



Technical Communication for Environmental Action

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*T*echnical Communication for Environmental Action, edited by Sean D. Williams, brings together diverse perspectives and approaches that scholars, researchers, and students can learn from to support and advance environmental action. The book includes an introduction by Williams, 11 authored chapters, and an epilogue by Caroline Gottschalk-Druschke. This collection is timely and necessary because, although research on technical communication related to environmental action is increasing, there is still relatively little guidance on it. Williams explains that the goal of the collection is to provide voices surrounding three rhetorical concepts: *praxis*, *phronesis*, and *dialogue*. In addition to these themes, there is a suggestion to read the chapters according to four topics: Diverse Voices, Narrative Methods, Policy & Process, and Pedagogy. At the end of the introduction, Williams clearly emphasizes the intention for this collection, which is simple but earnest—to prompt environmental action. Caroline Gottschalk-Druschke shares in the epilogue of the collection that these chapters serve as a “roadmap” to this action, clearly

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conceptualizing the ways these chapters work together to inform participation in environmental action, whether through pedagogy, illuminating Indigenous and global perspectives concerning the environment, or through reimagining how public participation can function.

Each chapter presents a form of environmental action and provides guidance for those seeking knowledge, new ways of thinking, ideas for community-participatory research, or expansive perspectives on social justice. From a programmatic perspective, this collection offers actionable and insightful observations for developing meaningful community-participatory classroom experiences, scenarios that provide a lens on social justice, and cases that demystify the often confusing and bureaucratic processes that prevent progress in environmental action.

A prominent and valuable element that stands out in this collection is the inclusion of diverse, localized voices and experiences surrounding environmental action related to technical communication. The first chapter in the collection, by Cana Uluak Itchuaqiyaq, “When the sound is frozen: Extracting climate data from Inuit narratives,” highlights how underrepresented Indigenous voices hold embodied, localized scientific knowledge about climate patterns, which is often excluded from Western knowledge production. This chapter challenges dominant and colonial perspectives on ways of knowing and shows that studying local, Indigenous narratives about the environment is a legitimate way to more deeply understand climate patterns. Beth Shirley, in Chapter 6, “The narrative of silent stakeholders: Reframing local environmental communications to include global human impacts,” also argues for the inclusion of underrepresented voices in environmental issues through applying the strategy of societal teleconnections. Shirley’s work shows the importance of giving voice to local communities who are often invisible stakeholders in global issues by documenting narratives that bring the experiences of Moroccan women to light. In Chapter 4, “Flood insurance rate maps as communicative sites of pragmatic environmental action,” Daniel P. Richards also shows the importance of taking a localized approach to environmental issues surrounding technical communication. Richards’ account demonstrates how technical communication can raise public awareness of flood risk and dispel misconceptions about flood insurance pricing, helping local communities become more resilient by encouraging individuals to obtain coverage. Together, these chapters emphasize the importance of amplifying marginalized and underrepresented voices in conversations about environmental action and show approaches that center on local, community-specific issues.

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The multiple detailed accounts of community-participatory learning in the classroom constitute a robust contribution to the collection, and each chapter offers a unique understanding of how these courses can be approached. In Chapter 3, “In defense of a greenspace: Students discover agency in the practice of community-engaged technical communication,” Bob Hyland provides an account of a community-participatory course centered around protecting greenspace in the Cincinnati Park system, which continued over multiple semesters. Hyland’s chapter illustrates how community-participatory learning creates a space for students to exercise agency, leading to meaningful environmental action, while also bridging the gap between theory and praxis in technical communication. In Chapter 5, “Collaborating for clean air: Virtue ethics and the cultivation of transformational service-learning partnerships,” Lauren E. Cagle and Roberta Burnes show the benefits of cultivating a partnership between educators and community groups over an extended period and how these partnerships lead to transformation among educators, students, and the community. In Chapter 8, “Writing for clients, writing for change: Proposals, persuasion, and problem solving in the technical writing classroom,” Monika A. Smith illuminates how a community-participatory project in the classroom enhanced rhetorical and technical communication skills among the engineering students, while also fostering a sense of interconnectedness with themselves and the world around them. Lastly, in Chapter 11, “Rhino crash: Teaching science, medical, and environmental writing for social action,” Michelle Hall Kells shares how a partnership with a South African-based rhino conservation group allowed for an “appreciative inquiry perspective” and encouraged students to engage with audiences as global citizens.

Many of the chapters explore the complexities and challenges of public participation in environmental action, as well as the role of technical communicators in addressing them, providing valuable insights to researchers, practitioners, and students interested in advancing a more sustainable future. Dan Card’s Chapter 2, “Boundary waters: Deliberative experience design for environmental decision making,” applies a social justice lens to examine how public participation functions in the environmental review process, revealing inequities and identifying specific areas where intervention is needed to ensure broader and more equitable access. Sara B. Parks and Lee S. Tesdell also seek to make the invisible visible in Chapter 7, “Resilient farmland: The role of technical communicators,” showcasing opportunities for technical communicators in agricultural decision-making, which is often kept private, through a case study in Iowa. In Chapter 9, “Health in the shale fields: Technical communication and environmental health risks,” Barbara George applies stasis theory to show the discrepancies and inconsistencies between how information is provided to the public and how stakeholders deliberate on

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issues. In conjunction with this analysis, George shows how an advocacy non-profit organization can help address these gaps and increase public knowledge of issues and processes, enabling the public to better understand and participate in initiatives that affect them. In Chapter 10, “Participatory policy: Enacting technical communication for a shared water future,” Josephine Walwema provides solutions to increase public participation by examining the policy surrounding South Africa’s governance of the water shortage. Through critical discourse analysis, Walwema shows the technical strategies that assisted the city of Cape Town in creating a policy to secure a successful water future. These chapters work to demystify complex processes and identify areas for intervention to improve public participation in policy and regulatory practices related to environmental issues.

Technical Communication for Environmental Action provides a rich source of information for researchers, practitioners, and educators to reference and build upon. Educators interested in community-participatory learning courses could gain insights and ideas to propose or develop similar courses focused on environmental action at their own institutions. Additionally, many chapters in this collection are appropriate for instructors to assign as reading in various undergraduate courses, such as technical and professional communication, science writing, and courses with a particular focus on the environment. While the collection provides insight into a wide range of topics appropriate for undergraduate learning, one of the most significant is social justice. Many chapters in the collection can be incorporated into social justice units to highlight Indigenous perspectives, global and underrepresented voices, and inequities in public participation practices surrounding environmental issues.

This collection makes visible the widespread technical communication needs in environmental action and provides insight into the vast number of opportunities for those interested in participating. As the climate crisis persists, it is encouraging to see an increase in scholarship in technical communication that offers a range of ideas and actions to advance environmental progress.

Author Information

Jessica Remcheck (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the University of Minnesota in Rhetoric and Scientific & Technical Communication. Her research lies at the intersection of the rhetoric of health and science, technical communication, and environmental justice. Currently, she focuses on how decisions are made and communicated in the context of human-induced toxic exposures. She is interested in the public understanding of risk and safety related to environmental toxins and in researching how the public can become better-informed about environmental policy and regulations.