

## **Chapter Objectives**

In this chapter, you will learn about:

- Types of end-user documentation
- How technical writing differs from other writing
- How technical documents are organized
- How to plan effective user documents
- Effective use of formats
- Strategies for technical writing
- Common problems in technical writing
- Tools used for technical writing
- How to evaluate documents

## **Additional Resources**

1. Learn more about technical writing:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical\\_writing](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Technical_writing)
2. How to write a user manual:  
[www.blueprintusability.com/topics/articleusermanuals.html](http://www.blueprintusability.com/topics/articleusermanuals.html)
3. More information on proofreading:  
[www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html](http://www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/proofread.html)
4. How to use fonts in a technical document:  
<http://ezinearticles.com/?Technical-Writing---How-to-Use-Fonts-Properly-in-a-Technical-Document&id=1920029>
5. Another view of the technical writing process:  
[www.docsymmetry.com/technical-writing-process.html](http://www.docsymmetry.com/technical-writing-process.html)

## **Key Terms**

- **Acronym**—A word formed from the initial letters of words in a phrase; for example, *RAM* (pronounced as the word *ram*) is an acronym for *random access memory*.
- **Active voice**—A sentence in which the subject performs the action indicated by the verb; for example, *Mary will present a tutorial on Excel macros on Monday*; compare to passive voice.
- **Analogy**—A comparison between an unfamiliar concept and a familiar one; an analogy highlights the similarities between things; for example, a computer hard disk is like a filing cabinet.
- **Brainstorm**—A method used to generate a list of potential ideas or topics; the brainstormed list is then prioritized and pared-down, as needed.
- **Dangling phrase**—An expression (or a single word) at the beginning or end of a sentence that adds little to the meaning of the sentence; can make a sentence unclear and confusing.

- **Documentation**—Written communication intended to provide user support information to end-users; can be printed or online; includes brochures, flyers, newsletters, handouts, training aids, user guides, handbooks, manuals, online help systems, proposals, letters, memos, email and chat messages, procedural and operational documentation, webpages, and troubleshooting guides.
- **Format consistency check**—An editing pass through a draft document in which a writer checks to make sure that the headings and subheadings, fonts, indentation, centering, boldface, italics, underlining, and other format elements are used consistently throughout a document.
- **Hierarchical organization**—A document organization style that flows from top to bottom; information is arranged from general to specific; online help systems are an example.
- **Hyperlink**—A highlighted word or phrase in a document, which when clicked, takes the user to additional information about the word or phrase—by displaying a webpage, opening a document, jumping to another location on the current page, or opening a popup window; also called a link.
- **Idiom**—A word or phrase whose meaning is different from the literal meaning of the separate words in the phrase.
- **Initialism**—An abbreviation formed from the initial letters of words in a phrase; for example, *USB* (pronounced as the letters *u-s-b*) is an acronym for *universal serial bus*.
- **Jargon**—Words that are understood only by those experienced in a field; for example, a *hacker* is jargon, whereas the *unauthorized user* is more general; define jargon words to ensure that readers understand them.
- **Justified text**—A document or paragraph format in which the text is extended to both the right and left margins; commonly used in books and newspapers, but can be difficult to read.
- **Link**—see the hyperlink.
- **Nominalization**—The use of *-tion*, *-ing*, *-ment*, and other word endings to create nouns from verbs; for example: “*Capitalization can be performed with the Change Case command.*” To avoid nominalization, this sentence could be rewritten as: “*To capitalize words, use the Change Case command.*”
- **Parallel structure**—A writing strategy in which similar items in a sentence, list, or table are treated consistently; examples include consistent verb tenses and consistent phrasing in lists.
- **Passive voice**—A sentence in which the subject of the sentence *receives* the action indicated by the verb; for example, “*The document was prepared by me*” is in the passive voice, whereas “*I prepared the document*” is in an active voice.
- **Reference format**—A document organization style that pulls together all the information on a specific topic in a single page, section, or chapter; compare to tutorial format.
- **Referent**—A concrete word or concept that is designated by another word; for example, in “*Before you insert a DVD, inspect it for scratches*”, the word *DVD* is the referent of *it*; avoid pronouns such as *it*, *them*, and *their* when the referent is unclear.
- **Sans serif typeface**—A style of type that does not have fine lines (serifs) added to each character; often used in titles and headings; compare with a serif typeface.

- **Sequential organization**—A document organization style that follows a step-by-step approach whereby information is arranged in the order in which the steps are executed; procedural documents are examples.
- **Serif typeface**—A style of type in which each character includes fine lines (called serifs) that project from the top and bottom of each letter; serifs lead the reader's eye from letter to letter across the line, improving readability; compare with sans serif typeface.
- **Specialty typeface**—A style of type that is intended for special uses, such as invitations, brochures, or flyers; draws attention to the text, although it makes the general text more difficult to read; script typefaces are an example.
- **Style sheet**—A list of common terms, formats, and writing conventions that describes a department's or organization's preferred usage and spelling so writers use consistent terminology and formats.
- **Technical accuracy check**—An editing pass through a draft in which a writer tests any procedural or technical steps in a document by performing the steps with the technology; helps reduce errors in step-by-step instructions or other technical information.
- **Tutorial format**—A documentation style that guides a user step-by-step through the features of a technology with frequently used features covered first; compare to reference format.