

# WELCOME TO TECHNICAL WRITING

Welcome to the BYU Office of Information Technology (OIT) technical writing guide. Please familiarize yourself with this guide during your first month and use it as a reference guide while you are at OIT.

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# What is the OIT?

The OIT is [the BYU Office of IT](#). It consists of several teams including development, user experience (UX), technical support, app engineering, human resources, customer service representatives (CSRs), and more. The OIT helps manage the technical needs of BYU students, faculty, and partners around the globe.

## Resources You Need as a Technical Writer

**Please review the following resources during your first week to prepare as a technical writer**

- [The UX Team's Writing Guide](#): Our efforts are tightly intertwined with our team's User Experience (UX) Designers. This writing guide contains tips and instructions for writing UX copy
- [Read 3 Articles \(of Your Choice\) from Nielsen Norman Group](#): Nielsen Norman Group (NN/g) is the top resource for UX info. Read three NN/g articles, specifically about writing for the web
- [Read this article from Qualtrics on Survey Design](#): Qualtrics is one of the top online survey maker tools. BYU has used it for several years

## Bookmark the following Writing Resources

- [The Chicago Manual of Style](#). As a BYU student, you have free access to the online version. If you've never used Chicago before, spend 30 minutes or so looking through the chapters we use most in technical writing: [Chapter 6 \(Punctuation\)](#), [Chapter 7 \(Spelling, Distinctive Treatment of Words, and Compounds\)](#), and [Chapter 10 \(Abbreviations\)](#)
- [The BYU Brand Style Guide's BYU Terms](#). This webpage lists terms and abbreviations specific to BYU and explains how writers should treat those terms
- [Merriam-Webster](#). This is the dictionary BYU uses for all publications. When you're unsure of how a word should be spelled, whether it should be hyphenated, etc., look it up in Merriam Webster

## Read [the BYU Brand Style Guide's Publication Guidelines](#)

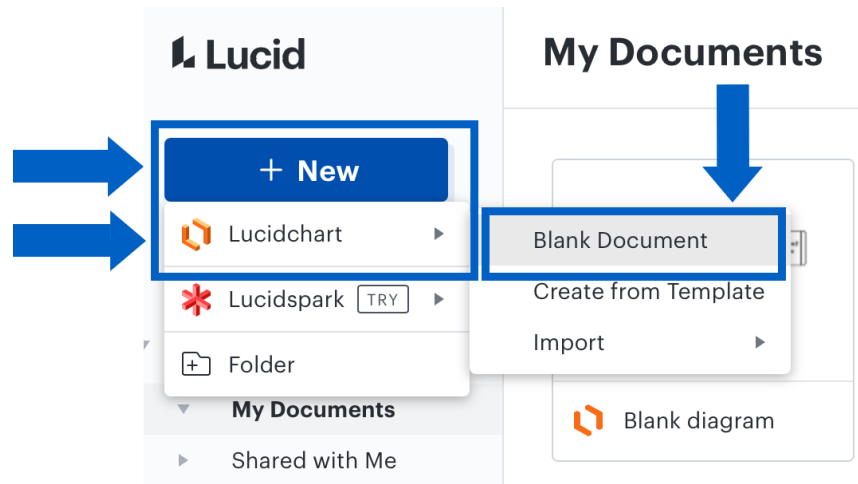
- This section of the BYU Brand Style Guide outlines BYU's departures from *Chicago* and *Merriam-Webster*. Familiarize yourself with these differences

## Scan [the BYU Office of IT Style Guide](#)

- This style guide is based on Chicago and highlights OIT variations. It's also useful for knowing how to handle technical terms
- Don't worry about remembering every little detail. Bookmark the style guide so that you can come back to it later

## Get Familiar with [Lucidchart](#)

- Lucidchart is an online program for designing flowcharts
- On the [Lucidchart](#) site, log in using Microsoft Office 365 (your netid@byu.edu and password)
- Create a new, blank document:



- Play around with the flowchart maker for 15 minutes

*Note: Section Credit to Josh Klingonsmith*

# Your Role as a Technical Writer

As a Technical Writer, you are part of the user experience (UX) team. You will help with a variety of projects:

- Creating documents about technical processes and software
- Creating flowcharts
- Creating system diagrams
- Taking meeting notes
- Writing content (microcopy and copy) for websites and mobile apps
- Writing technical articles/documentation
- Editing writing
- Writing training video scripts
- Conducting informational interviews

## Your Role within OIT

Your role is to provide clear and concise writing; clarity is the most critical aspect of Technical and UX writing. Technical writing is writing to express technical terminology or jargon in a language that users, software developers, UX designers, and stakeholders (decision makers) can understand.

Technical writing often involves asking questions to help you understand. The better you understand, the more clearly you will write about your topic, and the better the users will understand it. UX Writing is creating useful copy for websites that is easy to understand and scan. Your writing will communicate vital information between designers, developers, and users.

