



DigiNews

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Writing Online Documents

By Kavita Ryali

Why write online documents?

The Web is having a major impact on business communication. If you happen to be an experienced writer or starting to explore your writing skills, the Web has a multitude of opportunities for you. More and more companies want online documents and the reasons why they decide to do it are

- Inexpensive electronic distribution.
- Easy update and correction of current content.

- Faster communication.
- Standard delivery system for users around the world.

We have seen in our previous issues of *DigiNews*, in "Writing for the Web," how writing for online documents has a different set of rules as compared to writing for print. Now that you are ready to write for the Web, you might be wondering what types of online documents are popular, what interests you, and what authoring tools you need. Here are a few things you might find useful.

See Online, 10

A Farewell, Sort of

By Gloria Campbell

For the past six and a half years, I have had the great privilege of helping to develop the Technical Writing and Communication programs at BCC. As of September 1, 2003, I reduced my workload and handed over the director's duties to my longtime friend and associate, Adele Becker.

Way back in 1997 when Adele and I assessed the need for more opportunities for people to develop skills in the field of technical writing and communication, we decided that BCC was an ideal place to put such a program together. That spring we offered the first session of *Fundamentals of Technical Writing*

and gradually added more classes until we had a complete certificate program. Feeling pleased with our progress, we called the original advisory committee together and were told that now it was time to develop an editing certificate. And so it went. We kept adding certificates to the present total of seven.

As the certificate programs grew and the number of classes expanded, the volume of administrative work did the same. Eventually, the decision was made to make the Technical and Professional Communication Programs into a separate entity under the Work-Related heading, and I was

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Get Over the Writer's Boredom

By Lovely Choubey

Are you a technical writer who is longing to express more creativity in your writing? Do you fantasize about the freedom of writing fiction? Are you in a "Boredom" tunnel with no apparent way out? If so, there is hope! Most of the ideas and techniques outlined in this article came from technical writers just like you.



"Are you in a "Boredom" tunnel with no apparent way out?"

Balance your tasks

As Patricia Cornette, a seasoned technical writer puts it, "I spend some time teaching writing techniques and some time writing. Teaching requires more communication and writing requires more solitary work, so they balance nicely." A lot of the stifled feelings come from the daily grind of any job; so add variety to your daily job by doing some voluntary work, freelancing, or teaching.

Enhance your skills

The winning combination for employability in this ever-evolving economy seems to be monitoring changes and enhancing the skills needed to remain relevant despite such changes. So go ahead and take some writing courses related to marketing communication or science writing. This will enhance your skills, give your writing capabilities a broad spectrum, and help you

get out of the "Boredom" tunnel.

Recognize the boredom and use it as a stimulus for making changes

Take the "Boredom" as a challenge and let your mind work on how to add creativity to your technical writing. Implement changes in documentation sets being revised to include newer design and technological options, so it's not quite the same thing being done over and over.

Do not restrict yourself to writing at work

According to Cornette, many technical writers and editors write "fluffy" (non-technical) material from time to time. Some have articles, novels, screenplays, or poetry to their credit.

Maintain a personal diary, write personal histories, memoirs

Write about day-to-day happenings. This can help vent your boredom. Write about how you feel and what causes the boredom. It will be easier to find a solution when you know the specific problem. Write about your school days, about your grandparents who might have survived the war, or about your friends. Just look around and write anything that seems to be interesting and different from what you write everyday.

Join a group of technical writers, talk about your problem

Attend conferences and meetings meant for technical writers. Join groups like Society for Technical Communication. Talk about what you are going through; don't be afraid to admit it. Ask other writers if they have gone through something like this. What do they do about it? If you don't want to admit the problem you are having, do what one of my friends does. Tell everyone that one of your friends is in a big "Boredom" tunnel and is asking for suggestions.

Participate in contests

Winning doesn't matter, but it will give you a break from the kind of writing you are doing. It is also a good way of evaluating yourself, whether you are really ready to do the writing you are fantasizing about. Who knows, you might end up with a great piece of writing and get the break you need.

