

# CPD example 1

John, a senior technical author in a large organisation

Activity	Points
<b>Year 1</b>	
Attended Technical Communication UK (TCUK) – fully residential, all three days.	30
Attended a local area group – topic: ‘DITA’.	2
Read article in <i>Communicator</i> about DITA, which (together with local area group) led him to 3 hours of investigation into possible strategies for implementation.	3
Course related to his chartered engineer status – but identified areas that non-engineers may find confusing that relate to a current project. An hour of the 6-hour course, leading to a 1-hour review of the documentation and a 1-hour discussion (sharing the knowledge with the team).	3
Attended an engineering-focused conference, but identified other technical communicators and had lunch with them. Hour-long discussion about how best to portray some types of information. Came away with some new ideas.	1
<b>Year 2</b>	
Introducing a new authoring tool at work. Attended online webinars to learn how to use it (4 x 2-hour sessions).	8
Attended TCUK – but busy at work so could only go for one day.	8
Presented summary of topics from the TCUK day to his team (2-hour session, 4 hours preparation time).	6
<b>Total for both years</b>	<b>61</b>

## Evidence to support the claim of 30 points for attendance at TCUK (3 days)

John can provide a lot of evidence to support his claim that he attended TCUK:

- A certificate of attendance is given by the ISTC.
- The programme, which itemises each of the sessions, enabling John to indicate which he attended.
- His notes from the sessions he attended.

Depending on the depth and content of John’s notes, he may not need to write any more. However, notes tend to be descriptive, summarising what was said, rather than analytical, explaining what was learned.

A short reflection based on one of the themes at the conference may look like this, remembering that it, together with the other evidence, is supporting 30 points of CPD:

Accessibility is something that I’ve been aware of but always thought it didn’t apply to the documents I write. I’d only really thought of accessibility in terms of websites, and in providing information in different formats (I was aware people could ask for large-print

versions of letters and books) but neither of those seemed particularly relevant to my work. The big shock was at lunch – we were talking about one of the morning’s sessions that I hadn’t been able to attend, and someone mentioned colour blindness. It slowly dawned on me that we used traffic-light graphs throughout the documentation (and the equipment) to show when something is safe and when it isn’t. Not being able to tell the difference between the green (everything is fine) and red (something needs doing, urgently) could be a real issue. I attended the next session on accessibility, and also spoke to the presenter of the one I had missed during the afternoon break.

Back at work, I asked around – and wasn’t really surprised to find that no-one had considered colour-blindness at all. I was asked to investigate further and shared what information I gathered. We used what I learned – and a web resource that helped us see what our application might look like to someone who is red-green colour blind – to decide what needed to be changed, both in the documentation and to the indicators on the equipment.

I updated our QA procedures to incorporate checks for accessibility, and part of the planning process now involves thinking about accessibility issues. We’re working on an accessibility checklist, focusing on those areas likely to be an issue for our users.

## Evidence to support the claim of 3 points from a course related to John’s status as a Chartered Engineer

John may be able to provide evidence to support his claim that he attended the event:

- A certificate of attendance may be provided.
- An overview of the course, describing the topics covered, may enable John to indicate which were relevant.
- His notes from the course.

There is a big difference between this and his attendance at TCUK. Attendance at a conference targeted at technical communicators has an assumed relevance, although a short reflective account adds weight. Here, the relevance of a course not targeted at technical communicators must be explicitly stated. The reflection may look something like this – and note that it doesn’t have to be written all at once:

10 June

The third session of the morning – ‘Changing terminology in mechanical engineering’ – was extremely relevant to my role as a technical communicator. I already knew that some of the terms I had learned at university were either no longer used or had acquired a slightly different meaning – but this change had happened so gradually, that I’d forgotten about it. Now we were looking to standardise some of our terms to make sure that we could communicate with engineers in other English-speaking countries and I realised we had to modify our internal terms to match international standards.

It makes perfect sense, but I realised that we might have a short-term problem. During the transition period, we were going to have people who were used to the older terminology (or the old meaning of some of the terms) and people who had never known it. We needed to find a clear way to introduce the new terms while still helping those who did not recognise them. We also might need to revisit some of the changes in the more recent past – it explains some of the support calls we’ve been getting since expanding our range of equipment into new areas, where people have been confused by instructions

that have worked well in the past. Maybe a different sector uses slightly different terminology?

25 June

On return to the office, I analysed details of support calls – and most of the confusion came from the agricultural sector. Further investigation was required – discussions were held with trainers and engineers in that sector, and we discovered some differences in terms.

The existing documentation was reviewed to see the scope of the issue – and fortunately it was reasonably easy to identify the problem terms.

Discussed with the term the best way to clarify the terms and relate them to what the users may be used to in that particular sector. We had to use consistent terminology – we would only perpetuate the problem otherwise – but needed to provide a ‘translation’.

Decided to highlight any important terms and include them in a glossary, together with possible alternatives.

What had I learned? Another aspect of controlled terminology – that you have to consider the transition period very carefully if controlling your terminology involves changing it.