



TECHNICAL WRITING AS A CRITICAL TOOL TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Dr. ARCHANA BHATNAGAR

Assistant Professor (English)

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut, (U.P.)



Dr. ARCHANA BHATNAGAR

ABSTRACT

Present century is the golden epoch in the development of technical writing and communication. Written technical communication has a pivotal role in the success of an organization because it has become the *lingua franca* of official dispatch in the spread and exchange of knowledge and trade. It is a skill to explain technical subjects and information to both technical and non-technical readers. In other words despite being scientific it is presented to the audience in a very concise and comprehensible form. In all its genres it is highly organized and therefore easy and quick to understand. It is focussed on clear writings and avoids use of bombastic and unintelligent and stylistic phraseology. According to a survey conducted by the American Society for Engineering Education on the skills most needed for engineering careers in industry today, it revealed that technical writing as communication skills ranked above all other types of skills. Out of the thirty-eight skills analyzed technical writing acquired the second place.

The significance of technical writing and communication skills are inseparable. It is any form of writing in a variety of technical and occupational fields such as computer hardware and software, engineering, robotics, finance, aeronautics, chemistry, biotechnology, consumer electronics or the I.T. sector. The writer in technical writing must have good knowledge of technical vocabulary and must be familiar with accurate usage of the words. The language should be logical, effective and free from ambiguity for communication purposes. Hence, as a critical tool of effective communication skill the prospects of technical writing are very bright in the new millennium.

KEY WORDS : Technical writing , pivotal, concise, organized, communication skill, link language.

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Communication is a two-way process and it is understood correctly when it is transmitted precisely. Hence, arises the significance of Technical Writing i.e. use of exact, easy and quick to understand terminology. Written technical communication has a pivotal role in the success of an organization. This communication is easily

obvious in English as it is presently one of the richest among the modern languages of the world although "*English is a complicated language. Its vocabulary of some half a million words can be put into sentences of almost endless complexity.*"¹

Today technical communication in English has become the *lingua franca* of official dispatch in

diplomacy, international trade and commerce, scientific spread and exchange of knowledge". *Technical writing is the writing that people use as part of their jobs or professions.*" (Paul and Riordan). It is an art to explain technical subjects and information to both technical and non-technical readers and audience. When professionals such as doctors, engineers, legal consultants, technocrats, academicians and scientists write for their organizations not only do they require technical expertise but also good writing skills to substantiate their knowledge. Its significance lies in the fact that even highly scientific, technical or subjective information is presented to the audience in a very comprehensible form.

Today, English has become the most widely spoken- cum- official language of the modern era. More than 70% of the world's scientific literature is in English language. It has become a link language for the world and for the Indians, it is no more a foreign language after Hindi. Hence, technical writing is synonymous with Professional Communication and is scientific by nature. *"In technical writing each sentence must be clear and precise. It must convey information. Other forms of writing may amuse or inspire but the prime purpose of technical writing is to inform, instruct, to explain."*²

Any literary and other types of writing not in need of a rigid format, draft or structure are regarded as general writing - whether it is prose, poetry, drama or fiction and the style may be poetic, rhetoric or elegant. On the other hand, the different genres of technical writing could be Business / Official correspondence (Letters / e-mails), Technical Articles, Abstracts, Graphic Reports, Instruction Manuals, Handouts, Posters, Research/ Scientific/ Technical Papers, Memorandums, Press Releases, Product Specifications, White Papers, Resumes, Job Applications or any kind of writing that needs a format. In the words of Robert A. Day *" There is a world of difference between literary writing and scientific writing. The one deals primarily with feelings, emotion, opinion and persuasion. The other emphasizes the dispassionate factual recording of scientific investigation."*³

The roots of technical writing can be traced to classical antiquity with works of writers and philosophers such as Aristotle or Geoffrey Chaucer's work *Treatise on the Astrolabe* which is considered to be the first technical document to be published in English. The need for documentation became a necessity with the onset of Renaissance which was an era of the urge for knowledge. The Industrial Revolution and the World War II technological advances led to an increase in consumer goods and an increased level of living. Hence, during the 20th century, the need for technical writing sky-rocketed and the profession finally became officially recognized.

The nature of technical writing or general writing is antipodal to each other. But structure and punctuation are equally important to both of them. Every new data or logic is to be explained into a new paragraph. Paragraph is considered an important organizing tool. *"Since technical writing requires proper sequence, structure and classification of details, communication cannot be effective without logical division of paragraph in a despatch ."*⁴

Punctuation holds an equal significance in both technical and general writings though the use of punctuation is getting more flexible all over the world. Generally both forms of writing follow the conventional norms but flexibility is also permissible as per requirement of the subject-matter under consideration.

Formal or technical communication has no scope for personal beliefs, emotions, biases, allegations or prejudices. Some of the main purposes for which technical writing can be used are:

- To present information clearly, comprehensively and emphatically.
 - To present information in the appropriate format.
 - To organize details with conciseness and clarity.
- The salient features of technical writing may be enumerated as given below:
- Selection of right words and phrases
 - Use of familiar, simple and quick to understand vocabulary/terms
 - Use of active voice in place of passive

- Use of concrete and specific words / terminology
- Sparing use of acronyms and abbreviations
- Avoid use of jargons and cliches
- Avoid excessive use of foreign words and phrases
- Avoid redundancy and circumlocutory phrases
- Avoid using slang and
- Avoid discriminatory / biased writing (bias could be of gender, age, race, religion, disability etc.)
- Avoid malapropism (i.e. when one word may be confused with another that it somewhat resembles to.)

