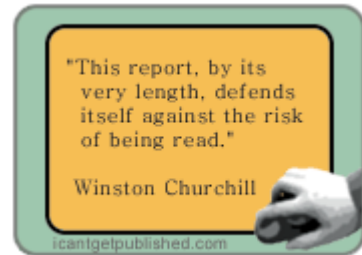


# Technical Writing

## Technical Writing: A Definition by Andrew McQuinn, MPC

Technical Writing is a term that represents an increasingly broad set of activities that are designed to communicate understandable information that can help people be productive. Content created by technical writers has traditionally involved items such as "how-to" manuals, reference guides and corporate reports. The emergence of new technologies, trends and customs prompts us to expand the frame of reference that encompasses a technical writer's activities.

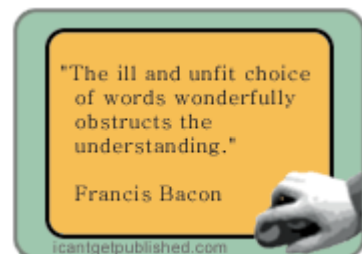


## The Value of Technical Writing

Discussions on the value of technical writers produce a variety of opinions. In his 2003 article titled *The Death of the Technical Author*, William Birn states: "Technical Authors do not have high prominence in the workplace, and they don't have the best of images...some wonder whether the role of the Technical Author will disappear." A decidedly different tone is delivered in a brochure produced by the Society for Technical Communication: "Because technology is everywhere in our world, technical communication has become one of the fastest growing professions—a profession that offers a variety of career options." As with many other areas of life, an enterprising spirit can determine the difference between an under-valued and low-paid technical writer with routine, boring tasks, and an esteemed technical author who develops a following because he/she has injected personality into an otherwise monotonous set of instructions. A technical writer may also become more valuable or praiseworthy if he/she invents or masters an innovative way of delivering messages. An example might involve abbreviated, but easily understood tips and instructions for stock traders, delivered via text messaging.

## Technical Writing and Style

In the past, a printed piece of media (a book, a brochure, a training video) often signified the conclusion of a technical writer's task. Today, technical writers frequently find that they are moderators in a discussion. Managers of call centers, customer support lines and online chat rooms want visitors to feel that they receive personalized attention with their service. The "personal touch" received may actually be anticipated, pre-typed responses that were created by technical writers.



The proliferation of blogs empowers technical writers to create community around their projects and to receive feedback about their creations. Hypertext links on blogs can initiate the creation of community around ideas that are presented by technical writers. Following are two examples:

<http://scottonwriting.net/sowblog/>

<http://www.poewar.com/archives/category/about-writing/technical-writing/>

Much of what exists as technical writing content may be considered instructional or informational. However, some argue that any final product also contains rhetoric. Author Carolyn R. Miller discusses technical writing and the notion of "practical rhetoric" in her article titled *What's Practical About Technical Writing?*

The practical seems to be concerned with getting things done, with efficient and effective action. Furthermore, efficiency and effectiveness seem more important for some types of action than for others; that is, some actions themselves have practical aims (rather than aesthetic or ritual ones), actions concerned with the material necessities of making a living or managing a household. One can thus be practical (or impractical) about practical action. Being practical suggests a certain attitude or mode of learning, an efficiency (or goal directedness) that relies on rules proved through use rather than on theory, history experience, or general

appreciation. Practical rhetoric therefore seems to concern the instrumental aspect of discourse—its potential for getting things done—and at the same time to invite a how-to, or handbook, method of instruction. Technical writing partakes of both these dimensions of practical rhetoric.

Technical writers do have opportunity to distinguish themselves within the field. Professional writers may join any number of organizations that promote best practices through training and competitions. Evidence of such opportunities may be found by following the links below:

<http://www.stc.org/>

<http://www.authorsguild.org/>

<http://www.attw.org/>

<http://www.iabc.com/>

<http://www.nagc.com/>

<http://www.stc-touchstone.org/>

<http://www.eham.net/articles/10411>

The technical writers who find the greatest amount of satisfaction from their work and the greatest amount of compensation are those who are fortunate enough to find employers who hold the skill set in high esteem and those who combine an entrepreneurial spirit with an interest in producing material that supports technical innovation.

Thanks to <http://www.icantgetpublished.com> for the article.