



Hello,

My name is Elizabeth Bailey and I live here in the Dallas area.

I am an Associate Fellow of the Society for Technical Communication, the Technology Director for the local chapter of the International Society for Performance Improvement, Board member of Big Thought (supports arts education in primary schools) and webmaster for several non-profit organizations.

I own my own business, WebConcepts Unlimited, which is an Internet consultancy with a focus on website design and development and Internet marketing. Our mission is to help smaller companies use the Web to achieve their business objectives.

I have managed documentation, training, and web development departments. I am currently working on the development of electronic learning material (also known as computer-based training) with a team of 4 people that I manage. This eLearning solution is being designed for IRS employees.

I support exploring methods to enhance performance improvement within an organization.

I teach technical writing classes at Richland College and North Lake College.

I hold a BS in Management and a MS in Instructional and Performance Technology.

So, enough about me...

## What Writers Do

- Plan ... and
- Write
- Edit
- Write
- Proofread
- Illustrate
- Produce
- Organize information
- Write clearly
- Edit
- Understand technology

As writers, whether in the corporate or academic world, we do similar things. We plan our material, write, edit, revise, proofread, illustrate, and produce information. In a corporate environment, we may very well wear additional hats where we play the role of people manager and project manager. Based on your job, you may do these things as well.

Keep in mind, writing is important for any job and is found within all industries.

Consider a software development environment where a writer creates user guides or training material. The writer must be involved as the software is being developed to ensure that the help file, user guide, system documentation, installation guide, and support guide information are all accurate, consistent, and current as of the time the software is released.

Consider a magazine or newspaper writer. The writer is but one cog in a very large piece of machinery. There is still layout, printing, delivery and doesn't even consider the work effort of the advertising department who brings in the ad money or the circulation department that brings in the sale of the final product income. But, without the any one of the cogs, the others would not be needed.

Can you think of a single industry in which writing is not involved? (Discuss.)

So, how do you teach students to write? You teach them these same concepts, right?

# Professional Writers

- **Analyze information**
- **Ask questions and probe the answers to ensure comprehension**
- **Identify and satisfy the needs of the audience**
- **Learn new software applications with ease**
- **Work well within a team**
- **Present information logically**

In addition to wearing many hats, writers must have a vast array of knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The Technical Writer works in close collaboration with many different teams at many different levels – subordinates, co-workers, and managers, all of whom have different educational levels and are of very diverse backgrounds.

Some job descriptions indicate successful writers must have a proven ability to independently produce technically detailed, conceptual, procedural, best practice, administrative, and troubleshooting documents. Each must have solid analytical capabilities and the ability to question why and how.

Must be able to organize and chunk information into usable format.

Must have the ability to work on multiple projects simultaneously.

Each of these characteristics may be present in many roles. You, as a teacher, can do each of these things. These characteristics are not specific to writing, per se, but carry over to other opportunities.

## Why Are You Here?

- **My boss made me attend**
- **I didn't have to teach today**
- **It's better than ...**
- **Professional development  
(Sharpening Your Saw)**

You work in a very difficult environment, not only are you teaching an audience who typically does not see the value in your lessons, but you are also teaching in an environment where you must prepare students for academic and real-world communication situations while faced with the increasing use of standardized high-stakes testing. So, to support both, you provide exercises to allow students to explore writing and define methods to evaluate that writing. Information you need to do this, new techniques, or methodologies don't just come to you overnight. You must seek information – much like attending workshops like this one.

Stephen Covey said: "The single most powerful investment we can make in life, is an investment in Ourselves...." Covey uses the metaphor-story of the man working non-stop sawing down trees. The man is challenged by a passer-by who suggests that he stops and sharpens his saw, to which the reply comes: " I have no time to sharpen my saw, I am too busy."

Consider two loggers in a contest trying to be the best at cutting down trees. In a contest, both men climb to the top of their respective tree that must be chopped in this competition. One works hard at the top, sawing away. The other saws for 10 minutes, then climbs down the tree and sharpens his saw. The first sees the other logger going up and down the tree and thinks his is displaying his determination and dedication to the job and will surely win. However, soon the other logger, who has kept his saw sharp, is the first to yell 'timber' and fall his tree top. Afterward in a discussion, the determined and dedicated logger discovers that by not taking the time to sharpen his saw caused him to lose the competition.

