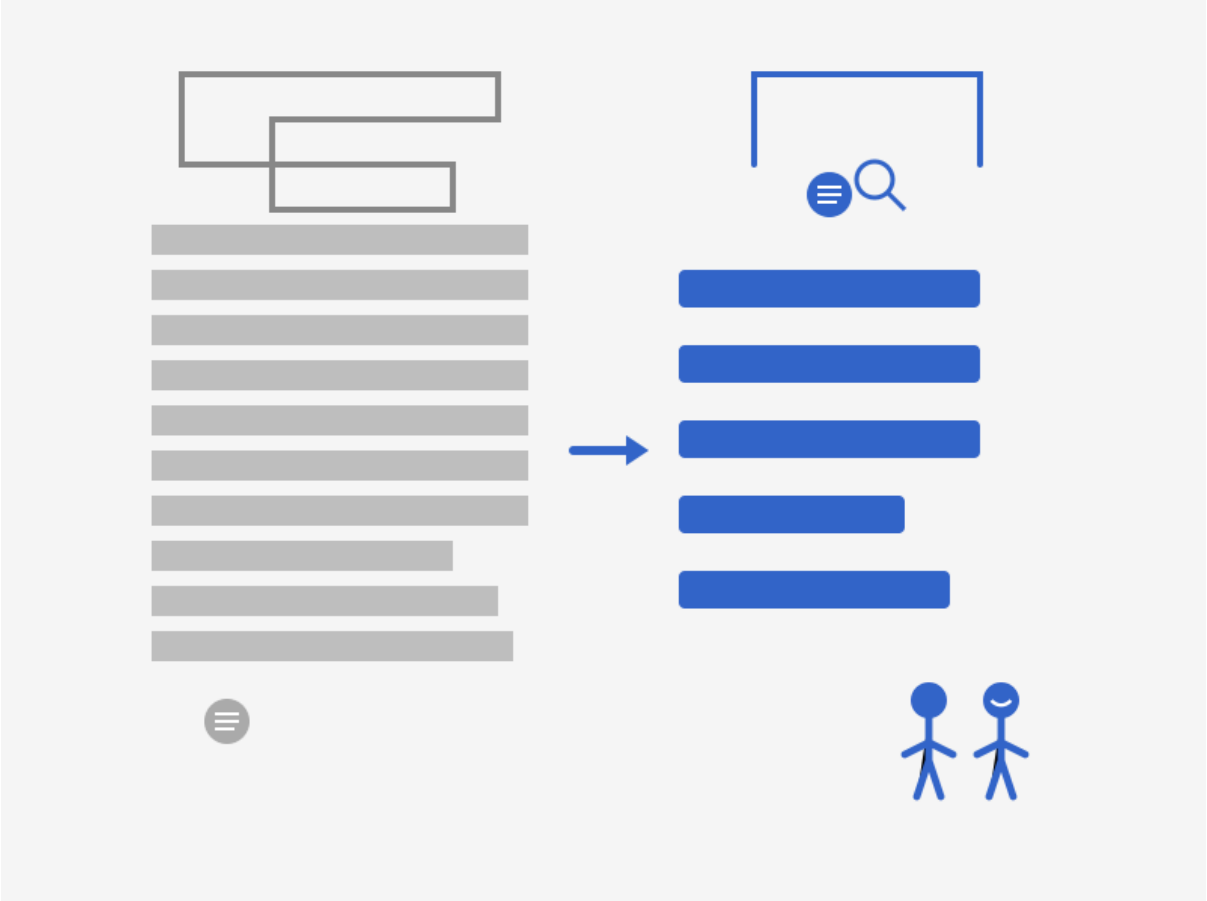
Plain language

How it can improve readability and usability



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Paper topic: Why should we adapt the language to fit the needs of technical communication?

Aim: Introduce the concept of plain language and help writers switch to technical writing.

Intended reader persona: aspiring/novice technical writers; 20-30 for a novice, 40+ for people switching jobs on the current market; both male and female.

