

# The Elements of Technical Writing



Reviewed by JENNIFER PARKS

**THE ELEMENTS OF  
TECHNICAL WRITING**  
Gary Blake and  
Robert W. Bly  
New York, NY: MacMillan  
General Reference: 1993.  
165 pp. • \$9.95  
0-02-013085-6

**G**ary Blake and Robert Bly, both authorities in the field of business and technical writing, have provided a valuable tool in *The Elements of Technical Writing*. As the cover states, this book is the essential guide to writing clear, concise proposals, reports, manuals, letters, memos, and other documents in every technical field. Not only have Blake and Bly included all the necessary information concerning punctuation, grammar, and tone, they have organized the book in an easy-to-use, precise format.

The first chapter begins with the following quote and serves as a good introduction to the material in the first chapter.

*"Newspaper reporters and technical writers are trained to reveal almost nothing about themselves in their writing. This makes them freaks in the world of writers, since almost all of the other ink-stained wretches in that world reveal a lot about themselves to the reader."*

—Kurt Vonnegut, Jr.

The first chapter, "Fundamentals of Effective Technical Writing," identifies the ten principles that make technical writing good technical writing. These principles include:

1. Technical Accuracy
3. Usefulness
4. Conciseness
5. Completeness
6. Cleanliness
7. Consistency

8. Correct Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar
9. A Targeted Audience
10. Clear Organization
11. Interest.

These principles are easily overlooked in business writing. Blake and Bly urge us to remember that our audience is made up of humans, not just technical personnel.

Each chapter in this guide is broken out into sections that clearly outline the information that follows. The format is legible, succinct, and lends itself to easy reference. There are chapters regarding the use of equations and numerals, grammar and punctuation, and principles of communication, as well as a chapter regarding commonly misused words and phrases.

Chapters six through nine break away from the rules of the English language and get down to the specifics of writing proposals, technical articles and reports, letters and memos, and manuals.

Chapter six, "Proposals and Specifications," details the components necessary in a formal proposal. The authors set forth their ten principles of proposal writing, which revolve around the focal point of the client. They are:

1. Learn everything you can about your prospective client and the people who will evaluate your proposal.
3. Sell your ideas by fitting them into your client's needs.
4. Don't just solve the technical problems; empathize with the customer's critical needs.
5. Recognize all critical factors that evaluators will use in assessing the proposal.
6. Make sure your proposal addresses every element mentioned in the RFP.
7. Use appropriate graphics to highlight your ideas and make them easy to visualize.
8. Tailor each proposal to the needs of the specific client.
9. Anticipate and defuse objections.
10. Avoid hedging and subtlety in proposals.

This issue features books on technical writing and statements of work. The opinions expressed by reviewers are their own and do not necessarily represent the views of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals. Book review recommendations are welcomed by book review editors Nancy Bromc and Paul Gigarec.

11. Make a list of where key resources are located if you do not have a proposal library.

Blake and Bly urge us to learn everything we can about our clients and then tailor our proposals to their needs. For example, the following sentence does not tell the client what we can do for them:

*"We have extensive experience in airlines operations and forecasting and evaluating traffic flows."*

A better way to make the point is:

*"Our extensive experience in airlines operations and forecasting and evaluating traffic flows gives us insight in to the logistics of your business and will help you respond faster."*

The second sentence focuses on what your company can do for the potential client and tells the reader how you will benefit them rather than simply stating your qualifications. The more tailored your proposal is to the reader, the more impact it will have.

Blake and Bly have written a useable, handy, and inexpensive style guide that is tailored to their audience: people who write for business. While the majority of style guides and writer's reference books tend to be very dry, I found Blake and Bly's book to be highly readable. They have practiced what they preach—their writing is clear, and more importantly, interesting. *The Elements of Technical Writing* is written specifically for technical writers, but it is also a very valuable reference guide for other writers. This concise style guide is now an indispensable part of my library.

# Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook

**Elaine Campbell**



## **Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook:**

**Style in Technical Writing** Ronald K. Messer,1982      Technical Writing Gordon H. Mills,John A. Walter,1986  
**Interpretations** ,1982      **Strategies for Business and Technical Writing** Kevin J. Harty,1985      Book Review  
Digest ,1922      **Paperbound Books in Print** ,1983      *WPA, Writing Program Administration* ,1987      **Illinois**  
**Technograph** ,1962      Resources in Education ,1996-06      **ESL Resource Book for Engineers and Scientists** Elaine  
Campbell,1995-11-03 Combines the fundamentals of technical writing and verbal communication with essential English as a  
second language ESL skills Contains a range of actual examples and case studies to enable non native English speaking  
professionals to write clear and effective documentation      *Manual and Exercise Book for First Year College English* Vincil  
Carey Coulter,Lois Law,1930      Engineering News ,1909      *The Educational Weekly* ,1880      **Western Engineering**  
,1918      *Western Machinery and Steel World* ,1918      **Book Bulletin** Chicago Public Library,1912      *Programmed*  
*Learning and Individually Paced Instruction* Carl H. Hendershot,1973      **Proceedings** American Society of Civil  
Engineers,1924 Vols for Jan 1896 Sept 1930 contain a separately page section of Papers and discussions which are published  
later in revised form in the society s Transactions Beginning Oct 1930 the Proceedings are limited to technical papers and  
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## **Table of Contents Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook**

1. Understanding the eBook Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  - The Rise of Digital Reading Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  - Advantages of eBooks Over Traditional Books
2. Identifying Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  - Exploring Different Genres
  - Considering Fiction vs. Non-Fiction
  - Determining Your Reading Goals
3. Choosing the Right eBook Platform
  - Popular eBook Platforms
  - Features to Look for in an Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  - User-Friendly Interface
4. Exploring eBook Recommendations from Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  - Personalized Recommendations
  - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook User Reviews and Ratings
  - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook and Bestseller Lists
5. Accessing Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook Free and Paid eBooks

- Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook Public Domain eBooks
  - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook eBook Subscription Services
  - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook Budget-Friendly Options
6. Navigating Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook eBook Formats
    - ePub, PDF, MOBI, and More
    - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook Compatibility with Devices
    - Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook Enhanced eBook Features
  7. Enhancing Your Reading Experience
    - Adjustable Fonts and Text Sizes of Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Highlighting and Note-Taking Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Interactive Elements Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  8. Staying Engaged with Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Joining Online Reading Communities
    - Participating in Virtual Book Clubs
    - Following Authors and Publishers Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  9. Balancing eBooks and Physical Books Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Benefits of a Digital Library
    - Creating a Diverse Reading Collection Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
  10. Overcoming Reading Challenges
    - Dealing with Digital Eye Strain
    - Minimizing Distractions
    - Managing Screen Time
  11. Cultivating a Reading Routine Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Setting Reading Goals Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Carving Out Dedicated Reading Time
  12. Sourcing Reliable Information of Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Fact-Checking eBook Content of Style In Technical Writing A Text Workbook
    - Distinguishing Credible Sources
  13. Promoting Lifelong Learning
    - Utilizing eBooks for Skill Development

- Exploring Educational eBooks
- 14. Embracing eBook Trends
  - Integration of Multimedia Elements
  - Interactive and Gamified eBooks

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