

# Introduction to Technical Writing Part 2

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# Agenda – August 28

- Tips on writing clearly and concisely
- Tips on how to get your foot in the door as a technical writer
- Tips on how to get technical writing contracts
- Resources



# Tips on writing clearly and concisely

# General writing tips – voice and tense

## ■ Use the active voice:

- Avoid: The attribute is set to ...
- Use: Set the attribute to ...

## ■ Use the present tense:

- Avoid: OSS applications will interact with the network...
- Use: OSS applications interact with the network...

# General writing tips – latinisms & contractions

- Avoid latinisms
  - Avoid: e.g., i.e.
  - Use: for example, that is to say
  - Per and via may be acceptable, depending on the organization
- Do not use contractions, for example: don't, can't...

# General writing tips - verbs

- Use simple verbs
  - Use change, not alter
  - Use position, not orient
  - Use choose, not select
  - Use end, not terminate
- Use “want” or “need”, not “wish” or “desire”
- Repetition is good, variety is bad.

# General writing tips

- Change “once” to “when” or “after” unless you mean “one time”
  - Weak: Once you have finished configuring ....close the form
  - Better: When you have finished....
- Change “if” to “when”. Use “if” for an unlikely scenario
  - Weak: **if** the template is updated, import it across files
  - Better: **When** you have updated the template, import it ....
  - Unlikely scenario: ***if*** the system fails, reinstall the software.
- Change “either of them” to “one of them” or “both of them” – either is ambiguous
- Avoid noun strings:
  - Weak: Administration evaluation session
  - Better: Session to evaluate our administration

# Edit for conciseness - redoubled words

- Watch for redoubled words, and choose one:
  - Mutual agreement (agreement)
  - Consensus of opinion (consensus)
  - Whether or not (whether)
  - Future prospects (prospects)
  - Reconsider again (reconsider)
  - Inadvertent error (error)

# Edit for conciseness - intensifiers and qualifiers

- Omit intensifiers and qualifiers:

- Very
- Extremely
- A considerable amount of
- Really
- Definitely
- To a certain extent

# Edit for conciseness - formulaic phrases

- Avoid formulaic phrases:
  - For the purpose of (to)
  - At this point in time (now)
  - With regard to (about)
  - As the case may be (--)
  - Due to the fact that (because)
  - In the near future (soon)
  - In view of the fact that (because)
  - Basically (--)

# Edit for conciseness - weasel words

## ■ Avoid weasel words

### □ Weak:

- A surprising **aspect** of most labor negotiations is their friendly **quality**.

### □ Better:

- Most labor negotiations are surprisingly friendly

### □ Weak:

- The **fact** of the war had the **effect** of causing many changes.

### □ Better:

- The war caused many changes.

# Edit for conciseness - weasel words (2)

- Omit “weasel” words if possible
  - Aspect
  - Case
  - Fact
  - Feature
  - Field
  - Kind
  - Matter
  - Nature
  - Problem
  - Quality
  - Situation
  - Sort
  - Thing
  - Type

# Edit for conciseness

## ■ Weak:

- The program is considered **to be** effective.

## ■ Better:

- The program is considered effective OR
- The program is effective.

## ■ Weak:

- Because of the terrain **being** rough.

## ■ Better:

- Because of the rough terrain.

# Edit for conciseness - Avoid passive verbs

## ■ Weak:

- It is felt** that an exercise program **should be attempted** by this patient before any surgery **is performed**.

## ■ Better:

- The patient should attempt an exercise program before surgery.

## ■ Weak:

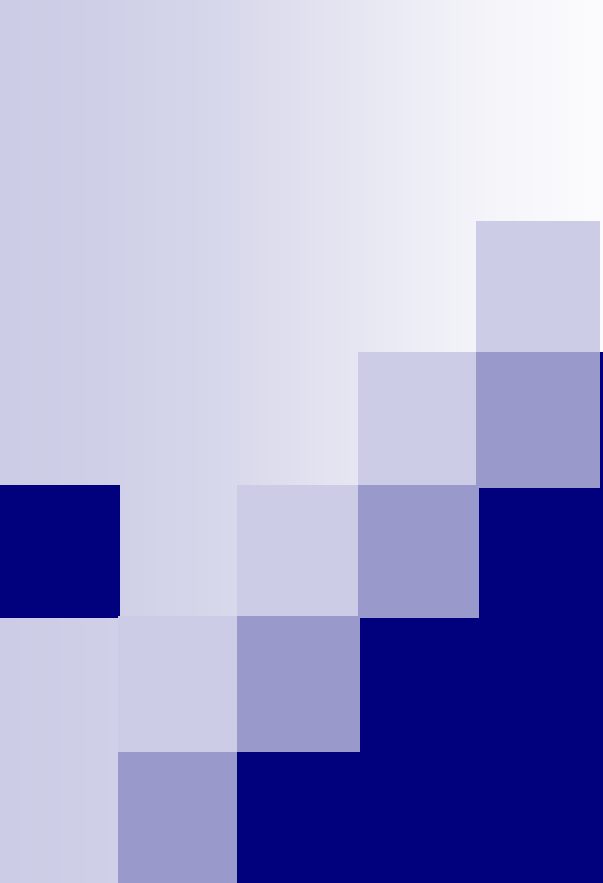
- The beveling jig **is said** by most users **to be** faulty.