Example persona: Hope Hadley, 26, white female, junior technical writer in training with some copy/marketing and amateur literary background (A3O).

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Plain language

How can it improve readability and usability

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1. Introduction

Switching from creative or speculative fiction writing to technical writing may prove difficult for established writers. Various elements differ between these types of writing, making the transfer hard for some (except maybe for non-fiction writers, who should be used to concentrating on the message rather than the form).

This paper attempts to sum up the differences between technical writing and other types of writing. It also intends to introduce the reader to the common ground and current approach to technical communication. I will show the language toolset and solutions that will help aspiring or newly established technical writers develop their skill set and boost their work.

While this paper is aimed at people entering the technical communication area, I believe seasoned veterans may also find something useful in it, even if just by rehashing what they already know and remembering current trends.

I chose this topic based on my years of personal experience and struggle. After more than two decades of creative and non-fiction writing, I had to chop down the language and trim my texts to serve the most basic purpose of conveying ideas rather than being a good read. I want to help others go more gently through this change and embrace their new vocation.

2. Defining technical writing

Technical writing is a specialized form of communication used by industrial and scientific organizations to convey complex information clearly and accurately. Its primary users include customers, employees, assembly workers, engineers, and scientists who rely on this content to perform tasks or conduct research. Technical writing simplifies grammar and integrates visual communication to enhance clarity and comprehension.

This writing style requires thorough research and the ability to present information in a format and reading level that the target audience can easily understand. There are two main types of technical writing, with procedural documentation being the most common. This includes standardized step-by-step guides and standard operating procedures (SOPs) used in industries such as manufacturing, software development, and medical research. The software industry, in particular, depends heavily on procedural documentation for user guides and installation instructions.

Technical writing is typically performed by trained professionals who follow standardized guidelines (e.g., DITA, AP Stylebook, Chicago Manual of Style) to ensure consistency and clarity. The goal is to communicate technical information effectively, with no variations in format, grammar, or style. Because the subject matter is often complex, strong writing and communication skills are essential. In addition to text, technical writers create and edit visuals using advanced graphics software, including illustration, diagramming, and CAD tools.

While engineers may occasionally write technical documentation, this is uncommon in large organizations where frequent product updates require dedicated technical writers. Marketing materials and press releases are generally handled by writers trained in marketing or creative writing, though technical writers may assist with editing or refining technical content.

3. Differences between technical writing and creative writing

There are significant differences between technical writing and other types of writing, such as creative or fiction. These differences reflect the purpose and the target audience of both and largely affect the style and approach.

Technical writing focuses on explaining complex, often specialized ideas accurately and in a way that even a layman should be able to grasp. Creative writing, on the other hand, aims to engage and amuse the readers through compelling storytelling.

Technical writers create documentation such as user guides, owners' manuals, tutorials, troubleshooters, or white papers. Creative writing allows more freedom in both style and content delivered with the use of literary genres such as novels, short stories, or essays.

Technical writing usually adopts a neutral, objective voice and uses precise terminology. It tends to avoid colloquial language and follows a specific structure for clear communication of complex information. Creative writing often employs a unique language that reflects the writer's or characters' personality traits and persona within the story. It also has more freedom regarding word choice, including slang or poetic expressions, as well as styling the visual part of the writing.

Technical writing demands thorough research and fact-checking, requires ensuring document consistency, and puts forward clarity and accuracy. In contrast, creative writing uses research and fact-checking to add depth to characters and stories, but it equally often exchanges the credibility of the fictional world for amusement and incorporates emotional appeal to keep readers' attention.

The following table summarizes the key differences between these two genres in more detail.

TECHNICAL WRITING	CREATIVE WRITING
Technical writing is based on facts and concepts.	Creative writing is based on imagination and creativity.
Technical writing focuses on factual and straightforward content.	Creative writing focuses on imaginative and symbolic content.
Technical writing has a specific reader/audience.	Creative writing has a general reader/audience.
The purpose of technical writing is to inform, instruct, and educate the user.	The purpose of creative writing is to entertain, provoke, and inspire.