Some interesting examples of malapropism are:

- An *ellipse* of the moon is a natural phenomenon. (The correct word is *eclipse*)
- *Gladiators* are iron things which emit heat. (The correct word is *Radiators*)
- When should we *accept* your next visit? (The correct word is *expect*)

Similarly, care should be taken to avoid gender biased words.

By little care and conscious effort, this discrimination can be avoided as given below:

Biased Words	Unbiased
Chairman	Chairperson
Manpower	Personnel
Businessman	Business Executive
Salesman	Salesperson

The sentences in technical writing must be logical and effective. It must be free from redundancy and foggy expressions such as :

- 6 p.m. in the evening
- Young juveniles
- Free gifts etc.
- Repeat, once more

It is always better to write precisely and in active voice rather than passive voice. Let the expression be direct such as :

Avoid	Use
Due to the fact that	Because
By hook or by crook	Anyhow
In the twinkling of an eye	In a moment
It came like a bolt from the blue	It shocked him / unexpected disaster

We extend our apologies We apologize

The significance of technical writing and communication skills is inseparable. Technical writing is a tool for enhancing communication skills in the field of technology by using clear-cut instructional terms such as 'Zoom in', 'Zoom out', 'tilt','tilt up','tilt down','re-take', 'cut', 'pack up' etc. in the field of video production in place of long, time-consuming instructions. Unless the expression is short and precise, there are chances of misinterpretation.

Technical writing is an important tool for any technical writer in the process of writing and sharing information in a professional setting. A technical writer's main task is to convey information to another person or party in the most clear and effective manner possible. The information that technical writers convey is often complex, and it is one of their main tasks to analyze the information and present it in a format that is easy to read and understand.

Therefore, technical writing is precise and as far as possible, free of errors. Such writers are focussed on clear writings and avoid using bombastic or unintelligent technical phrases and stylistic phraseology like passive voice and nominalizations. For example, in the case of preparing a user manual the writers have to point out the instructions in a very user-friendly and yet technical manner for proper use of any machinery, instrument or a gadget. Awareness of the audience's existing knowledge about the usage of a particular document is very essential along with the standard conventions of grammar and punctuation. According to a survey conducted by the American Society for Engineering Education on the skills most needed for Engineering careers in industry it revealed that communication skills ranked above all other types of skills out of the thirty-eight skills analyzed.

"These five communication skills are : Technical Writing (2nd place) ; Public Speaking (4th place) ; Working with Individuals (6th place) ; Working with Groups (7th place) ; Talking with People. (9th place) "⁵

Hence, the prospects of technical writing are all the more bright in the new millennium for it is rational,

logical, objective, easy, correct, organized and therefore quick to understand. It prefers the simple word and expression to the circumlocutory. Verbosity, bombastic words and tautology have no room in technical writing. Therefore, technical writing has become the life-line of modern-day globalized world.

Technical writing is a highly specialized expressive skill. Writing is a performing art. One can impose one's writing skills through the process of selection, organization and presentation of word-power. Any communication is but sharing of experience through activities of Role Play, Panel Discussion, Brain Storming, Buzz Group Method, Huddle Method etc. depending upon the purpose and its scope or limitations. The work environment in the new millennium is very different from what it used to be a decade ago. The most pressing need of present - day industries is effective communication and an impressive personality. Communication skills have become synonymous with effective functioning in all spheres of life. There is a strong need to develop global communication skills among learners of colleges and institutes of higher learning. Nicolas D. Sylvester in his book under the title *Engineering Education* has given data under the title "Engineering Education Must Improve the Communication Skills of its Graduates". From the data it is observed "75 percent of engineering undergraduates take jobs in industry, where at least 25 percent of an engineer's time is spent in the reporting process. As the engineer moves up the managerial ladder this time can increase to as much as 80%. ... Engineers cannot communicate, cannot spell, cannot make a sketch, have difficulty in all phases of communication with others. The student of today needs more ability than ever and a key need is to increase the ability to communicate both in speech and graphics."⁶

Technical communication and writing are different from general communication because the former involves a specific purpose and a well-defined audience. Broadly speaking technical writing has the main objectives of providing organized information facilitating in quick decision making, inviting new ventures / undertakings and expanding knowledge and awareness both in written and oral

forms. Thus, in the present day technical and business scenario, technical writing is beyond doubt serving as the life-line, the antenna and a critical tool to effective communication skills.

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BRIEF AUTO BIOGRAPHY

Myself, **Dr.Archana Bhatnagar**, born on August 6, 1958 at Udaipur (Raj.) is Ph.D. and M.Phil. (English Literature) from C.C.S. University, Meerut (U.P.) with M.A. from the University of Udaipur (Raj.). Presently I am employed as Assistant Professor (English), Department of Basic Science & Humanities, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel University of Agriculture and Technology, Meerut from the year 2003 till date. During my professional career so far I have been Member, Board of Studies; Member, Selection Committees; External Paper Setter; Syllabi Framers of a number of English courses of different universities; External Theory and Practical Examiner; Executive Editor of International Journal of " Progressive Agriculture", VOL.8.No,(2),August 2008; and Recipient of SRDA Gold Medal. I have oral presentation of 08 Research Papers, publication of 04 Research Papers, 01 chapter published in an edited book, 01 Book Review to my credit. I have a vast and versatile experience of teaching English Literature, Language and Communication & Spoken English of different degree programmes at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.