



Society for  
Technical  
Communication

Society for Technical Communication  
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## What's the difference between technical communicator and technical writer?

According to the United States Department of Labor (DOL), the official description, written years ago, of the technical writer's responsibilities is the following:

"Write technical materials, such as equipment manuals, appendices, or operating and maintenance instructions. May assist in layout work."

Today, communication covers much, much more. STC members do much, much more. Their work is dynamic and interactive. The old definition isn't nearly broad enough.

As times have changed, STC has been working with DOL to recognize the difference between its definition of a technical writer and what technical communicators really do. Whereas the technical writer would deliver "understandable language" for instructions, manuals, and catalogs, the technical communicator focuses on the user experience in all its forms. Technical communicators not only update manuals, they develop videos, podcasts, and other multimedia communications, as well as traditional print materials.

The STC office recently began working with economist Rick O'Sullivan to create a description specifically for technical communicators, proposing the following:

"Develop and design instructional and informational tools needed to assure safe, appropriate, and effective use of science and technology, intellectual property, and manufactured products and services. Combine multimedia knowledge and strong communication skills with technical expertise to educate across the entire spectrum of users' abilities, technical experience, and visual and auditory capabilities."

To read more about what STC has done to update the job descriptions with the Department of Labor, here are a couple of articles from STC's Executive Director, Susan Burton:

[Confronting Change](#) 

Burton provides an update on STC's work with the DOL to update the job description for technical communicator, and addresses members' concerns about the proposed new definition.

## You May Already Be a Technical Communicator

As STC works with the DOL to update the job description for technical communicator, use this checklist to determine whether you are indeed already a technical communicator. Also, if you have technical communicator as your job title, read on for how to let STC know so that this information can be compiled.