

Contents

Preface 15

What's in this book 15

Chapter 1: So, what's a technical writer? 21

Knowledge of technology 22

Ignorance is bliss 24

Who treats the doctor and who documents for the writer? 25

Writing ability 25

Miss Thistlebottom was right... 26

Organizational skills 28

Strong detective (and people) skills 30

Chapter 2: An overview of the technical writing process 31

Chapter 3: Very necessary evils—doc plans and outlines 35

What's a doc plan? 36

Who writes the doc plan? 39

Any formulas for writing doc plans? 40

Outlining—it's not just for high school papers anymore 42

What goes into the outline? 42

How many deliverables should there be? 44

Writing the outline 45

Chapter 4: The Tech Writer's Toolbox 47

- Content/text development tools 48
- Graphics software and clip art packages 50
- Help or web authoring tools 51
- File conversion utilities 52
- Other helpful software 53
- Computers and ergonomics 54

Chapter 5: Getting information 57

- Technical specifications and other development documentation 58
 - The benefits of a spec 58
 - The drawbacks of a spec 59
- Prototypes and software under development 60
 - The benefits of prototypes and prerelease software 62
 - The drawbacks of prototypes and prerelease software 63
- Legacy documentation 64
 - The benefits of legacy documentation 65
 - The drawbacks of legacy documentation 65
- Developers and subject matter experts 66
 - The benefits of developers and SMEs 66
 - The drawbacks of developers and SMEs 67
- Interviews with users 71
 - The benefits of interviews with users 72
 - The drawbacks of interviews with users 72

Chapter 6: Finally—it's time to start writing 75

- Audience, audience, audience 76
 - K.I.S.S. 78

Inclusive language	79
Analyzing your audience without spending a fortune	80
Style and terminology	83
Different types of content	83
Interface information	84
Reference information	86
Conceptual information	87
Procedural information	88
Dealing with the inevitable schedule changes	88
Experience is the best teacher	89
Chapter 7: Writing task-oriented information	91
Elements of a procedure	92
Introducing the procedure	94
Breaking down a task into steps	94
Including the results	95
Adding notes, warnings, and cautions	97
Using bulleted and numbered lists	98
Letting illustrations tell the story	100
Organizing information in tables	101
Inserting cross-references	102
Chapter 8: A few words about pictures	105
What sort of graphic should I use?	106
Understanding graphic file types	106
Vector images	107
Bitmap images	109
File formats	110

- Scope of an illustration 111
- Displaying information from your computer screen 113
 - Mac screen shots 114
 - Windows screen shots 114
- Placing graphics in your documents 115

Chapter 9: Editors—resistance is futile 119

- Preventive measures—an editor’s early involvement in a project 121
 - Reviewing doc plans and manual outlines 122
 - Establishing style guidelines 122
 - Deciding on terminology 123
 - Examining legacy documentation 124
 - Editing early chapters 124
- Copy editing vs. technical editing vs. production editing 125
- Editing the documentation—what you and the editor can expect 126
 - What an editor can expect from you 127
 - What you can expect from an editor 129
- Editorial checklists 132
- Working with a markup 133
- The reality of time constraints 134

Chapter 10: Indexing 137

- What should I index? 139
 - Indexing definitions 140
 - Indexing tasks 141
- Cross-indexing 142
- Using primary and secondary entries 143
- “See” and “See also” entries 144

How long should my index be? 145

Editing your index 145

Some helpful tips 148

Chapter 11: Final preparation—production editing 151

What the production editor expects from you 153

What to expect from a production editor 154

The production edit 154

Hyphenation and bad line breaks 155

Page breaks and copyfitting 156

Widows and orphans 158

Right/left pagination 159

Running headers, running footers, and pagination 160

Consistency in presentation of tables and figures 161

Page numbers in cross-references 161

Production checklists 162

Preparing final output 163

Chapter 12: Avoiding international irritation 165

Some basic definitions 166

Did we mention audience? 167

Language is an eight-letter word 168

More on mores 170

Some common-sense rules for international writing 170

The myth about images 175

Much ado about taboo 175

Screening your graphics 176

- Designs that won't hurt you 177
 - Text expansion 177
 - Other problems with tables 180
 - Other issues 183
- Think globally, act locally 185

Chapter 13: Single sourcing 187

- The traditional workflow 188
 - Parallel development 188
 - Serial development 189
- Evaluating whether single sourcing is right for a project 191
- Benefits of single sourcing 192
 - Eliminating maintenance on multiple file sets 192
 - Saving money 192
 - Presenting information customized for each delivery medium 194
- Objections to single sourcing 194
- Planning for single sourcing 195
 - What information goes into the deliverables? 195
 - A high-level planning grid 196
 - A paragraph-level planning grid 197
- Choosing single-sourcing tools 198
 - Basic tools 198
 - Intermediate tools 199
 - Enterprise-level tools 199
 - Database publishing 199

Appendix A: Getting your first job as a technical writer 201

- Demonstrating the skills of a technical writer 202
 - Understanding of technology 203

- Writing ability 207
- Organizational skills 209
- Detective and people skills 209
- Interviewing 210
 - Dress professionally 210
 - Don't oversell 210
 - Don't ask about salary 211
 - Be on time 211
 - Send a thank-you note 212
- The portfolio 213
 - What should my portfolio look like? 214
 - Should I bring my portfolio to the interview? 215
- Where should I look for a tech writing job? 215
 - Contracting—getting your foot in the door 216
 - Transferring within a company 217
 - The end run into technical writing 217
 - Start-up companies 218
 - If you've got it, flaunt it 218
 - Internships 218
- Professional organizations 219
- Working as a freelance technical writer 219
 - What you need to make it as a freelancer 219
 - How much experience do I need to begin freelancing? 220
 - Where can I get more information about freelancing? 221
- Appendix B: Resources 223**
 - General technical writing 224
 - Print 224
 - Mailing lists 224

Editorial	225
Print	225
Web sites	226
Audience and task analysis	226
Information design	226
Indexing	227
FrameMaker	227
Print	227
Web sites	227
Mailing lists	228
Other tools	229
Web sites	229
Mailing lists	230
Professional organizations	231
Ergonomics	232
Job banks	232
Placement firms	233
Appendix C: Tools information	235
Free email providers	238
Appendix D: Sample doc plan	239
Index	247