

## Part 1 Writing for Technical Communication

### 1 Global authoring: writing for a global audience

*Lorcan Ryan*

Despite the paradigm of the English language functioning as a global *lingua franca*, the majority of the world's population is unable to speak, read or understand the English language. In the realm of digital content, the languid assumption that global information consumers *probably* speak and understand English has resulted in a situation where professional publishers of digital documentation have focused their efforts on optimizing content for native speakers of English, at the exclusion of the requirements of the other groups that make up a global audience.

### 2 The case for ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English

*Mike Unwalla and Ciaran Dodd*

This book shows the challenges that face technical communicators today. We are a long way from conventional paper manuals, linear documents and static illustrations. Now we have video tutorials, graphic only instructions, mobile technology and adaptive content. Do text-based tools like ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English® (ASD-STE100) still have a role? Our answer is emphatically yes.

### 3 Why do we take the people out of our writing?

*Kirstie Edwards*

What and how we write conveys a representation of ourselves, and we have many choices over how we construct this self-representation'. The choices we make over what to include and how conveys messages about us. In academic and professional writing we work within many constraints and often leave ourselves out as much as possible. I argue in this chapter that we should aim to bring more of ourselves into our writing and keep the 'constructed' identity in our writing as close to our genuine personalities as possible. I'm here writing this for you to read.

### 4 A change in tone

*Ellis Pratt*

Some organizations are changing the way they write User Assistance, and are, for some content, not using the traditional, generally accepted, best practices. Through web analytics and other measures, they are reporting a noticeable benefit from making these changes. The reason for making these changes is due to people's relationship with technology changing, and a desire by organizations to deliver better forms of User Assistance. However, there is no one right answer, you will need to experiment to see what works best for your organization.

### 5 "No manuals" – writing user interface copy

*Andy Healey*

As software becomes easier to use, some technical writers are embracing the opportunity to provide 'front-line' help by designing and writing user interface (UI) copy.

Drawing on their inherent language expertise and empathy with users, technical writers are embedded into product design teams, helping to create simple and usable software.

From button labels to tooltips, this chapter will introduce you to producing ‘invisible’ help to guide users through their journey.

## 6 Technical communication and accessibility

*Klaus Schubert and Franziska Heidrich*

Accessibility is a central notion in current societal debate. In this context, accessibility is often viewed primarily as an attempt at designing public buildings, means of transport, websites or printed documents in such a way that they can be used by people with disabilities. These are technical measures aimed at persons with mobility or perceptual disabilities. If successful, they allow the targeted group to perceive a certain piece of information. But what if the problem lies in understanding the contents? The present contribution, therefore, is concerned with linguistic and communicational measures intended to enable audiences with various kinds of abilities to perceive and understand information and to actively engage in communication.

## Part 2 Resources for Technical Communicators

## 7 Scalable video production for technical communicators

*Jody Byrne*

The idea of using video to communicate technical information is nothing new. For many years video has been used to great effect to provide technical training, software demonstrations and simulations. Recently, the increased availability and usability of video production tools, as well as the steady improvements in the infrastructure needed to deliver them, mean that increasing numbers of people and organizations are using video to explain how things work.

Even a cursory search through YouTube reveals countless how-to videos and tutorials on a vast range of technical subjects produced by professionals and enthusiasts alike. Clear evidence, if it were needed, that video content is no longer regarded as a high-tech novelty or as a ‘nice to have’ bonus for users. Instead, many users regard videos as their first port of call when they need help, and if manufacturers don’t provide them, they’ll find someone who will.

But with the proliferation of video as a means of communicating technical information come new challenges. While producing one or two videos on an ad hoc basis is quite straightforward, developing a model for scalable video production as part of an organization’s user assistance (UA) strategy requires careful thought and planning. The fact that there are numerous ‘fan’ videos available on the Internet is a clear indication that many companies still have a long way to go in terms of producing the large volumes of instructional videos their users demand.

## 8 Managing digital complexity in technical communication

*Marie Girard and Patricia Minacori*

While technical communication teams are already busy managing growing volumes of content, new challenges arise. With the sheer diversity in authors of technical content, publication platforms, and formats available, technical communication projects tend to grow out of control. A new, more systemic approach is required to address complexity in technical communication.

In this chapter, we first discuss the origins and principles of systems thinking, and describe why this approach can help address the challenges of the growing complexity technical communicators are facing today.

Then, we describe the practical advantages of systems thinking for auditing, governing, and planning content.

