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About This Publication

The Maverick Messenger is a student-run newsletter featuring articles on technology, cross-cultural communication, web design, career advancement, and much more. In this edition of the Maverick Messenger, we explore facets of technical communication related to our fields of interest and professional experience.

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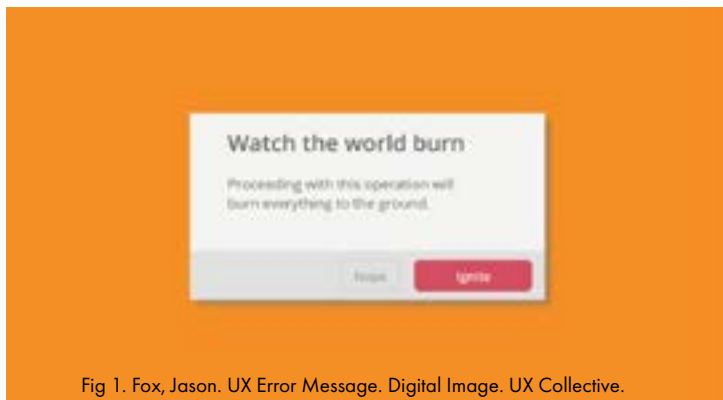
The Rise of UX Writers

LENNY DIBONO

Fig 1. Fox, Jason. UX Error Message. Digital Image. UX Collective.

Navigating the web and our mobile apps can often feel quite like the image above. When those responsible for designing the interfaces we use don't take the time or care to lead us through a virtual experience safely, we can easily find ourselves one mistaken button-click away from "burning everything to the ground."

Users of digital products navigate the virtual world by referring to the text that is located across the page, on buttons, in fields, tips, and wherever else is convenient and necessary. In the UX field, these small tidbits of copy are called microcopy, and their purpose is to guide users through a digital product in a clear, simple, and even enjoyable way (Lyonnais 2019). When this microcopy isn't created correctly, a user can find themselves purchasing something they didn't want to purchase, signing up for a bunch of spam e-mails without knowing, or even giving away personal information to an unknown source.
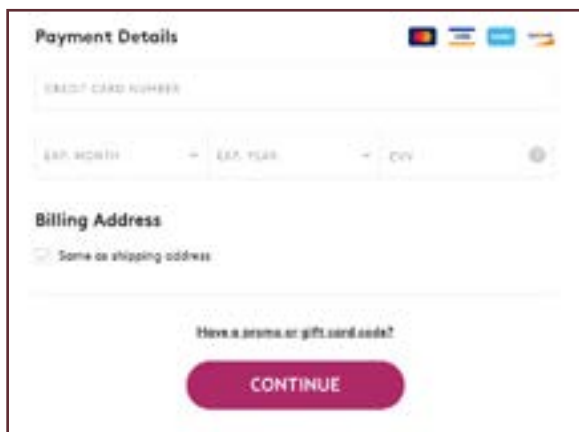

Fig 2. Mapes, Melissa. Credit Card Pay Information. Digital Image. Real Big Words.

Take this image for example. Ever come across one of these terribly misleading buttons when making a purchase online? Continue... continue where? To a 'Review My Order' screen? Or a 'Congratulations, your order for that $3000 television you weren't sure you wanted to buy yet has now been placed' screen? Poorly labeled buttons like these frequent the virtual landscape, and they often leave the user feeling scammed and cheated. It's only one word on a button, but that one word can have a huge impact on a user's experience with a brand or product. It's important to get it right.

Fig 3. Vos, Lesley. Booking Engine. Digital Image.

Or what about this one? I'm sure you've seen an ugly robotic error message like this while trying to navigate an app or website. "Failed to initialize booking engine." I'm sorry, what was that? Are you speaking to me in another language? Did you suddenly mistake me for a computer? Unfortunately, we encounter computer-like language all of the time in the virtual landscape, which is strange, because humans are the main audience that all of these sites, apps, and products are designed for. Good microcopy is supposed to "reduce the alienation between people and machines," not make it even more salient (Yifrah 2019, 10).
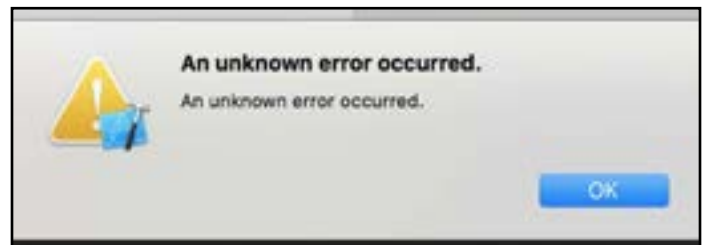

Fig 4. Munro, Lindsay. Unknown Error. Digital Image. XD. January 12, 2020.

Okay, last one. Is there anything worse than one of these? Can you imagine how helpless, confused, and frustrated a user must feel after getting an error message like this? "An unknown error occurred." That's about as helpful as saying, "We hope you like mysteries friend! Good luck figuring this one out." To see that your last action caused an error, but there's no explanation as to why it occurred, or what can be done to fix it, is maddening. And beyond that, for companies, it's a clear recipe for destroying any relationship you have with your users. If you want to send your users fleeing from your website in a hurry, this is definitely the way to do it.

Unfortunately, these poorly written strings of microcopy show up a lot in the virtual world, and based off the lack of care for the user displayed in the text alone, it's pretty easy to figure out that a UX Writer wasn't the one responsible for writing any of the messages

depicted in these images. UX Writers are the ones who craft micro-copy for digital products, and they are specifically trained to craft copy that creates the best experience for users. To put it simply, UX Writers make things nice and easy for users as they make their way through a product or experience. They help users feel competent, satisfied, and even delighted after engaging with a product (Wood 2020).

When we see words like "Error 404" or "Invalid Field" or any other form of computer jargon, you can be certain a UX Writer is missing from the development team. These messages are what you could call 'developer-talk,' and when UX Writers aren't having a say in crafting the microcopy on a team, the developers who are building the app or website usually are given that authorial role. And no offense to developers and programmers, but the way they write microcopy usually translates to a confusing and frustrating time for users (Mapes, n.d.).

These were just a few examples of bad UX Writing, but there are tons of other examples out there that we come across every day while scrolling through our phones or clicking through websites. As a ground rule, bad UX Writing leads to bad experiences for users. And when users have bad experiences, this doesn't bode well for a company or a brand. After all, happy users are what give life to a brand. If users aren't enjoying their time with a company's products and services, they might never come back. And worse than that, you can be sure they'll be telling all their friends and family about their terrible experiences as well. This is why the job of a UX Writer should never be undervalued.

Enter the UX Writer

In order for companies to avoid all the pitfalls of a bad user experience, they should consider hiring a UX Writer onto their team. Why? Because UX Writers know how to craft excellent microcopy and make users happy, of course!

What Does a UX Writer Do?

As mentioned earlier, UX Writers craft microcopy for digital products. However, there is a lot more involved with the role than just that. The main mission of a UX Writer is twofold:

- Write clear, simple, concise copy that guides a user through a digital product, action, or experience
- Write copy that is on brand with the Company's voice, creating a meaningful conversation between user and product, while further developing the user's relationship with the brand

Based off these two main job requirements, the real challenge UX Writers face is that they must condense an entire user manual for a digital product into the user interface itself, all in the simplest, clearest, and most efficient way possible, all while crafting copy with

language that is aligned with the Company's voice, tone, and brand (Podmajersky 2019, 2-11). In order to accomplish this effectively, UX Writers use a variety of tools, charts, and research methods to write the best copy for their audience. For example, take a look at the below Voice Chart; a tool used by many UX Writers to pin down the voice of the company they are writing microcopy for.

PRINCIPLE	EFFICIENT	SAFE	COMMUNITY
CONCEPT	Convenient, time-saving, various services	Security	Accessible, easy to use.
VOCABULARY	Success, quick, easy, various	Assured, trustworthy	Use "Please", friendly words
VERBOSITY	Only use adjectives related to success, no other adj/adv	Enough words for conciseness	Conversational, short and clear
GRAMMAR	Affirmative sentences in passive voice Imperative clauses	Sentences in passive voice Confirmation questions	Active voice, avoid imperative clauses, questions
PUNCTUATION	Use exclamation marks	Use periods, commas, question marks	Use periods, commas, exclamation marks
CAPITALIZATION	Title-case for titles, buttons Sentence-case for others Extremely no ALL CAPS		

Fig 5. Nguyen, Mayvees. UX Voice Chart. Digital Image. UX Collective.