It follows a formal and standard style of writing.	It follows an informal and artistic style of writing.
It gives readers information about some technical topics, or it gives directions on how to do something.	It gives readers a theme, message, moral, or lesson that is helpful in their real lives or gives temporary entertainment to the reader.
It uses text features like the table of contents, index, labels, charts, photos, and graphs.	It uses narrative elements such as conflict, character, theme, setting, and resolution.
The tone of technical writing is objective.	The tone of creative writing is subjective.
It is based on specialized vocabulary.	It is based on general, evocative vocabulary.
It is organized sequentially and systematically.	It is organized arbitrarily and artistically and may not be systematic.
In technical writing, graphics are included to give more information about the topic.	In creative writing, graphics are included to give more allure to the topic.
Technical writing depends on end result, research, information, etc.	Creative writing depends on the schedule and mindset of the writer.

Table source: Geeks For Geeks

4. Benefits of using plain language in technical writing

Based on the previous chapters, let’s try to trim down the definition. Plain language, aimed at technical communication, needs to follow certain rules. It must provide communication that leaves no room for error through clear wording, easy-to-follow structure, and visual design. The aim of all that is to ensure that the target audience can easily:

- Find what they need,
- understand what they find, and
- use this information.

Why is it important to use plain language techniques in technical writing? Now, let's summarize the knowledge from Chapter 3. In the world of technical communication, where expert, technical, or complex facts are predominant, the need for clear and concise information is critical. For areas such as business, legal, or government, the stakes are high. For example, posting straightforward financial information can result in informed consumer decision-making; at the same time, a poor announcement on the website may cause serious confusion, resulting in stock exchange chaos. This is no different, however, for technical documentation and manuals. While a word processor online help might pose considerably little danger, a bike or, for that matter, a wheelchair maintenance error might be critical.

Whether they are drafting software instructions, designing a website, or announcing an upcoming tax change, skilled technical communicators understand that information is meaningless unless the reader can easily and properly comprehend it.

Below are the key benefits of applying plain language principles in technical communication, particularly in technical writing. They can be put in several main areas of interest.

1. Usability and content comprehension

Using plain language in these areas ensures that information is easy to understand, navigate, and process, reducing cognitive effort and improving user experience.

Plain language improves comprehension. It simplifies concepts and ideas, making complex, specialized information more accessible to everyone, even if they do not have detailed knowledge of the topic. This is especially beneficial for users with cognitive impairments. If the readers have learning disabilities or attention deficit disorders, using plain language and conveying the message in a clear and structured way helps them understand information more effectively and remember it more easily.

Plain language increases usability. Content written in plain language is easier to navigate, understand, and use. This leads to an overall better user experience. Structural and semantic elements such as clear headings, straightforward instructions, and even things like easy-to-understand navigation let users find the information they need without confusion or frustration.

It makes the knowledge more approachable. Plain language reduces the cognitive load on users by presenting information in a digestible format. Putting the previous - utterly terrible - sentence clearly: using simple language makes the information clear and understandable even for users with lesser knowledge or otherwise less advanced. This is particularly helpful when users access information under stressful conditions, time pressure, or other inconveniences, especially if they are inexperienced.

2. Accessibility and inclusivity

Here, plain language makes content available to a wider audience, including people with disabilities, lower literacy levels, or language barriers, ensuring equitable access to information.

Plain language aids inclusivity. The texts can reach a broader audience, including readers with lower literacy levels or people who are not fluent in the foreign language, by using simplified language that is easy to understand. This inclusivity ensures that more individuals can benefit from the content or services provided, which is also beneficial for the product or service itself.

It benefits screen reader users. Plain language helps screen reader users by providing content that is clear and, hence, more likely to be properly interpreted by assistive technology. Simplified vocabulary and language structure let screen readers convey information more effectively. This greatly enhances the experience for users who need to rely on assistive technologies.

