Careers in Technical Communication for English Majors

RACHEL HOUGHTON AND BETHANY BOWLES

Presentation for the Sigma Tau Delta International Conference
March 21, 2013
Agenda

- Technical communication
  - Skills
  - Disciplines
  - Career opportunities
  - Paths to careers in tech comm
- Society for Technical Communication
  - Values
  - Benefits of membership
Technical Communication is ...

- Communicating about technical or specialized topics in terms the layperson can understand
- Communicating by using technology, including emerging new media
- Providing instructions about how to do something
Skills

• Core skills in writing and editing
• Creative page design
• Photography and videography
• Technical illustration
• International communication: “Global English” for non-native-English speakers and for translation
• Training and education
• Web and IT skills
Creativity

- Visual design
- Photo
- Video
- Technical illustration
“Tech writing? Yccch! Bor-r-r-r- ing!”

“Not so. The days of ‘Tina the Brittle Technical Communicator’ in Dilbert are gone! New technologies bring new excitement in exercising traditional skills.”
Linguistics and International Communication

Source: http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/Dec12/LinguisticsOutreach.html
Education and Training

• Training is much more than manuals!
  ○ Online rhetoric
  ○ Tutorials
  ○ Web-based instruction
  ○ Textbooks
  ○ New media
The basic principles of rhetoric apply to business communication as well as to literature and the arts:
  - Research your market
  - Know your readers/viewers
Collaboration

- Teamwork is critical in technical communication
- Collaborative writing is the norm in the field
- Your communication skills also posture you well for leadership in collaborative teams in the workplace
Web/IT Skills

- Opportunities for both analytical and creative technical writing and marketing communication
- Web site content and design
- Blogs
- Wikis
- Social media
- IT expertise for collaborative writing environments
Disciplines

- Technical writing and editing
- Hardware and software documentation
- Technical marketing communication (e.g., proposals, brochures)
- Scientific writing (and “ghost writing”)
- Medical writing
- Grant proposals
- Web design
- Usability and accessibility
- Indexing
- Information/knowledge management
- Instructional design
An interdisciplinary approach is essential to successful technical communication, because the profession spans so many disciplines.
Tech Writing/Editing

- Hardware and software documentation
- Policies and procedures
- Textbooks
- Proposals
- Marketing collateral
- Video scripts
- Magazine articles
- Copy editing for publishers
Traditional Tech Writing

- Instructions for installing, maintaining, and repairing hardware
- Instructions on how to properly use software
- Detailed manufacturing process plans
- User manuals for everything from toasters to automobiles
- Medical reports and research articles
Research

- Pure
- Applied
- Research and writing within the field of technical communication
- Collaborative writing with SMEs researching within their specialty
Aerospace & Industry

- Proposals to capture new business
- Technical reports and presentations
- Marketing collateral to attract new customers
- Multi-media presentations
- Web site content and design
- Internal policies and procedures
- Employee communications
- Media relations
- Community relations
Advertising & Marketing Communications

- Advertising across multiple media
  - Print
  - Radio
  - TV
  - Billboards
  - Web sites
  - Social media
- Diverse marketing collateral
  - Brochures
  - Flyers
  - Fact sheets
  - Trade show graphics
  - Narrated video
  - Web sites
Writing for Non-Profits

- Grant proposals
- Fund-raising collaterals
- Literature for those who are served by the non-profits
- Web site design, content, and maintenance
- Empathy and commitment
Healthcare

- Editing or ghost-writing articles by physicians for medical journals
- Patient-oriented web sites
- Flyers describing illnesses and treatments, for doctors’ offices
- Medical transcription
- Instructions for prescription medication
- Marketing collaterals and web sites for for-profit hospitals, pharmaceutical companies, etc.
Gaming

- Game designers
- Documentation writers and designers
- Strategy guide writers
- Promotional writers

Excellent article in STC’s *intercom* magazine:
Career Opportunities

- Technical communication spans many disciplines → the job market is huge
- Unless technology stands still, it will always be a growth market
- Companies are beginning to realize that poor writing and poor communication hurt their bottom line
- Solving that problem taps into your core skills as English majors
Tap Core Skills

- Writing accurately
- Writing clearly
- Writing concisely
- Writing coherently
- Writing creatively
- Tapping diverse media
- Crossing boundaries and cultures
Growing Job Market

There are 45,000+ technical writers in the U.S.!

