

**Course 319 Supplementary Materials**  
**Technical Writing Resources**

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## Suggested Reading

Books marked with an asterisk are available on Amazon.com with “Look Inside”

### General

\**Technical Communication* (Bedford/St. Martin's Press, 2004, 978-0312403386), by Michael H. Markel is a good introduction to the subject.

\**Human Factors for Technical Communicators* (Wiley, 2001, 978-0471035305), by Marlana Coe, applies the research on ergonomics and cognitive psychology to technical writing.

\**Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel (Technical Communication, Multimedia, and Information Systems)* (MIT, 1998, 978-0262032490) edited by John M. Carroll is the follow-on book to his original *The Nurnberg Funnel* (MIT, 1990, 978-0262031639). While *The Nurnberg Funnel* was the original book about the minimalist approach to tutorials and the research behind it, it is no longer in print. The second book provide insights based on eight years of using minimalist tutorials from a number of professional writers in the field.

*UnTechnical Writing* (UnTechnical Writing Press, 1999, 978-0966994902) is a general introduction to creating documentation for the consumer market, as is the more specific *The User Manual Manual* (UnTechnical Writing Press, 1999, 0966994914). Both are by Michael Bremer. Bremer has extensive experience, including writing the highly regarded manuals for the SimCity products. There is some overlap. *The User Manual Manual* is no longer in print but is available though second hand book dealers (and, as a result, for less than the cover price).

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*Writing Better Computer User Documentation* (John Wiley & Sons, 1990, 0471622605), by R. John Brockmann, gets the highest recommendation. The book is an excellent guide to its topic and presents the current (as of 1990) state of available empirical research. Many of the statistics used in this course come from Brockmann's book, and almost every book that discusses technical writing refers to it. Unfortunately, the book is difficult to find. Easier to find are Brockmann's books on the history of technical writing (including *\*Exploding Steamboats, Senate Debates, and Technical Reports* and *\*Twisted Rails, Sunken Ships*)

*Clear Technical Writing* (McGraw-Hill Companies, 1973, 978-0070079748) by John A Brogan. Focusing on concise writing and as much a workbook as a textbox, this book includes literally hundreds of sample sentences in its exercises.

*Style: Ten Lessons in Clarity and Grace* (Pearson Longman, 2004, 978-0321288318) by Joseph M. Williams. Builds on and extends the format recommended in this course for sentence (strong subjects, focused verbs, additional material at the end of the sentence).

*Word Power Made Easy* (Sagebrush, 1999, 978-0808504054) by Norman Lewis. This popular book continues to help readers improve their vocabulary.

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## Style Guides

\**Technical Writing Style* (Allyn & Bacon, 1998, 978-0205197224), by Dan Jones, is the only book I know of that successfully tackles the question of writing style in technical writing—at least, in the sense most people mean when they say “style.”

*Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago, 1993, 978-0226104034) is the most comprehensive style guide relevant to technical writers, though its audience is really academic rather than technical writers. The chapter on copyright is probably the best coverage of this topic without consulting a lawyer.

\**The Handbook of Technical Writing* (St. Martin's Press, 2006, 978-0312352677), by Alfred, Brusaw, and Oliu, is indispensable for the technical writer but is more specific than the Chicago Manual and doesn't cover as many topics.

\**Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications* (Microsoft Press, 2003, 978-0735617469) is the public version of Microsoft's style guide.

\**Read Me First: A Style Guide for the Computer Industry* (Sun Technical Publications, 2003, 978-0131428997) is Sun Microsystem's style guide. The Sun guide has an extremely thorough discussion of using callouts in graphics (24 pages of a 240-page book). It also has a very good discussion on creating indexes, if you're determined to do it yourself.

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**Managing, Editing, and Ethics**

*\*Managing Your Documentation Projects* (John Wiley & Sons, 1994, 978-0471590996), by JoAnn T. Hackos, is one of the best books in this area.

*\*Technical Editing: The Practical Guide for Editors and Writers* (Addison-Wesley, 1992, 978-0201563566), by Judith A. Tarutz, is the standard book on editing technical writing.

*Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors* (Prentice Hall, 2004, 978-0131477490), by Gretchen Hargis, describes IBM's standards-based process.

*\*User and Task Analysis for Interface Design* (John Wiley & Sons, 1998, 978-0471178316), by JoAnn T. Hackos and Janice C. Redish, is a great introduction to scenario analysis, though not aimed at technical writers.

*Ethics in Technical Communication* (1999, Allyn & Bacon, 978-0205274628), by Paul M. Dombrowski, is a thorough discussion of the ethical perspectives in technical writing.

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## Graphics and Page Layout

*\*Dynamics in Document Design* (John Wiley & Sons, 1997, 978-0471306368), by Karen A Schriver. The subtitle says it all: "Creating Texts for Readers." The book that probably best addresses the needs of technical writers.

