Technical writers use both words and visual aids to explain difficult concepts, often to nontechnical audiences. Work products for technical writers include instruction manuals, process documentation, and grant or bid proposals. Whether they support internal or external customers, technical writers’ ultimate goal is to communicate complex information in a clear and concise manner.

### Technical Writer Duties and Responsibilities

While technical writers may write about a very wide variety of topics, their duties tend to fall into several functional categories:

Study Products and Processes

Much of a technical writer’s job consists of learning the information they need to communicate. This can come in the form of observation, formal training sessions, or other research. Writers may use products or observe processes in action to gain a better understanding of them.

Consult Subject Matter Experts

Technical writers frequently work with designers, engineers, and others responsible for key processes to gain an understanding of their subject matter. The information elicited from interviews and other communications provides the foundation for the final written product, although a significant amount of “processing” is typically required.

Produce and Maintain Documentation

Technical writers produce documents that distill complex technical concepts for a broader or less technically experienced audience. Some are used internally to help train employees or provide uniformity for large organizations. Others, such as end-user manuals, may be designed for a general readership. Technical writers also maintain existing documentation and keep it up to date as products or processes change.

Test Documentation

To evaluate whether their work product effectively serves the target audience, technical writers may conduct studies or tests with sample readers. These reveal whether the documents the writer has prepared do their job. The test audience could include company employees in the case of internal process documentation, or customers in the case of product manuals.

### Technical Writer Skills and Qualifications

Technical writing demands a keen eye for detail and exceptionally strong communication skills. Employers also prefer to hire candidates with the following additional abilities:

* Explanatory writing skills – technical writers must be able to convey complicated ideas to nonexpert readers with clarity and a minimum of obscure jargon
* Information gathering – whether they’re reading existing literature, interviewing subject matter specialists, or analyzing processes, technical writers conduct extensive research to prepare for their writing tasks. The ability to absorb complex information and compile good working notes is important for successful technical writing
* Graphic design – a technical writer may employ a variety of charts, diagrams, and other visual aids to help communicate technical concepts
* Media production – some technical writers also produce videos or social media posts, especially if they work with external audiences
* Editing – technical writers work together by reviewing and editing each others’ work to improve its clarity and consistency