3. Business advantage and technical benefits

Using plain language enhances compliance with regulations, improves international reach, and reduces misunderstandings or errors, leading to better efficiency and user satisfaction.

The introduction of plain language helps meet specific requirements. Many industries or business branches have specific regulations and guidelines that require accessible communication, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Using plain language can help projects comply with these requirements, benefiting accessibility and inclusivity. In areas such as aviation, clear communication is even more important, as human health and life depend on it. Legal, medical, and business documents also gain a lot when they are delivered clearly and understandably, eliminating potential business risks or health hazards.

Plain language facilitates better and easier internationalization. Projects that are intended for internationalization can greatly benefit from plain language when it comes to translation. Simple and clear language translates more accurately and efficiently into other languages. Proper translation reduces the risk of errors or misunderstandings in the translated content. Such errors can have potentially dangerous impacts or adversely affect the proper use of a product.

It improves SEO. While the detailed ways of algorithms remain somewhat of a mystery, it is known that search engines favor content that is easy to read and understand. Using plain language, easily scannable structure, and clear navigation, documentation websites can improve their SEO (search engine optimization). This greatly aids the discoverability of such projects, although in the days when most popular search engines feed their users with AI-generated content, the effectiveness of this approach may become questionable.

As we can see, plain language usage affects all important areas of technical writing to varying degrees. No matter which of these functional areas is crucial in our case, investing time into proper content creation is worthwhile and will present a significant return-on-investment ratio (ROI).

The following chapter will provide practical, battle-tried advice on how to incorporate plain language in both the design phase and daily work.

5. Incorporating plain language and technical writing techniques in your work

Knowing what plain language is and why it is important, it is now time to approach the application of this knowledge. There are several resources online that can aid the technical writer and provide solutions. However, all the practical tasks boil down to just a few simple steps listed below. These were taken from and based on the idea suggested by the Center for Plain Language (the expanded version is linked at the end of this chapter).

1. Define your audience.
   Properly targeting the audience can include geographic, language, or age factors. It should also often include a list of key questions the audience might ask and the supposed tasks they want to accomplish. It is crucial to realize that not all readers possess the same level of knowledge of the subject; some of them might be completely unfamiliar with the concept. Skilled technical writers widen their audience range by adopting the plain language approach to eliminate the entry threshold for those users. This type of preliminary research is the most important when communicating externally to the public or to coworkers who do not predominantly cover the same field of expertise.

2. Structure the content appropriately.
   Plain language can greatly enhance user experience. However, language is just one factor, and the information must also be delivered in a clear, structured way. An organized, logical flow of information quickly leads the reader through difficult technical data and helps them comprehend it the first time. Using headings, short sections, and intuitive lists enhances customer satisfaction and keeps the information manageable. It also makes the document easier to scan for specific information and easier to skim for the basic concept or idea.

3. Write in plain language.
   Technical writers can break down readers' barriers to understanding by using simple, everyday words, active voice, present tense, and less jargon. Simplifying content without sacrificing accuracy is the main task here. Writing clearly and concisely keeps the reader focused and engaged. The main, most important information must be put forward. Details, additional data, and variable possible solutions should be mentioned further in the document so the readers do not get distracted or confused.

4. Use information design principles.
   As already mentioned in step 2, technical writers should avoid such writing solutions popular in creative writing, as a wall of words. Instead, they should rather consider data visualization, photos, graphics, or other ideas to make content more understandable, such as lists or tables. Such visual aids can largely reduce misinterpretation and errors. An easy-to-navigate web page with headers and subheaders can help readers move quickly and efficiently. The same goes for a glossary and table of contents in a printed manual.

5. Test the design and content.
   This final step is often omitted due to time or budget constraints, but it remains a crucial and immensely valuable activity for every technical writer. However, this step can be very treacherous, as the content creators know all the answers and the supposed user path to follow. Questions to be asked at this time include whether the user was able to complete their top tasks. Did they search unnecessarily? Did they become frustrated due to unclear labels or incomplete instructions? Could they accurately describe who and what the document or site is intended for?

