# Job description: Technical writer

Technical writers, also sometimes known as technical authors, communicate complex and technical information about products and services in a way that is jargon free and easy to understand. This could be information for user guides or instruction manuals for items such as software applications or household appliances.

As a technical writer you could find yourself working in various sectors of the economy, such as manufacturing, pharmaceuticals, IT or government.

The work of a technical writer involves more than simply producing written information. You could also be involved with creating interactive tutorials, diagrams and video guides. The work is usually written for consumers of products but you could also find yourself summarising technical information for the internal staff of an organisation.

Usually a technical writer will undertake the following day-to-day tasks:

* Gathering information from reports
* Analysing the information needs of the user
* Working with sales and marketing specialists to understand existing user materials and the purpose of new guides
* Writing top quality, easy to understand material, print or online, for user guides/instruction manuals
* Proofreading and editing your own work and the work of others
* Making amendments to written material in line with the suggestions of other departments
* Commissioning illustrations, diagrams and photographs and incorporating them into text
* Commissioning or presenting video games
* Create tutorials for users or internal staff
* Adapting communications for different audiences
* Editing and updating existing user guides and marketing materials
* Mentoring and training other writers
* Attending planning and briefing meetings
* Indexing and cataloguing material

### Key skills

* Writing and editing skills: The ability to write is essential but beyond this you need to be able to translate technical language into a form of words everyone can understand. This hinges upon an ability to understand the technology in the first place, so it’s a specialist skill you need to have honed.
* Software and IT skills: Technical writers need a good working knowledge of MS Office applications and often also Powerpoint, Javascript, HTML and CSS. Multi-media skills, such as web design and video production, are becoming increasingly useful too.
* Interpersonal skills: As a technical writer you will spend a lot of time interacting with internal ‘experts’ who develop the products you write about. You need to have the ability to tease out their technical knowledge and put it into simplified (not over-simplified) language.

### Benefits

* Flexible working: As a technical writer, the main thing you need is an internet connection and computer, so the ability to work from different locations, including from home, should be possible at least from time to time if not regularly, depending on the organisation you work for.
* Lifelong practice: Writing is a practice you can continue for the duration of your life, unlike other jobs that may require more dexterity, physical stamina, and social interaction.
* Freelancing: As a freelancer you can be your own boss. The freedom to make decisions and handle business is all in your hands and control, which can be very rewarding.

### Qualifications

An undergraduate degree is normally expected for the role of technical writer. ‘Technical’ degrees in computer science or engineering are considered the prime subjects, although English may also stand you in good stead. Sometimes an HND qualification in the area you wish to work in will suffice. Check out technical communication courses from the [Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators](http://www.istc.org.uk/learning-and-skills/).