

Technical Communication Today

Sixth Edition

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Cover Designer: Pentagram Design
Cover Illustrator: Anuj Shrestha
Cover Art: Pentagram Design
Manufacturing Buyer: Roy L. Pickering, Jr.
Printer/Binder: LSC Communications
Cover Printer: Phoenix Color

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Johnson-Sheehan, Richard, author.

Title: Technical communication today / Richard Johnson-Sheehan, Purdue University.

Description: Sixth edition | Boston : Pearson, [2018] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016048445 | ISBN 9780134425733 (student edition) | ISBN 0134425731 (student edition) | ISBN 9780134432373 (a la carte) | ISBN 0134432398 (a la carte)

Subjects: LCSH: Communication of technical information. | Business communication.

Classification: LCC T10.5 .J65 2018 | DDC 601/.4--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016048445>

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Student Edition ISBN 10: 0-13-442573-1
Student Edition ISBN 13: 978-0-13-442573-3
A la Carte ISBN 10: 0-13-443237-1
A la Carte ISBN 13: 978-0-13-0443237-3

To Tracey, Emily, and Collin

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Preface

The sixth edition of *Technical Communication Today* marks a major shift in the direction of this highly successful book. In the previous five editions, *Technical Communication Today's* signature feature has been its emphasis on networked computers as the central nervous system of the scientific and technical workplace. At the time, that was a revolutionary concept. Today, digital devices, from smartphones to mainframes, are the indispensable infrastructure of today's workplace. These networks have become the central hub of written, spoken, and visual communication in today's technical workplace.

As we launch this new edition of *Technical Communication Today*, I want to draw your attention to what I believe is an emerging revolutionary change in science and technology: the centralization of innovation and entrepreneurship in the technical workplace. Of course, innovation and entrepreneurship are not new. What *is* new is that these concepts have been moved from the leading edge into the core mission of scientific and technical work. Today, you will be involved in developing new products and services. Your employer will expect you to look for creative new ways to do things faster, cheaper, and more efficiently. You will need to engage and interact with customers, clients, and the public. In other words, innovation needs to be happening everywhere and all the time to keep up with the rapid shifts in communication technologies and emerging markets.

Meanwhile, entrepreneurship is not just a buzzword in today's scientific and technical environments. You need to always think like an entrepreneur, whether you are helping to launch a start-up tech company, working for a large enterprise tech company, or doing research

in a laboratory. Entrepreneurship is a mindset that blends together creativity, leadership, self-reliance, resilience, and persuasive communication. This innovation-centered mindset is a recognition that the workplace is always fluid and flexible, continuously adapting to new ideas and technologies. In the workplace, you will be assigned to specialized teams that are designed to take on specific projects. Then, when those projects are finished, you will be put on other teams that are meeting other objectives. The teams you are working on will often include people from around the world, who are being brought in because they have specialized skills and knowledge. Like an entrepreneur, you will need to know how to work independently and in teams, adapting quickly to new people, new tasks, and new workplace environments.

Of course, much of this change is due to the disruptive power and creative potential of emerging information technologies. Communication tools like social networking, cloud storage, videoconferencing, and real-time collaboration are accelerating the pace of the technical workplace. If you know how to write clearly, speak persuasively, and design functional and attractive texts, you will succeed in today's innovation-based and entrepreneurial workplace.

Personally, I'm excited about this new edition of *Technical Communication Today* because it strikes off in a new and uncertain direction. We've seen incredible changes in the technical workplace over the past decade, and I can only imagine what kinds of changes are waiting for us over the next decade. Whatever happens, I know scientific and technical communication will be at the center of it all.

What's New in the Sixth Edition?

The focus on innovation and entrepreneurship in *Technical Communication Today* 6e has brought about many improvements and new features. Here are some of the major changes in the book.

Improvements throughout *Technical Communication Today* include:

- A new focus in every chapter on the importance of innovation and entrepreneurship in today's scientific and technical workplace.
- Increased coverage of transcultural and global issues and their impact on emerging markets.
- New figures that are more illustrative of important processes and concepts.
- Direct connections between learning objectives and specific key sections in each chapter, making assessment much easier.
- Streamlined chapters that incorporate computer-based skills once featured in separate "Help" sections.