   Spending sufficient time during the testing phase and reaching out for external help from others will help reduce these errors. This will, in turn, save time during implementation and also spare the writer or designer the need to return to, amend, and fix the already published documents. While updating and fixing errors on a website or in a PDF is pretty simple, making changes in printed manuals attached to the product poses a significant challenge.

You can read further breakdowns in the Five Steps to Plain Language article (sometimes in excruciating detail, but at least delivered in the form of easy-to-follow bulleted lists) by the Center for Plain Language. Adapting this solution as a form of checklist for technical writing tasks may be a game-changer for those who enter the field of creating documentation.

Here are some simple takeaway tips about implementing plain language and putting the knowledge into action:

- Use active voice and avoid passive constructions.
- Avoid jargon, technical terms, and acronyms unless they are clearly defined.
- Break down complex information into smaller, manageable chunks.
- Use bullet points or lists to organize information.
- Test the content with your target audience to ensure understandability.

6. Transitioning from creative to technical writing

Hardly ever does one start a technical writing career without previous writing experience. While it is not uncommon for project managers or even developers to take this step, it would probably be true to say that creative writers, copywriters, and translators are prevalent. Coming from a previous, established writing background is, of course, a great aid, but it can also be a serious setback. This is because technical writing has little in common with writing fiction for entertainment or even factual non-fiction or essays.

The most important difference is the plain language discussed and described in this paper. It is worth noting that certain parts of this work do not follow the advice of using Simplified Technical English (STE) or plain language at all. This is because some chapters must evoke the readers' interest. Practical solutions, however, such as five steps to plain language given previously, follow their own advised solutions. Easily switching between these two “modes” of language is a skill that takes considerable time and a lot of hard work to achieve.

At first, while writing technical documentation, I tended to make the language “nice”. I wanted the reader to find pleasure in delving into the secrets of the software product we were describing. However, reading pleasure is not sought after by the readers of technical manuals. This is wrong. Users need answers. Users want facts. The target audience demands clear and concise instructions. Solutions, tutorials, demos, and code snippets in the installation sections are what people want.

As mentioned before, it took me time to learn. Gone were the adjectives, the passive voice has been reckoned with, and chopped into pieces were the lengthy sentences with the unmistakable melody of American English. Away with ye! After more than two decades of writing pretty stories, I had to restrain myself and spit out precise, concise, factual, and actual data. The resulting frustration was described (even if in a semi-humorous way) in my essay titled Tech-writer lamentation: You is the because.

The two greatest aids in this somewhat sad but necessary switch were reviews from an experienced mentor and software solutions. The help of an older colleague is always invaluable. First of all, they provide all the onboarding knowledge, such as the application of brand books, preset documentation rules, company-specific approaches, and other regulatory devices. What is covered by these? Mostly the vocabulary, the predominant language variety if applicable (it will be different for the USA and UK, for example), and the preference for certain words and names used to address certain concepts.

An experienced mentor will also review and - at least in the first phase - correct your work and give you instructions and tips on how to improve your writing and where to change the approach to certain types of documents produced. Learning by practice is probably the most superior way to gain new skills, however, a skilled mentor is not always available.

Should that be the case, there are certain gimmicks and software solutions one may employ to aid their daily work. Spell-checkers and language aids are the first that come to mind. Online browser plugins such as Grammarly or Hemingway come in handy. The first one can point out and fix your errors on the go. It can also help set the text tone and approach toward

the reader, as well as the language variety. While commercial, it also offers a free version. Hemingway helps to break down and rewrite sentences and passages to make them simpler and more accessible. It, too, offers both a commercial and free version, although the latter is far less comfortable to use than its competition.

If you employ the docs-as-code approach in your technical writing - probably a general standard in software companies - you may make great use of development tools, such as linters and command line tools that can not only point out spelling mistakes but can even be fed dictionaries and rulesets to follow. One such tool is Vale, which can reside on a repository level on GitHub. Attached to an editor, such as VSC, it will underline all words not present in the dictionary. It will also point out language mechanisms such as passive voice if the applied ruleset does not allow them. Such software will often use external standards such as the Microsoft Style Guide, Proselint ruleset, or Readability rules to check the language.

