description
 - Software Test Plan
 - Software Installation Plan
 - Software User Manual
 - and many more...

MAJOR MOVES

- Responsibilities in this Technical Communications role were:
 - Editing technical documents and ensuring adherence to the Military Standard templates required by the US Navy
 - Document management/version control — contractually obligated to keep copies of all versions of documents
 - Preparing delivery packages of documents and software
- Stayed at this company for several years but my job changed

FROM DOCUMENTS TO CODE

FROM DOCUMENTS TO CODE

- Learned Web (HTML, CSS, Javascript) and Java programming languages
- Started out writing Graphical User Interface (GUI) code
 - Immediate feedback was appealing — what you write is what you see on the screen
- First Java programming job was to write software for a submarine Imaging system
- Continued to leverage Technical Communication skills
 - Referenced Software Requirements Specification and other Military Standards documents — system had to adhere to guidelines
 - Wrote efficient tool-tips for GUI controls — supplementing the Software User Manual

FROM DOCUMENTS TO CODE

- Advanced Software Engineering skills on wide variety of projects for several different Federal Government organizations
- Geographic Information System (GIS) application that CDC used for relief effort planning for complex humanitarian emergencies
- Identity document validation application used by intelligence analysts in their national security mission
- Technical Communication skills continued to be valuable in Software Engineering roles

“The value that technical communicators deliver is twofold: They make information more useable and accessible to those who need that information, and in doing so, they advance the goals of the companies or organizations that employ them.

Society for Technical Communication website

<https://www.stc.org/about-stc/defining-technical-communication/>

CREATING SOFTWARE IS MORE THAN WRITING CODE



CREATING SOFTWARE IS MORE THAN WRITING CODE

- Often became the translator between users and fellow developers
 - These skills were especially beneficial on small teams — the more hats you could wear, the better!
- Handled customer change requests (bug reports) and helped connect the dots between the problems users discovered back to the code that needed to be updated
- Translated user needs into system requirements which project managers turned into directions for software developers
 - Agile software development put a new spin on defining software requirements — writing “user stories”

CREATING SOFTWARE IS MORE THAN WRITING CODE

- Developing a clear, audience-appropriate writing style proved vital
 - Decent graphics and document layout skills helped
- Learned how to adopt and, as needed, adapt existing document templates
 - When no template existed, created one using best practices
- Authored software user manuals on multiple projects
- Created and presented technical project information briefings to communicate with management and other stakeholders
- Wrote a technical report which recommended technologies for adoption into users' workflows

CREATING SOFTWARE IS MORE THAN WRITING CODE

- Worked in a “technology matchmaker” role — compared user needs to technology vendors’ white papers/documentation/presentations to find good matches
 - Being fluent in Technical Communication enabled better/easier comprehension of technical materials
- Many aspects of creating software involves using or creating technical documentation
 - Creating design documents showing how new code will plug in
 - Documenting code so other developers can better understand the purpose
 - Maintaining internal, “body of knowledge” wikis for project (on-boarding for new teammates, sharing tips/tricks/gotchas, etc.)

THAT'S MY STORY... WHAT WILL YOUR STORY BE?



“

Technical communication is a user-centered approach for providing the right information, in the right way, at the right time so that the user's life is more productive.

Technical Communication Body of Knowledge website

<https://www.tcbok.org/wiki/about-tc/definition-technical-communication/>

66

Jobs in the field of technical communication include:

- Business analysts
- Content strategists
- Instructional designers
- Technical communication teachers and researchers
- Technical writers and editors
- Trainers and eLearning developers
- Usability and human factors professionals
- User experience professionals
- Web designers and developers

Technical Communication Body of Knowledge website

<https://www tcbok org/wiki/about-tc/definition-technical-communication/>

ADVICE



ADVICE

- Get involved with publications and make a portfolio — create content and/or design layouts (campus/other organization publications, personal blog, etc.)
- Don't be afraid to get nerdy — take some programming classes
- Become proficient in content generation applications — word processing, presentation, diagramming, screen capture, website/HTML editing, and image editing
- Keep an open mind on how you can leverage your skills

WRAP UP