Geographical Distribution of Jobs in Technical Communication
## Competitive Compensation

### Salary Comparison Table, Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Technical Writers</th>
<th>Reporters, Correspondents</th>
<th>Public Relations Specialists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Mean $/y</td>
<td>Median $/y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon</td>
<td>570</td>
<td>69.6K</td>
<td>74.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>2,000</td>
<td>70.0K</td>
<td>69.7K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Hampshire</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>71.1K</td>
<td>65.3K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Jersey</td>
<td>1,530</td>
<td>71.5K</td>
<td>67.7K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecticut</td>
<td>910</td>
<td>71.7K</td>
<td>72.2K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>2,880</td>
<td>76.3K</td>
<td>72.9K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>1,610</td>
<td>79.5K</td>
<td>79.7K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>1,960</td>
<td>82.1K</td>
<td>81.5K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>5,910</td>
<td>84.4K</td>
<td>80.1K</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>45,120</td>
<td>67.3K</td>
<td>64.6K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data is shown for the 9 states with the highest salaries in technical writing, plus the national average.
The mean and median salaries for tech writers are much closer than for other writers, reflecting dependable income.
Tech Writing Salaries Around the U.S.

Tech Writing Salaries in Major Metropolitan Areas

The higher the concentration of technology and industry, the higher the salaries.
Paths to Careers in Tech Comm
Before tech writing programs appeared in universities, “OJT” was the only path to a career in technical communication.
Degree Programs

- B.A. in tech comm
- M.A. in tech comm
- Ph.D. in tech comm
- Undergraduate minor in tech comm
- A certificate based on a given number of courses in tech comm
Professional Certification

- STC-developed professional certification program
  - Portfolio-based, not test-based
  - Candidates submit work samples demonstrating core competencies
  - Faster and cheaper than degrees or certificates
STC Membership

Society for Technical Communication
## Society for Technical Communication

- Largest and oldest professional association dedicated to the advancement of technical communication
- Sets the global standards for technical communication
- Members reach across every industry and continent
- Produces a wide array of educational events
- Publishes award-winning publications: *intercom* and *Technical Communication* (a quarterly peer-reviewed journal)
- Maintains a comprehensive website including an extensive archive of webinars
- World’s largest technical communication conference
## Values and Behaviors

<table>
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<th>Values</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Innovation</td>
<td>Transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Open communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionalism</td>
<td>Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Benefits of Membership

- Affiliation (geographic or virtual) with an STC student chapter
- Affiliation (geographic or virtual) with an STC geographic chapter
- Affiliation with one STC special interest group (SIG) in a technical communication discipline of particular interest to you
- Access to salary scales, job listings, and other valuable intellectual property on the international STC web site
Benefits of Membership (Cont.)

- Eligibility for STC student mentoring programs
- Professional networking
- E-access to industry-leading professional publications
- Reduced rates for STC conferences, webinars (plus free webinars), and certification in technical communication
Career Growth

Networking within your Affiliated STC Communities

Career Advancement

Job Search and Placement

Professional Development
Student Mentoring Programs: The Why’s, How’s, and More

Bethany Bowles and Rachel Houghton

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Joining STC

Society for Technical Communication
Where It All Comes Together
Membership Levels

- Student Membership
- New Technical Communicator
- Classic Membership
Special for Sigma Tau Delta Members

• 50% discount on membership for the rest of 2013 (save $37.50)
• Eligible for 33% discount on student renewal for 2014 (save $25.00)*
• Sign up at the conference
• Call 1-571-366-1909
• barbra.sanders@stc.org

Offer Ends April 30!

* Renew by Dec 31, 2013.
Questions? Come See Us!

- SMEs from STC for questions and answers
- Materials on the benefits of STC membership
- Materials on the various disciplines within technical communication
- Materials on careers in technical communication
- Materials on core skills for technical communicators
- Typical salary scales for jobs in technical communication
- “Toolkit” (printed book and accompanying DVD) on how to establish and sustain a student mentoring program
- Discounted STC student memberships!
- Free giveaways!
Better Together!

The Society for Technical Communication
Thank you for Coming!
Feel free to contact us!

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