All major popular solutions, such as Microsoft Office or Google Docs, offer basic language tools that can be boosted and expanded with plugins and scripts. Professional publishing and DTP software, such as Adobe InDesign, offer powerful tools that can deal with the technical side of text composition. Employing these in your daily tasks can lessen the workload for both the writer and the reviewer and make the transition from creative to technical writing easier and less frustrating. Having a helping hand, even if it is just an AI-driven piece of code, is always better than staggering up those steep stairs on your own. There are many available solutions, and because we love standards, there are also plenty of them that can be applied in a technical writer’s work. While this is not exactly the place for Linus’ Tech Tips and enumerating writing software, I will mention a few popular plain language standards in the next chapter.

7. Industry standards for plain language

While it is now clear why plain language is important in technical communication, there is always the problem of finding a definite approach. There have been several attempts to do it, and a commonly accepted standard in the mid-2020s is the Simplified Technical English specification, brought forth by ASD Europe. However, there are more standards, and I will briefly present a few of those.

7.1 ASD-STE100

ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English (STE for short) is a controlled natural language for writing technical documentation.

STE was created in the late 1970s by the European Association of Aerospace Industries (AECMA) in cooperation with the Aerospace Industries Association of America (AIA), upon request from the Association of European Airlines (AEA). The goal was to make aircraft maintenance documentation more readable for those with limited knowledge of English. Essentially, 80% of aviation workers are not native English speakers. The resulting AECMA Simplified English Guide was released in 1986 and later became an international standard: ASD-STE100 Simplified Technical English.

This specification is required by most subjects in commercial aviation. The European Defence Standards Reference recommends STE as one of the best practice standards for writing technical documentation to be applied to defense contracting by all European Defence Agency participating member states. STE is also a requirement in official directives issued by aviation authorities such as the European Union Aviation Safety Agency, the Federal Aviation Administration, and the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

Other industries, inspired by the success of STE in aviation, want to use it as well for maintenance documentation. Interest in STE is also present within the academic world, where it is applied to engineering and language studies.

The current issue of STE is dated April 2021 (Issue 8). While its structure is stable and consolidated, the language has to be kept in line with the developing technology and amended following the feedback received from the users.

The STE standard provides a set of writing rules and a dictionary of controlled vocabulary. The key takeaways of ASD-STE100 are:

- The writing rules cover aspects of grammar and style.
- The dictionary specifies the general words that can be used.
- These words were chosen for their simplicity and ease of recognition. In general, there is only one word for one meaning and one part of speech for one word.

In addition to its dictionary, STE permits the use of company-specific or project-specific technical words (referred to in STE as technical names and technical verbs). It provides

rules and categories for these technical words. Writers can use the approved words from the dictionary as a core vocabulary. They can also use terms that are usual in their companies or industries and applicable to their projects and products.

By adopting a ready-made solution and applying the rules of STE100 daily, technical writers can make the task of creating informative, usable, accessible, and efficient documentation much easier.

7.2 ISO 24495-1:2023

The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) is an independent organization that develops, publishes, and sells international standards. It has issued over 25,000 standards since its establishment. An ISO standard provides requirements, specifications, or guidelines to ensure the consistent quality of products and services. They are issued as documents that can later be used to adapt the standards internationally and are the basis for ISO certification.

The International Organization for Standardization issued the *ISO 24495-1:2023 Plain Language — Part 1: Governing Principles and Guidelines* in June 2023. It attempts to help authors develop documents that communicate effectively with their audience. It can be applied to most written languages. The document reflects both the recent research on plain language and the experience of global language experts.

The ISO standard definition of plain language (adopted from the International Plain Language Federation) is communication in which wording, structure, and design are so clear that intended readers can easily find what they need, understand it, and use the information.