So when considering enhancing our own skills by taking classes and attending seminars, it seems so obvious that "I'm busy" is an obtuse thing to say, and yet in real life that is exactly what we so often do!

# Communication

**“To communicate, all I have to do is speak.”**

**True or False?**

Each of you knows that speaking is not communication. Communication is the process where the sender shares information (either verbally or in writing) and the receiver listens.

So, what is listening? Listening includes the factors of keeping your mind open to new and potentially different ideas than you would normally consider. Does everyone know how to listen? No.

You must find the trigger – that thing that will cause your reader to sit up and really read your information.

Consider the hiring manager who comes upon your resume that was not tailored to his or her experience requirements. If your resume does not immediately grab his or her attention with your experience exactly in the areas he seeks, he or she will put aside your resume and keep reading – for someone out there has done just that.

So, you must teach students that writing is communication and is more than just a topic in your curriculum, but a lesson that will be the foundation upon which all specific knowledge can be built.

# Analysis

- **What are the needs of my audience?**
- **What are the attitudes of my audience toward me and toward the message?**
- **What does my audience know – and not know – already?**
- **Under what conditions are your audience members reading?**

We teach students that the first thing to be done is to plan.

A major aspect of this is the Audience analysis. For most technical writers, audience analysis is *the most important* consideration in planning, writing, and reviewing a document. You "adapt" your writing to meet the needs, interests, and background of the readers who will be reading your writing.

Students need to recognize that this is the biggest and most important aspect of writing. While I know you teach these things in your classrooms, let's use an analogy that you may not have considered – finding a job.

So many people plan to find their ideal job immediately after high school, because they can't see themselves in college or simply can't afford it. Others plan for college and once they are finished still aren't sure what they want to be when they grow up.

If you, as a teacher, wanted to become a corporate instructor, you would search for jobs in the newspaper and on the internet and find organizations to which you would submit your resume. Would you change your resume for each organization? In reality, you should. One company wants a technical instructor who understands Microsoft Word and knows how to deal with lesser educated people. Another company wants an instructor who has experience with soft skills training including teaching others how to conduct interviews or how to develop attainable business objectives. Of course, you would tweak your resume to reflect your ability to do the desired skill. This is a real-life example of planning for your audience.

## Edit

- **Suitability for audience and purpose**
- **Completeness and accuracy of information; ethics**
- **Organization and clarity**
- **Visual design and usability**
- **Style**
- **Correctness of grammar, punctuation, and spelling consistency**

Reference the page in your handout called **Editorial Review: Review Type, Questions, and Checks**.

These are the items we teach in college-level technical writing. (Review editor's questions.)

1. Does this document respond adequately to the assigned task?
2. Are all the required parts included? Is the content accurate technically and adequately developed for the intended audience? Do the content and discussion of it respect ethics?
3. Does the sequence of information reveal the relationship of ideas? Are related parts treated in consistent ways?
4. Will page or screen layout, illustrations, and searching devices (table of contents, headings, menu, index) help readers find what they need? Does the visual design enhance interpretation of content? Consider that visual design includes typeface and type size, margin widths, bold and italic usage, numbers, bullets, headings and subheadings, and color usage.
5. Do sentence structures and word choices clarify meaning? Is the tone right for the audience?
6. Do grammar, punctuation, and spelling conform to conventions? Are capitalization, use of numbers, dates, and abbreviations treated consistently?

This is a good tool to use when reviewing your own material.

## Differences Then and Now

- Paper-based user guides
- Type setting
- Marked-up paper
- Manual copy editing
- Face-to-face content gathering
- Online, text-searchable user guides
- Word processors
- Online editing and change tracking
- Online spell and grammar check
- Teleconference email, and instant message content gathering

Several years ago, the requirements for a technical writer were different. There were not as many desktop publication tools, there were fewer online delivery options, and most documents were presented on paper. Now with the Internet in full access by a majority of the population, online help files, web sites, online user guides, computer based training, and even basic communication methods have changed. The way of the corporate memo has changed to the email delivered to every known corporate email address. Instead of walking from one office to another, many corporate staff members use some form of instant messaging to ask a quick question or clarify an idea. More complex questions and ideas are presented in email. The written form of communication is even more important.

