

Chapter 1

Why Technical People Needn't Fear Writing

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Writing in the technical workplace is important because _____.
 - a) paper trails prove due diligence
 - b) work teams are often dispersed
 - c) every project requires documentation
 - d) all of the above
2. Poor communication _____.
 - a) is costly
 - b) can cause even well-engineered projects to fail
 - c) wastes time
 - d) all of the above
3. Which of the following is NOT true about the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe in 2006?
 - a) Email warnings of the impending problem were ignored.
 - b) Email warnings contained an inappropriate tone and/or unclear message.
 - c) A technical glitch prevented intended recipients from receiving email warnings.
 - d) Eleven workers died.
4. Which of the following attributes is most important when learning how to write technically?
 - a) a knack for wordplay
 - b) the ability to follow rules, guidelines, and principles
 - c) knowledge of modern literature and poetry
 - d) creativity and imagination
5. Technical professionals spend _____ per cent of their time communicating in writing on the job.
 - a) less than 5
 - b) 10–15
 - c) 20–40
 - d) more than 40
6. Which of the following is a key attribute of good technical writing?
 - a) conciseness
 - b) standardization
 - c) translatability
 - d) complexity
7. Which of the following is the best location to state your main idea in an email?
 - a) first paragraph
 - b) middle paragraph
 - c) concluding paragraph

- d) It doesn't matter, so long as it is in bold or underlined.
8. Common categories of audiences of technical writing do NOT include _____.
a) decision makers
b) experts
c) general readers
d) watch makers
9. General readers of a report may _____.
a) influence decisions even when they don't have decision-making power
b) carry out the actions described in the document
c) require detailed technical information
d) need technical terms to be defined
10. Which of the following is true about agents?
a) They don't have a lot of time, so they require brief summaries.
b) They appreciate a clear explanation of why changes are necessary.
c) They have a thorough understanding of the technical details of your report.
d) They require frequent graphics and illustrations.
11. On the subject of brainstorming, the textbook recommends _____.
a) avoiding brainstorming when writing in highly technical fields
b) creating an outline before brainstorming
c) brainstorming with your audience and purpose in mind
d) disregarding audience and purpose so as to be able to find all ideas
12. Organizing content means putting information into the following sequence: _____.
a) Context, summary, details, next step
b) Details, content, summary, next step
c) Summary, context, details, next step
d) Introduction, details, next step, closing summary
13. An email or letter is like _____.
a) a one-time thing
b) a two-dimensional drawing
c) a three-pronged approach
d) a one-way conversation
14. The purpose of a document _____.
a) can be implied
b) is communicated by document type (e.g., email, report, essay)
c) need not be stated when there is a clear title
d) belongs in the opening statement
15. Generally, correspondence and reports require _____.
a) data

- b) conflict
 - c) clear solutions to problems
 - d) follow-up
16. The “conversation with the reader” refers to _____.
- a) an essay-style of writing more suited to topics in the humanities
 - b) a good way to think of technical documents, especially emails and letters
 - c) a poor way to think of technical documents, especially emails and letters
 - d) something that can take place only after the reader has read the writer’s report
17. The “conversation with the reader” requires a qualification, namely that _____.
- a) the reader isn’t able to ask any qualifying questions
 - b) the reader and writer must be in contact via email or share instant-messaging software
 - c) the reader and writer adhere to professionalism in their conversation
 - d) the writer needn’t provide all the details because a face-to-face conversation will eventually take place
18. Which of the following statements about writing in technical fields is FALSE?
- a) Correspondence and reports require follow-up.
 - b) You write because something has to get done.
 - c) Writing is an integral part of getting things done.
 - d) Urge readers to grant requests—but never stipulate deadlines.
19. Which of the following statements about summaries is FALSE?
- a) Readers may safely read only the summary, not the full document.
 - b) One should think of the summary as not being part of the report at all.
 - c) A summary should be the same length as the introduction.
 - d) A summary should be one-tenth the length of the total report.
20. When writing your first draft, which of the following should you NOT do?
- a) Imagine that you are sitting across the desk from your reader.
 - b) Write unselfconsciously, with no fear of judgement.
 - c) Think of it as a one-way conversation.
 - d) Pay careful attention to spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
21. When revising a draft, a writer should revise in stages. These stages, in the correct order, are _____.
- a) substantive editing (content and sequence), copy editing (tone and style), proofreading (grammar and mechanics)
 - b) copy editing (tone and style), substantive editing (content and sequence), proofreading (grammar and mechanics)
 - c) proofreading (grammar and mechanics), substantive editing (content and sequence), copy editing (tone and style)
 - d) The editing stages—substantive editing, copy editing, and proofreading—are discrete; however, their order does not matter.

