Instructor's Resource Manual

to accompany

Technical Communication

Fourteenth Edition

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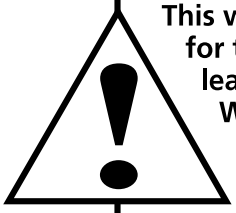

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The Composition Teacher as Technical Writing Teacher

As demand increases for technical writing courses, many instructors are recruited to teach a subject that they might regard as alien to their training, ability, and primary interests. But anyone experienced in teaching composition can make an easy and rewarding transition to teaching technical writing. Your proven ability to assess clarity, economy, organization, and rhetorical effectiveness provides the essential ingredient—along with a touch of curiosity and willingness to experiment. In this course, as in any composition course, purpose, audience, and rhetorical strategy are stressed.

In technical writing, a major rhetorical challenge is to write for an audience whose technical understanding is less than the writer's own. Accordingly, the emphasis in this text is on writing for a general audience. Instructors without technical background, therefore, make an ideal audience—as do students with widely varied majors.

Technical Writing's Practical Focus

In a technical writing class, you don't need to struggle for answers to the student's implied question on each assignment: "Why are we doing this?" Because students choose subjects with observable limits, and because they write for a specific reader in a specific situation, they are able to make the connection between writing in the classroom and writing in the workplace. And with high motivation, skills improve quickly.

Students learn to master rhetorical strategies by writing about subjects of primary or immediate interest. The issues are more substantive than abstract. A report analyzing why the campus has no day-care center may require these expository skills: classification, definition, description, narration, and persuasion, in addition to strategies for summary writing, outlining, primary and secondary research, and letter writing. Along with obtaining valuable writing practice, then, students in this course develop a clear sense of purpose, because they write about problems that touch them and their community. The range and variety of topics are infinite, with repeated emphasis on highly informative writing. Writing is taken out of the rarefied English classroom and based in the real world. As an act of communication for a specific purpose to a specific audience, writing becomes more a cognitive than an affective task, more than an exercise in creative self-expression. Justifi-

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cation for such assignments is both implicit and explicit. With practice in thinking and writing for a tangible situation and purpose, for an audience who will *use* the information, students in any major leave the course better prepared to think and write incisively about any subject.

A report-writing assignment is, in effect, an instructor's call to "teach me," rather than "discover yourself." The practical purpose for writing is always clear. Unlike the rhetorical errors in more personal writing, deficiencies in a factual message can be identified readily; moreover, a summary, an expanded definition, a set of instructions, a physical description, or a proposal provides common ground for student-teacher discussion of content, arrangement, and style.

Technical Writing as a Point of View

For the skeptical newcomer, technical writing's greatest liability is its name. The term "technical," often misleading for both instructors and students, leads to misunderstanding about what goes on in a technical writing course. It is one thing to discuss a *technical subject* (a specialized subject, usually mechanical or scientific); it is another to discuss any subject, technical or not, from a *technical point of view* (an informed and precise perspective from which the writer sees the related particulars of a subject). Even the most abstract subjects are discussed from a technical point of view if interpretations and conclusions are predicated on demonstrable evidence, and if the writing has utility beyond self-expression; literary criticism is an example.

In technical writing, the cognitive tasks of observing, interpreting, and reporting discourage any tendency to make absolute or sweeping statements. And, because guidelines for structure and format include an explicit and inclusive title, a clear statement of purpose, a detailed outline, and relevant headings, students maintain a sense of direction consistent with purpose. Far from enforcing mindless, mechanical transcription, technical writing assignments elicit thought and expression that are deliberate; volition rather than chance shapes the message.

Because of its concrete subject matter, technical writing encourages analytical thought. Students learn to pose imaginative questions, to answer them by precisely interpreting factual evidence, and to communicate their findings in a "professional" format. The approach is empirical, not mechanical. Students see that they are writing for a reason, and that good writing is the product of a good plan and a clear sense of the specific reader's specific needs. Written assignments, oral reports, and class discussions about analogues in the real world—e.g., evaluating your college's internship program, establishing a student-operated food co-op, comparing four popular wood-burning stoves, analyzing safety devices at a local nuclear power plant—all have practical translations, are easy to justify, and are carried out with enthusiasm. Ideally, a student report will also satisfy an assignment in another course.

Assignments with a Purpose

As a major course project, the analytical report can evolve from shorter assignments in summary writing, definition, description, and the like. Students are motivated when convinced that they are not performing an exercise in busywork or philosophical rambling;

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instructors are pleased to learn something informative instead of suffering the usual, thankless, and bleary-eyed plodding through unmemorable essays.

In short, teaching technical writing is one way in which instructors can make the required conceptual and practical adjustment from education for its own sake to education with a visible purpose. Such a change hardly means settling for second best. This kind of teaching, as many continue to discover, offers the occasion for growing professionally and for actively involving our students in reciprocal teaching and learning.

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Using the Masters for Classroom or Online Instruction

This manual includes master sheets associated with each book chapter that you might use in a number of ways. You can copy and distribute this material as handouts. You can also integrate these into your presentations during class by projecting them right from the digital version of this instructor's manual, integrating excerpts into your PowerPoint or other digital presentations, or projecting them via document cameras or transparencies. If you are teaching an online or hybrid course, you can also extract these as pdf files and distribute them via email or your learning management system (LMS).