Read the kind of writing you would like to write

Keep yourself well informed about what's happening in the writing world. Read lots of books, magazines, and newsletters—especially the kind of writing you are interested in.

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Farewell

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made the director. While I had intended to continue in this role a little longer, I have found it necessary to reduce my workload.

I am now working from my home base as much as possible, but will still be accessible to help you reach your professional goals. I will be in my new office at BCC, room 135, on Thursdays from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. You can reach me to make an appointment

at my old number 425-564-2943 or at my cell 425-301-1048. My email will remain the same—gcampbel@bcc.ctc.edu.

Building these programs has been a great experience and opportunity, and I have enjoyed working with the staff at BCC, with the marvelous faculty, and with all of the students. And I look forward to developing new programs with The Publishing Institute, working with the *DigiNews* staff, and counseling students as they go through the programs. So this is not really a farewell, but rather a change of hats.

Show Your Creative Side

By Mike Klassen

Are you a technical writer looking to expand your writing skills? Would you like the chance to put more personality into your writing? If so, you might want to explore marketing communications (Marcom).

Marcom writers create content for brochures, sales letters, press releases, data sheets, radio ads, and other avenues that businesses use to reach customers. A Marcom writer may also create content targeted to company employees in the form of internal newsletters, company policies, or scripts for training videos.

Reading this as a technical writer, you may be focusing on the *marketing* in Marcom and wondering if your technical writing skills have any value. They do! Don't forget that the second part of Marcom—*communications*—is what you're already doing in technical writing. The key is putting a different emphasis on your writing.

Similarities and differences of Marcom and TechComm

Take a look at the following list and see whether it applies to technical communications or marketing communications:

- Concise
- Clear
- Accurate
- Specific to a predetermined audience

You've probably guessed that these qualities apply to both styles of writing. (And by no means is this a complete list.) Since you're already applying these qualities in your technical writing, the jump to Marcom may not be as big as you think.

The differences between technical writing and Marcom are important to understand. Content is usually more creative and persuasive in Marcom. You'll often need a little hype to inspire a purchase or build brand loyalty.

For example, new computer software needs a variety of written material. The technical writer would traditionally be involved in creating the instruction manual and maybe design specifications.

The Marcom writer would create content for brochures, press releases, sales letters, or magazine ads. Each would have a slightly different focus:

- **Brochure**—Summarizes the key selling points and includes enough information to generate a sale or at least a request for further information. The brochure might include screen shots of the software and the benefits of using the software. There could even be a comparison to similar products on the market. There should also be some sense of excitement that this new product is available to fill a need.
- **Press Release**—Sent to the media, this might stress how the software does something no other product has done before. The point of the press release is to generate enough interest to lead to free publicity in newspapers, magazines, radio, or television.
- **Sales Letter**—Sent to potential customers or customers who bought other products from the software company. If the sales letter is addressed to purchasing managers, it might focus on the savings that could be achieved by using the software. A letter sent to the IT department of the same prospect might focus on ease of installation and how simple the software is to learn. That translates into less support required from the IT department.

See Creative, 7

Using the Web to Find Work

By Justine DuFour

The Web is a tremendous resource for finding work, but searching the Web can be overwhelming if you lack a plan. To formulate a plan, know what you are really looking for and know what Web resources are available.

As you search, take notes on everything from keywords to URLs. Notes save far more time than they take.



What are you looking for?

The key to finding your job is to know what your job is. Although you may think that an "I'll take anything!" approach might give you more opportunities, it will only waste your energy and time. What keyword will you search on, *anything*?

Searching job Web sites requires identifying your preferences in three general areas: geography, category, and keywords. Geography is easy, though how regions are broken out varies by Web site.

