

Engineers' Guide to Technical Writing: A Book Review

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Bibliographical Details:

Author of the Book : ***Kenneth G. Budinski***

Title of the Book : ***Engineers' Guide to Technical Writing***

Name of the Publisher : ***ASM International***

Place of Publication : ***USA***

Year of Publication : ***1st edition (February 15, 2001)***

ISBN : ***0-87170-693-8***

Length : ***400 pages (Hardcover)***

Introduction

Technical communicators often must take technical content and make it understandable to non-technical people. An engineer may excel at engineering, but have problems explaining matters to accountants, marketing people, even the general public. Budinski's ***Engineers' Guide to Technical Writing*** addresses this problem, not for technical communicators, but for engineers and other technical professionals. Effective communication is a prerequisite for a successful technical career, and this book presents a system that has proven to be successful in making effective communicators. Budinski divides the book into 15 chapters where he spends considerable time talking about visualizing the concepts to be communicated for a non-technical audience as though visuals would replace written explanations. He mentions several visualization tools that receive considerable attention.

Features

- This book provides easy-to-follow guidelines, methods and rules that will make you a more efficient technical writer.
- Describes how to write clearly and concisely by presenting the essential attributes, methods, and objectives of good technical writing.

- Provides an easy-to-follow writing strategy that will help you arrange and prioritize your thinking before you actually start to write.
- Includes techniques that make good writing less of a challenge.
- Features checklists and step-by-step procedures that will help even the most reluctant writer.
- Through numerous examples, tips, and rules, you will learn how to write effective memos, documents, and technical reports and help you advance your career.
- Incorporates at least one figure, table, graphic, bullet list, or equation on most pages.
- Explores the various avenues for publishing your work.

Summary

I found this book to be very well thought out and well written. I think engineers of all types are often required to write reports, summaries, manuals, guides, and so forth. While these individuals certainly have had some sort of English or writing course, it is less likely that they have had any instruction in the special requirements of technical writing. Filling this void, *Engineers' Guide to Technical Writing* enables readers to write, edit, and publish materials of a technical nature, including books, articles, reports, and electronic media. Since the book is written by a renowned engineer and widely published technical author, it complements the traditional writer's reference manuals and other books on technical writing. It helps readers understand the practical considerations in writing technical content. The author presents many first-hand examples of writing, editing, and publishing technical materials.

The overall objective of the book is frequent, effective, written documentation produced by effective communication. And this is the purpose of this book to explain types of technical documents and how to write them. The author does not focus on the "laws of the English language." This book discusses most types of documents that average technical person will encounter in business, government, or industry. The first iteration of this book was directed toward college students in the sciences and engineering. In my opinion, this book can help students as well as working technical people.

The first four chapters are intended to bring the reader on board – to convince him or her that it is worth the effort to become a reasonably good technical writer. There is also a chapter on how to conduct technical studies. There is a chapter on how to make effective illustrations

and one on how to make oral presentations. The remaining “teaching” chapters cover specific types of technical documents: informal reports, formal reports, proposals, correspondence, etc. The book ends with another philosophical chapter. This one is on how to discipline yourself to get writing tasks done in a timely manner. Grammar, punctuation, and report mechanics is relegated to the appendix. Readers who need help can use them. The appendix also contains examples of just about every kind of technical document that one would encounter including a complete technical paper and a patent. Exercises for practice and references appear at the end of each chapter.

Although, the book has high price, this book is a very useful writing reference for all engineering students. The book is great for non-engineers also. Good references, examples and direct to the point make this book more readable. Engineers and technical people tend to be math / science geeks, and often their style with written communication is not great, to say the least. Enter the Budinski book. Work it from cover to cover and you'll have the one awesome training course.

To sum up, an engineer with experience in the automotive and chemical process industries, Budinski has compiled material he used to train new engineers and technicians in an attempt to get his co-workers to document their work in a reasonable manner.

Body of the Review

I have focused on three major aspects of this book for the review. They are content, presentation technique, and use of the language.

- **Content**

I found that as the book is written for a particular readership, the author has chosen the content and wording properly. As Technical documents must provide useful information that the readers want, the author has satisfied what they want. This book is free of plagiarism as the author has stated references at the end of each chapter. As most technical writers need facts supported by data to convince readers to take action or pay attention to the message in a document, the author has provided the sufficient background materials to justify the conclusions.

A clear, concise statement of the purpose of each chapter is set in the beginning of each chapter, as the author is aware of the fact that readers' time is important. The writer has followed a more practical reason for timeliness is that you may lose data or forget important details if you do not write your report in a timely manner. A good technical document gives proper attribution when the work of others is cited to make a point or provide background information. The author has cited many sources of information to make his work more authentic. I feel that a good report should explain statistical terminology in words understandable by the intended readers. The author is aware of the fact as he eliminated technical jargons and acronyms in this book.

- **Presentation**

In this section, I have focused on the critical attributes of presentation technique i.e. overall writing methodology (or style). The most important aspect of this book is a logical structure for the reader. Budinski has presented all information in a proper way and with a proper use of the language. Though the writer has used many technical words, he avoided acronyms. He believes that technical writing must be objective. He has stated facts and formulated conclusions based on these facts. As bias is usually detected by a reader and credibility may be questioned, the writer has got reviewed this book by his trusted coworker.

Budinski has tried to reduce reader boredom and maintained reader attention by using attractive (but not distracting) page layouts, useful illustrations, attractive headings and fonts. His report mechanics makes this book more clear and readable. He has followed hierarchical heading as his choice of section and subsection headings makes this book easier to read. This book has proper visual appearance which increases readability.

- **Language Skills**

Every language has its rules. Since this book only deals with English, in the United States the Modern Language Association (MLA) is the keeper of the rules. Budinski has followed only general aspects of language skills. As previously noted, he has avoided acronyms in this book. There is hardly any punctuation error found in his book. The author has used a blend of sentences of varying length that makes the sentences and paragraphs readable and concise. The book is written in the Active Voice. Therefore, the author has tried to use verbs that connote action in the present tense.

Budinski has used words with concrete meaning and clear definitions, instead of complicating simple thoughts with unnecessary contortions of the English language. This book is free of misspellings, which increase the credibility of the entire work. The author has followed reasonable grammar. He is aware of one of the most common grammar errors in English writing that is disagreement of verb and noun in a sentence.

Conclusion

In summary, I found this book with a good technical content arranged in a logical format that is presented in an easy-to-read format without technical or grammatical errors. I found this book particularly useful, as it gave me more insight to improve my written communication effectively. As I started to read the first chapter, which was about 'what is technical writing', I realized that the book wasn't just the boring. It was intelligently written and had utmost technical documents illustrated from formal report, research paper, patent to informal report, proposal and correspondence etc. Although I didn't want to read such bulky book with 400 pages, it wasn't as bad as I had expected, and I found it to be enjoyable and informative. I recommend this book to colleagues, researchers and students of engineering.

References

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