Technical Communication: A Brief Introduction

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Agenda

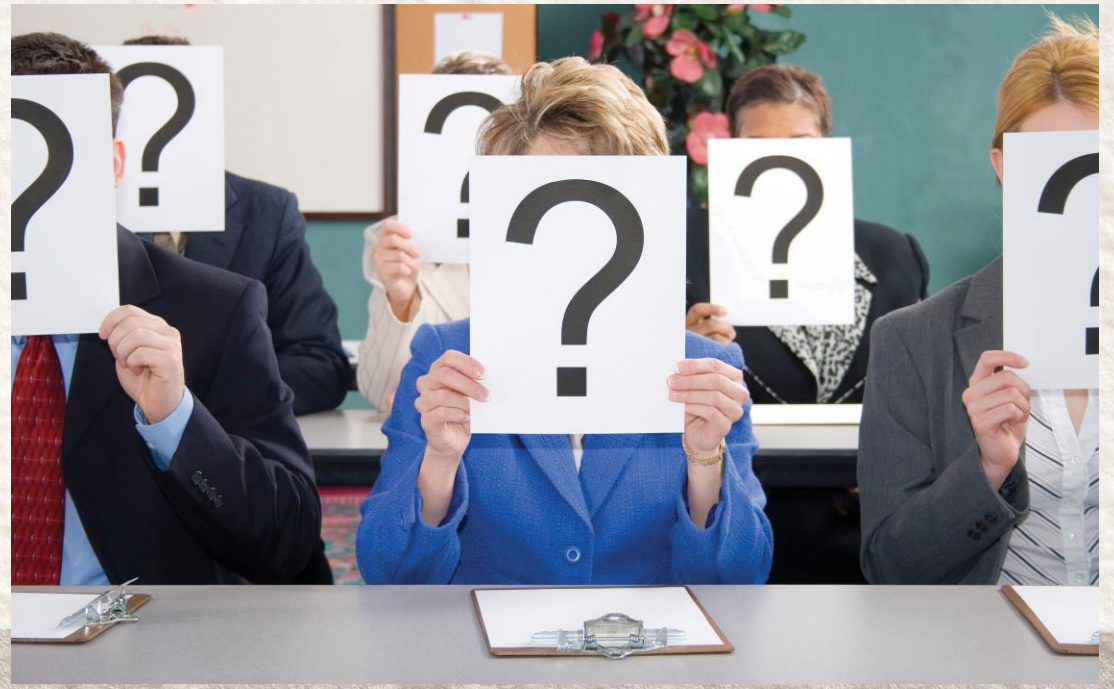
1. What is Technical Communication?
2. Some Principles of Technical Communication
3. Types of Technical Communication

What is Technical Communication?

- Technical Communication is the **teaching some practical skills at a distance**.
- Teachers can customize their lessons on the fly to suit the learner's skills and difficulties.
- But written documents cannot (easily).
- Write like a teacher, and not like a student (or a Wikipedian).

Know your audience

- Who they are.
- What they already know.
- What they do not know.
- What they need to know.
- Do your research.



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Structure and Organization

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- Users will read documentation in fragments and out-of-order.
- Well structured documents facilitate such non-linear reading.
- Write documents with lots of repeating patterns (parallelism).
- Consider the graphical design as well.

Accuracy

- Documentation must be consistent with both itself and with the product.
- Documents should be updated alongside their products.
- Like with software libraries, reuse as much as possible.

Completeness

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- Provide the audience with all the information; nothing more or less.
- Always keep the reader's goal in mind.
- Allow readers to find additional help if they need it.

Concreteness

- People learn and reason more effectively with familiar things from everyday life.
- Create analogies.
- Use examples.
- Provide exact information.