Categories also vary by Web site. For example, a

job listing for a *writer of white papers for a medical equipment manufacturer* could be found in Administrative and Support Services, Engineering, Manufacturing, Marketing/Advertising, or Scientific/Medical. The category *All Categories* is safest if the Web site offers it. Otherwise, search each category, and keep notes on where each Web site categorizes the work you're looking for.

Keywords vary with each job listing. Monster.com defines keywords as "words, phrases, and terms that you can enter to describe educational and professional experiences, skills, and company names." Of all the things you can specify in a job Web site search, keywords are the trickiest. For example, searching on the words *technical writer* not only brings up job listings for technical writers, it brings up job listings that require the ability to work with technical writers; your search doesn't bring up job listings that use the words *technical writing* instead.

Aggressively using the Web site's search logic rules can help, provided the site has them and explains their use. Common rules include the use of quotation marks to define a phrase, and the use of Boolean operators

such as AND, OR, and NOT. Rules vary; find and read the explanations.

Because most Web sites don't accommodate wildcard searches, use long strings of keywords related to your intended work to cover all the possibilities. Variations on the word *edit* can lead to a listing for writing. Make sure that your keyword string includes every activity that your job would entail, not just what you consider the central functions.

Again, rules vary; find and read the explanations. Some Web sites will only show postings that show all the keywords in the string, so you should search one keyword at a time. Other Web sites will show postings including the entire list first, and then show postings that include some of the words in the keyword string.

Many job listings don't use the keywords you would expect. At one Web site, over half the job listings for technical writers had no form of the word *write* in them. The prospective employers considered other skills or expertise in the subject matter more important than the writing. Awareness of the employer point of view is fundamental to formulating an effective keyword string.

In sum, first identify your interest and expertise, and

then write a comprehensive string of keywords. Finally, realize that technical communications is practiced in an enormous variety of fields and by many kinds of companies, so search broadly.

What Web resources are available?

Different kinds of job Web sites offer different resources; choose them by their contributions to your individual search, and change as needed. There are six general kinds of Web sites where jobs are listed:

- All jobs, anywhere Web sites
www.monster.com/ and <http://hotjobs.yahoo.com/> are examples of Web sites that list all kinds of jobs, anywhere in the country and sometimes the world. Enter the word *jobs* into Google to find many more.
- Government Web sites
www.usajobs.opm.gov/ and www.fedworld.gov/jobs/jobsearch.html are examples of various government branch Web sites that list federal jobs worldwide. Individual state Web sites have state jobs as well as links to city, county, and federal job Web sites. Try www.statejobs.com/ or enter the state name and the words *state* and *jobs* into Google to find them.

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Writing White Papers

By Lovely Choubey

In an unpredictable economy, it is a great idea to keep updating your skill set. Technical writers are often asked to write white papers so it's good to have formal training in the subject. Bellevue Community College offers a five-week course in writing white papers. Students are encouraged to select their own product/service, do the required research, and produce a white paper by the end of the course.

If you take this course, you get

- Lots of good suggestions from the instructor and fellow students.
- A chance to do peer editing.
- To go through the whole process of writing a white paper.
- A portfolio piece.

What is a white paper?

White papers are an effective way to educate and inform and, most important, influence a prospective customer. A white paper from a company should reinforce why the organization needs to be selected over the competition. Think about white papers as a persuasive but subtle marketing tool. White papers are distributed through many channels, including the Web, trade shows and conferences, and sales representatives.

A white paper is generally a part of the launch package. It uses facts, figures, and graphs to make the case. In a white paper, a problem is presented and a solution is given.

What questions does a white paper answer?

- What is the problem to be solved?
- What solutions are available?
- Which solution is the best and why?

What does a white paper usually contain?

- **Abstract:** Short description of what the paper is about, the problem, how the product solves the problem, and who is the target audience.
- **Current industry problems/trends:** Begin with a description of the broadest issues and trends in the industry that will introduce the reader to the topic. Then move on to discussing the specific attributes of the solution.

