

The Technical Writer's Process

The Technical Writer's Process helps you create high-quality technical writing quickly and efficiently.

Follow these steps to effective technical writing:

1. Determine your purpose.
2. Profile your audience.
3. Brainstorm ideas.
4. Choose and sort your ideas.
5. Organize your ideas into writing plan.
6. Write the first draft.
7. Revise, correct, and rewrite.

1. DETERMINE YOUR PURPOSE

You must clearly know your purpose before you can start. Why are you writing? What is your aim or goal? What do you intend to accomplish in this letter, memo, e-mail, or report? What do you want your reader to know or to do as a result of your writing? Write your purpose in a clear sentence at the top of your worksheet.

2. PROFILE YOUR AUDIENCE

Who are you writing to? How much does your audience already know about the subject? Is the reader familiar with the terms and jargon you may need to use? What tone should you adopt? What does your reader need to know in order for you to fulfill your purpose in writing? What does your reader need to know in order to have enough information to do what you want them to do?

3. BRAINSTORM IDEAS

With your purpose and audience clearly in mind, brainstorm and write down all ideas related to the subject. Include facts and information as well as notes about writing style and approach and even vocabulary. Without limiting or rejecting anything (yet), list everything you can think of related to the subject, your purpose, and your audience. If you are working from a scenario, from a dialogue, or from a failed version of the writing, DO NOT work directly from this alone. You must take out the important ideas and put them in your own list, using your own words if possible. Work from this list in subsequent steps.

4. CHOOSE AND SORT YOUR IDEAS

Choose the best ideas that you have, and eliminate anything that will not help you to fulfill your purpose. Sort your ideas into categories. Make sure you have what you need in order to accomplish your purpose.

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5. ORGANIZE YOUR IDEAS INTO A WRITING PLAN

Create your writing plan. Further organize and order your ideas using lists, clustering, classification trees, graphs, or charts. Eliminate anything that does not directly relate to your purpose. Where should new paragraphs start? Should you use headings, lists, charts, or graphics? Do you have a writing format you are following that will help organize your writing? Review your writing plan. Will it fulfill your purpose? Are you missing any steps? Are you missing any important information?

6. WRITE THE FIRST DRAFT

Follow your plan. At this point, just write. Don't worry about grammar, word choice, or spelling, and don't let anything else distract you. Keep your purpose and audience firmly in mind, and write; keep the ideas flowing.

7. REVISE, CORRECT, AND REWRITE

First, check to make sure your writing fulfills its purpose. Is anything else needed? Could anything be taken out? If you think your reader may have any questions, answer them.

Now check to see if your writing is clear and easy to understand. Is it cohesive and easy to follow? Are headings and topic sentences appropriate?

Next, make sure your writing has both good paragraph structure and good sentence structure. Do you have a variety of sentence types?

Finally, proofread and edit your writing for any grammar, usage, and word-choice errors. Look for the kind of errors you have made in the past -- have a personal checklist built up from your own analysis and from feedback from your instructors.

Write the finished copy. Make sure your handwriting is clear and legible or that your computer-based text is formatted well.

Do a final check.