Voice Charts like these are one of the main tools used by UX Writers to define the voice for a brand, covering categories like concepts, vocabulary, punctuation, grammar, and more, all of which will be decided upon by the UX Writer after consulting with various members of the organization who have a clear vision of the company's audience and goals. When finalized, these Voice Charts are used as a reference for crafting microcopy for the entirety of a company's digital products, ensuring that no matter what product users are interacting with, they feel as if they are engaging with the same entity each time. These Voice Charts help UX Writers stay unified in voice across all company products, no matter who is doing the writing (Podmajersky 2019, 18-30).

While every company will use a unique voice that is specific to their audience and goals, there are some agreed upon best practice principles that all UX Writing should follow:

UX Writing should be Clear

Users should understand exactly what they are being told to do. Text should be so easy and clear to follow that even a child could understand it.

UX Writing should be Concise

Users should not have to read long paragraphs of text to figure out what needs to be done. Efficiency is key; the fewer words the better, without losing meaning.

UX Writing should be Useful

Users should feel like what they just read is relevant to their goals, that it advances them in accomplishing what they set out to do.

UX Writing should be Consistent

Users should not feel like they are navigating a maze of similar words and terms to get where they need to go. Specific terms should be used consistently across a product; "Order" and "Purchase" should not be used interchangeably if there is only an "Order" button. Synonyms are not your friends with UX Writing.

UX Writing should be aligned with the specific Voice/Tone/Brand of an Organization

Users should feel as if they are engaging with the same organizational entity, regardless of what digital product of a company they are interacting with. Disjointed personalities should not exist across products.

UX Writing should follow the principle of Show, Don't Tell

Users should be shown what needs to be done, wherever possible. Visual examples, auto-filled fields, and conveniently placed tips are helpful.

The best UX Writing follows these principles to ensure a user is feeling smart, satisfied, and even delighted while using a product. Overall, UX Writing is meant to be helpful and subtle. You want to show users exactly what they need to do and exactly how they need to do it, and then quickly get out of their way so they can enjoy doing it (Munro 2020).

You can always tell you're dealing with good UX Writing when users don't even realize it's there; when they can zoom right through a digital product, make their purchase, download their software, play their game, or whatever they came to do, and then carry on their day without ever thinking an ill thought about the company that provided its service. People may not remember all of the great experiences they have with a brand, but they will always remember the bad ones. With UX Writing, you want to make sure your users aren't having bad ones (Podmajersky 2019, 15).

Skills and Traits of a UX Writer

While the job description is stated as "crafting microcopy for digital products," UX Writers are often seen wearing many different hats while on the job. 'UX Writer' may be the name of the role, though in their work, UX Writers dip their feet into roles and responsibilities of Technical Writers, Marketing Writers, Researchers, Information Architects, Digital Copywriters, and Content Strategists as well. When you're operating in a field that involves design, development, market research, content strategy, and user interaction, a lot is expected from you. To be effective in this role, a UX Writer needs to display:

- Empathy for the user
- A strong command of language and grammar
- An ability to make confusing things simple and concise; efficiency with words
- An ability to define and craft a voice for a brand and stay consistent with copy
- Willingness to collaborate and compromise with teammates on design decisions
- Confidence and courage to speak up for the user amidst difficult design decisions
- A desire to stay up to date with best UX Writing practices, modern technology, and standards of good design

Above all things, the UX Writer needs to be an advocate for the user, and this is perhaps one of the most important traits a UX Writer possesses. While designers and developers stay focused on creating the best-designed product with all the latest bells and whistles, they sometimes lose sight of the greater vision of the audience and the user; something the UX Writer is committed to at all costs. With a UX Writer on the team, it is a guarantee that the user's wants and needs will be front and center, and all important design decisions will be made with them in mind (Wood 2020).

When to Bring a UX Writer onto the Team?

Because UX Writing is a fairly new and emerging field, not all companies are familiar with when the best time to bring a UX Writer onto the team is. While all may know on some level that it's important to enhance the microcopy on their site or app to make it more user-friendly and engaging, they would be wrong to think hiring a UX Writer once the design is complete is the right way to go about it.

Unfortunately, this is often the case. Many companies treat UX copy as an afterthought. They go on and create a beautifully designed interface with the development team, and then decide to bring on a UX Writer to make the interface come alive with text. Or even worse, they release their product to market without any help from a UX Writer, only to find out that their users can't figure out how to accomplish a single thing with the product. Their users become frustrated and annoyed (Mapes, n.d.).

This is usually when a UX Writer is called upon to "fix all the words." However, sometimes this is too late in the game to even be effective. The product has already been designed, and important functionality decisions have already been made that will now cost time and money to reverse. It is because of this reason that the best time to hire a UX Writer is before the development of a digital product even begins.

UX Writers need to be a part of the entire development phase of a digital product because working on the text of an interface early on can often reveal issues with the design itself. Because the UX Writer is an advocate for the user and always has the user's

experience in mind, UX Writers have a large role in shaping the overall product's look, feel, and design. They provide questions and insights that are useful during the research and development phases of a product, that then influence important design decisions made by the development team (Podmajersky 2019, 1-2).

When it comes to developing a product, the UX Writer's goal is to make sure the layout of the product and the copy work together to create the best experience possible for the user. This is much easier to do when the UX Writing accompanies the development of the product at the same time. If a UX Writer decides the user's experience would be enhanced with success messages after a user completes an action, that is far easier to implement while in the process of development, as opposed to after the interface is already complete and released to users (Munro 2020).

While UX Writing is gaining more popularity in today's world, there is still a lack of UX Writers on teams where they are needed, as can be seen from the many poorly written bits of microcopy we all encounter on our phones and computers daily. Luckily, the future landscape seems to be improving for UX Writers.

The Future of UX Writers

In today's world, UX Writers are being hired by many big companies to help develop their digital products and user experiences. Google, Apple, XBOX, Amazon, Uber, and tons of other household names all have UX Writers on their teams to help build their brand and make their users happy. These companies recognize the value UX Writers offer and have the resources to hire them as well. While start-ups and smaller companies may not have the same resources as larger companies, it won't be long before even they begin to carve out space on their design teams for UX Writers, simply due to how much value they provide. Interest in hiring UX Writers is trending upwards overall (Wood 2020).

As the world becomes more advanced and technology and digital interfaces take on more of the human landscape, the need for UX Writing will only increase through time, as well as interest in this role by job seekers. Becoming a UX Writer now is setting yourself up for a long and rewarding career that will only become more and more of a necessity as time goes on. A job that requires empathy, creativity, technical thinking, efficiency, and collaboration – a full working of the mind and heart – it's no surprise this job has one of the highest job satisfaction scores in the world today. Plus, as an extra incentive, the money to be made in this role has a high upside, with senior positions pushing well into six figure salaries (Sauro, 2018).

Conclusion

The world will always need people who are aware of what words make a user delighted to use a digital product and perform a task. As humans continue to expand our quest into the virtual landscape, UX Writing will only continue to become even more of a necessity

to ensure users are navigating digital products properly with a smile on their faces. While there are tons of examples of terrible UX Writing floating around in the virtual world today, making users all kinds of frustrated and upset, it is the UX Writers who will ultimately change the tides and make the virtual world a better place to live in, one strand of microcopy at a time.

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How Governments Are Deploying Technical Communication During the COVID-19 Pandemic

ANDREW SCOTT

Source: Philippines Ministry of Health

Ask a Filipino about BIDA and they're sure to tell you of the superhero team that stormed the nation's airwaves, social media outlets, billboards, newspapers, and other media channels encouraging residents to **B**—Bawal walang mask (Don't go out without a mask), **I**—I-sanitize ang mga kamay, iwas hawak sa mga bagay (Sanitize your hand, avoid touching things), **D**—Dumistansya ng isang metro (Keep your distance of 1 meter), and **A**—Alamin ang totoong impormasyon (Know the right information).

The Philippines's BIDA communication campaign kicked off last summer to encourage the nation's nearly 110 million residents to #BIDASolusyon (Be the Solution) to stem COVID-19 infections. The Ministry of Health's messaging, in Tagalog and Cebuano, the Philippines's two major languages, featured Filipino actor Alden Richards and four comic book-looking characters, each representing a letter from the BIDA behavior.