- **Technology:** Description of the technology if necessary.
- **Solution:** Describe how the service offered or the new technology works. Why is it the best solution to the problem?
- **Features:** The features of the product/service that make it the best solution.
- **Visual appeal:** Graphics, charts and images to break the monotony of reading text and also tools to understand the topic better.
- **Conclusion:** Summary of why the product is the best solution to the problem.

Who reads white papers?

White papers are technical marketing documents that are read by business decision makers and technical decision makers. White papers are often used as the first external source of information when conducting research about a particular product/service. Only after reading the white paper, do they decide whether or not to request more information about the product/service.

What skills does it take to write a good white paper?

The following skills can be useful to technical writers who are asked to write white papers:

- Understand the purpose of the white paper.
- Conduct research.
- Interview subject matter experts.
- Information design and organization skills.

The white paper on the Microsoft Windows Server 2003 TCP/IP Implementation Details is an example of a well-written white paper. You can read the white paper on the Microsoft Web site or www.bitpipe.com.

No colorful advertisement, brochure, or other marketing document delivers the essence of technical products/services like a properly crafted white paper does. But remember, if you want your white paper to stand out, it should be clear, concise, and easy to digest.

My First STC Conference—A Learning Experience

By Donna Christopher

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) annual conference brochure listed many session topics that caught my eye. I was especially interested in three categories—Tools and Technology, Usability and Information Design, and Writing and Editing. If I registered in advance, the student fee was \$100. Wow! I could attend a lot of sessions and get a lot of information for that price during the four-day conference. Should I attend? Could I afford to go?

The analyst in me decided to do some research. I was in BCC's Technical and Professional Communication Programs, so I asked Patricia Cornette, Claudia Mazzie-Balheim, and Gloria Campbell about the STC annual conferences. Positive and encouraging comments made me really want to attend. Since I was going to the Midwest anyway in late May for vacation, I decided I would attend STC's 50th Annual Conference as part of my vacation.

I arrived on Sunday afternoon and went to the conference hotel to pick up my conference materials. I knew I wanted to attend as many events and sessions as I could during my stay. I reviewed all the conference materials and marked all

the sessions I was interested in.

One of the toughest things for me was deciding which conference session to attend during the specific time slots. There were so many that sounded interesting, it was sometimes hard to choose. I reviewed the schedule each day and mapped out my daily plan.

The conference hotel was huge and the sessions and events were held in several areas. It definitely would have been more convenient to stay at the conference hotel.

The various receptions on Sunday were fun and casual. I met some of the Seattle area STC board members at the regional reception. It was interesting talking to different people at the receptions and finding out about various careers.

I attended several Technical Sessions Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. The session presented by the Technology Information Design Team at Southwest Airlines was one of my favorites. Different team members talked about their experiences when changing from "writing documents to meeting user information needs." These two statements in their handout and presentation are great.

"Information supports people, not products."

"Information can't make a difference until it gets into people's heads."

A panel discussion on "Emerging Trends, Technologies, and Skill Sets" was another session I found quite interesting. One of the main ideas I came away with and thought I could use on my resume is a title of "Information Developer" instead of "Technical Writer." This title may not work for some people, but for me I can see it as a way to categorize my systems analyst skills along with my technical communication skills.

There is so much more I could mention about the conference—like the keynote speaker, like the daily newsletters provided by the Lone Star STC Chapter, like the vendor exhibits—it was all great. Getting a few "golden nuggets" of useful information from the sessions made it all worthwhile for me.

Going to the conference was a bit outside my comfort zone. I don't consider myself especially outgoing, so I had some concerns about how I would feel at a conference by myself. Since I was finishing my three certificate programs at BCC, I thought the conference was a great way to celebrate, enjoy

the experience, and get more tech comm information. I did feel at ease and comfortable at the conference by myself. Everyone I met was friendly. The conference was a great experience and I hope I can attend more in the future. Maybe the STC conference will be my springtime vacation every May.

