

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Key concepts all technical writers should know.



AUDIENCE



PURPOSE



CONTEXT

Framing your thinking around these 3 concepts is the first step of any technical communication. Performing an audience and task analysis will structure your entire project and keep it user-centered.

USER CENTERED & TASK ORIENTED

Technical writing must be created with the end user in mind at all times. Beyond that, it must be created in a task-oriented manner which focuses on improving how users can accomplish their tasks.

THE BIG PICTURE

How does your project fit within the bigger project development picture? What software development methodology do you need to align your documentation project with? Who do you need to talk to to get the right information at the right time?

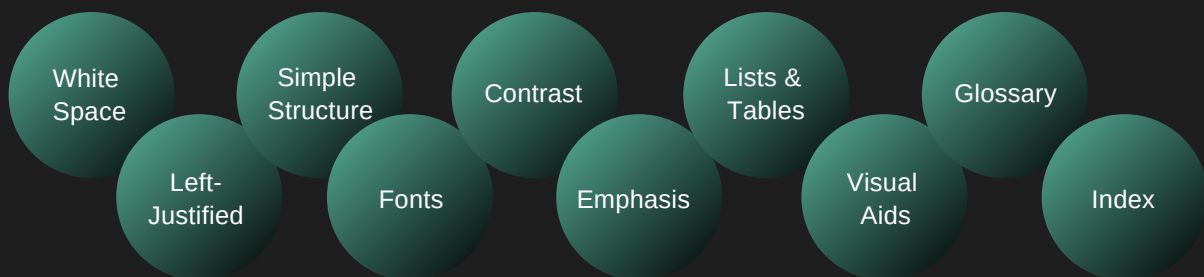
DOCUMENT DESIGN

SIMPLE

LOGICAL

CONSISTENT

Content Design should be simple, logical and consistent to make sure that it is retrievable, readable and usable.



PROJECT PLANNING PROCESS Key components of a project plan

“Technical Writers spend more time researching, planning, reviewing, designing and analyzing than actually writing material.”
- Mary Preston

Purpose

Scope

Objectives

Requirements

Definitions

Audience

Constraints

Timelines

Controls

Team & Responsibilities

Cost Estimate

Reviews



Did you know that technical writers spend more time planning projects than writing projects? It's true. Without a solid plan in place, projects can quickly get off track.

RESEARCH/LEARNING TECHNICAL MATERIAL

Any technical writing project needs to be grounded in solid research. Where can you look to find the background information you need to produce solid technical communication:

- **Engineering Reports**
- **Engineering Specification Sheets**
- **Technical Team Documents**
- **Email Communications**
- **Prototypes**
- **Marketing Materials**
- **Internal Repositories**

COLLABORATING WITH THE EXPERTS

Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) can make or break your technical writing project. Here are things to keep in mind when collaborating with SMEs.

- **They're busy.**
- **They have more important things to do than to talk to you.**
- **They don't always value documentation.**
- **The can be the key to a great final document.**

TYPES OF TECHNICAL DOCUMENTATION

- **User Manuals**
- **Tutorials**
- **Quick Reference Guides**
- **Online Help**
- **Social Media**
- **Procedural Documentation**
- **Reference Information**

STYLE GUIDES

Style Guides keep documents consistent. They outline the following:

- **Terms**
- **Grammar and Punctuation Rules**
- **Formatting**
- **Font Choices**
- **Referencing**

GRAPHICS

Graphics come in all forms. Only use graphics to help the users complete their tasks. Don't add graphics just to dress up the document.

Types of Graphics:

- **Lists**
- **Tables**
- **Icons**
- **Photographs**
- **Drawings**
- **Charts**
- **Diagrams**
- **Screen Captures**

REVIEW PROCESS

The purpose of a review is to ensure that the user has been advocated for. Reviews ensure that the document is user and task-focused. Additionally, reviews check for omissions, errors and overall document usability.

Here are the minimum review gates:

- 1. Documentation plan, draft layout design, and outline.**
- 2. First draft review.**
- 3. Final review of release candidate.**
- 4. Production readiness review.**

REFERENCES

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Preston, M. (2019). TWR2004. [Lecture notes]. Centre for Continuing and Online Learning, Algonquin College, Ottawa.