Technical Writing and Editing Guide

- **The Purpose of the Project**
    - Inform, describe (typically a process), or persuade.
    - If you are persuading in your project, make sure your argument is clear. Whether in a visual aid, a document, or another form of communication, consider if you want an explicit (direct) or implicit (implied) argument.
        - Explicit argument: an argument that directly states its claim to the audience and provides reasons and evidence to support this claim (Morey, 2014).
        - Implicit argument: an argument that may provide a claim, reasons, or examples, but most likely not all three and does not directly state what the author wants the audience to think (Morey, 2014).
    - If you want to go the implicit route, be sure you aren't the only one who can get the the point without explanation.

- **The Audience**
    - The project should focus on the reader. Consider the clarity of visual aids, writing, and wording from the audience's perspective.
    - Consider the following about the audience:
        - Who is the intended audience?
            - Experts, technicians, administrators, non-experts, etc.
            - Also consider who the unintended audience that might also see/use the document is.
        - "Background: how much does this audience type already know about the subject? . . . Is basic background or preliminary information needed for this audience?
        - Motivation*:* is this audience type interested and motivated toward the subject area? What particular needs or expectations do they have of the document? How will they want to use the document? What can the document contain to address these issues?
        - Demographics: what is the audience's relative age? Gender? Lifestyle? Education? Disposable income? Political preferences? Other pertinent demographics?" (Amare, Nowlin, & Weber, 2011, p. 21).
        - Get Started: once you consider these things, make notes about how these ideas about your audience can help you write the document.
            - Consider background information you need and any research you have to do, visual aids that would help, and how to best organize or design the project.
    - If you have an international audience, consider how you address measurements, temperature, money, dates, context, graphics and visuals, colors, etc.

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- **Colors, Symbols and Organization**
  - Make sure the colors work well together and are readable (for example, background and text color, on the screen and projected, etc.)
  - Colors have psychological and cultural meanings. Research this before picking, submitting, or approving a website, logo, advertisement, or any other project that combines and uses colors.
    - http://www.informationisbeautiful.net/visualizations/colours-in-cultures/
    - https://www.helpscout.net/blog/psychology-of-color/
  - Be sure to pick clear symbols; some symbols might mean different things to different people.
  - Use whitespace to give the audience a visual break, lessen overwhelming text, or to help the design.
  - For specific projects, look up how to format in up-to-date books or internet guides. Ask consultants, professors, or see the references of this guide for help.

- **Extras (Warnings, Caution, Danger, Tip, Note)**
  - Distinguish any warnings at the beginning of the document, if needed. Warnings should be clear and in their own section. You can also use a different color, font, bold letters, and/or a symbol to further emphasize the importance.
  - Cautions and Danger Possibilities should be placed before a section where the caution or danger arrises. This placement allows a reader to know about any dangers before proceeding. Again, emphasize this section to make it stand out.
  - Tips, Notes, etc. can be placed wherever they are mentioned (end of a section, where it is relevant, etc) as long as you are consistent once you decide. You should also emphasize this section, but you do not need to make it stand out as much as Warnings, Cautions, or Danger Possibilities.

  Note: Make different choices for color or symbols if you use them (with the possible exception of tips and notes). For instance red for Warning, orange for Caution.

- **Grammar and Wording**
  - Technical Writers follow the rules of grammar, abbreviations, spelling, numbers, etc listed out in *The Gregg Reference Manual* (Located in the Writing Center)
  - Clear and concise sentences are important.
  - Consistency matters. For example, don't call a copy machine a "copier," a "Xerox," and a "photocopier" only call it by one name to avoid confusion.
  - Coherent order of the document is a must--make your document easy to follow For example, don't explain step 4 before step 2. Do not put warnings at the end.

- Make sure the information is correct. Wrong technical information in some settings could lead to injury, death, electrical problems, furniture collapse, a lawsuit, etc.
- Watch the tone and attitude of the project; make sure it is appropriate, no matter who the target audience is.
- When making lists, make sure they are worded similarly to each other. For example, if most of them start with a subject, they should all start with a subject.
- Technical Communication Style (Riordan, 2014, pp. 89-96)
  - Use subject-verb-object sentence format.
  - Write in active voice. (For example, The intern conducted the test, NOT The test was conducted by the intern. However, passive voice is needed if there is no living agent/subject such as robots, companies, samples).
  - Use parallelism (each verb in a sentence should have the same form).
  - Avid nominalizations like -ion, -ity, -ment, or -ness endings.
  - Use *there are* constructions carefully (*there are* and its other forms burry the subject in the sentence).
  - Put the main idea first, if possible.
  - Don't use sexist constructions. (For example, The clerk made sure to punch in, NOT he punched in.).
  - Eliminate common clarity errors.
  - Avoid strings of choppy sentences.
  - Use *you* only when referring to the reader, but never in a formal report.

Tips:

*Always double check technical writing projects before submitting or publishing.

*Never manipulate visual aids or graphs to make data look positive when it is not.

*Consider ethical issues (copyright, confidentiality, conflicts of interest, discrimination and harassment, financial ethics, job safety, and public safety) with projects.

Copyright Law Video- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Uiq42O6rhW4

Copyright, Fairuse, and Public Domain Website - http://fairuse.stanford.edu/

References

Amare, N., Nowlin, B., & Weber J.H. (2011). *Technical Editing in the 21st Century.* New Jersey: Pearson.

Morey, S. (2014). *The New Media Writer.* Southlake, Tx: Fountainhead Press

Riordan, D. (2014). *Technical Report Writing Today* (10th ed.). United States of America:Wadsworth Cengage Learning.

Check out *Technical Report Writing Today* for information on color schemes, manuals, proposals, reports, visual aids, and more. (Located in the Writing Center and JCK Library).