

Tips for Tech Editing in the Science and Engineering Industry

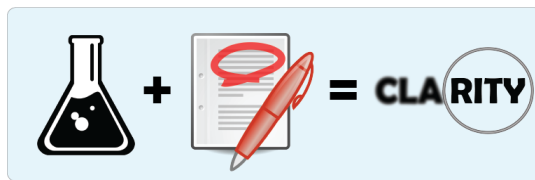
These tips come from this panel's 60+ years of combined experience working in the science and engineering industry in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). There are many ways to find a job and thrive as a technical editor—these are just a few of our thoughts.

Finding Jobs

- **Informational interviewing.** There are paths to find both in-house and freelance work in the industry. For in-house, learn what companies/firms are in your area and ask for informational interviews. If they don't have a dedicated technical editing group, ask to speak with the marketing group, as these roles are often combined. For freelancers, both touch base regularly with your clients and let your colleagues/network know of your interest. You don't need to be slick, just real.
- **Northwest Editor Guild job board.** Technical editing jobs get placed [here](#) from time to time. A number of technical editors are members of the Guild, so participating in meetings, online chat groups, etc. may lead somewhere.
- **Editing Certificate programs.** [University of Washington](#) has one and there a variety of others online as well. Even if you don't consider taking a program, talk to the instructors and ask them for job hunting or skill building tips.
- **Professional organization events.** A couple of professional organizations to look at:
 - o [Society of Marketing Professional Services](#). This is focused on marketing but there are many gatekeepers here who would know where to point you in their organization to talk technical editing. Seattle has the biggest chapter in the country, and Portland's chapter is also very active.
 - o [Northwest Environmental Business Council](#). Dozens of PNW science and engineering firms and their technical staff that would hire you are active in NEBC. This is a good place to do preliminary research. [ASCE](#) and [AWRA](#) are others to check out as well.

Interviewing

- **Review the website ahead of time.** Like in any good interview, you should know what sort of company you are applying to. Not only is it important to know a bit about the people who will be interviewing you, but to learn any details about specific projects the firm has completed. Also, try to get copies of any reports the company worked on ahead of time to review. Many of these are public record and may be available online and/or via public information request.
- **Talk to the principals.** An interview with technical staff/principals (i.e., not just technical editors) usually indicates that the company cares about the technical editing role and the relationships between writers and editors. If they are in the room during your interview, it is a good sign you'll enjoy it there.
- **Ask about professional growth opportunities.** Some companies see technical editors as extensions of their administrative branch and don't actively consider growth in the role. Others are very invested in their editors and offer to help with continuing education and flexibility in shaping the position to fit an editor's interests. Be sure to ask about career opportunities and specific examples of how technical editors at the firm have grown in the past.



- **Highlight your critical thinking and interpersonal skills.** Whether you have a science background or not, critical thinking is a universal skill that helps us edit documents even if the content is unfamiliar and is a good skill to highlight. Your people skills are also just as important as your technical skills. Don't forget to mention them.
- **Have editing examples ready and be prepared for a test.** Lots of different types of editing work are applicable to technical editing. Give specific examples of experience you've gained in other realms of editing that can translate to challenges you may face in your new field. Look at the firm's writing style and edit as much in their style as possible.

Doing the Work

- **Learn your clients (internal and external).** It's important to understand that science and engineering consultants are businesses. So, the science and engineering reporting must clearly say how the client's problem will be fixed. Learn about your internal clients (the writers) and your external ones (the one that hire your company). Learn about client types (government agencies, private developers, homeowners, etc.) at your company and what they look for in a good report. Do they want jargon/technical terms explained? Is this report going to a public audience and therefore in need of plain language? Part of our value as technical editors is as a client advocate: if we can understand the science, our company's clients likely will, too.
- **Stay curious + ask questions.** Approach new and potentially confusing subject matter with genuine curiosity. This can help focus your queries to technical staff when the writing is unclear. Taking time to ask or query things like "Tell me about how this method works" and listening to the answers can help clarify to both you and the writer how to best retool the writing.
- **Lynda.com is amazing.** Not everyone comes into this business with a solid understanding of the key technologies we use every day (Microsoft Word, Excel, PowerPoint; Adobe InDesign or Illustrator). Lynda.com is a great website for learning the ins and outs of new software.
- **Advocate for editing/your team.** As an editor at a science/engineering firm, you will not be the first thought on every writer's mind. It is important to keep yourself visible to the technical team and help them see how your work benefits the document. Find "cheerleaders" who see the value in your work and use them to help amplify your voice. Become comfortable asking for support where you need it. The better tools you have, the better the whole firm looks.

Some Technical Communication (Writing/Editing) Resources

[Technical Editing](#) by Carolyn Rude

[Chicago Guide to Communicating Science](#) by Scott L Montgomery

[Style: Lessons in Clarity And Grace](#) by Joseph Williams

[On Writing](#) by William Zinsser

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