7.3 The Federal Plain Language Guidelines

The Federal Plain Language Guidelines introduced by the Plain Writing Act of 2010 were first developed in the mid-90s. They are revised every few years to provide updated advice on clear communication. Initially, they were primarily focused on regulations, but the coverage broadened with time.

The guidelines are organized into sections, but many of the topics fit within more than one section. They start with a discussion of your audience, as it should be considered before writing or planning to write. Then, they move to the organization because developing a good organization is important during the planning stage. Next come the writing principles, starting at the word level and moving up through paragraphs and sections. This is the most extensive topic. The Federal Plain Language Guidelines cover both the principles of writing documents and the principles of writing for the web.

These are the official guidelines for the Plain Writing Act of 2010 to write clearly so your users can:

- Find what they need,
- understand what they find, and
- use what they find to meet their needs.

7.4 Other examples

The three mentioned above definitely do not complete the list of plain language guidelines and regulations. Many countries have their own solutions in place. If you are interested in this topic, you can start your journey at the PLAIN website's Plain Language Around the World article, which mentions worldwide and local solutions.

There are also sets of rules and standards in place, designed for specific purposes (for example, news journalism), such as the AP Stylebook or the Chicago Manual of Style. These get periodically updated and are often adopted by writing professionals globally. A lot of writing aids and editor plugins, such as the ones mentioned in the previous chapter, allow for using these guidelines in your daily work, some of which have already been mentioned in chapter 6.

8. Summary

Technical writing is a structured and precise form of communication used to present complex information clearly, often through procedural documentation such as manuals and user guides. It differs from creative writing in its objective tone, structured format, and emphasis on clarity and accuracy. A key principle in technical writing is **plain language**, which enhances comprehension by simplifying terminology, structuring content logically, and using clear formatting. The benefits of plain language include improved accessibility, usability, inclusivity, compliance with legal standards, and better SEO. It is clear that this summary does not employ plain language, and this specific remark was made for the fun of both the writer and the reader.

To apply plain language techniques effectively, technical writers must first define their audience, structure content appropriately, simplify the language, incorporate visuals, and test the final usability. For those moving from creative to technical writing, adapting to the new style can be challenging. However, mentorship, software tools, and adherence to style guides can ease the transition, ensuring content is both effective and user-friendly. Tools such as online and desktop language checkers help writers transition from creative to technical writing by enforcing clarity and consistency and helping to maintain a stable level of simplified language needed to convey the often complex ideas and information.

The technical writer should always ponder and put forth the suggested target audience and consider the reader persona. Focusing on them will help deliver a clear and precise message. The clarity and understandability of documentation may sometimes seem trivial, but there are times when it affects human safety and may cause various hazards when the message is not conveyed efficiently. This is why constant development and, first and foremost, following current trends in writing solutions and language tools, and rules is a crucial part of the technical communication experience. The author of this paper hopes that these several notes, remarks, and pointed-out phenomena might help someone on this challenging but also very satisfying journey.

At all times, be clear in what you write or otherwise deliver to your users.

9. Glossary of terms

Accessibility – Making content usable for people with disabilities, often guided by standards like the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG).

AP Stylebook – A widely used style guide for grammar, punctuation, and writing standards.

ASD-STE100 (Simplified Technical English - STE) – A controlled natural language developed by the European Association of Aerospace Industries (AECMA) to improve the readability of technical documentation, primarily for non-native English speakers.

Chicago Manual of Style – A style guide that provides guidelines for writing, editing, and publishing.

Cognitive Load – The mental effort required to process and understand information. Reducing cognitive load improves comprehension and user experience.

Creative Writing – A form of writing that emphasizes storytelling, imagination, and artistic expression, often seen in novels, short stories, and poetry.

DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) – An XML-based architecture used for structuring, developing, and publishing technical content in a reusable format.

Docs-as-Code – A documentation approach that treats writing like software development, often using version control systems.

Fact-Checking – The process of verifying the accuracy of information in a document to ensure reliability and credibility.

Geeks for Geeks – A source referenced for comparative analysis between technical and creative writing.

