

Technical Writing – Overview and Opportunities

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Abstract –

Technical writing is a diverse field of communication that serves the needs of the end user of technical information: the reader. Technical Writing is communication, the primary aim of which is to convey a particular piece of information to a particular audience for a particular purpose. Technical writing comprises of designing and creating technical documents such as user manuals, administration guide, installation manual, quick reference guides, and training manuals etc. The subject matter of technical documents revolves around technologies, products, or processes. The field is gaining more importance in this current period of fast technological advancement. Technical writing is among the fastest-growing and most lucrative writing professions, with opportunities to serve a wide variety of industries including science, technology, education, oil and gas, business communications, web-based publishing, and freelance writing and editing. Technical writing stretches the student beyond the competencies required for academic writing. This article attempts to bring into notice the overview, existence and scope of technical writing in various fields. In conclusion, we highlight the opportunities offered by this field to various walks of life.

Keywords - Information, communication, user manual, products, processes, freelance.

What is Writing?

Writing is a medium of communication that represents language through the inscription of signs and symbols. In other words, writing is a method of representing language in visual or tactile form. Writing systems use sets of symbols to represent the sounds of speech, and may also have symbols for such things as punctuation and numerals. Writing is a powerful tool for learning, one that plays a critical role in our education.

The Need to Write

"Writing" is the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form. With the exception of speaking, writing is the most popular and prevalent method of creating connections among people. As a means of building links between individuals and within communities, writing serves as the flexible foundation for almost every type of communications media. Print, video, audio, speech and interactive web media all begin with writing. Writing connects people across time, space and culture. Because of the influence of writing, individuals can learn from yesterday, gain knowledge about today and design for tomorrow.

Writing is a Process

- Good writing does not happen overnight. It is a long process .It requires planning, drafting, rereading, revising and editing.
- There are no shortcuts. Practice makes perfect.

What is Technical Writing?

Technical writing is a form of technical communication used in a variety of technical and occupational fields, such as computer hardware and software, engineering, chemistry, aeronautics and astronautics, robotics, finance, consumer electronics, and biotechnology. In other words, Technical Writing is communication, the primary aim of which is to convey a particular piece of information to a particular audience for a particular purpose. Technical writing can be more difficult than some other forms of writing, because it must be clear and to the point. Technical writing requires clarity of expression and therefore simplicity of language. Technical writing is intent on expressing certain key concepts so that these may be understood as easily as possibly by the intended readers. We can also say that Technical Writing is "translating technical ideas into words a specific audience will understand". Therefore audience analysis is thus a key feature of all Technical Writing.

Technical writing involves analysis of a document's intended audience in order to translate complex technical concepts and instructions into a series of comprehensible steps that enable users to perform a specific task in a specific way. To present appropriate information, writers must understand the audience and their goals. For example, an audience of highly trained scientists will require less explanation of technical terms than a help guide intended for general audiences.

Language itself is important to enable readers to understand and believe the written text. Language affects a reader's ability to comprehend and assimilate what a writer is presenting.

Technical Writing is a specialized, structured way of writing, in which information is presented in a format and manner that best suits the cognitive and psychological needs of the readers, so they can respond to a document as its author intended, and achieve the purpose related to that document.

The Goal of Technical Writing

Good technical writing results in relevant, useful and accurate information geared to

specifically targeted audiences in order to enable a set of actions on the part of the audience in pursuit of a defined goal. The goal may be using a software application, operating industrial equipment, preventing accidents, safely consuming a packaged food, assessing a medical condition, complying with a law, coaching a sports team, or any of an infinite range of possible activities. If the activity requires expertise or skill to perform, then technical writing is a necessary component.

Only a small proportion of technical writing is actually aimed at the general consumer audience. Businesses and organizations deliver vast amounts of technical writing to explain internal procedures, design and produce products, implement processes, sell products and services to other businesses, or define policies.

How is Technical Writing different?

- The information is organized, presented and communicated in a specific format.
- The writing is concise, clear and accurate.
- The writing takes into account the audience's needs, biases and prior understanding.
- The writing presents information to help readers solve a problem or gain a better understanding of a situation.
- The writing conveys technical, complex, or specialized information in a way that is easy for a non-technical reader to understand.

Characteristics of Technical Writer

The people, who design, create and maintain technical documentation, are known as technical writers. They possess skills in language, writing skills and solid research. A good technical writer may not be a subject matter expert (SME), but requires the expertise to interview SME's, do additional research, understand the targeted audience, and create documentation that is accurate, complete, unambiguous and concise. The documentation can be produced in a variety of forms: printed, web-based or other electronic documentation, training materials, and industrial film scripts.