DigiNote—USB

Flash Drives are devices about the size of your thumb. When plugged into a computer or laptop, they serve as extra storage similar to a floppy drive. The difference is that Flash Drives can hold 64 MB or more. One possible use is storage of your portfolio pieces so you have them handy no matter where you are. As long as you have access to a computer, you can show someone samples of your work.

Creative

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- **Magazine Ad**—Includes a picture or headline that catches the reader's attention. There needs to be enough information in the ad to generate interest in the product. Just as important is information on where someone could learn more. This might be through a Web site or toll-free phone number.

You can see where some creativity and persuasiveness comes into play. A technical writer may think in terms of "just the facts" since their work is normally viewed after the sale. The Marcom writer figures out how to motivate someone to actually create the sale in the first place.

Making the move to Marcom

If you're considering a move to Marcom, how do you go about it? There are a few options. Your current employer may have opportunities to help create marketing material. This is how a number of technical writers get their feet wet. Another possibility is joining an ad agency. This might be a little more high-stress than you're used to, but you'd have the advantage of working with others who have been in this field for many years. Finally, you could work freelance and market yourself to companies. Again, it's more high-stress, but you have more freedom.

When considering a move to Marcom, take into account your own personality. In technical writing you may have months to put together an instructional manual. In Marcom you may have a week to put together content for an ad campaign. If you tend to work at a leisurely pace, you could be in for a shock when you get your first Marcom assignment.

If ambiguity bothers you, there's potential for problems. As a freelancer, your clients may not have a good idea of what they want. They may depend on you to come up with a concept. When you present your concept, they might not like it, but they can't quite put their finger on what the problem is. It will be up to you to probe and figure how to make the clients happy.

If you tend to be an introvert, the thought of cold-calling potential clients or taking part in a brainstorming session may be a turn-off.

All these things can be dealt with if you have the desire to succeed. Chances are you had concerns when you started a career in technical communications. Remembering how you overcame those obstacles can help as you get started in marketing communications. Plus, there are plenty of books or classes to help strengthen any weak areas you identify. And don't forget to talk with Marcom writers. Ask them how they broke into the field and find out what steps they'd recommend you take. You might find you're closer to becoming a Marcom writer than you think.

Preparing your portfolio

Your technical work is the best place to start. If nothing else, it should prove that you can write clear, concise, and accurate content. If you don't have any marketing-related samples, make some up. For one thing it will help prove you have enough creativity to come up with a concept from scratch. If you need something to get you started, take a look at junk mail. Examine how a sales letter attempts to get your attention and persuade you to make a purchase. Use those techniques to create a sales letter of your own. Even fiction or magazine articles you've written can showcase your writing skills.

For further reading, look for Robert Bly's *The Copywriter's Handbook: A Step-By-Step Guide to Writing Copy That Sells*. It contains information on writing newsletters, direct mail, brochures, and more. You'll also find tips for things like writing effective headlines.

Showing your creative side isn't as difficult as it might seem. Your technical writing skills give you a foundation to build upon. The ideas in this article can help you take the next step.

DigiNote—Create a newsletter that incorporates your portfolio pieces. Not only does this give you a unique way to present your portfolio, the newsletter itself is a portfolio piece. There are many free Word newsletter templates to help you get started.

Students' Success Stories

From Donna Christopher:

I attended information sessions and considered the University of Washington (UW) Certificate Program in Technical Writing and Editing at different times for several years. Each time I felt the specific schedule, timeframe, and coursework were not flexible enough for me.

The BCC Technical and Professional Communication Programs offered several options and lots of flexibility. I knew I could pursue these programs on a schedule that worked for me. I took a couple classes before deciding to ask Gloria Campbell about the application process for Information Design and for Technical Writing and Communication certification.

I began to pursue the Information Design program first because I thought it would fit with my work as a systems analyst. One of my duties at the time was to maintain a Web site for end-user documentation. The Information Design coursework taught me more about good design for usability. I now have the certification and knowledge to tell others about chunking information and about using design elements like bulleted lists for better usability.