Grammar Simplification – A key characteristic of technical writing that involves eliminating complex sentence structures to enhance clarity.

Grammarly – An AI-powered writing assistant that corrects grammar, spelling, and style errors.

Hemingway App – A tool that improves readability by highlighting complex sentences and passive voice.

Inclusivity – Ensuring that content is accessible to people with varying literacy levels, cognitive abilities, and language proficiencies.

Information Design – The practice of organizing and structuring information in a way that enhances readability and comprehension, often incorporating visuals and logical formatting.

Internationalization – The process of designing content so it can be easily translated and adapted for different languages and cultures.

Legal and Compliance Requirements – Standards and regulations that technical documentation must meet, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), to ensure accessibility and clarity.

Linter – A tool that analyzes text or code for errors and inconsistencies.

Markdown – A lightweight markup language used for formatting plain text documents.

Microsoft Style Guide – A set of language and style recommendations for writing technical documentation.

Objective Voice – A writing style that maintains neutrality and avoids personal bias, commonly used in technical writing.

Plain Language – A writing approach that prioritizes clear, concise, and easily understood wording to help readers find, understand, and use information effectively.

Procedural Documentation – A type of technical writing that provides step-by-step instructions, including user guides, installation manuals, and standard operating procedures (SOPs).

Proselint – A tool that checks text against established style and grammar rules.

Readability Rules – Guidelines used to ensure text is clear and understandable for the intended audience.

Return on Investment – ROI is a core financial performance measure used to evaluate the efficiency of an investment and to compare the efficiency to other investments.

Screen Reader – Assistive technology that converts digital text into speech or braille, benefiting users with visual impairments.

SEO (Search Engine Optimization) – Techniques used to improve the visibility of online content in search engine results, often influenced by clarity and readability.

Standardized Guidelines – Established rules for maintaining consistency in technical writing, including the AP Stylebook, Chicago Manual of Style, and industry-specific standards like DITA and ASD-STE100.

Simplified Technical English (STE) – A controlled language designed to simplify and clarify technical documentation.

Target Audience – The intended readership of a document, which influences writing style, terminology, and complexity.

Technical Communication – The practice of conveying complex information in a clear and accessible manner for specialized audiences such as engineers, scientists, and customers.

Technical Names and Technical Verbs – Industry-specific or project-specific terms permitted in ASD-STE100 to ensure precision while maintaining clarity.

Technical Writing – A specialized writing discipline focused on creating documents that communicate technical or complex information in a clear, concise, and accurate manner.

Usability – The ease with which a user can interact with and understand technical documentation, influenced by structure, clarity, and design.

Vale – A style and grammar checker for technical writing, commonly used in software documentation.

Visual Communication – The integration of graphics, diagrams, and other visual aids in technical writing to enhance understanding.

Writing Rules – The grammatical and stylistic guidelines set forth by ASD-STE100 and other standards to maintain clarity, consistency, and precision in technical documents.

The glossary was created with the aid of ChatGPT.

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About the author

Bartek Biedrzycki has been a technical writer for the CKSource software product company since 2020. He works in the docs-as-code approach currently, but is also familiar with other ways of preparing documentation and technical papers. He also used to translate technical documentation (mostly for medical equipment) and teach English professionally, and he spent more than a quarter of the century in the IT industry (so far).

The author comes from a creative writing background, both fiction and non-fiction. Since the mid-1990s, he has been writing, publishing articles and ephemera, and recording podcasts about all things culture. He has also been writing novels, short stories, and comics for more than two decades.

As a technical writer, he is responsible for preparing, editing, updating, and adapting user guides, tutorials, demo samples, and walk-throughs for a cross-platform WYSIWYG editor framework. His work also included documenting supporting solutions and products, writing releases, deep-dive articles, and communication blog posts.

His non-professional body of work covers space exploration, dystopia, alternative history, science fiction, fantasy, and slice-of-life dramas. He also created a few retro 8-bit games that he documented and fitted with user manuals all on his own.