"We worked closely with the Ministry of Health to do a number of activities and one of them was the BIDA campaign," said Cathy Church-Balin, Senior Program Officer II with Johns Hopkins Center for Communication Programs in the Philippines.

In the Southeast Asia archipelagic country, Church-Balin knew the challenges of reaching a large swath of residents, especially from the lower-middle class to the poor, with clear messaging during the critical stages of the pandemic.

"That's about 75% of the population here, so it [the BIDA campaign] had to be for every man. It had to be easy to understand, it had to be clear, and it had to appeal to the masses," she said.

The Philippines's BIDA campaign is just one example of the approach taken by world governments to effectively communicate to residents critical and complex information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Communicating about social distancing and hand washing presented its own set of challenges in the Philippines.

"Huge slums ... that's where a lot of people live. So distancing is a hard sell. Culturally, people are always together," Church-Balin said. As for hand washing, the Ministry of Health opted to use "sanitize."

"Sanitize covers any way you can wash your hands, because some people don't have access to even soap and water," Church-Balin said. "They use ash, which isn't the best, but there's lot of things people do to try to clean their hands—alcohol is pretty prevalent."

COVID "Missed" Communication

Language presents a real barrier in reaching communities with healthcare information. The World Health Organization's (WHO)

dedicated COVID-19 page has only Russian, Arabic, French, Spanish, Chinese, and English represented.

"This leaves the challenge of making public health messages ... equally accessible to speakers of the world's other estimated 6000 languages." (Piller, 2020, as cited by Garcia, et al., 39).

Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru, for instance, are home to nearly 100 indigenous groups in Latin America. Yet, the Ecuador government's COVID-19 communications originally emerged in Spanish before audio and video clips were translated into Kichwa, one of the country's 13 native languages. (Garcia, et al., 41).

"These messages were based on direct translations from Spanish and a Western cosmovision, making understanding and acceptance by Kichwa speakers difficult. For example, the apparently simple phrase 'stay at home' was translated literally and accompanied by images of urban-style dwellings located in middle class neighbourhoods." (Garcia, et al., 41)

Source: Ministry of Tourism (Ecuador, 2020)

Making Messages Accessible

In its communications, Australia is paying particular attention to reaching the continent's indigenous peoples with COVID-19 messaging via videos, posters, and radio spots in Warlpiri and Yolŋu Matha languages.

"In terms of Indigenous languages, there are more than 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken throughout Australia," said Becky Cutcliffe, spokesperson for the Australian Government Department of Health. "As most [of these] languages are verbal, with not a strong emphasis on a written form of the language, recording audio messages is an important part of our strategy."

Radio ads have been translated into 15 languages and disseminated throughout the country, she explained.

"Our main goal is to create materials that are going to resonate with our audiences and that will be culturally safe and appropriate," Cutcliffe said.

In France, it's what's unspoken in a video, entitled "La projection," that may catch the public's attention.

Viewers of the 50-second spot from the French Ministry of Social Affairs and Health watch as a grandmother, sitting in her chair unaware, is surprised by the appearance of her grandchildren at the door. The boy and girl, brimming with excitement, sprint for the grandmother's anxiously awaiting arms. But then, the scene suddenly shifts to reality where the grandmother is awakened from her dream state as a nurse prepares her COVID-19 vaccination. The tagline follows: "Because we all dream of meeting each other, let's get vaccinated."

Source: Ministère des Solidarités et de la Santé

Ethics in Communication

In health communication, "Appeals to solidarity and responsibility resonate with positive social values and can cultivate a sense of agency by showing that people's choices and actions can make a positive difference." (Guttman and Lev, 121).

However, Guttman and Lev also note that such appeals can raise ethical questions, such as the sincerity of authorities, the use of fear and scare tactics, "war" terminology in "fighting or combatting" the virus, and stigmatizing groups that contract the virus.

"A common rationale for employing such tactics is the assumption they make the information more vivid and serve as a strong motivator to help people overcome their resistance to adopt the protective practice. Some scholars argue this actually enhances their autonomy to choose what is best for them." (Bayer and Fairchild, as cited by Guttman and Lev, 117).

Church-Balin said one communication tool, the Extended Parallel Process Model, provides a useful framework for presenting public health messaging. The model examines the combination of rational views (efficacy beliefs) and emotions (fear or threat).

"[The model] is good for things like a COVID situation where you are at risk and it's a real risk and you have to take some precautions," Church-Balin noted.

The challenge is finding the right balance. Where communication is overwhelmingly fear-driven, "people just freeze. They ignore it. They're like, 'I can't do anything about it,'" she said.

Lessons From SARS

How countries responded to the 2002–2004 Severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) outbreak is now affecting their response to the COVID-19 pandemic. With a lack of transparency and inadequate communication during SARS, the messaging is noticeably different now.

Speaking of China's COVID-19 response, Professor Huling Ding, director of the graduate program in technical communication at North Carolina State University, said, "I think there is the memory of SARS and the damage done was still fresh. That was why its mass mobilization went really well."

Ding, author of *Rhetoric of a Global Epidemic: Transcultural Communication about SARS*, says that collaboration between healthcare professionals and the private sector in China aided communication efforts.

Baidu.com (China's leading internet search engine) became an aggregator of videos produced by nationally renowned medical experts and physicians. At the same time, questions posted about COVID-19 on baidu.com's platform were answered by various medical professionals.

"Three tiers of experts were mobilized by the Beijing Medical Association working together to make this possible," Ding said.

Millions watched the videos and hundreds of thousands submitted COVID-19-related questions. Each submission was fed through a "national language processing algorithm" and categorized with answers to populate future search results, Ding explained.

There was no obstacle for the government where communicating about wearing masks is concerned because in China, most people wear masks—even when there isn't a pandemic, Ding explained.

The Chinese also mobilized around government-initiated lockdowns; contact tracing, including video surveillance to track who went where; digital thermometer checks; health IDs; and more.

"People just think differently … if you're in a collective culture," Ding said of China.

Since WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic in March 2020, countries worldwide have employed different strategies to communicate about COVID-19, using an interplay between visuals, text, audio, video, and online and offline platforms. For world governments, taking information about the virus and making it comprehendible for residents requires technical communication competence. That message couldn't be clearer.

> " Where communication is overwhelmingly fear-driven, people just freeze. They ignore it. They're like, 'I can't do anything about it.'

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Connections Between Basic Writing Instruction and Technical Communication: Parallels That Inform Pedagogy

CONNIE ODENTHAL

As a community college educator and professional writer, I maintain that most of the qualities of good writing remain static across genres. No matter the form writing takes, its intended audience, the method of delivery, or a project's specifications, the mastery (and execution) of these critical elements creates communication that is clear and effective.

Daily, I look for patterns in effective writing—student text messages, emails from my editor, PowerPoint presentations in professional development workshops, resumes, newsletters. These writing samples help me isolate the elements of good writing in real-world settings. With thousands of writing textbooks, millions of articles, dozens of essay modes, and countless pedagogical approaches to wade through and consider, planning a writing course can quickly become unwieldy. So, when it comes time to select, reconfigure, or cut content, bearing in mind these critical concepts shines the light on what is fat to trim and what is bone.

Another reason I seek patterns of good writing is because the more commonalities I find across genres, the more relevant I can make instruction for students, regardless of their career goals. In other words, I believe that students who intend to become law enforcement officers, nurses, child care providers, welders, electricians, or workers of any other profession under the sun should be taught writing skills that, first, help them succeed in their career preparation (college), and, then, inform the writing tasks they will encounter for the rest of their lives (in their daily lives and workplaces). Sometimes, we instructors neglect the second. Simply put: there is no reason that writing instruction in the community college classroom should not align with the principles and best practices of writing in the workplace.

In the field of technical communication, where writing must be understood and usable, these connections become immediately apparent. Using basic writing instruction and the field of technical communication as illustrations, I have identified four critical concepts that I believe inform good writing of any variety and, therefore, constitute important focal points for community college instructors who teach writing:

- Awareness of Audience

- Easy-to-Follow Organization

- Sentence Clarity

- Sound Thinking

Audience

Instructors of basic writing often advise students to begin their writing projects with concerns of audience and purpose. We ask our students to consider who they are writing for and to what end before they set pen to paper (or power on those laptops). We remind them to keep the audience's needs present in mind as they work. We explain the purpose of our assignments and instruct students to fulfill that purpose in order to satisfy the audience. I even sometimes ask my students to write the audience's name or role on a Post-It note and stick it beside their computer screen; if they find themselves stuck on a supporting point or difficult concept, a refocus on the audience as a human face sometimes helps.