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Clarity and Style

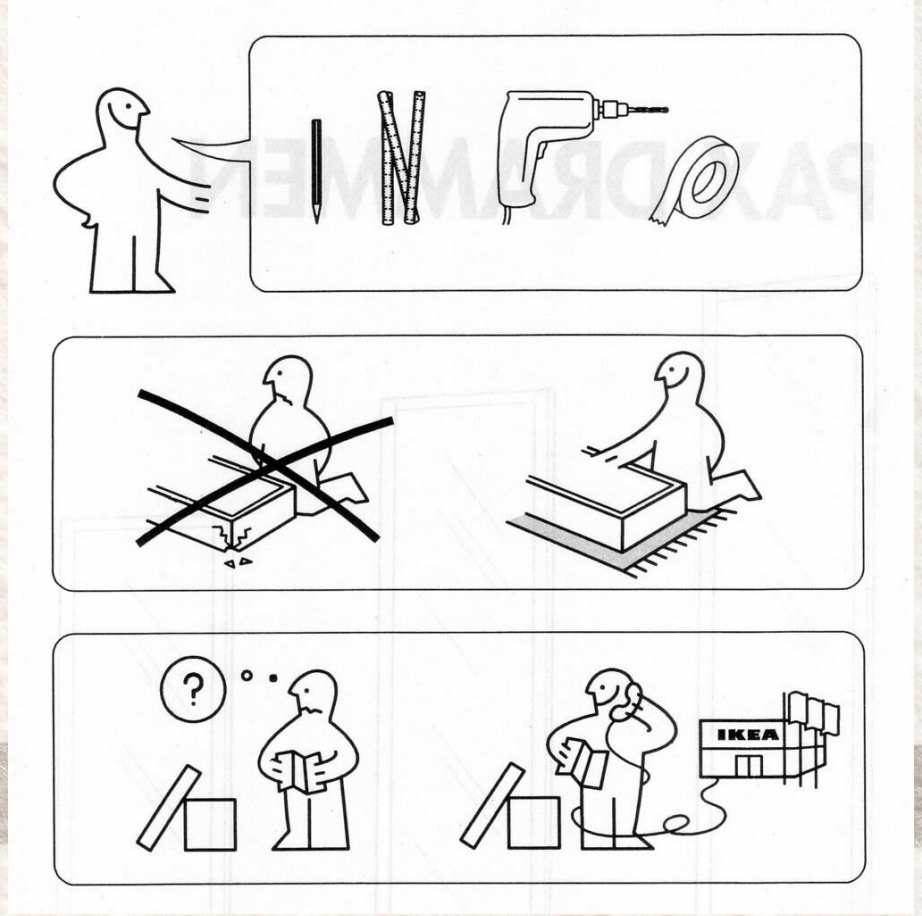
- Write short and grammatically simple sentences.
- Write coherently and without ambiguity.
- Use the style guide to keep your writing consistent.

Types of Technical Documents

- Instructions and Tutorials
- Reports
- Proposals and White Papers
- Presentations

Instructions and Tutorials

- Step-by-step guide for users to preform some task.
- Purely informational.
- Should follow some set guidelines.



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Reports

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- A summary of past events.
- Has a specific audience (e.g., financial reports for executives, test reports for engineering).
- More formal, needs for follow industry standards or regulator requirements.
- Purely informational.

Proposals and White Papers

- An outline for some future action.
- Written to persuade the audience, unlike reports or instructions.
- White papers: short persuasive documents with some technical content.

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Presentations

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- Unlike most technical writing, involves both writing and speaking.
- Can have any number of goals.
- Should have some more flexibility, allowing the presenter to react the circumstances.

Thank you for your time!

- Further reading:
  - Carey, M., Lanyi, M. M., Longo, D., Radzinski, E., Rouiller, S., & Wilde, E. (2014). *Developing quality technical information: A handbook for writers and editors* (Third edition). IBM Press.
  - White, M. (2005, August 13). List of place names in English with non-intuitive unpredictable pronunciations. *WikiWatch*. http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/wikiwoo2.htm#13Aug