A good technical writer has the ability to create, assimilate, and convey technical material in a concise and effective manner. A technical writer may specialize in a particular area. For example, API writers primarily work on API documents, while other technical writers specialize in electronic commerce, manufacturing, scientific, or medical material. He should have out of box thinking.

Technical writers gather information from many resources. They must understand quite a bit about the products they describe. Their information sources are scattered all over the company—from developers to marketing and service department. The effort to create this environment means that many technical writers are employees—either of the producers or of service providers.

Various activities a Technical Writer involves in –

The role of a technical communicator involves:

- Project planning and project management
- Research into user and business needs

- Designing and (if applicable) prototyping
- Interviewing and observing people at their work
- Gathering information from a range of other sources - existing documentation, specifications, experts
- Recording and organizing the information gathered
- Developing the information product
- Updating and correcting draft versions of the information product following reviews by users and content providers
- Testing the information product for functionality and usability
- Publishing or delivering the information product
- Periodically updating the information product to ensure that it remains relevant, complete and correct.

Deliverables

- Forms of technical content created by technical writers, includes
- Scientific reports
- Specifications
- Technical papers
- Online Help
- Training materials
- Troubleshooting guides
- Installation guides
- User guides
- Programmers' guides
- White papers
- Network administrators' guides
- Network configuration guides
- Policies and procedures
- Presentations
- Proposals
- Reference documents
- Release notes
- Reports
- Requirements documentation
- Corporate Annual Reports
- Corporate disclaimers
- Feature Design Documentation
- Magazine articles
- Site preparation guides
- Journal or Research Articles
- Social Media
- Network recovery guides & Etc.

Scope of Technical Writing in India

Presently, technical writing picture is not as bright in India. The field of technical writing did not exist till 1990s. Almost a decade old now, technical writing does not have many professionals associated with it, but it is slowly gaining momentum.

One thing that you should know is that a person does not really need to be very creative to become a technical writer. Technical writing is all about explaining difficult to comprehend concepts and procedures in a very simple, plain and easily understandable language. But that does not mean that job of a technical writer is an easy one, as lots of mind and time goes into it and lot of research work is done. It is regarded as both art and science as it involves both writing and a systematic technique of doing technical writing. So a person with a technical background as well as a mass communication or an English literature graduate may be a latest participant in the field of technical writing.

The scene for technical writing as a career is continuously growing with pay checks at par with other prevalent career options like IT and management in India.

Right now a technical degree is not mandatory to become a technical writer profession. Currently, the only decisive factor is very good command over English language. Our counterparts in US are realizing the need for professionally trained technical writers and that gives force to their employability. So US is giving lots of opportunities to the aspirants to get trained in the subject while in India there are almost no university courses for technical writing. There are some privately run institutes who have realized the need of the hour and are offering courses in technical writing. With the continuing trend technical writing will get the boost the profession requires.

Opportunities by Technical Writing –

Technical writing careers are often a mystery to those on the outside. What do technical writing jobs involve? What is the industry like? What is the career path of a technical writer, and what challenges do technical writers face?

Technical writing or Technical communication is all about communicating an idea to particular readers in an easily understandable way. Companies need the help of a Technical writer or Technical communication professional, in order to translate or explain the technical usage of their products in simple language so that even a common man who could not understand the technical words and language could figure out the advantages or the operation of their products or services. In short, Technical writers specialize in writing technology for non-technical persons. A technical writer writes reports that any technically oriented professional / expert/specialist do as part of their regular job.

A technical writer develops an expertise in a particular technical area for which one is working for, and whatever he writes or says about the field, is termed as technical communication. A technical writer should have an interest in science and technology. And he should also have researching skill as he has to collect information through books, internet and some times he needs to interview people who are the technological experts in the field. The technical writer should also possess good command over English and should know how to present a matter in an easily

understandable manner.

A technical writer can find work in various firms such as advertising agencies, IT companies, Newspapers and magazines etc. If you have good command over English language and confidence that you can understand the technology and simplify the technical language to a user friendly one, then you can choose technical writing as your career. TWIN (Technical Writers of India) and Society for Technical Communication (STC), India are two online services that help Indian technical writers.

The highest demand for technical writers is generated by the IT industry. If one does not want to work under an organization, he/ she can work as a freelance writer. Freelancers can take up work on a contract basis with companies for a period of time and will be paid for the work he does. As far as freelance writing is concerned freelancer should meet the dead line that the company puts forward and for that he needs a personal computer with internet connectivity that will help him in researching the materials and also help him to communicate with his payer.

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