*Illustrating Computer Documentation: The Art of Presenting Information Graphically on Paper and Online* (John Wiley & Sons, 1991, 978-0471538455), by William K. Horton, covers all the research and recommendations on graphics available at the time but is weak on pulling it together. However, it isn't just about computer documentation but applies to using graphics in any type of document. (no longer in print)

*\*Visual Explanations: Images and Quantities, Evidence and Narrative* (Graphics Press, 978-0961392123) and *\*Envisioning Information* (Graphics Press, 978-0961392116), by Edward R. Tufte, are not as relevant to creating end-user documentation as the other books mentioned, but these two beautifully designed books are worth reading for their information on presenting information.

*Visual Language: Global Communication for the 21st Century* (MacroVU Press, 978-1892637093), by Robert Horn, the inventor of structured writing. This book attempts to develop a system for using graphics and words together.

*\*The Non-Designer's Design Book* (Peachpit Press, 2003, 978-0321193858), by Robin Williams, will give you a good start on book design, if you don't want to become a specialist.

*Open Here: The Art of Instructional Design* (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1999, 1556709625) by Paul Mijksenaar, Piet Westendorp. This is a great collection of sample graphics used to convey information. The text doesn't provide much (really: any) guidance but the book is still a useful collection of examples to draw on.

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## Grammar, Spelling, and Language

*Woe Is I* (Riverhead Trade, 1993, 978-1594480065) by Patricia T. O'Conner is an introduction to grammar that isn't dull—just like grammar.

*\*The Deluxe Transitive Vampire: The Ultimate Handbook of Grammar for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* (Pantheon Books, 1993, 978-0679418603) and *\*The New Well-Tempered Sentence: A Punctuation Handbook for the Innocent, the Eager, and the Doomed* (Ticknor & Fields, 1993, 978-0395628836), both by Karen Elizabeth Gordon, are great, short (and fun) grammar books.

*\*The Art of Spelling: The Madness and the Method* (W.W. Norton & Company, 978-0393322088), by Marilyn vos Savant, will help you spell words correctly so that you can spot typos better.

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## Arcane Knowledge

These books aren't strictly about technical writing but have been recommended by course instructors and the author.

\**The American Language* (Knopf, 1921, 978-0394400754) by H. L. Mencken. A great book for pointing out how little we actually know about words.

\**Verbatim*, (Harvest Books, 2001, 978-0156012096) edited by Erin McKean. A collection of articles from the language-oriented magazine of the same name.

\**How to Lie with Statistics* (W.W. Norton, 1993, 978-0393310726) by Darrell Huff Really, a way to recognize the subtle lies that people use and how they distort the facts.

\**The Meaning of Everything: The Story of the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2003, 978-0195175004) by [Simon Winchester](#). A wonderful book on the greatest dictionary ever created and on the process of defining words. And, if you think that short sentences are the key to successful technical writing, Winchester's style will disabuse you of that belief. This is a companion to Winchester's earlier book on the American lunatic who contributed to the development of the OED (The earlier book has two titles: in North America, it's called *The Professor and the Madman*; in England it's called *The Surgeon of Crothorne*. Under either title, it's also wonderful).

*Mr. Beck's Underground Map* (Capital Transport Publishing, 1994, 978-1854141682) by Ken Garland. Perhaps the most used piece of technical graphics in the world is the map of the London Underground (subway). This book details the history of the map and the man who created it. Only available in England but can be ordered through [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk). The book was sufficiently popular that a sequel was written: *Underground Maps After Beck* (Capital Transport Publishing, 2005, 978-1854142863) by Maxwell J. Roberts.



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*\*Language Visible* (Broadway, 2003, 978-0767911726) or *Letter Perfect : The Marvelous History of Our Alphabet From A to Z* (Broadway, 2004, 978-0767911733) by David Sacks. Under either of its two titles, a comprehensive, and fascinating, look at the history of the English alphabet and alphabets in general.

*\*The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford University Press, 1992, 978-0192141835) and the *\*The Concise Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford University Press, 2005, 978-0192806376) by Tom McArthur. An extensive collection of articles for the general reader on all aspects of the English Language. If the full version is too weighty, the concise version, which is about one-third shorter, cheaper, and easier to get).

*History of the English Language* by Seth Leder on audio tape (from The Teaching Company at [www.teachco.com](http://www.teachco.com)). With audio you can hear the difference in sounds as English has changed (for instance, the change involved in the Great Vowel Shift).

*\*The Language Instinct* (Harper Perennial, 2000, 978-0060958336) and *Words and Rules: The Ingredients of Language* (Pheonix Press, 2000, 978-0753810255 ) both by Steven Pinker. An introduction to linguistics and how languages interact with the human mind. Not everyone agrees with Steven Pinker.

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## Organizations and Journals

If you're not a member, you should consider joining the Society for Technical Communication ([www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)). Many of the society's publications are available to nonmembers (though nonmembers pay more), and presentations made at the annual conference can be downloaded from the society's Web site. The society publishes a journal quarterly on relatively technical topics in technical writing and a magazine monthly on less technical topics.

Baywood, a scholarly publishing company, publishes the quarterly *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, edited by Charles H. Sides. Their web site is <http://www.baywood.com>.

The Plain Language association has its site at <http://www.plainlanguage.gov/> where you can download their guide to plain writing (*Writing User-Friendly Documents*) and sample documents among other tools.