## ■ Better:

- Most users say the beveling jig is faulty.

# Spelling

- Use the spell checker
- Learn the difference between words that sound similar but are spelled differently
- Master the rules of capitalization



# Tips on how to get your foot in the door as a technical writer

# Trends in technical writing (1)

- Some technical writing jobs require writing and programming skills such as writing code, JavaScript, or XML.
- Some jobs combine technical writing with
  - instructional design or information architecture
  - industry-specific skills such as statistics for insurance writing, and skills in interviewing, managing, or design.

# Trends in technical writing (2)

- Outsourcing—shifts costs away from internal to external (more contract work)
- Offshoring—sends technical documentation work overseas (but there have been negative outcomes)
- Single Sourcing—create multiple documents from a single content file (using Framemaker)

# Reality

- If you have no experience as a tech writer, it's difficult to get hired as one
- To obtain experience
  - volunteer to help with writing user guides for start-ups
  - Work with an experienced tech writer
- Take courses

# Technical writing training

- Algonquin College

- Full-time technical Writing - 1 year program

- University degree/college diploma and writing samples

- [www.algonquincollege.com/technical\\_writer](http://www.algonquincollege.com/technical_writer)

- Continuing Education

- for example: Technical Editing, Framemaker

- University of Utah

- Online graduate program in technical writing

# Getting your foot in the door

- Network – attend professional events
- Learn the tools:
  - Framemaker, Webworks, Robohelp, Dreamweaver
- Register with agencies
- Create a version of your resume that emphasizes your writing experience and technical background
  - Some companies may favor writers with technical background over “traditional” technical writers
- Create a portfolio
- Prepare for a writing test

# Create a portfolio (1)

- Make a portfolio that showcases how organized, professional, and detail-oriented you are
- Organize your samples into logical categories
- Examples of what to include:
  - Technical: user manuals, functional specifications
  - Marketing collateral: brochures, flyers, newsletters, articles
  - Research papers, proposals, essays
  - Online help, tutorials
  - Web pages
  - Test plans and verification reports
  - Illustrations, drawings, photographs

# Create a portfolio (2)

- Be prepared to explain your role in creating each example
- Add a preface, Table of Contents, and tabs for the sections
- Add any written kudos you received on the material
- Place in a professional binder

# Prepare for the writing test (1)

- Be prepared for questions about:
  - Document development cycle
  - Hardware or software development life cycle
  - Printing and production
  - Creating technical documentation from specifications
- Be prepared for questions that require essay-type responses

# Prepare for the writing test (2)

- Be prepared for exercises on restructuring information
  - Reorganization or rearrangement
  - Chunking
  - Simplified/controlled English
  - Substantive editing
    - Organization
    - Comprehensiveness
  - Proofreading:
    - Grammar
    - Spelling, punctuation
    - Vocabulary

# Prepare for the writing test (3)

- What are they looking for?
  - Language knowledge
    - Vocabulary
    - Grammar, spelling, punctuation
    - Organization, structure
  - Technical aptitude or expertise
  - Attention to detail
  - Ability to work to deadlines



# Tips on how to get technical writing contracts

# Resources

- STC local chapter  
[www.stceo.org](http://www.stceo.org)
- Tech writer site (the classic)  
<http://www.techwr-l.com/techwhirl/>
- American Medical Writers Association in Canada  
<http://www.amwa-canada.ca>
- Technical writing in general  
<http://www.usernomics.com/documentation.html>

# Agencies that place tech writers

- Aija

- <http://www.ajja.com/>

- Procom

- [www.procom.ca](http://www.procom.ca)

- CNC Global

- [www.cncglobal.com](http://www.cncglobal.com)

- Adecco

- <http://www.adecco.ca/>

- Ian Martin

- [www.ianmartin.com](http://www.ianmartin.com)

- Robert Half

- [www.roberthalftechnology.com/](http://www.roberthalftechnology.com/)

# Job sites

- Monster

[www.monster.ca](http://www.monster.ca)

- Workopolis

[www.workopolis.ca](http://www.workopolis.ca)

- Ottawa Job Shop

[www.ottawajobshop.ca](http://www.ottawajobshop.ca)

- Working (Canadian, by city)

[www.working.com](http://www.working.com)



# Questions



Thank You