Technical Writing. A Guide for Effective Communication

Carmen Bombardó Solés, Marta Aguilar Pérez & Clàudia Barahona Fuentes.
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Writing a book review entails a certain amount of responsibility, particularly towards readership and, above all, towards prospective teachers and faculty who may be deciding which book to select for their courses. The publication we present today, *Technical Writing. A Guide for Effective Communication*, is an elaborate, dense textbook for intermediate students at a university setting. The publication is particularly suited for engineering students and professionals alike in which they will be able to find materials from different sources so that what authors propose as being an integrative approach may be fulfilled. This course book intends to familiarize students, first, with the different types of scientific texts and, second, with the characteristics of technical writing.

The history of technical writing goes back a good number of decades. According to Brockman (1998), Joseph D. Chapline is considered to be the first technical writer to introduce software documentation to the rest of the world. Early in the 1940s, while working for Eckert and Mauchley, he became the first technical writer employed to document the way an operating system worked. He first wrote the *Binac Computer User Guide* (1949) and later an eight-page pamphlet called *Technical Writing* (1950). During the sixties and seventies, numerous publications appeared in which their main concern was technical writing, and including journals such as the *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication* with its first issue in 1971, all of which have provided information to professionals on writing for technical purposes. The course book we have at hand is another excellent link in this chain of manuals for prospective technical writers.

Authors of course books, in their pre-planning activities, purposefully analyze the scope and range of their texts in an effort to foresee what their intended readers might need. As Gopen and Swan (1990: 550) wrote, "[i]f the reader is to grasp what the writer means, the writer must understand what the reader

needs". Carmen Bombardó and colleagues, based on their extensive professional experience, fully understood this idea when they set out to compose this writing manual. It is a book deeply grounded on their expertise in which they give ample room to theory and practice as well. Their approach is basically threefold –product, process and genre–, although the process dominates the other two since, as the authors point out, this approach aims at contributing to "the development of the students' writing abilities" (page 5).

The book is divided into three major sections, the first one (chapter 1) gives an introduction to technical writing, what it is, and what its characteristics and the main functions of technical discourse are; the second and most extensive section concerns the writing process in which the authors develop the three writing stages –"Pre-writing stage" (chapter 2), "Writing stage" (chapter 3) and "Post-writing stage" (chapter 4)–; finally, in the third section, called handbook, the authors go over some of the main constituents in language through a revision of "Grammar, Style and Punctuation" (chapter 5). They also add an appendix with the key to exercises in the text, very useful for students and professionals who may need a refresher course in technical English. Students often complain that scientific texts are too hard to read; the authors show how to approach them without oversimplifying scientific issues, while at the same time maintaining their original flavor. Through an accurate description of different rhetorical and linguistic skills, they present a cogent and well-organized set of texts that provide an ample spectrum of issues and reference materials for engineering students in general from such technical disciplines as telecommunications, computing, civil engineering, and the like.

Of particular interest is the genre-specific concern throughout the text which provides students with an awareness of the different types of texts they will encounter in their future profession. This is accompanied by numerous texts and exercises related to different genres, such as letters, abstracts, summaries, reports, research papers, etc. This concern, however, does not simply rest on how a term paper, a report, a letter, or a scientific abstract may be structured; the authors supply a step-by-step description of paragraph formation, with its topic and supporting sentences, which is perhaps one of the stumbling blocks we as teachers have encountered in our day-to-day classroom activity among Spanish university students. Also of interest to readers is the description of proofreading and peer review activities as the last step of the writing process, providing a series of checklists for self or peer control.

This is indeed a carefully put together course book with an intermediate level in English which reveals a good amount of preparation and dedication on the authors' part. They carefully selected a wide range of authentic texts related to engineering, most of which were published in the last two decades, which reflect not only what science has to say through popular and scientific publications, but also the communicative realities of the discipline. We most certainly welcome a text such as this one which will undoubtedly be used to full satisfaction by teachers in their classrooms.

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Reviewed by **Jordi Piqué-Angordans**
Universitat de València (Spain)
jordi.pique@uv.es

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