

It's Not Just Technology

Technical Communication is Human Connection

Jay R. Fude

Missouri Western University

### It's Not Just Technology

#### Technical Communication is Human Connection

Technical Communication is a term that may cause some people to avoid the field, and as technical communicators, we need to do our field justice, and open our doors to great communicators that may be put off by the technical aspect inherent in the name. This essay should help to alleviate these concerns, and help to bring understanding and comfort to people that feel that they are not technology people, and that technical writing is an intimidating concept for them.

Merriam Webster's dictionary defines technology as "The practical application of knowledge especially in a particular area" (Technology). This does not mean technology is limited to devices requiring electricity, nor is it limited to only specialized knowledge, or indeed is it limited at all. Technology merely means the application of knowledge. When a blacksmith heats metal, and hammers this heated metal into a spoon, this is technology. When a baker creates a cake, this too is technology. All human endeavors are technology, and your job as a technical communicator is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge so that someone can apply this knowledge, thus creating an instance of technology.

Killingsworth and Jones in their article, "Division of Labor or Integrated Teams" concluded that "there is a perceivable trend in the management of technical communication toward what has become known in management circles as the "self-directed team." (Killingsworth, Jones 338) This means that technical communicators are embedded in teams, and that this article, about technical communication, is about managing people, forming working

units, and how technical communicators facilitate and coordinate the team's generated documentation and knowledge. At no point was a specific type of technology mentioned, beyond the mention of what industries the respondents to their survey were in. Even in this, there was the spectrum, from computer and electronics, to government organizations, consumer products, in short, the gamut of enterprise had technical communicators responding to their survey (Killingsworth, Jones 329).

L. M. Hayes when talking about what they do sometimes describes themselves as a copywriter, and explains "I don't write software manuals, either, or anything else that most people would consider "technical." (Hayes 149) even though they work at a marketing firm that deals specifically with software. They then describe a conversation with another, as put, bona fide technical writer, in which Hayes has an epiphany in which the concepts they learned in school, were actually applicable to what they were doing in the field, and "All writing is technical writing. All writing is creative writing." (Hayes). This discovery, that showed Hayes that what they were doing was both creative, and technical is the heart of the matter. If you are writing, there is going to be human activity, that is driven by human knowledge. If there is knowledge, there is the application of this knowledge, and application of human knowledge is technology Q.E.D. Therefore it is logical that all writing is technical writing, and because writing is a creative process, it is also logical to say that all writing is technical and creative.

In the initiation story by Carol Hoeniges, she describes the creation of a safety manual that requires her to pull viewpoints from vastly differing backgrounds, outlooks, requirements, education and time in the industry to have all shareholders of the manual represented in the

creation of same. This process is facilitated using some of the oldest technology available. Face to face, conversations in groups, with basic written notes. The manual was covering an ancient technology, as humans have been using boats on rivers as far back as any recorded histories we have. There was new technology covered in the manual, but the technical communicator, Hoeniges, did not have, and was not required to have any of this specialized knowledge. What she was required to do was “negotiating, problem solving, and communicating” which she found to be “inventive and dynamic”. In the process of being the communicator, or facilitator, she generated “a boatload of information” (Hoeniges 59).

In conclusion, if you write, it involves technology, as do all human endeavors. You should not be put off by thinking of technical communication only involves a narrow view of technology, but that it truly involves creation and dissemination of directed knowledge. Technical communicators do not have to be experts, but we do need to be able to reach out to experts. You are not required to know everything about everything, but we do need to know how to find out anything about everything, and distill this knowledge for an audience that hungers for knowledge as much as we do.

### References

Hayes, L. M. (2001). "It Isn't What You Write That Makes You a Tech Writer" *Writing a Professional Life*, pp. 149- 154

Hoeniges, Carol. (2001). "It's Not Mark Twain's River Anymore" *Writing a Professional Life*, pp. 50-59

Killingsworth, M. Jimmie and Betsy G. Jones. (2003). "Division of Labor or Integrated Teams" *Professional Writing and rhetoric*, pp. 321-339

Slack, J. D., Miller, D. J., & Doak, J. (2003). *The Technical Communicator as Author: Meaning, Power, Authority*. *Professional Writing and Rhetoric*, pp. 80-97

Technology. (n.d.) In Merriam-Webster online. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/technology>