

## **Five steps to writing good technical documentation**

Anyone who wants to break into Technical Writing or Technical Communication, should take at least one course in Technical Communication. This is where the methodology of writing technical documentation is taught. Many believe that a degree in English and/or knowing how to string words, sentences, and paragraphs together is enough. It is not enough if one doesn't learn the methodology of creating technical documentation that works as intended. Anyone with a good command of English can produce good technical documentation if they perform the following five steps:

1. Front-end audience analysis, Learn the purpose and the audience for the documentation.
2. Research to provide the information that satisfies the purpose for the intended audience.
3. Organize the information and present it in a form suitable for the purpose of the intended audience.
4. Perform usability testing. Use participants as representative sample(s) of the user audience to test the documentation. Monitor and take notes to determine where the documentation works and where it doesn't work. Make it clear to participants that the documentation is being tested and not the participants. No matter how good one may be as a technical communicator, usability testing is the key to determining good documentation that works as intended.
5. Revise the documentation until it works as intended.

Technical documentation may look good, get signed off by managers who are not a part of those that will use the documentation, and yet the documentation does not work as intended. This means that the training department or customer/technical service must be on hand to solve the problems that could be avoided by good documentation. If the five basic steps above are performed, good technical documentation that works as intended can be created.

A certificate or courses in Technical Writing does not guarantee that an entry level technical writer position will be obtained, but it provides a better chance of success and the knowledge of technical writing methodology to interview more confidently.