Chapter-by-chapter improvements include:

- **A completely revised Chapter 1, "Technical Communication in the Entrepreneurial Workplace,"** which explores the emerging importance of innovation and entrepreneurship in technical communication. Technical communication is recast as part of the creative work of scientific and technical fields.
- **A revised Chapter 2, "Profiling Your Readers,"** which shows how to think of readers as stakeholders who can be motivated to say yes to new ideas and projects. The chapter explores in greater depth how transcultural readers react to written, verbal, and visual cues.
- **An improved Chapter 3, "Working in Teams,"** which reframes teaming in terms associated with entrepreneurial start-ups and projects, helping students understand the

fluid and evolving nature of today's technical workplace.

- **A repositioned Chapter 5, "Starting Your Career,"** which moves the career chapter forward in the book to reflect how and when it is used in most technical communication courses. This content emphasizes the importance of continually revising career materials for today's evolving workplace.
- **A revised Chapter 7, "Technical Descriptions and Specifications,"** which shows how the purpose of technical descriptions is changing to fit today's innovation-based technical workplace and stresses the importance of technical descriptions in developing new products and services.
- **An updated Chapter 9, "Proposals,"** which highlights how proposals are often the centerpiece of innovation and entrepreneurship in scientific and technical fields.
- **A new Microgenre, "Post Mortem," in Chapter 10, "Brief Reports,"** a new text that is becoming increasingly common and essential in today's technical workplace. In addition, the chapter has been renamed in accordance with emerging workplace terminology.
- **A completely revised and retitled Chapter 12, "Thinking Like an Entrepreneur,"** which moves creativity-enhancing techniques to the forefront, while following with strategic planning tools that capitalize on creative thinking.
- **Reworked coverage in Chapter 13, "How to Be Persuasive,"** which offers strategies for getting people to say yes to a new idea.
- **A revamped Chapter 20, "Presenting and Pitching Your Ideas,"** in which presentations are reimagined as a way of using persuasion to support new ideas, products, and services. More emphasis is placed on the importance of promoting new ideas rather than simply transmitting technical information, as well as the importance of online types of presentations.

- **A revised Chapter 21, “Writing for the Internet,”** which stresses brand-building, messaging, and teaming strategies that are common with today’s Internet. In addition, there is more emphasis on reaching out to team members, clients, and customers with social networking, blogs, and websites.
- **Seven completely new case studies** that feature the experiences of entrepreneurs in today’s scientific and technical workplaces. These are titled “Entrepreneurship Case Study”:
 - Facing the challenge of maximizing productivity and getting team members to work together (Chapter 3)
 - Developing a revolutionary idea while considering the physical and ethical implications of the concept (Chapter 4)
 - Creating a design and prototype for a new product while stealing someone else’s idea (Chapter 9)
 - Generating ideas for new products at an enterprise company (Chapter 12)
 - Starting a new service on a college campus (Chapter 13)
 - Using a start-up incubator as a way of introducing the importance of design in new products and services (Chapter 17)
 - Figuring out how to pitch a product idea with a colleague who is not a confident public speaker (Chapter 20).
- **New and updated exercises and projects** throughout.
- **Completely revised MLA documentation coverage** that reflects the 2016 overhaul of MLA style.

Guiding Themes

In this book, I have incorporated the newest technology in workplace communication, but the basics have not been forgotten. *Technical Communication Today* is grounded in a solid core of rhetorical

principles that have been around since the beginning. These core principles have held up well and, in fact, are even more relevant as we return to a more visual and oral culture.

Entrepreneurship as a Mindset

This edition features innovation and entrepreneurship as central motivators in the scientific and technical workplace. Students learn how to “think like an entrepreneur,” always looking for ways to be creative, self-reliant, and resilient.

Computers as Thinking Tools

This book’s long-standing theme is that networked computers and mobile devices are integral and indispensable in technical communication. *Technical Communication Today* shows students how to fully use computers and succeed in a complex and fast-moving technical workplace.

Visual-Spatial Reading, Thinking, and Composing

Documents are “spaces” where information is stored and flows. Visual-spatial reading, thinking, and composing involve interacting with text in real time. *Technical Communication Today* shows students how to engage, compose, and interact with texts in four important ways:

- It shows writers how to use visual-spatial techniques to research, invent, draft, design, and edit their work.
- It teaches students how to write and speak visually, while designing highly navigable documents and presentations.
- It provides guidance on composing visual-spatial multimodal documents and presentations.
- It practices what it preaches by providing information in an accessible, visual-spatial format.

The International, Transcultural Workplace

As with each edition, international and transcultural issues have been expanded as the world

becomes more globalized. This topic has been woven into the main chapter discussion rather than placed on its own because issues of globalization are not separable from technical communication.

