Technical communication: what is it?

A definition

The technical report is an act of communication by a professional in an organizational system to transfer information necessary for the system to continue to function.


Therefore, technical communication should not be

- Poetic
- Lyric
- Fictional
- Indirect

Some Linear B texts

http://www.96300.org/file/Linear_B_tablet.jpg

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linear_B

“Our contents consist of inventories of palace equipment, arms, slave personnel, and the like; land holdings of various categories, probably for tax purposes; offerings to various gods and goddesses, and similar material. Except for these palace records, no use of ‘Linear B’ is known beyond an occasional name on a Mycenaean vase.”

Tablet PY An1, DMG 53
rowers going to Pleuron
in Louwa 8 men
in Rion 5 men
in Pherai 4 men
Tetaranes 6 men
in Aponis(?) 7 men

http://proteus.brown.edu/greekpast/4690

So, it would appear that bureaucrats and accountants invented writing.


What conclusion can we draw?
Practical writing appeared at the dawn of history, and it will persist to the end.

“Multivariate analysis indicates that despite the technological changes occurring in places of work, skills in oral communication, written communication, public speaking, motivating and managing others, and effective group leadership are most essential for career improvement....”

From the abstract of Zekeri, A. A. (2004). “College curriculum competencies and skills former students found essential to their careers.” College Student Journal, 38, 412-422. [Emphasis added]

Two main purposes of technical communication:

Informing   Persuading

What might be documents of each type?

You may find this news distressing.

The Scream (1893), Edvard Munch
www.ibiblio.org/wm/paint/auth/munch/
Some examples of technical documents

- Lab reports
- Project reports
- Research papers
- Feasibility studies
- Grant proposals
- Software Documentation
- Progress reports
- Resumes
- Instructions

“The technical report is an act of communication by a professional in an organizational system to transfer information necessary for the system to continue to function.”
---Mathes and Stevenson, op.cit.

Characteristics of technical writing

Useful
Understandable
Concrete

Different sorts of abstraction: pure abstractions and general terms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pure Abstraction</th>
<th>Pure Concrete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>Quadruped</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gravity</td>
<td>Sheep</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effort</td>
<td>Automobile</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
<td>Computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Stairway</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

S. I. Hayakawa’s Ladder of Abstraction

Highly abstract
Moderately abstract
Almost concrete
Let’s consider “quadruped”…

Welsh Corgi

http://www.dogbreedinfo.com/pembrokecorgi.htm

Frilled Lizard

http://animals.nationalgeographic.com/animals/reptiles/frilled-lizard/

Sheep

Which conveys more information?

I saw a quadruped running past.
I saw a sheep running past.

Which sentence conveys more information?

I saw a quadruped running past.
I saw a sheep running past.

Hayakawa’s Ladder of Abstraction

Sentences or phrases can themselves be abstract. Consider this one…

"We believe that the way we work can add meaning and value to the world. That ideas inspire positive change. That coloring outside the lines can illuminate fresh perspectives. And that small details yield important realizations. Above all, we believe the collaboration is the best way forward."

--HDR ad for electrical engineering intern (engineering, architecture and environmental firm)
“We believe that the way we work can add meaning and value to the world. That ideas inspire positive change. That coloring outside the lines can illuminate fresh perspectives. And that small details yield important realizations. Above all, we believe the collaboration is the best way forward.”

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Good technical writing should be clear, accurate, supported and, where necessary, documented.

Technical writing must be grammatically correct.

Technical writing must be clear.

So, if you do not know grammar…

You must learn it. Educated people will expect it of you, even if you were not taught it in school.

Hint: get a good “College Handbook” or “University Handbook” such as the Harbrace College Handbook.

What happens if…

You ignore the rules?

Some Newspaper Headlines

Miners Refuse to Work after Death
Hospitals are Sued by 7 Foot Doctors
Dealers Will Hear Car Talk at Noon

http://lene.solbakken.net/lene/humor/newspapers.html
Some Newspaper Headlines

Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers

Lawmen From Mexico Barbecue Guests

Kids Make Nutritious Snacks

Why are these headlines funny?

In other words, what is wrong with them?

Remember: even subtle mistakes can be a source of unintentional humor.

So, remember

Language follows rules.

Follow the rules or be misunderstood.

Follow the rules and be understood

Context is important and must be made clear

There are different sorts of rules

Grammatical Rules

Syntactical Rules

Logical Rules

Violation of any of these can cause problems

So, technical communication is governed by basic principles

These principles are not difficult to learn

They will help you

Decide how to write

What to write

How to organize what you write

In other words, these rules are your friends; they will make your work easier

Conclusions about grammar and syntax

It is a measure of intellectual competence.

Observing the rules of grammar and syntax results in clearer thought and expression.

Failure to observe the rules results in unclear expression.
If you write like you do not know what you are doing, why should people think you know what you’re doing?

If you cannot tell the people who need to know about your work what you are doing, then your work hardly matters.

The easiest proof is experience

Once working you will find that you must do a great deal of technical communication.

The more you rise, the more of it you will do.

If you cannot do it, you will not rise easily.

In other words, we do not have to convince you; reality will convince you in about three years.

Points to recall

Technical communication is not subjective: it involves language, which follows rules.

There are principles for the drawing up of technical documents.

Work that cannot be communicated is wasted.

Importance of technical communication

It is important.

The better you are at it the higher you will rise.

The higher you rise, the more of it you will do.

http://wheelerblogs.com/2012/04/18/social-media-personal-and-visual-pt-1-know-your-audience/
Some things to consider

- Field of education
- Level of education
- Age
- Interest
- Do different audiences require different things?
- What things?

How might you successfully write for an audience of different readers?

Technical writing is designed to convey technical information efficiently.