The Technical Writing and Communication program was a logical path for me since writing has always been part of my work life. There were so many classes to select from for the certification that it was sometimes hard to decide which classes to take. I took classes that interested me or classes I felt would add value to my work duties. I will be back at BCC some time taking all those other classes I still want to take.

I took the Professional and Technical Editing and Proofreading program because I wanted to learn more about what editors do. I have always been a detail person, and I always seem to proofread when I read, so maybe I could be an editor. The coursework did give me information about what editors do and did help me confirm my strengths. The information I learned in the classes will help me be a better writer.

Patricia Cornette's *Writing Online Help* class was almost like a project for all my certificates. I used various skills and knowledge I had learned in other classes when creating my online help. The design classes helped me select appropriate font styles and sizes, use bulleted and numbered lists, and chunk information for better usability. The indexing classes helped me use

terms in the index that the end user might look for. I wrote concise help topics with action verbs, and I used editing skills to keep all help topics consistent.

I received my three certificates in June 2003, but that will certainly not be the end of my training at BCC. I know that constantly improving my skill set and continually learning is necessary in the ever-changing work world.

BCC offers lots of options and flexibility for constant learning. Thanks BCC!



"BCC offers lots of options and flexibility for constant learning."

DigiKnow?

By Kavita Ryali

DigiKnow? Adele Becker, current director of Work-Related programs at Bellevue Community College (BCC), has taken over administration of the BCC Technical and Professional Communication Programs. Anita Castle will continue as support staff. Gloria Campbell has retired as director, but will continue to be involved in major activities in the program. (See Campbell's *Farewell* article on page one for more information.)

DigiKnow? There are two new courses.

- *How to Write the Right Employee Handbook* covers the essential elements of a good employee handbook, a company's most important communication tool. You will learn how to develop or revise an effective employee handbook that is legally sound, current, clearly written, and comprehensive. The course can count as an elective towards certification programs in Technical Communication.

- *Researching for Scientific Writing* introduces students to the methodology and available resources used in writing a scientific article. You will be discussing interesting topics such as organizing research, finding print and online sources, communicating with subject experts, and evaluating sources. This class counts as a core class for those interested in the Science Writing Certificate program.

DigiKnow? If you are looking at an opportunity to sharpen your writing skills, *Workplace Writing Lab* is for you. You will get to pick and work on a real-life writing sample with guidance from the instructor. At the end of the course, you will see how much you have improved your writing proficiency. Jane Sheridan, a graduate of the Technical Writing program, is teaching the course. This five-session course (Item K108) will be held on Thursdays starting Oct. 30. Class timings are from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

DigiKnow? For those interested in Information Design, there is some good news. The *Visual Thinking* workshop has been expanded to two sessions to provide more opportunity to practice the concepts presented. This workshop will help you define the visual components of document design, including content objectives, viewer psychology, graphic composition, color theory, and stylization of type imagery.

DigiKnow? There's something new about The Publishing Institute. Plans are being made to develop a three-certificate program in publishing. Probable certificates will be

- Writing and editing for publication
- Getting your work published
- Marketing your work

Writers, editors, graphic artists, small publishing houses, and others who want to know more about this certificate program can see the next issue of *DigiNews* or contact Gloria Campbell.

DigiKnow? The fun has started at *The Young Writers Workshop* for all 15- to 18-year-olds who love to write. The first class was held this summer. The students published an online magazine (zine), which will be available shortly. So if you are looking to develop your writing interest or talent with peers in a workshop setting, this course is for you. You'll learn to get new ideas and explore different forms of writing such as fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. You will also learn to revise, edit, and get feedback on your own work so you can make it better.

You can find complete information on all the available courses at <http://www.conted.bcc.ctc.edu/>.