In my experience, the difficulty for some students is that, in college, the audience is usually the instructor. In this case, the instructor functions as a false audience: students are expected to write to their instructors without addressing them in any way or acknowledging that this audience is already a master of the discipline and the subjects the students are exploring. Those of us with academic backgrounds understand this type of theoretical audience, and we rarely think about how stilted it might feel to the unseasoned. If we are honest with ourselves, however, collegiate writing is the odd man out here—it is the only genre that asks writers to do such tricks. Students, especially at the developmental level, often find writing to the false audience a strange and futile task, and the consequence can be writing that lacks a clear purpose.

Acknowledging the false audience can sometimes help students understand their collegiate writing assignments. A better solution, in my opinion, is to remove the false audience in favor of a true one. Assigning writing tasks with real audiences, such as the jurors of a contest, the editor of a student-run literary journal, a town mayor, or a future employer, can have a profound impact on students' awareness of audience and understanding of the writing process. Many of us in technical and community education have already moved toward assigning these kinds of writing tasks and projects in order to align our assignments more clearly with students' real-world goals. The last holdouts seem to be the writing instructors themselves—the steadfast defenders of the collegiate essay as a form. I invite these educators to consider that many of today's strongest and most beneficial writing assignments are no longer complicated rhetorical exercises: instead, they are successfully completed writing tasks with practical applications, the kinds of tasks technical communicators and other writers complete every day.

In technical communication, awareness of audience is equally critical. However, it goes by another name entirely. All discussions about user experience and usability are, in fact, discussions about audience.

For example, when technical communicators edit and level subject matter experts' work for clarity, they are bearing audience in mind. When technical communicators design and place eye-catching icons to consistently identify a sequence of tasks on an instructional guide, they are bearing audience in mind. When technical communicators create personas of the perceived readers of a promotional material, they are bearing audience in mind (and, like in my request to my students above, giving a human face to their audience). In truth, anything done to improve a document's usability is a refocus on the audience's needs.

To further illustrate, let's look at Susan Anker's text for developmental writers, *Real Writing Interactive: A Brief Guide to Writing Paragraphs and Essays* (2015). This short text begins with a discussion of audience and purpose, accompanied by this simple table:

Image Credit: Anker, 2015

The table outlines for students the three most common types of writing they will do: writing for college, writing for work, and writing in their everyday lives. Anker then goes on to provide examples of a writing task in each of these areas, highlighting shifts in purpose. Notice Anker's mention of the importance of "demonstrat[ing] your knowledge of the subject" in college writing, and ask yourself how many times in your life, outside of the college setting, you have been asked to complete a writing task to demonstrate knowledge or understanding. In sharp contrast to the audiences of the other two types of writing mentioned, the false audience is rarely addressed outside of the college classroom.

It isn't difficult to draw the conclusion that technical communicators straddle the second and third categories of Anker's chart—they are writing for work in order to provide users texts for their everyday lives. Consider, then, that technical writing projects and other such workplace tasks are far more tangible and purpose-driven efforts for most students than collegiate writing exercises. Many of our community college students will understand the relevance of writing an email to coworkers to communicate information about a new provider far easier than why they should write an essay to show their environmental science instructor what they have learned in a particular unit.

My point here is that although we expect a much higher level of writing proficiency in our technical communicators and professional writers than we do in our students, in some ways, we are asking students to complete the more difficult and theoretical writing tasks. Since lessons of audience awareness are always relevant, why not provide students with writing tasks with true audiences and purposes to develop and practice the skills they will actually be using after college?
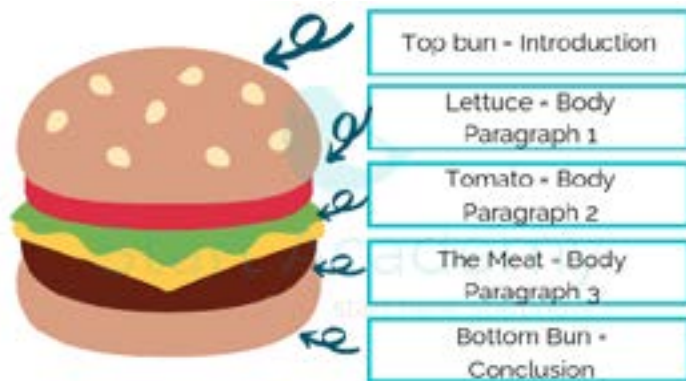
Easy-to-Follow Organization

All writing should be organized. And the principles of organization taught by writing instructors align perfectly with those taught to professional writers.

Joshua Schimel devotes multiple chapters of his book, *Writing Science: How to write papers that get cited and proposals that get funded,* to the discussion of structure in science writing. He argues that science writing is story writing, that "All stories have a beginning, middle, and an end." (Schimel 2012, 26) He moves on to outline four core structures that writers of science may use as templates as they write their research for publication. He discusses the importance of beginning and ending well. Although professional writers are not Schimel's target audience, nothing a college educator reads in his text is news. In truth, the advice he gives could be applied to any writing task in any discipline or division.

It's true that basic writing instructors tend to limit or simplify the organizational options for their students, but the basics, as Schimel has outlined them, remain. All writing should have an introduction, a body (message), and a conclusion, regardless of genre or mode. Instructors spend time modeling how to write topic sentences and supporting points for students, breaking down the paragraph into its essential parts. The focus here again is on clarity—just like in technical communication.

Consider how different Schimel's advice is from the visual metaphor below, used in many basic writing classrooms, the Hamburger Essay:

Top bun - Introduction
Lettuce - Body Paragraph 1
Tomato - Body Paragraph 2
The Meat - Body Paragraph 3
Bottom Bun - Conclusion

These repeated patterns become expected by readers, and it is this expectation that helps create meaning. We expect to be told what we are going to learn; then we expect the information itself; and finally, we expect to be reminded of the key points. When there is a shift in organization, in any genre, it tends not to stray from this basic pattern.

Cunningham, et al discuss how to copyedit for specific organizational patterns in their comprehensive text *Technical Editing: an introduction to editing in the workplace.* (2020) The text outlines how to edit for arrangements such as chronological order, spatial arrangement, and order of importance, complexity, or familiarity.

This hardly differs from Anker's discussion. She instructs students about time order, space order, and order of importance. All that differs are the terms, leveled appropriately for the beginning writer.

Cunningham, et al go on to outline what they call "established patterns" of organization, such as classification, comparison or contrast, and argumentative. Likewise, the majority of Anker's 238-page guide is the discussion of "kinds of paragraphs and essays" (note more of the careful leveling of vocabulary), which—you guessed it—includes the three established patterns in the technical editing textbook.

Discussion of the ways to organize for these common modes of writing reoccur in almost every composition and basic writing textbook. In truth, they can almost without question be pared down to the basics of introduction, body/message, and conclusion. Instructors can spend as much of the semester as they like discussing different essay modes and their variances of organization (for example, comparison and contrast essays can follow a whole-to-whole pattern that results in four paragraphs instead of the typical five-paragraph essay). Yes, these differences and nuances are of value.

Still, students—and professional writers—can't go wrong in their future writing tasks if they remember the three basic components of well-organized writing: introduce your point (introduction), explain your reasons (body), and remind readers of your point (conclusion).
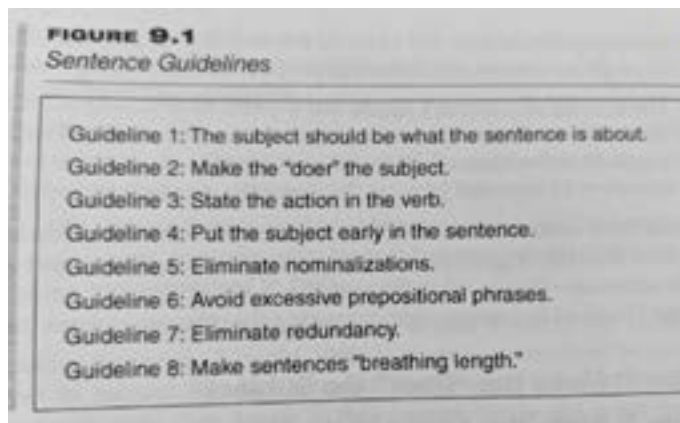
Sentence Clarity

No semester of basic writing or composition passes without a discussion of sentence skills. However, many instructors of college-level writing classes teach sentence skills (and grammar) as an afterthought. Indeed, the majority of textbooks on my office shelves relegate grammar and sentence skills to the back of the book or do not include this information at all, leaving it instead for supplemental books or manuals. Textbook authors and editors likely do this for two reasons: first, they assume at-level college students have at least some mastery of sentence skills; and, second, they assume students loathe grammar lessons in general.