We conclude that a systems-thinking approach can complement the more standard analytical approach, adding flexibility and agility to the necessary structure of content systems

## 9 Writing good API documentation: an expert's guide, by a complete beginner

*Neal Goldsmith*

This is a case study charting the author's journey from never previously having written any API (application programming interface) documentation to launching a well-received developer hub. It's intended to provide the reader with the background, understanding and inspiration needed to tackle their own API documentation project, with current best practices in mind. Through the author's learning process, the discussion considers common problems with API documentation, the difficulties that can be encountered when trying to improve documentation, how to overcome those difficulties and ultimately attempts to identify some central tenets of good API documentation.

## 10 The development of DITA XML and the need for effective content reuse

*Keith Schengili-Roberts*

DITA XML is the fastest-growing standard for structured content. In the decade since its launch, DITA has changed the way many organizations undertake their own technical documentation, as well as changed the discourse around how structured content can better communicate consistent messaging in an efficient and cost-effective manner.

## 11 Automatic documentation for software

*Andrew McFarland Campbell*

Many software products are complex and have anything from a dozen to thousands of configuration parameters. This is particularly true for distributed or cloud-based systems. Traditional documentation methods have trouble keeping up with development, especially in Agile development environments where there may be many subtly different product versions.

It is increasingly important to automate as much of the documentation process as possible, as this reduces the burden of effort required to create documentation, and because it ensures that documentation is always up to date. It also makes it much easier to produce different versions of the documentation to match the different software versions.

# Part 3 Roles of Technical Communicators

## 12 Trends in technical communication in Ireland

*Yvonne Cleary*

Technical communication is a new field in Ireland, and most technical communicators work in software environments. Worldwide, technology and globalization have altered technical communication practice considerably. This chapter reports on the findings from interviews with nine technical communication practitioners, managers and company owners, all based in Ireland. They discussed trends affecting the field, predicted future trends and made recommendations for curriculum content. The findings indicate that practice is impacted most by new media, agile development, virtual teams and off-shoring. Foundational skills such as writing and information

design should remain prominent, as technical communication curricula develop to respond to trends.

### 13 The collaborative effects of cyberspace

*David Bird*

The dawn of computer mediated communications (CMC) has been revolutionary and at the forefront of advancing human collaboration during this modern Information Age. In our bid to communicate and share information, our information technology (IT) journey has transgressed the traditional client-server model and manifested itself in the Cloud. Technological advancements we take for granted today have blurred the lines of our intellectual property sovereignty within cyberspace. This chapter discusses my contemporary historical reflection of the last 25 years or so of the World Wide Web (WWW) and the Internet that underpins it – the dominance of this virtual dominion, the future to behold because of it and the advantages and disadvantages of using it.

### 14 Creating effective, timely, and valuable documentation reviews using a risk management framework

*Annette Wierstra and Joe Sellman*

Reviews are an integral and required part of the documentation process that serve to enable content experts to give their approval. However, the authors' experiences are that reviews are often thought of as a separate entity to an overall project/process, with little or no rationale for what is needed. The authors contend that as technical communicators we can, and should, provide a useful and valuable assessment of documentation review processes at the planning, execution, and sustainment phases of a project using a risk management framework to help focus and prioritize reviews. In this chapter, the authors will discuss their own experiences in documentation review, with the aim of providing guidance and best practices that other technical communicators can use to improve and influence reviews in their own workplaces.

### 15 Training technical communication students in structured content using DITA

*Nolwenn Kerzreho*

University of Rennes 2 added DITA training to its programme in 2009. From writing topics with a text editor to collaborative migration projects, the programme has evolved significantly over time. Teaching student technical writers is, of course, very different from professional training. The younger generation have fewer bad habits to shed but need to comprehend the business drivers behind the publishing of technical content. Students are also at ease with new technologies. Nevertheless, there is considerable ground to cover to convince them of the industrial and professional usage of information within organizations and the B2B world at large.

### 16 Are AI writers capable of work in the current workplace

*Jason Lawrence and Chelsea Green*

While human professional writers can protest that Artificial Intelligence cannot possibly write better than them, that doesn't change the fact that AI can write and edit. This feasibility project accepts an AI writer can be a coworker on a team of human technical writers. Therefore, based on current technology, is it feasible to consider AI professional writers as a future trend? The answer to that question requires a review of AI principles, a survey of current technologies, and a showcase of current AI writers-some of those requirements can be completed by current AI.