Online

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Know your purpose:

Online documents could belong to three major categories based on their purpose (most actual online documents serve a balance of these purposes):

1. Instructional: purpose is to learn a product or application. Examples of this type include help files, tutorials, guided tours, computer- and Web-based training documents.

2. Reference: purpose is to aid the instructional type document. It may sometimes be combined with instructional documents. Examples of these include read-me documents, software error and status messages, and reference sections in online help.

3. General: purpose is to either inform or entertain users. Web sites and electronic books (e-books) fall in this group.

Know your audience:

You must give attention to the audience's skill level before starting to write. You might want to decide to write for one or more of the following categories of audiences:

- Novice users who have little or no experience with the application (or the subject matter the application addresses).

- Experienced users who are familiar with the subject area and have enough skill with the application, or with computers, to perform most basic tasks.

- Expert users who are experienced at performing most tasks required by the application or subject.

Every document has a primary and a secondary audience, and clearly defining it goes a long way in writing a good online document.

Know the popular options and tools:

The next step is to know what types of online documents are out there and what authoring tools you need to build them. There are a number of options, and you can evaluate them based on factors that are important to you. I have discussed a few popular ones here, which can be useful in giving you a basic idea about them and some interesting resources.

Online Help

It is one of the most common technical online documents that is produced by writers for products. You could write documents that allow users to get quick access to specific information needed while using a product or application.

How to create: You design a table of contents, an index of help topics, and context-sensitive IDs in

the help file that aid users in performing routine tasks. Some files contain text, graphics, and other elements that appear in your help topics. Other files contain information about how your help system looks and how users navigate through your help topics.

Skills and tools: A basic understanding of HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language) is good but not necessary. You must be familiar with at least one text editor, such as Notepad. HTML Help Workshop, the help-authoring tool, provides an easy-to-use system for creating and managing help projects and their related files. RoboHelp is another commonly used help authoring tool.

Computer-Based Tutorials (CBT)

Computer-based tutorials teach concepts and procedures to users who normally take a series of lessons on how to use a new product or application. Users learn to use the features of the product while taking lessons.

How to create: You can create courses or tutorials using CBT authoring software or tools by dragging and dropping custom wizards and templates. Some authoring tools come with rich multimedia capabilities such as video, sound, and animation to

make your courses interactive. You can create quizzes with the many available question formats.

Skills and tools: Click2learn's ToolBook Assistant helps you build e-learning courses that you can deliver over the Internet and intranet, on a network, or CD-ROM. ToolBook templates help you create learning applications by providing hyperlinks, image maps, and custom menu pages. You can also add multimedia, such as graphics, sound, video, and animation, for more interesting learning modules. There are some good scoring and feedback options too, which can increase student retention of course concepts. You can write and/or design the tutorials with other CBT authoring tools such as CBTMaster and Everest. You may have to work in coordination with a programmer if you are using a code-based authoring application.

Product Demos and Multimedia Presentations

A product demo is intended to introduce the product to potential users and be a marketing tool to sell the product.

Multimedia presentations use sound and video to demonstrate a process in a product such as product

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assembly instructions. They can be regular static Web pages or animated demos. You could have a voice narrated version or a text version for the same. For example, you can visit www.hoovercompany.com. See the “assembly” section of the product Steamvac for an animated sound and video product assembly demo. Visit IKEA at www.ikea-usa.com. Select a product from the list and navigate to the “tips and ideas” section to view text version animated video demos.

Tools: Macromedia Director MX allows you to build demos integrating interactive audio, video, text, bitmaps, fonts, and more. RoboDemo and Turbo Demo are other tools that help create interactive demos by recording any on-screen activity and adding text instructions.

Online Manuals

This option is a step-by-step complete reference guide for functions and features of a product. While many online manuals are replicas of paper versions, some companies offer an online version with interactive demonstrations and customized help.