In my teaching, I have found neither to be the case. Many students appreciate sentence skills refreshers and grammar lessons and confess that they wish they had even more throughout the term. And in developmental classrooms in particular there is typically an acknowledgement on the part of the students that they struggle a great deal with their sentences. They need—and want—help.

The good news is that good sentences are good sentences. The skills we teach in the classroom for improving and strengthening sentences in college are equally relevant in the field of technical communication and in any other piece of writing.

Check out this figure, from Richard Johnson-Sheehan's important manual on proposal writing:

FIGURE 9.1
Sentence Guidelines

Guideline 1: The subject should be what the sentence is about.
Guideline 2: Make the "doer" the subject.
Guideline 3: State the action in the verb.
Guideline 4: Put the subject early in the sentence.
Guideline 5: Eliminate nominalizations.
Guideline 6: Avoid excessive prepositional phrases.
Guideline 7: Eliminate redundancy.
Guideline 8: Make sentences "breathing length."

This is but one example of countless in technical communication texts that may as well be a lesson in a writing classroom. Both Schimel and Cunningham et al contain full chapters with similar content, designed to help writers craft strong, clear sentences that convey clear meaning.

Anker addresses similar issues toward the very end of her text when she isolates five common problems that make writing difficult to understand: word-choice problems, slang, wordy language, clichés, and sexist language. Likewise, composition texts contain chapters on parallelism, dangling and misplace modifiers, nominalizations, and more.

In sum, strong and clear sentences are an essential part of any writing task, collegiate or professional.

Sound Thinking

Something that is more complex but of equal importance in writing is logic and critical thinking, or what I term here "sound thinking."

Critics of liberal education and the humanities sometimes claim that critical thinking lessons are misplaced in writing classrooms, but I disagree. Nowhere is sound thinking more important than in the act of organizing one's thoughts into cogent and clear written work that is intended to enter an ongoing conversation. In fact, this is the very nature of academic writing.

Likewise, technical communicators work to follow the logic of complicated concepts and processes and to make sure that these lines of thought are as clear to the end user as possible. In short, good writing begins with clear thinking.

> " Many of today's strongest and most beneficial writing assignments are successfully completed writing tasks with practical applications—the kinds of tasks technical communicators and other writers complete every day.

Conclusion

Parallels between the instruction of basic writing and technical communication may seem obvious to some readers and of little importance to others. Still, I argue that considering connections among such fields illuminates the most essential components of writing instruction. That is, the qualities that remain static from genre to genre and across all writing tasks are those that instructors should focus on in their course design. In my opinion, writing instructors, especially at the community college, could consider that the single genre of writing that does not strictly adhere to these guidelines is the formal academic essay—and to think carefully about whether the differences therein are worth our precious time and efforts, or whether we can modify the academic essay assignment to align more closely with other styles of writing. After all, we want to teach writing to everyone—not just to those who pick up the torch of instruction and become teachers themselves.

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Overcoming Barriers to Intercultural Communication

NATALIE CHAU

We are living in a multicultural era with increasingly globalized business and education that bring the world closer together. Interacting with people of different races, cultures, and linguistic backgrounds in everyday life becomes inevitable. This is when intercultural communication happens, and communication barriers are incidental. We must understand various cultures, accept others' values and beliefs, appreciate the differences, embrace the diversity, and bridge communication gaps to improve interpersonal and international relations.

Sources of Intercultural Communication Barriers

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, talked about the uptick of COVID-19 cases in Europe with NBC News' anchor Chuck Todd during an appearance on MSNBC's Meet the Press program: "But once you declare victory, you know, that metaphor that people say, 'If you're going for a touchdown, don't spike the ball on the five-yard line. Wait until you get into the end zone.' And we're not in the end zone yet" (Todd 2021). If a person is new to the United States and has no knowledge of the nation's sports culture, do you think they are likely to understand Dr. Fauci's message?

Intercultural communication involves "interactions between people from different cultural or subcultural backgrounds intended to lead to shared understandings of messages" (Chandler and Munday 2011). Jackson (2014) defines intercultural communication as "interpersonal communication that involves interaction between people from different culture (and often linguistic) backgrounds." Both definitions emphasize "people", implying that humans' behaviors and language can impact, both positively and negatively, others. When individuals are culturally or linguistically different, challenges of communication arise.

Language

Language is a shared code with arbitrary symbols governed by rules, allowing us to express our thoughts and concepts, thus being a major tool for people to connect. However, each language has unique semantics, syntax, phonology, morphology and pragmatics. When two individuals are speaking different languages, challenges may appear if they fail to interact with a common language. Language barriers not only occur between people speaking different languages but also dialects. For example, in Hong Kong, Cantonese and Mandarin are two dialects of Chinese, but they are very different in terms of syntactic structure, lexicon, and phonology. Another typical example is American English and British English have different idioms, metaphors, vocabulary, spelling, and accents. If communicators do not possess the knowledge about others' languages or dialects, conflicts and misunderstandings are inevitable.

Speaking of language barriers, we cannot overlook language abilities. In a multicultural community or group, a common language is needed for effective communication; however, individuals may have varied language proficiencies. For example, I worked at several banks in Hong Kong where Cantonese and English are the official languages. After the handover of Hong Kong to China in 1997, more native Mandarin speakers had joined the banks. When we spoke in Cantonese too fast or used some slangs, they sometimes could not grab the exact meanings.

Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism, or a belief that our culture ("ingroup") is more superior to others' or foreign cultures ("outgroups"), is a crucial communication barrier because we all have a tendency to judge outgroups with our own standards and customs. According to Neuliep (2012), all humans are to some extent ethnocentric, falling somewhere along the continuum from low to high ethnocentrism. Highly ethnocentric individuals are reluctant to engage in intercultural communication because they have a strong ingroup identification and feel "suspicious, defensive, and hostile" toward outgroup members (Jackson 2014; Spencer-Rodgers and McGovern 2002); they instinctively identify their ways of seeing or handling things as the standards, if not much better, resulting in little or no motivation to learn more about other cultures (Neuliep 2012).

Stereotyping

Owing to ethnocentrism, we tend to, usually negatively, characterize individuals from cultural backgrounds different from ours based on preconceptions, standards, portrayals of different cultural groups or social classes in the media, and own life experiences (Jackson 2014). We may also characterize an individual from one's nationality. For example, Chinese people are portrayed as Mandarin speakers in most western movies or dramas, causing many English speakers to assume that all Chinese people's native language is Mandarin. The

fact is nationality is not an indicator of what language a person may speak. Stereotyping can lead people to ignore the individual or cultural variations and uniqueness which may result in using improper use of language, perpetuating various types of inequalities, devaluing individuals and groups and overlooking individuals' identities. These situations can discourage intercultural interactions.

Intercultural communication apprehension

Intercultural communication apprehension is defined as ''the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication apprehension with people from different groups, especially cultural and/or ethnic groups'' (Neuliep and McCroskey 1997, 148). The fear or anxiety is triggered by uncertainty arising from initial encounters with a stranger and can happen to any individuals, either from the host culture or foreign culture. Intercultural communication apprehension is a close relative to ethnocentrism as illustrated by a study that both were negatively related to the willingness to communicate interculturally (Lin and Rancer 2003). Some cultures or individuals have higher tolerance for uncertainty that is vital for both intercultural and intracultural communication. Individuals who are highly intercultural communication apprehensive are not interested in approaching intercultural strangers, owing to uncertainties about strangers' behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and values, and communicators' feelings about the interaction or when misunderstandings occur. Outgroup members may also avoid any interaction lest ingroup members may not understand them or are not happy with the ways being approached. Imagine that you first meet a foreign co-worker whom you want to welcome. You may ask, "Should I shake hands with them? Do they speak the same language as me?" Your hesitation shows your uncertainty about the situation, which could influence your decision and hinder the communication.