22. Readers who will be directed to carry out actions described in a document are considered _____.
a) employees
b) technicians
c) agents
d) staff
23. In technical writing with multiple audiences, the needs of _____ should be considered most strongly.
a) technical experts
b) citizens
c) decision makers
d) stakeholders
24. Which of the following elements is most useful to decision-makers?
a) appendices
b) clear instructions and procedures
c) summaries
d) graphics and illustrations
25. It is best to write your first draft _____.
a) without stopping
b) whenever you have time
c) without a plan
d) one sentence at a time

True or False Questions

1. Communication in the technical workplace almost always requires writing.
2. Technical writing should be regarded as a skill—not as a gift.
3. Technical people are poorly positioned to learn to write well.
4. Few projects in the technical workplace require documentation.
5. Writing creates a paper trail that negates due diligence.
6. The tone of emails is often incorrectly perceived.
7. The absence of communicative body language is something a writer must overcome.
8. What makes technical and business writing effective also makes literary writing effective.
9. Ignored emails can be linked to serious catastrophes.
10. Technical writers should develop the habit of thinking like a reader.
11. Attributes of good technical writing include complexity.
12. A writer should begin revising a document by editing for grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

13. A writer should think of the summary as an integral or essential part of the document.
14. Good correspondence and reports should not require follow-up.
15. Emails are primarily a tool of convenience and a writer should not spend much time fussing over the organization and formatting of emails.

Short Answer Questions

1. What does it mean to write *concisely*? Why is writing concisely so important in technical writing?
2. Define *accessibility* as it pertains to technical writing. Describe one way to achieve accessibility when writing technical documents.
3. What is the very first step in the writing process? Why is this step important?
4. Define the meaning of *audience* as it pertains to technical writing. Why is it important to consider your audience before you begin to write?
5. Write a brief summary comparing the different requirements of decision makers, experts, agents, and general readers.
6. Draw a diagram illustrating the standard document organization as a conversation or story. Why do you think this particular structure is effective at getting the message across?
7. What does it mean to think of correspondence as a “one-way conversation”? Why is this a helpful way of approaching a technical writing task?
8. Describe the parallels between writing a technical report and writing a story.
9. Why is it important to write your first draft in one pass, without stopping?
10. What does “mechanics” refer to in relation to writing? Why is this element important?

Long Answer Questions

1. Describe a situation—at school, at work, or at home—in which some form of written communication was misunderstood. What were the consequences of this miscommunication? Next, identify the cause of the miscommunication. How would you revise the piece of writing to make it more effective?
2. Describe the similarities and differences between written correspondence and having a face-to-face conversation.
3. Recall a situation in which you read a technical document that you had difficulty understanding. What category of reader were you? Describe point by point, what was ineffective about this written document and what could have been done differently to make it more effective.

Answer Key

Multiple Choice Questions

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. d | 14. d |
| 2. d | 15. d |
| 3. c | 16. b |
| 4. b | 17. a |
| 5. c | 18. d |
| 6. a | 19. c |
| 7. a | 20. d |
| 8. d | 21. a |
| 9. d | 22. c |
| 10. b | 23. c |
| 11. c | 24. c |
| 12. c | 25. a |
| 13. d | |

True or False Questions

- | | |
|-------------|--------------|
| 1. T | 9. T |
| 2. T | 10. T |
| 3. F | 11. F |
| 4. F | 12. F |
| 5. F | 13. F |
| 6. T | 14. F |
| 7. T | 15. F |
| 8. F | |

Short Answer Questions

1. To write concisely means to write as briefly as possible, while remaining clear and complete. Writing concisely is important because the more words you take to say something, the longer it will take for others to read. This can result in your message not getting across, as readers may get confused or lose interest and stop reading altogether.
2. Accessibility means that readers can find the specific information they require easily and without having to read the entire document. One way this can be achieved is through grouping topics together and using bullet points. Another is to use headings and subheadings. Writing concisely also helps with accessibility as it will ensure that important information is not buried amongst irrelevant information
3. The very first step in the writing process is to determine your purpose. Usually, your purpose involves trying to inform your readers or get them to do something. This step is important because your purpose impacts every other aspect of your writing, including its content and

tone. If you lack a clear purpose, your readers will be unsure of what you want them to know or do, which will waste both your and your readers' time.