Tools: If you plan to have the online version the same as print, you may want to convert your document to the Adobe PDF format. The advantage is that this format can contain everything from spreadsheets,

presentations, and brochures, to photographs, rich graphics, and more. It can preserve the look and integrity of your original documents and you can share them with anyone electronically, regardless of hardware and software platforms. For customized versions, you can choose HTML Help or any other help-authoring tool.

Web sites and e-books

This is for you if you really want to explore your creativity. This has no boundaries. You could write on a subject you like; be it a romantic story, a thriller, or maybe you just want to write about the business aspects of an existing or upcoming company!

Tools: You can use FrontPage or Dreamweaver to write content and/or design a Web site. Print books can be published as e-books by converting the print version to the Adobe PDF format.

This is just the beginning for exploring the range of choices you have for writing online documents and the authoring tools that you need. You might just want to start or learn more right here at Bellevue Community College (BCC). BCC offers an eight-week course on “Writing Online Help” in which you will learn and create an industry standard help file. The course is taught by Patricia Cornette, an expert, who enriches the course by sharing her years of experience in technical writing.

Web

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- Staffing firm Web sites
www.net-temps.com/ and <http://jobs.volt.com/> are examples of contract house and staffing firm Web sites. While some gather together jobs from many contract houses, others are specific to one staffing firm. Enter the words *contract* and *jobs* into Google to find them and lists of them, such as the list at www.jobinsight.net/contract.html.

- Publication Web sites
<http://classifieds.nwsourc.com/jobs/> and www.heraldnet.com/ are examples of publication Web sites that carry job listings. To find the Web site of a newspaper whose name you don't know, enter the word *newspaper* and the location into Google.

- Profession-specific Web sites
www.mediabistro.com/ and www.stc.org/ are examples

of profession-specific Web sites. Web sites dedicated to a profession rarely require membership to view job listings, but the national and chapter Web sites of professional organizations often do. All such Web sites have links to valuable information about professional trends.

- Company-specific Web sites
<http://jobsearch.boeing.newjobs.com/> and www.microsoft.com/careers/search/ are examples of company-specific job Web sites. Gather company names and Web sites, store and order them by location or field, and check each company Web site periodically for new jobs.

In order to get the best out of the resources the Web offers, tailor your search to include the entirety of your expertise as a technical communicator as well as the skills your interests and life experiences have brought you. **Knowing** what you want makes **getting** what you want far more likely.

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Boredom

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Turn your technical writing into fiction

In your spare time, try to write humorous and mysterious stories based on the technology you are working on. This is just for your collection. You can tell these stories to your kids or start an interesting novel.

Be proud of what you are doing

"Technical writers are sneered at as non-creative. That doesn't bother me, because I know it takes a great deal of creativity to communicate technical information well, or even to get the facts to be communicated. Actually, there isn't any clear division of writers into the two camps (technical and creative)" says Cornette.

Never think that fiction writing means more money and a less demanding job

Most writers trying to sell "creative" work in the commercial/literary publishing world don't make much money at it, so writing is a second job for them. Sometimes, it ends up being very stressful and they quit. Technical writers generally make enough from writing to support themselves.

Moreover, if you are not in the field of fiction writing, you can never figure out how demanding it is to succeed at creative writing. You have to research the market, crank out works tailored to the requirements of the commercial market, and sell your finished work. Finally, if successful in marketing, you have to meet deadlines set by the marketing departments of the commercial publishing houses. This doesn't mean that technical writers should

not think about writing fiction. But do not take a dive into this kind of writing expecting a quick delivery of "name and fame."

Cornette, from her 21 years of experience in this field, suggests, "Success in technical writing or creative writing includes lots of discipline and drudgery, as well as a mastery of techniques specific to the genre. Apply your noodles to getting the whole job done, and it will take all the creativity you can muster, whether you work on the technical or the fluffy side of the profession (or both)."

Even after trying everything, you feel that you are stuck at the wrong place, you need to update your portfolio, focus on your interest, and start looking for your dream job.

Best of luck. Hope you find your way out of the "Boredom" tunnel.

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