Anxiety

Ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and intercultural communication apprehension largely contribute to the anxiety of communicators and demotivate individuals to communicate with outgroups. Uncertainty about the interaction, language abilities of communicators, differences in expression of emotion, differences in verbal communication style, and differences in body languages and gestures among various cultures could make a person anxious. With all these concerns in mind, humans, as a natural instinct, will back away from possibly uncomfortable interactions for fear of experiencing embarrassment, frustration, or hostility. Moreover, like the above barriers, ingroup members and outgroup members may both suffer from anxiety if not other negative emotions: frustration, impatience and suspicions, which in turn increase anxiety, trapping them in a vicious circle.

Non-verbal communication cues

Nonlinguistic cues, like posture, facial expressions, and proximity, as well as body language and gestures could hinder intercultural communication. These elements are essential in daily conversation and interaction, either providing, supplementing or enhancing meaning of spoken words. Further, people encode and decode usually spoken words differently. Appropriate non-verbal cues play a significant role in clearing up confusion. For instance, the OK hand gesture, connecting the thumb and index finger into a circle with the other fingers straight, signifies approval and that everything is going well in most English-speaking countries but is considered vulgar and offensive in countries like Brazil, Germany, Greece, Russia, and some Middle Eastern countries. In France, this gesture means "worthless" or "zero" and in Japan, it symbolizes "money."

How to overcome intercultural communication barriers?

"Communication is the process of exchanging information, ideas, needs, and desires" (Levey 2014)—the intent is to create and share meaning with others. An effective communicator should be able to communicate a message successfully so others can understand and make sense of the information. This concept can be applied seamlessly to intercultural communication. For example, you are visiting Japan but do not speak Japanese. What can you do if you would like to ask for the directions to a famous ramen restaurant? Are you going to ask for help in English, or are you going to use some body languages simultaneously? This is for sure a simplified scenario as interacting with people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds is much more complicated. To solve these kinds of issues, we should possess intercultural communication competence, or "the ability to communicate appropriately and effectively with individuals who have a different cultural background" (Jackson 2014), aiming to establish and maintain relationships with individuals across cultures. Individuals, organizations and schools can contribute to overcoming intercultural communication barriers so that effective communication can occur in any context.

Individuals

Communicate to understand but not to judge. As stated, humans instinctively perceive their own culture as better or the standard of how we respond to the world around us; hence, prejudice is visceral and natural. When we keep in mind that we are communicating to share and understand, shall we still focus on judging others with their differences at the expense of broadening our horizons?

Open our heart to welcome cultural differences. If we are more open-minded to recognize cultural divergence and set aside our cultural biases, preconceptions about "outside" values, beliefs, and norms though it is impossible to learn everything about an unfamiliar culture, we all can be competent intercultural communicators.

Identify intercultural differences that bother you the most. A culture influences humans' behavior, attitude, values, judgment, and language (e.g. word choice, speech acts [direct or indirect]). Understanding the intercultural differences that greatly disconcert us increases the self-awareness of negative emotions we

may reveal toward outgroup members and inspires us to reflect on our actions that may upset others. Self-awareness and reflection can help eliminate some negative reactions or emotions. It is a good start for building intercultural friendships.

Recognize individuality. Do you want others to consider you as a person or to categorize you as one of the members of a social or cultural group? Every individual is unique and deserves respect, regardless of their nationality, race, culture, and language.

Put ourselves into others' shoes. Have you ever experienced ostracism at school, at work, or in any other occasion? Ethnocentrism, stereotyping, and intercultural communication apprehension exist everywhere in the world, and we may have been exposed to these throughout our life. Starting from today, think about how you may feel if you were being criticized, isolated or looked down because you have different opinions, beliefs or values, or behave differently from the majority. This is what outgroup members are experiencing in a multicultural society. If you have had similar experiences, do you want to be treated like that again?

Understand the context. The communicative context provides hints for what is going on in the world. There are two types of culture: high-context and low-context. In high-context cultures such as China, Japan, Kuwait, Mexico, Nigeria, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, and Vietnam, messages are mostly conveyed through indirect speech acts and non-verbal cues. In low-context cultures such as Australia, Canada, Denmark, Germany, the UK, the US, Switzerland, and Sweden, message delivery relies heavily on "direct, specific, and literal expressions", being transmitted explicitly and verbally. Understanding the context guides us to balance the use of verbal expressions and non-verbal cues and leads us to select the appropriate tone, body language, and gestures for communication success.

Be considerate and amicable. Again, the ultimate goal of communication is to exchange information effectively, avoiding idioms, slangs, jargons, metaphors, or similes which can mislead or insult others is the key. When you are visiting your primary physician, what if they keep using terms that you barely understand? Furthermore, speaking clearly and, if needed, slowly is another way to show your empathy to communicators from other cultures.

Do not hesitate to ask. Always be brave to ask questions, politely, when in doubt. Clarifying the meaning of what is said and gestured facilitates effective intercultural communication.

Organizations

An increasing number of multinational companies and firms, and booming international businesses have transformed workplaces into more diverse and dynamic environments. Organizations can be role models for employees to accept and adapt to different cultures, cultivating inclusive and positive workplaces that can promote a

sense of belonging. Also, employees are the most valuable assets of all organizations. Providing employees with training and assistance in intercultural communication can foster employees' growth and job engagement, improve their competence and increase the competitiveness of both employees and the companies.

Offer workshops and training. Employers can provide workshops and training to promote inclusion and diversity training. In these sessions, coaches can introduce different cultures through games and activities, explain the importance of learning other cultures, and provide useful techniques and tips on effective intercultural communication, such as active listening, clarity in speaking, body language, and gestures. Conflict mediation is another crucial skill in successful communication. It is more challenging when communicators are speaking different languages.

Hold sharing sessions. Organizations can hold informal sharing sessions for employees to express their predicament, concerns, or anxiety in getting along with people from foreign cultures. Employers can then incorporate employees' needs into their workshops and training.

Identify market trends. Localization and internationalization are the recent trends. Demands for translation and interpretation, multilingual support, and specialized content (e.g. user manuals, websites, corporate reports written in various languages) are increasing. Employers can brief staff regularly for the needs of accommodating people from different countries or cultures in order to succeed in marketing, negotiation, creation of products, and documentation.

Increase awareness of the dependence on language. As mentioned earlier, language is a major communication tool. Organizations are encouraged to demonstrate to employees how much humans depend on language in both working and daily life. Providing language courses or subsidizing employees to learn foreign languages can show organizations' emphasis on language proficiency, increase employees' communicative competence and reduce their anxiety in interacting with co-workers, business partners, or clients from different parts of the world.

Schools

In the United States, there are more than one million international students, and the number is growing. Schools, teachers, instructors, and other student service professionals should consider the needs of these students and think about how their behaviors and messages delivered will be perceived.

Offer counseling and assistance. People who are living in unfamiliar environments may experience many challenges and negative emotions. Some students leave their home country to study abroad alone; therefore, they may need additional caring and support from others. All kinds of educational institutions can set up

an international student center to provide assistance and counseling for students and sometimes parents in need, understanding their difficulties and helping students tackle the problems and assimilate to the local culture. Academic advisors in higher education may need to put more effort into making students feel welcomed and accepted.

Educate local students. While taking care of foreign students, schools should educate local students that the world has become more culturally diverse. Schools can foster inclusion by promoting different cultures periodically, showing students how to appreciate others' cultures, or arranging activities to let students work as teams to accomplish some tasks together. The aim is to eradicate any stereotypes or preconceptions of each other's culture.

Use plain language and mutual signs whenever possible. Everyone in the classroom has an equal learning opportunity. Depending on the subjects or course requirements, teachers or instructors should use plain language and mutual signs whenever possible to avoid isolating or discriminating international students.

Learning to accept and adapt to new things always takes time. We may begrudge at first because of a variety of reasons: We do not want to take a risk; we are afraid of failure or uncertainty; we do not think it is necessary, etc. All things are difficult before they are easy. What we need is motivation and the awareness of how a concept or knowledge may benefit us.

In the process of overcoming these barriers, we not only learn that no one culture is better than all others but also increase self-awareness of how we interact with others and develop self-monitoring of how our mindsets and behaviors influence communicative partners and the situation. We will gain new perspectives to see things from others' point of view, reduce self-centeredness, broaden our mind and vision, and establish healthy intercultural relationships.