## Technical Writing

Technical writing for the OIT usually involves taking what a developer is doing and communicating that to people who are not as familiar with technology and programming. There are many types of technical writing documents and projects, but the basic strategy is to research to understand, write for clarity, and present for effective communication.

## Additional Resources

[What is Technical Writing?](#)

[8 Leading Technical Writing Certifications](#)

[What is Technical Writing? Definition, Examples, and Steps](#)

# Starting a Technical Writing Project

Starting a technical writing project generally involves a lot of research. However, if you start your document organized, it will practically write itself. Follow these best practices in this document on starting a technical writing project: [Talking Technical: Starting a Technical Writing Project](#).

1. Receive a project assignment
2. Set up a meeting with the project requester
3. Take lots of notes
4. Ask lots of identifying questions
5. Do your research
6. Decide your format
7. Gather any visual resources you need
8. Organize your notes in a single document
9. Write your introduction
10. Write your title and headings

## Asking Questions

Ask lots of questions. When you get a new assignment, meet with the customer as soon as possible. Identify your audience, purpose, desired outcome, type of document, tone, research requirements, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), and timeline. This collection of information is generally called the scope.

## Taking Notes

Organized notes can help you write effectively. Be sure that your notes are clean and legible. Typed notes are fast, easily shared, and quickly organized into a document. If you are documenting a meeting with several people, ask another writer to assist you and ensure all essential details are recorded.

Be sure to take detailed notes of meetings you set up or meeting minutes you are asked to record, including document questions, decisions, changes, action items, and specific details.

## Additional Resources

[27 Tips and Tricks for Conducting Successful User Research in the Field](#)

[Talking Technical: Starting a Technical Writing Project](#)

[Surveys and Interviews](#)

[How to Interview Someone for an Article: Step-by-Step Guide](#)

[Take Meeting Minutes like a Pro](#)

# Developing Soft Skills

Soft skills are essential for every job, especially as a technical writer. You will often be expected to work with teams, independently, and on multiple projects at once. Practice new soft skills to enhance your professionalism.

- Clear communication
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership
- Problem-solving
- Work ethic
- Time management

## Additional Resources

[What are Soft Skills? Definition, Importance, and Examples](#)  
[10 Methods You Should Use to Develop Your Soft Skills in 2022](#)

# Collaboration

Collaboration is vitally important to running a business. No one knows everything, so it's important to share knowledge, time, energy, resources, and experience. Collaboration involves listening, taking responsibility for your role, and opening consistent lines of communication.

## Working with UX Designers

UX Designers are your teammates here at OIT UX. They design web pages that developers code and research the user experience to ensure designs are user-friendly and user-focused. You will occasionally assist in research and UX writing: editing, proofreading, content creation, testing as a user, assisting with user testing, or giving a second opinion on designs.

## Working with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)

An SME (or 'smee') is someone who works with and knows a specific subject well enough to help you write about it. They will usually be software developers, engineers, or campus representatives for specialized application features.

When you interview and interact with SMEs, remember that you are there to get their information. Be polite and professional and ask lots of questions. If you need clarification on something, ask. If you need more information on something, ask.

## Working with Stakeholders

Stakeholders are people, usually in leadership positions, interested in a project. They often do not interact with the users, but their input, concerns, and wants are critical as they are the decision-makers.

Involve the Stakeholders in weekly review meetings—present data when relevant. When writing for stakeholders, remember to write for your audience. They may be experts in their field but not in technical jargon. Use professional language that is easy to understand but not demeaning or condescending.

## Working with Project Managers

Project managers, also known as project owners, oversee projects, generally have project information, and are responsible for the project if it doesn't happen. Work with the project manager to stay on track with your work and inform them of any significant barriers to your project.

## Working with Agile Coaches

Agile coaches are essentially assistant project managers. They make sure the team stays on track. They lead daily standup meetings, weekly planning and review meetings, facilitate communication, and help with logistics. Let the Agile coaches know when you have trouble getting information from people, need help finding or contacting someone for the project, or if any logistical issues arise.

Also, remember you are not an agile coach or project manager. If you are being asked to do things outside of your job description, talk directly with the team you are working with or reach out to your manager (Mike).

## Working with Engineers and Developers

Engineers and developers are the SMEs you will likely work with the most. You will often be asked to assist with KB Articles or READMEs, highly technical documentation that provides information to support developers during technical problem incidents or code updates. Be sure to communicate clearly and directly. Be respectful and professional.

Ask clarifying questions when you are unsure:

“Always ask questions and clarify! Early on, I often realized after a meeting that I didn't understand what the engineers were saying or what they needed me to do, and I didn't want to go back and clarify. This caused misunderstandings that could have been prevented if I just asked and always made sure to clarify what they needed/expected.” — Emma Bills | Technical Writer | 1+ years of experience.

