TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING

Overview

- What is technical writing?
- Are technical writers nerds? Are they from a different planet?
- Do they only write eight hours a day?
- Do they write code?
- I am an engineer with a penchant for words; I have published many articles in technical magazines. What is my chance of becoming a technical writer?
- Are creative writers eligible to become technical communicators?
- What are the job prospects in this field?
- What are the demands of the technical writing profession?
- Should I be a grammar expert to become a technical writer?
- My friends in the industry use different desktop publishing (DTP); help authoring tools (HAT); word processing software, and imaging editors. How can I learn these?
- Is freelancing/telecommuting a good option in technical writing? How do I bid for projects?
- Are usability experts, instructional designers, indexers, and information architects different from technical writers?

Many questions were unanswered when we set out to explore technical communication a few years ago. Technical writing in India was nascent then and our decision to jump into this profession was based on the assurances and colorful pictures of our associates who were then a veteran of four years at Sun Microsystems, had painted our my mind. Technical writing has since grown in leaps and bounds though with little noise. While we had to take the decision based on what on experiences of many our friend said regarding the opportunities , one can source information from a host of places.

``What is Technical Writing?"

If you ask this question to five technical writers working in five companies, you will return with five different opinions – needless to say confused and disappointed. Let us quickly draw your attention to how technical writers have touched our lives. Have you noticed the manuals that are bundled with your new mobile phone, iron box, mixer, refrigerator, television, etc.? We are sure you may have used these manuals too – Users guide, Operation manual, Instruction manual, and so on. When you use spreadsheet software such as MS Excel, you may have noticed the Office Assistant that amuses you at first and then gets to your nerves. This is called an online help. All these artifacts are the handiwork of a technical writer.

Most software/hardware products and consumer durables are supplied with documents such as Users guide, Instructions, Installation guide, Troubleshooting manual, Maintenance manuals, Quick Start, guide, etc. These are only some of products that technical writers conceive and produce in a company.

If jazzy images and detailed description of features influenced your decision to buy a particular brand of digital camera, then the technical writer who created the brochure should get the due recognition. Likewise, if you repeatedly visit one website for news or cricket score, do we have to say much about the content developer?

A technical writer may perform one or more of these activities. To become a technical writer, you must have the technical aptitude, willingness to understand how a product works, and explain in simple language to the end user. To serve as an effective communication bridge between the developer and user of the product, you are expected to do one or more of the following activities:

- Identify the required documents
- Profile the user
- Hire resources
- Purchase software
- Plan the document deliverables
- Identify topics
- Delegate tasks
- Interact with subject matter experts (SMEs)
- Draft the text
- Review and revise the text
- Finalize the documentation
- Facilitate the localization requirements

While experienced technical writers manage multiple projects at a given point in time, beginners work closely with SMEs, draft the content, and revise the topics based on feedback.

In addition to this, many technical writers don multiple caps in the organization – intranet website developer/administrator, content creator, usability engineer, newsletter developer, domain expert, trainer, programmer, analyst, quality assurance engineer, and so on.

Based on your aptitude, you may choose to work as a:
- Software technical author
- Hardware technical author
- Technical editor

COURSE OUTLINE:

INTRODUCTORY MODULE (10 hours)

- Killing the myths associated with Technical Writing.
- Distinction between Technical Writing and other forms of writing.
- Drawing parallels with engineering, scientific communication
    - assessing the audience
    - selecting the format (choice of type face/placement of heading/citing references
    - crafting the style (structure/language/illustration)
    - formal reports
        - front matter (cover, title, content, summary)
        - main text (introduction, discussion, conclusion)
        - back Matter (appendices, glossary, references)
- Importance of technical writing

- Separating the product from the process
  - pre-write
  - write
  - rewrite

Technical writing objectives
- Clarity
- Conciseness
- Accuracy
- Organization
- Ethics

*** Assignment 1: Re-write the jumbled sentences to make a cohesive, meaningful story.*

ADVANCES LEARNING MODULE

Audience recognition and involvement
- Types of audience
  - high-tech
  - low-tech
  - lay audience
- Multicultural audiences
- Audience involvement
  - set the tone
  - explain benefits
  - use positive words and verbs
- Audience survey and templates

*** Assignment 2: Given a set of data…*

Role of technical authors in the production of technical documentation
- Technical writing process
- Hands-on exercise to understand:
  - planning
  - formatting
  - language and style
  - editing
  - proof-reading
  - house-styles

Technical publications, designs, and production
- User guides
- Reference manuals
- Support documentation
- Overhaul and service documentation
- Troubleshooting guides

- Reports
- Training material
- Upgrades and revisions

Documentation designs
- Design and layout
- Design concepts
    - chunking
    - order
    - access
    - variety
- Typography
- Color
- Finishing and Packaging

*** Assignment 3: Use the specifications given to write instructions for using an ATM.*

Electronic publishing
- DTP
- Word-processors
- E-publishing
- Dedicated systems
- Database publishing

Graphics & Illustration
- Graphics and Drawing software
- Including graphics in documents
- Positioning illustrations
- Referencing illustrations
- Captions

Online documentation help authoring
- Help systems and tools
- Hypertext and multimedia systems

*** Assignment 4: Create an online help using a help authoring tool*

User manuals
- Components of users manual
- Information included in users manual
- Examples of users manual

Proposals
- Types of proposals
- Criteria for proposals
- Common sections in proposals
- Organization of proposals

Total Quality Management
- SDLC and DDLC
- Managing source documents
- Costing and scheduling

LAB EXERCISES
*** Assignment 5 and 6*

SUMMARY & PROPOSAL

Module Name	Duration (In Hours)
INTRODUCTORY	**10**
Technical writing objectives *** Assignment 1: Re-write the jumbled sentences to make a cohesive, meaningful story.*	**30**
ADVANCES LEARNING MODULE	
• Audience recognition and involvement *** Assignment 2: Given a set of data…*	
• Role of technical authors in the production of technical documentation *** Assignment 3: Use the specifications given to write instructions for using an ATM.*	
• Documentation designs *** Assignment 4: Create an online help using a help authoring tool*	
• Electronic publishing	
• Graphics & Illustration	
• Online documentation help authoring	
• User manuals	
• Proposals	
• Total Quality Management *** Assignment 5 and 6*	
TOTAL	**40**

- **Training Methodology will be a combination of the following:**

1) **Instruction based: Week Ends – 5 hours.**
2) *Self Instruction Module: Material will be provided.*
3) *Lab Exercises through Software Tools.*
4) *Batch Size 15*