The Activity of Technical Communication

Technical Communication Today continues to stress the activity of technical communication—producing effective documents and presentations. Each chapter follows a step-by-step process approach that mirrors how professionals in the technical workplace communicate. As someone who has consulted and taught technical communication for over two decades, I know that students today rarely read their textbooks but, instead, raid them for specific information. For this reason, like any good technical communicator, I have tried to make this book as “raidable” as possible. That way, students can get in the book, get what they need, and get things done.

Resources for Students and Instructors

Revel™

Educational Technology Designed for the Way Today’s Students Read, Think, and Learn

When students are engaged deeply, they learn more effectively and perform better in their courses. This simple fact inspired the creation of Revel: an interactive learning environment designed for the way today’s students read, think, and learn.

Revel enlivens course content with media interactives and assessments—integrated directly within the authors’ narrative—that provide opportunities for students to read, practice, and study in one continuous experience. This immersive educational technology replaces the textbook and is designed to measurably boost students’ understanding, retention, and preparedness.

Learn more about Revel at <http://www.pearsonhighered.com/revel/>

Instructor’s Manual

The *Instructor’s Manual*, available online at www.pearsonhighered.com, offers chapter-specific teaching strategies, prompts for class discussion, strategies for improving students’ writing and presentations, in-and-out-of-class activities, and quizzes (with suggested answers).

Acknowledgments

Every edition of *Technical Communication Today* has given me the opportunity to work with many people at Pearson and at colleges around the country. I wish to thank the following individuals for their insight and support: Teresa Aggen, Pikes Peak Community College; Sherrie L. Amido, California Polytechnic State University—San Luis Obispo; James Baker, Texas A&M University; Lauri M. Baker, University of Florida; Russell Barrett, Blinn College; Eric Bateman, San Juan College; Jenny Billings Beaver, Rowan-Cabarrus Community College; Patricia Boyd, Arizona State University; Norman Douglas Bradley, University of California—Santa Barbara; Lee Brasseur, Illinois State University; Jonathon Briggs, Central New Mexico Community College; Stuart Brown, New Mexico State University; Ellie Bunting, Edison College; Maria J. Cahill, Edison State College; Tracy L. Dalton, Missouri State University; Roger Friedman, Kansas State University; Timothy D. Giles, Georgia Southern University; Mark Gula, Northern Arizona University; Charlotte Hyde, Purdue University; Jeffrey Jablonski, University of Nevada—Las Vegas; Rebecca Jackson, Texas State University; Leslie Janac, Blinn College—Bryan Campus; Miles A. Kimball, Texas Tech University; Christy L. Kinnion, Wake Technical Community College; Jamee Larson, North Dakota State University; Barry Lawler,

Oregon State University; Arthur Leal, University of Florida; Barbara L'Eplattenier, University of Arkansas—Little Rock; Anna Maheshwari, Schoolcraft College; Barry Maid, Arizona State University; Jodie Marion, Mt. Hood Community College; Steve Marsden, Stephen F. Austin State University; Mary S. McCauley, Wake Technical Community College; Sheryl McGough, Iowa State University; Kenneth Mitchell, Southeastern Louisiana University; Jacqueline S. Palmer, Texas A&M University; Andrea M. Penner, San Juan College; Cindy Raisor, Texas A&M University; Sherry Rankins-Robertson, Arizona State University; Mark S. Rideout, University of Tulsa; Mark T. Rooze, Florence-Darlington Technical College; Carlos Salinas, The University of Texas at El Paso; Teryl Sands, Arizona State University; Paul R. Sawyer, Southeastern Louisiana University; Jennifer Sheppard, New Mexico State University; Rick Simmons, Louisiana Technical University; Nancy Small, Texas A&M University; Kara Smith, Brunswick Community College; Krista Soria,

University of Alaska Anchorage; Karina Stokes, University of Houston—Downtown; Christine Strebeck, Louisiana Tech University; Valerie Thomas, University of New Mexico; Christopher Toth, Iowa State University; Jack Trotter, Trident Technical College; Greg Wilson, Iowa State University; Alan Zemel, Drexel University.

Editors Brad Potthoff and Anne Brunell Ehrenworth were essential in the revision of this book, and I thank them for their ideas. Thanks also to my colleagues, Professors Scott Sanders, Charles Paine, and David Blakesley. Finally, thanks to Nick Marino and Erin Brock Carlson for their assistance.

Most important, I would like to thank my wife, Tracey, and my children, Emily and Collin, for their patience, because sometimes working on books like this one takes time away from them.

Richard Johnson-Sheehan