Practice makes perfect. Mastering the techniques of intercultural communication eventually enhances our communication skills and transforms us into more thoughtful and observant people.

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The Role of Microlearning in Industry

LOGAN KITCHEN

Microlearning may sound like an unfamiliar word to you, but what you may not realize is you most likely take part in it every single day. If you have ever skimmed a snippet of news on the internet, watched a short YouTube video on a topic of interest, or listened to a radio podcast on the way to work, you are participating in microlearning.

What is Microlearning?

What do the above examples have in common? They are brief, focused, and delivered in a format that is convenient for you. Microlearning can take many forms, but in most cases, it is a form of rapid e-learning consisting of small chunks of information on a particular topic that can be absorbed in around five minutes or less. It focuses on being engaging and leverages video, visuals, and gamification elements to enhance learning and attention span. In a study by Microsoft, the average human attention span has decreased by 4 seconds since 2000 to a whopping 8 seconds today. Now, try to imagine how a one-hour training session on employee manuals might really kill the mood.

The truth is that workers today do not have the time, desire, or ability to effectively learn from traditional training sessions, workshops, and manuals. As technology has rapidly transformed the way employees do business, it has also changed the way they learn. Today, people are not opposed to new learning any more than in the past; they just desire more control over when and how they do it.

Characteristics of Successful Microlearning

There are certain key elements that separate microlearning from more traditional methods. These characteristics are also the reasons it is so successful in industry today.

Flexibility

This is one of the most valuable assets to microlearning. A successful microlearning is accessible across all devices and is especially mobile-friendly. How do most people take in information when they are not working? They watch videos, browse social media, check emails, and search the internet directly on their phone. By emphasizing mobile application, employers can allow the workforce to learn at their own pace and on their own time. This empowers individuals, lets them buy in to their own learning, and keeps employees working for longer. Traditional workshops and training sessions take an entire workforce out of work for that set amount of time and can be detrimental to company deadlines, tight schedules, and the overall stress of employees.

Fast Delivery

A successful microlearning module is completed in around 5 minutes or less, with 10 minutes being the upper limit, while some sources emphasizing under 4 minutes. The reason microlearning benefits from being so short is that after around 5 minutes, knowledge retention begins to drop, and the participant loses interest or cannot afford to dedicate any more time. Larger, more complex topics can be broken down into multiple learning modules that are completed over a span of weeks or even months. The shorter timeframe gives no reason why microlearning cannot be implemented on a daily basis in any organization. Although the learning is much quicker in the short-run, in the long-run the individual will spend more time actively engage in learning than they would in a single, long session. Fast delivery also has some major benefits for the employer conducting microlearning. Less content per unit means more can be built at a faster pace. Breaking the content down also lets organizations respond to changing business needs and training demands much quicker with significantly less lost time.

Leverages Multimedia and Gamification

One of the strengths of microlearning is the ability to take advantage of various forms of media such as audio, images, video, and interactivity. Millennials make up most of the workforce today, and according to John Eades on eLearning Industry (2014), "70% of Millennials visit YouTube monthly. They simply prefer video over other mediums." Varying the types of media between text, images, video, and audio keeps the learning fresh and the viewer attentive. Gamification is the addition of game elements to non-game activities. Whether it be points, badges, or leaderboards, building a competitive game-like atmosphere in your microlearning encourages participation and engagement. It also provides a way to prove learning took place. Incorporating multiple choice questions or some other forms of assessments goes a long way in effective learning. It has been widely understood for a long time in education that assessment is critical for knowledge retention and learning. The learning cycle is not complete until the user is able to apply what they have learned and subsequently fill in any gaps in their knowledge by learning from their mistakes. Successful microlearning utilizes this same theory and involves the user in some sort of assessment or knowledge check. The best assessments also include feedback for incorrect answers that helps explain what the user may have misunderstood.

Examples in Industry

There are numerous examples of microlearning that can be found in any industry. Here are a couple examples of situations where microlearning is beneficial for an organization:

A new employee has just been hired in a niche engineering field where they have little experience. They must learn the ins and outs of numerous pieces of equipment, specifications, best design practice, and software to do their job effectively. Rather than taking this information in at once in a series of weeklong trainings, they are supplemented with a catalogue of 50 microlearning units that covers the wide range of topics. The employee is expected to complete all 50 units by a specific deadline, but when they choose to view is up to them. This allows the employee to maximize their time at work on other productive tasks that keep them busy and saves the time and effort of another employee who must conduct the training. It also gives the employee and the rest of the company a valuable resource to draw back on when they need a refresher on a particular concept.

A company-wide process is changing, and thousands of employees must learn this new practice or concept. Rather than attempting to conduct consistent training across multiple locations with multiple groups of people that takes up considerable time, a 10-minute microlearning video is sent to all employees to complete on their own. This guarantees that all employees receive the same training in a consistent format that is extremely cost-effective to the organization.

Limitations

Although microlearning is an excellent source of training and learning, it may not be the best option in some instances. This simply depends on the subject matter. Some concepts are so complex that the return on investment to develop 50 microlearning units to appropriately cover all related topics is just not there. Microlearning could work for a high-level introduction; however longer training materials may better suit complicated subjects. If the complex concepts must be learned in a short amount of time, the organization may not have enough time to develop the microlearning units quick enough, and it could be more cost-effective to conduct a formal in-person training workshop in one long session. Fortunately, once a microlearning module is developed, it exists for the inevitable future and is very easy to modify and improve as information and content change. By investing in microlearning early on and properly maintaining it, the organization will benefit for generations after.

The Future

Microlearning is gaining traction in industry today and is likely going to continue in future years as more companies realize the benefits of this form of lifelong learning. This form of training delivery has accelerated with the recent COVID-19 pandemic. As more and more companies have turned towards remote work, the need for training to be conducted and delivered electronically and accessibly is increasing quickly. This amplifies the advantages of microlearning. Looking into the future, many organizations will see a higher percentage of employees continuing to work remotely and therefore, remote delivery of training will begin to be expected. It is time for executives to realize the potential they have for microlearning in their own business.

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The Role of Technical Communication in Higher Education Marketing

JEN CUCURULLO

Most often when we think of technical communication professionals, we think of technical writers, UX writers, copy editors, IT managers, and corporate trainers. However, is there room in higher education marketing for a technical communication professional? Minnesota State University, Mankato's Technical Communication master's program has attracted marketing professionals from the region and especially within higher education, myself included. The graduate program's website boasts that their degree "prepares students to be professional information developers, technical or professional writers, and editors who are skilled at using the written and spoken word, along with visuals, to effectively inform and instruct a wide range of audiences." This description describes common strategies and techniques that two alumnae of the program have implemented into their professional marketing roles in higher education.

Recently, I connected with these two alumnae of the MA Technical Communication program and asked them questions about the overlap of technical communication and marketing/recruitment and how the program shapes their profession in higher education.

Meet our professionals:

Lindsey Beyer received her MA in Technical Communication in 2017 and is the Director of Web Marketing for Minnesota State University, Mankato.

Jennifer Chelstrom, a 2012 graduate of the program, is the Associate Director of Graduate Studies at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

JCucurullo: Tell us a bit about your educational and career background and motivation to receive your master's degree in Technical Communication.

LB: I love learning. I wanted to learn a wide range of things and really fell in love with communications: visual, written, and multi-media (like video and animation). In 2006, I graduated from Gustavus Adolphus with a double major, Studio Art BFA, Communication Studies BA, and in 2008 I got an AAS in Commercial Art (graphic design).

After school, I received an internship at an advertising firm in Mankato, which led to full-time work as a multi-media designer. When the ad game became too much for me, I started working in ecommerce at Fun.com here in Mankato as a graphic designer. The Director of Web Marketing position opened up at Minnesota State Mankato; I applied and was hired. The first thing I did was started looking at graduate programs. I had worked with some folks at Fun. com who had gone through the [program] and all had awesome things to say about it, and how helpful and relevant it was to marketing.

JC: My undergraduate degree is in Elementary Education. I've worked at the [University] for 16 years, 13 of those years in Graduate Studies. While researching graduate programs, I noticed that the Technical Communication courses really seemed to align with the type of work I was doing or wanted to be doing. A lot of my work involved (and still does involve) simplifying complex information and processes through communication and technology. I was working full-time and raising young children, so the flexibility of the online program was important to me.