For Quizzes

No book will do students any good unless they read it. To ensure that your students have (1) done the reading and (2) understood what they have read, you might use the quiz at the end of each chapter discussion section. Each quiz has ten questions that can be answered in ten to fifteen minutes. You can reproduce the quizzes directly from the PDF of this manual. You may also enter the questions directly into the quiz tool of your online learning management system.

For Writing Samples

In addition to quizzes, many chapter discussions are supplemented by Master sheets of visuals and writing samples. In the discussions of the letter and short-report chapters, masters of student writing illustrate successful responses to exercises in order to complement many of the on-the-job examples from the textbook.

For Syllabi and Course Description

Either of the two sample syllabi, the course specifications, and the description of a grading system can be reproduced directly.

Advantages of a Visual Format

Besides enhancing class discussion and lectures and improving students' attention, routine exposure to visuals is valuable preparation for students' careers. Research suggests

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that, in any presentation, speakers who use visuals are regarded as better prepared than speakers without such aids.

How Master Sheets Are Distributed in This Manual

To follow the same principles of efficiency set forth in the textbook, master sheets have been deliberately omitted (except for quizzes) from some chapters. Most of the master sheets are found in Part I (to enhance discussions about the writing process) and in Part IV (to provide guidance in planning and revising typical documents). For Part II, documents produced by your own students should provide abundant examples.

As a quick survey of the Table of Master Sheets suggests, the emphasis in this material is on the *process*, not just the *product.* Instead of merely showing sample responses to this or that assignment, many of the masters illustrate the writing process as a *thinking* process.

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Annotated Bibliography of Resources for Teachers

Journals

Up-to-date information on these journals can be found online. Journals affiliated with a professional society are typically included as part of the membership dues.

IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication. Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers.

Journal of Business Communication. Association for Business Communication.

Journal of Business and Technical Communication. Sage Publications.

Journal of Mass Media Ethics. Published by Taylor & Francis Group.

Journal of Technical Writing and Communication. Sage Publications.

Technical Communication. Society for Technical Communication (STC).

Technical Communication Quarterly. Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW).

Bibliographies

"Academic and Practitioner Perspectives on Essential Works in Technical Communication." Gerald J. Alred. *ATTW Bulletin* 15.1 (Spring 2005): 11–13.

"ATTW Bibliography." The Association of Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) offers a yearly listing of literature in technical and scientific communication. Available on the ATTW Web site.

"Information Design: A Bibliography." Michael J. Albers and Beth Conney Lisberg. *Technical Communication* 47.2 (2000): 170–176.

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Collaboration

"Collaboration: How Japanese Poetry Can Help Tech Writers." David L. Major. *Issues in Integrative Studies* 26 (2008): 105–137. The author of this article "draws on the practice of collaboration in Japanese poetry to suggest strategies for dealing with the most common problems in collaborative writing."

"Collaborative Writing: Bridging the Gap between the Textbook and the Workplace." Stephen Bremner. English for Specific Purposes 29 (2010): 121–132. This study of eight technical writing textbooks examines the effectiveness of teaching collaboration and offers suggestions for effective classroom instruction.

"The Role of Communication and Trust in Global Virtual Teams: A Social Network Perspective." Saonee Sarker, Manju Ahuja, Suprateek Sarker, and Sarah Kirkeby. *Journal of Management Information Systems* 28 (2011): 273–309. These authors examined the role of trust and communication on individual performance in globally distributed student teams.

Writing Together: Collaboration in Theory and Practice. Andrea A. Lunsford and Lisa Ede. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012. This collection of essays by two collaborators spans decades of their work together. Though primarily intended for composition teachers, many of the essays apply also to technical communication. One of the most recent contributions to the collection looks at audiences and new media. The book includes the 1990 article "Collaborative Writers at Work."

"Using Knowledge Networks to Teach Online Writing Skills in the Professional Writing Classroom." Rachel Robertson. In Herrington, A. and Schrape, J. and Singh, K. (eds). *Engaging Students with Learning Technologies*. Perth, Western Australia: Curtin University, 2012. 167–176. Describes a project requiring students to use Google Docs and Google sites to complete individual and collaborative projects involving writing for online audiences. Includes compelling student feedback on the project.

Ethical Communication

Avoiding Plagiarism, Self-plagiarism, and Other Questionable Writing Practices: A Guide to Ethical Writing. Miguel Roig. Search for this article at <ori.hhs.gov>. A thorough discussion of the topic. Though written for scientists, the guide is useful to students across disciplines.

Copyright Basics. Library of Congress. Provides basic information on U.S. copyright law in an easy-to-read format. Search for "Circular 1" at <www.copyright.gov>.

Honest Work: A Business Ethics Reader, 2nd ed. Ed. Joanne B. Ciulla, Clancy Martin, Robert C. Solomon. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Office of Research Integrity (ORI), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. <ori.hhs.gov>. Promotes ethical conduct in the health and behavioral sciences. Publishes a quarterly newsletter. The Web site lists external resources and educational materials about topics such as peer review and collaboration.

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