Important you ask – when there is a special language now for instant messaging? Yes, while your students may learn the quick, shortcuts to the English language for their cell phones and computer communications, in the corporate world written communication is still important.

## Writing is Significant

**When students write as a part of learning, "they are challenged to think about and integrate facts, ideas, and perspectives in ways that extend their learning in new directions. "**

**Philip Gaines**

In his work, *Using Writing as a Teaching Strategy*, Philip Gaines of Montana State University's Department of English identifies that using writing in a course to supplement learning means teachers may have to give "attention to perhaps unfamiliar teaching methods- and does involve some extra time." This is outside of the English or Composition & Rhetoric classroom.

His paper offers examples such as in-class writing where students write a brief impromptu piece in class as a great way to get them interacting with material and to provide student discourse for discussion in class. For example, Gaines states:

"This type of activity takes about 10 minutes or so and should be in response to a prompt (i.e. question or other discussion point) that is given on the spur of the moment. This type of activity requires students to organize elements from a domain of knowledge into some level of coherent perspective-often a great advantage over class discussion, in which many students don't feel confident in contributing."

He goes on to offer information on other ideas for Developing Writing Assignments, Responding to Student Writing , Dealing With Errors in Student Writing , and Grading Papers.

If I were in your shoes I would be thinking – but I know how to do that! But, could you explain this to other teachers outside of Language Arts? Could you define to a math teacher how writing could be beneficial to his or her classroom instruction methods? This book, listed on the Resources page, contains many suggestions and is an excellent guide to integrating writing activities to support learning – support the use of writing to synthesize new information with existing knowledge.

## What You can Do

- **Seek out new sources of knowledge and best practices**
- **Involve everyone in the learning process**
- **Encourage learners to create, ask, and answer their own questions as a learning process**
- **Ask the learners to summarize discussions**

Look to your handout and find the page labeled **Resources**. This is a small start to finding additional information about writing as a profession.

Within your organization, you may have a group of colleagues who have similar interests relating to learning. Create a discussion group. Involve everyone in the learning process. Meet once a week or once every other week. Only meet online so there are no space or time requirements. Write a current buzz word on a board (or in a posting) and discuss implications to you and your jobs. Have someone summarize the discussion and make available to everyone in the group. Encourage participants to create, ask, and answer their own questions as a way to start a discussion. Create reference pages for where to get more information, similar to what I have done in your handouts.

How many of you have participated in an online threaded discussion such as Yahoo groups?

How many of you feel comfortable communicating online? How many of you communicate with parents by email?

Within an online discussion, a person posts a statement or question in regard to a topic. Participants who are members of the discussion group, receive the posting as an email, or receives an email indicating a new posting has been made. Participants read the topic and may elect to post a response or additional thoughts to the initial idea.

In your handouts is a document entitled **Rubric for Discussion Participation and Essays**. You can use this rubric in your classroom or in your discussions with your colleagues.

## Developing Yourself

- **Requires an honest self-assessment**
- **Takes time**
- **Is lifelong**
- **Is your responsibility**
- **Requires action**

Developing yourself is not easy. You must explore your world and find new resources. You must set long-term objectives. You must set goals to assist you in meeting your objectives. You must document your accomplishments to remember where you are and where you need to be.

Where else do you find resources and current educational information? Look to your local community colleges and universities for certificate and degree programs. You have a print from the Richland College website on their Technical Writing Certificate program and a printed page from the University of North Texas' Masters degree in Technical Writing. Both offer classes that are considered current and relevant to you as a writer.

By performing internet searches and library database searches, you can find resources to take you into the second decade of the twenty-first century. You are already doing your part for the community – teaching; now do something for yourself – sharpen your intellectual saw. Remember what Robert Frost said, “**I teach in order to learn.**”