> " If I need to add a lot of instructions or workarounds to a document or application, it tells me I may need to revisit the design.

JCucurullo: How does what you learned in Technical Communication show up in your everyday work?

LB: Part of my job is to oversee the strategy of the Minnesota State Mankato website. I need to be able to think about the information architecture and usability of the site both from a big picture view, as well as consider strategies for smaller sections of the site. I learned to design systems for communication instead of only graphics. I learned to design information architectures in a way that would better serve our audiences. I learned and really dove deep into UX best practices and brought those back to the University as well. Additionally, I'm asked to give advice on how to write for the web. Information chunking, skim-able text with lots of headings, skim-able lists, consistent structures, and more are all concepts that I relay to our website content writers.

JC: It probably shows up more than I even realize, but here are some examples in visual design, website, and marketing pieces:

- Writing and Editing: production of communication pieces, writing for the web

- Usability: asking undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff for feedback on website, marketing pieces, applications, etc.

- Content strategy: leveraging CRMs on campus to create email campaigns

- Information design: displaying and analyzing data

JCucurullo: Were there any courses or topics from the MA Technical Communication curriculum that changed the way you view certain tasks or projects in your current role?

LB: Yes. User Experience courses especially. Being successful in my role means providing the best user experience for our audience. This program taught me UX as it pertains to the web especially. It has changed the way I design websites, and it's changed the way I think of design. Now I think of designing the information in ways that people can best access and use it.

JC: We learned about product design in Rhetorical Theory. In my role, the "product" is usually an electronic application or procedure. If I need to add a lot of instructions or workarounds to a document or application, it tells me I may need to revisit the design.

I learned in a Visual Design course that we can be creative in displaying data. I still think about that when I need to share information and data. We know which type of charts and graphs we should use for different data sets, but are there other ways to display info, to help an audience make sense of it.

JCucurullo: Can you describe a task or project that you approached with a technical communication mindset and how it impacted the outcome?

LB: The University's website design and information architecture. As a leader on the project of this magnitude, especially in this mobile-driven world, it was crucial to understanding how to best go about it. How did it impact the outcome? In the last couple years, there have been several websites I've created for our administration that the MN State system office has then gone on to use as their "standard"— the coronavirus website was one of them. The presidential search website was another.

JC: Since I have been at the University, we have moved many manual paper processes to electronic versions. In each of these instances, I have tried to incorporate what I learned in technical communication:

- Determine who needs to be involved and invite them early

- Take an audience-centered approach

- Test: at least informal usability testing

JCucurullo: What are your thoughts on how technical communication and marketing overlap?

LB: In a Master's program like this one, I am surprised that marketing isn't one of the primary career opportunities. Technical writing focuses on all of the things a good marketer should. If I were to use broad terms to describe what marketing is, it would be communicating clearly, concisely, and effectively. If I were to use broad terms to describe what the Technical Communication program at Minnesota State Mankato is all about, it would be communicating clearly, concisely, and effectively.

JC: I think there are several ways they overlap, a few being:

- Defining target audience and creating personas

- Consistency in messaging and branding

- Creating clear, accurate, and user-friendly content

- Visual design that helps users learn about a product

> " User experience, editing, content creation, and visual design—all elements that are the driving force of technical communication.

JCucurullo: If you had a wish or would love to implement something in your current role, in your department, or in the entire University, what would it be?

LB: Easy, EpiServer. My dream capabilities for our web CMS (EpiServer) actually were inspired in large part by those types of conversations had in grad school. EpiServer does have capabilities beyond what we are using, but we're still transitioning the last of the webpages and have not had time to implement anything new yet. But it can integrate into systems and can act as a database of sorts. In fact, we're looking into products right now that could integrate EpiServer with a media asset library, Sharepoint/OneDrive/Teams, AND Adobe products like InDesign. My dream is that when people start implementing more effective systems, they choose products that integrate with EpiServer (because with the right integration, it can do pretty much anything).

JC: Tools like a CMS and SIS [student information system] can help us improve the quality and efficiency of our work across work units. The technological tools will change, but the knowledge and skills gained from the Tech Comm program will help us use the latest technology to meet the needs of students and employees.

After wrapping up our conversation, it was clear that technical communication plays a vital role in higher education marketing for these two professionals. Both Lindsey and Jen spoke about user experience, editing, content creation, and visual design, all

elements that are the driving force of technical communication as well as marketing.

Higher education marketing and communication teams realized how critical it was for their messages to be delivered digitally throughout the pandemic. The past year has also taught consumers to be savvy with digital communication as they found themselves using digital tools to gather and consume information including apps, social media, online ordering, online meeting platforms, virtual visit tools, and more. A recent Inside Higher Ed blog post talks about how the shift and emphasis on digital communication means that marketing teams need to implement new elements for success. These elements include:

- Creating or strengthening User Experience teams to focus on the overall customer experience.

- Creating more relevant and strategic marketing messages for the digital consumer.

- Collaborating effectively across teams and developing successful content strategies.

- Implementing digital support and training for all communication professionals.

- Organizing a structured, system wide, metric system for defining success. (Johnson, 2021)

The above elements focus on methods and techniques that are the pillars of technical communication. The technical communication curriculum at Minnesota State Mankato provided the two interviewees the tools needed for their everyday tasks and long-term projects; we could capitalize on that by using their testimonies for further recruitment. The digital evolution brought on by the pandemic has provided an opportunity to recruit more higher education professionals into the technical communication world.

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Minnesota State University, Mankato; College of Arts and Humanities; the English Degree Programs "Technical Communication" page.

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This issue of The Maverick Messenger *was made possible by the students of* ENG *577. The project was completed under the guidance of Professor Lee Tesdell.*

Natalie Chau worked in the banking industry in Hong Kong for over 10 years, working as a procurement manager, before moving to the United States in mid 2019. Natalie is now pursuing her MA in Technical Communication at Minnesota State University, Mankato. As a trilingual speaker of Cantonese, English and Mandarin, she would like to be a technical writer focusing on writing bilingual documents to accommodate readers from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Natalie is living in Washington with her husband and four adorable cats, and their "main duty" is to give their cats a sweet and happy life. She loves baking, cooking, reading, and taking care of cats.

Jen Cucurullo has been working in the marketing field for most of her career and is currently the Director of Marketing and Communication for the College of Business at Minnesota State University, Mankato. In addition to her professional career, she is pursuing her MS in Technical Communication. Jen is excited to apply her new communication skills, including editing, documentation, and user experience to her day job. She believes strong and accurate communication can solve any problem. Jen and her family love to travel, garden, and host outdoor parties using their wood-fired pizza oven.

Lenny DiBono has been working at Broadridge Financial Solutions as Lead Proofreader for the past three years, and is currently pursuing his MS in Technical Communication with a focus in UX Writing and UX Design. Back in 2014, he graduated from SUNY Geneseo with Bachelor's Degrees in both Psychology and Philosophy. Upon graduating from the MS program, Lenny plans on pursuing a career as a UX Designer, building new digital products, apps, and websites that connect the world in new ways. In his free time, Lenny loves writing novels, training for ultramarathons, and spending time with friends and family.

Logan Kitchen has worked as a mechanical designer for Water Technology Inc, an aquatic engineering company, for the last three years. He's enjoyed being a part of the international team, helping with the design of large, themed, entertainment waterparks across the globe. He holds a Bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and is completing his graduate degree in Engineering Management this spring semester. Post-graduation, Logan plans on obtaining his Professional Engineering License and would like to continue working in the entertainment industry, designing and engineering water parks and attractions. In his free time, he enjoys disc golfing, playing board games, backpacking, and playing his fair share of video games.

Connie Odenthal earned an MFA in creative writing from MNSU in 2002 and has worked as an editor, copywriter, children's book writer, and instructor of English and reading ever since. She received her BAs in writing and psychology from Concordia College, Moorhead. She is now pursuing the graduate certificate in Technical Communication. She teaches at South Central College and lives in Le Sueur, MN, with her husband and six children.

Andrew Scott is pursuing his MA in Technical Communication at Minnesota State University, Mankato. He has a BA in English/Journalism from Bernard Baruch College in New York and has almost 20 years' experience in the communications field. He currently works as an editor and plans to find ways to apply the knowledge he has gained from the master's program to his career. In his "free time," Andrew enjoys fishing, swimming, spending time with his family, and engaging in church activities. He resides in South Florida with his wife and two children.

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