## Additional Resources

[8 Strategies to Collaborate Effectively in the Workplace](#)

[5 Tips for Effective Collaboration at Work](#)

[What is a Subject Matter Expert \(SME\)?](#)

[6 Tips for Working with Your Subject Matter Expert](#)

[10 Key Principles of Stakeholder Engagement](#)

[4 Strategies for Dealing with Difficult Stakeholders](#)

[What Does a Project Manager Do](#)

[Who are Project Managers, and What Do They Do?](#)

[What Does a Software Engineer Do?](#)

[How to Most Efficiently Communicate with Your Developers](#)

# Using the Writing Style Guide

## The Writing Style Guide

The [Writing Style Guide](#) is a guide to ensure consistency among OIT documentation. It has stylistic grammar rules that follow [The Chicago Manual of Style](#), [The Global English Style Guide](#) by John R. Kohl, and the BYU Editorial Style Guide. It also contains a few variations specific to OIT.

Each section in the guide explains the rule and includes correct and incorrect examples. Use the links in the table of contents and refer to the guide frequently to ensure consistency in your writing.

## Practicing Grammar

Technical writing involves a lot of writing. That means you will need to use proper grammar to communicate properly. It's essential to regularly review general grammar rules and technical writing grammar.

- Passive or Active Voice
- Commands and Directions
- Bullets and Lists
- Editing Software

## Additional Resources

[Grammar for Technical Writers](#)

[BYU Office Of IT Writing Style Guide](#)

[BYU Editorial Style](#)

[UX Team Voice](#)

[The Voice of Brigham Young University](#)

[From Chaos to Clarity: Achieving Cohesion in Technical Writing](#)

# Writing for Your Audience

Your audience defines why and how you write. When you know your audience, then your audience will comprehend your content. Write for clarity and understanding. Avoid technical jargon or language that your audience will not understand. Decrease the effort it takes to read your content. Write for the user, and remember, you are not the user.

## Additional Resources

[Google Technical Writing One Audience Audience](#)

[Writing for General Audiences](#)

[Personas](#)

# Choosing a Document

Three of the most critical aspects of technical writing are your audience, your research, and your presentation. It would be incredibly awkward and detrimental for you if you were to write the perfect user-oriented process article with research to back it up, but the client asked for a user-manual.

It's important that you understand what the customer is looking for and what the users need to get from it. Be sure to ask questions to get a clear and defined description of what you need to do.

## Formatting Your Documents

Format your documents to present your information clearly and efficiently. Use the format for the type of document you are creating. Use fonts that are large enough to read easily. Use headings and keep your documents organized and uniform. Refer to the [writing style guide](#), [example documents](#), and the [BYU Brand Guide](#) for further guidance.

## Writing for the Web

The goal of writing for the web is to convey information as efficiently as possible.

- Put important information first
- Put 70% of the information in headings
- Use fonts large enough to read
- Write clearly and simply
- Keep paragraphs short
- Simplify your language
- Use active voice
- Use bullet points for lists

## Using ServiceNow

As a technical writer, you will most often use [ServiceNow](#) for Agile Boards and writing Knowledge Base (KB) Articles. Agile Boards help teams stay organized while working on big projects. Access the Knowledge Homepage

to create new articles. Templates and information blocks will help you know what information to ask from SMEs. A [ServiceNow training video](#) was created to help you navigate the site.

## Writing Internal Documentation

OIT Internal Documentation is usually very technical. Work closely with developers to make sure that the information is correct. Present it clearly and make sure that links are updated.

## Writing External Documentation

External Documentation is for a general audience. Your language needs to be simple, concise, and accurate. Work with developers and SMEs to ensure that the information is correct. Perform user testing to ensure your writing is easy to understand.

## Creating a How-to Document

When creating a how-to or process document use a conversational and clear tone. Use numbered steps and screenshots. Write the way you would talk while guiding someone through the task. Be detailed and remember your audience.

## Additional Resources

[11 Best Software Documentation Tools in 2023](#)

[8 Technical Writing Examples to Inspire You](#)

[Writing for the Web](#)

[Writing for the Web - How-to and Tools](#)

[Best Practices for Web Writing](#)

[Master the Art of Headings to Boost UX](#)

[What is Knowledge Base Documentation?](#)

[An Easy Guide to Internal Documentation](#)

[How to Write Technical Report](#)

[What is User Documentation?](#)

[Scribe-How-to Guide Generator](#)

[How to Create Process Documentation in Just a Few Clicks](#)

# Using Technical Terms

When using technical terms, be sure to know what your audience already knows. Avoid over-explaining what they already likely know. At the same time, write clearly to ensure reading your content is a low-effort process. Your content should support and improve the experience for your users, experts or not. A good practice is to use common language that the least experienced in your audience would understand and provide definitions or explanations for more complex language.

## Additional Resources

[Dealing with Technical or Professional Jargon](#)  
[Cringeworthy Words to Cut from Online Copy](#)

# Writing Conclusions

Know when your document needs a conclusion and when it does not. If it does, keep it brief. Remember to keep the most important content at the beginning, and a conclusion should quickly recap of the document itself.

## Additional Resources

[Conclusions](#)

[How to Write a Conclusion \(With Tips and Examples\)](#)