



Technical Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 6

Editors: Kirk St.Amant & Pavel
Zemliansky

Place of Publication: Colorado

Publisher: Parlor Press, WAC

Clearinghouse

Date of Publication: 2024

Number of Pages: 358

Reviewed by

Ashley Patriarca

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

Keywords: pedagogy, textbook, service course, open educational resources

Part of the *Writing Spaces* series published by WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, *Technical Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing, Volume 6*, focuses specifically on issues connected to *technical* writing and communication. Editors Kirk St.Amant and Pavel Zemliansky have assembled an expansive collection that is a welcome addition to the *Writing Spaces* series and to any technical communication course.

Jointly published by the WAC Clearinghouse and Parlor Press, every volume in the *Writing Spaces* series shares a commitment to publishing high-quality, open-access undergraduate classroom materials. Earlier collections have focused primarily on materials for first-year writing courses, so Volume 6 marks the series' first expansion into other fields. Like the authors in each previous volume, though, each author in *Technical Writing Spaces* is an instructor writing for undergraduate students, using an engaging, straightforward style. More, each chapter stands alone, making it easy for instructors to select PDFs of the individual chapters that would work well in their classrooms.

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This entry in the series includes 17 chapters covering a range of technical and scientific communication topics, including accessibility, collaboration, international contexts for communication, and more. Most chapters focus on transferrable knowledge that would apply in a range of upper-level technical and scientific communication courses classes (including service courses), rather than genre-specific content; those chapters that *do* focus on genre (e.g., K. Alex Ilyasova’s “Last to be written, first to be read: Writing memos, abstracts, and executive summaries”) address genres common across upper-level technical and scientific communication courses. Despite the focus on content for upper-level undergraduate courses, some chapters are more appropriate for first-year writing courses aimed at students in technical and scientific majors; for example, Therese I. Pennell’s “Assessing sources for technical communication” focuses at length on academic sources and the teaching resources following the chapter explicitly identify first-year students as the audience.

Each of the chapters does an excellent job of drawing on students’ previous writing knowledge, including their experiences in first-year writing classes and casual writing on social media platforms, to clarify what technical communication is and can do. By encouraging them to think beyond writerly intuition and demographics to focus on research into users’ needs, values, cultural backgrounds, and more, Joanna Schreiber’s “Beyond audience analysis: Three stages of user experience research for technical writers” deepens students’ understanding of the audience analysis that they may have done in first-year writing. Similarly, Clinton R. Lanier’s “Social media as a space for today’s technical communication work” skillfully supports students in making the leap from their previous experiences with casual social media to professional and organizational uses of social media; Lanier’s section, “Tips for using social media in TC,” is a particularly useful heuristic for students to use as they begin planning for an assignment.

Another benefit to this collection’s affiliation with the *Writing Spaces* series is the wealth of accompanying activities, assignments, and other instructional resources. A “Teacher Resources” section follows the Works Cited section of each chapter; these sections include teaching strategies, discussion questions, and other content that will enrich students’ interaction with the concepts. I particularly appreciate the resources that offer ideas about how to adapt discussions and topics for the different kinds of technical communication courses, as well as how to handle topics that typically require significant amounts of time in industry (e.g., Candice Lanius’ and Ryan Weber’s ideas for implementing user-centered design projects or Darina M. Slattery’s discussions of

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adapting presentations depending on students' prior experiences within the technical communication program).

The book's website, writingspaces.org, also hosts a growing archive of technical and scientific communication assignments and in-class activities to support instructors using this volume in their classes. Although the online *Writing Spaces* resources focused on technical communication remain limited in comparison to those focused on first-year writing, they are all thoughtfully designed for adaptation, and several would work well as the starting point for a unit within the technical communication service course. For example, Megan Von Bergen's "Who is this space designed to exclude? Instructions and usability/accessibility analysis (IAUA)" could easily be adapted into a class activity or a full unit, depending on an instructor's needs. It would also pair well with several of the collection's chapters, particularly Cathryn Molloy's "Basic approaches to creating accessible documentation projects: What is accessibility, and what does it have to do with documentation projects?"

The only true downside to this collection is that the chapters are published in black-and-white/grayscale, rather than in color. While this lack of color does not negatively affect most of the chapters, it is a limitation for the otherwise-excellent chapters addressing visual communication. Though Candice A. Welhausen's chapter, "Worth a thousand words: Constructing visual arguments in technical communication," includes an appendix in color, the impact of the content would be even stronger if the full chapter were in color—at least for the online, open-access version.

Technical Writing Spaces is a timely, much-needed volume. Although a number of excellent technical communication textbooks already exist, many of the most expansive are also the most *expensive*. For anyone seeking lower- or no-cost alternatives for students, it's exciting to see the publication of a high-quality, open-access technical communication textbook. *Technical Writing Spaces* is just that kind of textbook, and I am pleased to recommend it highly. More, I am already adding selections to my upcoming classes, and I look forward to future technical communication-related volumes in the *Writing Spaces* series.

Author Information

Ashley Patriarca is an Associate Professor of English at West Chester University of Pennsylvania, where she has taught undergraduate and graduate professional and technical writing courses since 2013. She is the former coordinator for the Professional and Technical Writing Minor and currently serves as the director of First-Year Writing. Her research focuses on professional and technical writing pedagogy, usability, and risk and crisis communication.