4. Your audience is the person or people to whom you're writing. It is important to consider your audience before you begin to write as different audiences have different needs in terms of the information they require and how such information must be presented. For example, a fellow technician will not need to have technical terms defined for them, nor will they need an explanation as to why a particular piece of equipment is necessary—an accountant, on the other hand, might.
5. Decision makers require brief summaries, definitions of technical terms, and your thoughts on what you consider to be the most likely outcome of what you're recommending; experts require detailed technical information, helpful tables and illustrative figures, and possibly appendices; agents require clear instructions and/or procedures and a clear explanation of how changes will affect their job; general readers require definitions of technical terms, frequent graphics to illustrate technical concepts, and descriptions of how the content of the document will affect them.
6. A diagram should look similar to Figure 1.3. Answers may vary, but this particular structure may be effective at getting the message across because it is logical and reflects how people learn and take in information. For example, the main point should come first because it informs readers of the overarching idea and provides context for understanding all other details that follow.
7. Thinking of correspondence as a “one-way conversation” means to think of the document as a conversation without the reader being there to ask clarifying questions. This is a helpful way of approaching a technical writing task because it encourages you to write in a logical, organized manner similar to the way a conversation would naturally flow, beginning with the main idea or request, followed by contextual information, important details, and next steps. It also helps you to find the proper tone.
8. Both written documents and stories contain a beginning, middle, and end. In the beginning of a story you introduce the context or scene; likewise, in a technical report, you describe the contextual circumstances that have led up to the writing of the report. Next, you tell the story or describe the situation that is the basis of your report. Lastly, you make explicit the moral or meaning of the story, or in the case of a report, the conclusion or takeaway message. Unlike a story, however, a report will also include a summary that condenses the whole report into one-tenth the length of the original.
9. It is important to write your first draft without stopping to correct yourself so that you write as simply and as clearly as you speak when you explain something in a conversation. In this mode of writing, you do not stop to second-guess yourself or tweak your grammar—grammar and mechanics can be worked on later.

10. “Mechanics” concerns things such as consistent margins, parallel headings, and capitalization. Proper mechanics is an important element of a polished piece of writing because it signals attention to detail and respect for form, which in turn signals professionalism; it also enhances the accessibility and readability of the document.

Long Answer Questions

1. Answers will vary. Consequences (primarily experienced by the reader) may include carrying out the wrong instructions, not understanding the urgency or importance of the message, and hurt feelings. Broadly felt consequences may include wasted time and money, stress and anxiety, and animosities amongst involved individuals. Possible causes of miscommunication may include poor word choice, inappropriate tone, unclear formatting, and poor organizational flow of content.
2. Answers will vary, but should include the following details: Both written correspondence and face-to-face conversations follow the same logical flow of conveying information. For example, you start by stating your main idea or request, followed by an explanation of why you are making the request or why the statement is important, followed by specific details, and next steps. The difference is that in written correspondence, the conversation is one-way and the reader is not able to ask any clarifying questions. This means that all necessary details must be included. Furthermore, in written correspondence, you do not have the benefit of being able to give and receive body language, thus making it all the more important that you explain things clearly and with the appropriate tone.
3. Answers will vary. An example situation is having to read instructions on how to use a new piece of equipment as a technician (agent) within an organization. Potential problems with the document may be that it assumes prior knowledge, or does not contain all necessary information; it may contain an excessive number of technical terms that are unfamiliar to you at your level of expertise; it may lack visual illustrations or diagrams to help you understand procedures; it may contain poor organizational setup, perhaps lacking a numbered list to help you understand the proper sequence of steps.