

From Fairy Tales to Horror Stories: Getting to the Truth about Technical Editing

Northwest Independent Editors Guild
Red Pencil in the Woods
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Technical Editing: Definition

- Technical editors work on documents with technical subjects.
- Subjects technical editors may work with include computer science, engineering, medicine, science, government, agriculture, education, and business.
- Technical editing is also the manner of working with the subject matter: to analyze, explain, interpret, inform, or instruct.
- (Carolyn D. Rude and Angela Eaton, Technical Editing, 5th Edition, 2011)

Technical vs. Non-technical Editing

- Technical documents are like bugle calls and non-technical documents are like classical music.
- “a bugle call has a single meaning that you had better understand perfectly while classical music has multiple interpretations usually determined by the conductor”
- (W. Earl Britton as quoted in Thomas L. Warren, History and Trends in Technical Editing, in New Perspectives on Technical Editing, Murphy, Avon J., ed., Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing.)

Common Style Vices Found in Scientific and Technical Writing

- Passive voice
 - It was shown that substance A was not effective. *Who or what is acting?*
- Unclear antecedent to the pronoun
 - Mr. Jones reported that the 5620 Road was built along the concrete embankment in 2000. Soon after, it started cracking and had to be repaired. *Does the word “it” refer to the 5620 Road or the concrete embankment?*
- Poor use of punctuation
 - The second stage would consist of either a biofilter or a virgin activated carbon tower. *virgin-activated carbon tower or virgin, activated carbon tower?*
- Inconsistent subjects...poor linking between sentences
 - The standard statistical anchor for our lab’s operations is flawed. Spanish researchers are now changing their methods in DNA change measurements to... *As standard statistical anchors are critical to scientific communication, we might look to the Spanish researchers who are now changing...*

Panelist Questions

- What was your pathway into the field of technical editing/writing?

- How would you describe your experience getting into technical editing? A fairy tale or a horror story?

- What are your top two tips for breaking into technical editing?

Q & A

Technical Editing Resources

Society for Technical Communication

<http://www.stc.org/>

Membership application at <http://www.stc.org/membership/join-or-renew-now>

Certificate in Technical Writing and Editing, University of Washington Professional and Continuing Education

<http://www.pce.uw.edu/prog.aspx?id=6121>

Alred, Gerald J., Brusaw, Charles T., and Oliu, Walter E. 2009. Handbook of Technical Writing, 9th edition, Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's.

Murphy, Avon J. 2011. The Top 100 Technical Communication Books of 1991-2010. *intercom*, July/August 2011, pp. 6-9. (copy attached with permission from Mr. Murphy)

Murphy, Avon J. 2010. New Perspectives on Technical Editing. Murphy, Avon J., ed. Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing.

Rude, Carolyn D. and Eaton, Angela. 2011. Technical Editing, 5th edition., New York: Pearson Education, Inc.

Salary information at:

- ❖ US Dept of Labor Occupational Outlook Handbook, Web page on Technical Writers: <http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos319.htm>
- ❖ Salary.com
- ❖ Survey on Freelance/Self employment sector of labor market: <http://www.internationalfreelancersday.com/2011report/>
- ❖ <http://www.glassdoor.com/Salaries/index.htm>

