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Write a Better Technical Article in Half the Time

By Christine Taylor

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Good technical articles are challenging to write. They're time-consuming, demanding to research and hard to organize. But they're valuable weapons in the PR and marketing arsenal, and you need them.

If you can outsource the article, great. That's what writers like me are here for. But if you can't - or don't want to -- then read and apply the tips below to save time and energy on research and writing, and come out with a much better product.

Get Ready

1. Review your resources - hard copy like books and articles, Web access, interview contact information.
2. Arrange for interviews if you need them, it always takes a while to track down the interviewees.
Note: If you're ghostwriting an article for a company, you may not have an interview past the initial meeting.
3. Make sure you know the following: a) the reader's challenge, b) the key message relating to their challenge, and c) the type of reader you're writing to.
4. Understand the main message the client want to communicate. Many technologies are similar, but your client will have a defined slant on their implementation. (If they don't, they should - this is your chance to offer them your strategic message building services.)
5. Even "vendor-neutral" articles are written with a point of view - either the writer's or the company the writer is working for. This is only a problem if the article bias makes for a misleading article, or tells a whopping big lie.

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Outline

6. Never skip this step, for your own or your readers' sakes. Outlines speed up your writing, and readers will follow your argument much better.

7. Organize your research into three themes. Some thematic organizations are obvious - for example, I wrote an article on three steps to optimizing your storage. In other articles, there may be several possibilities. There is probably no one right choice, so if two or three seem fine to you, just pick one and go with it.

8. Remember your junior high school/high school/college outline lessons? They apply. If you don't remember your lessons, here's a reminder: I. Introduction (Outline problem, introduce solution, state theme) II. Body A. 1st major point B. 2nd major point C. 3rd major point III. Conclusion (short case study/example, restate solution, concluding paragraph)

9. Put your outline on paper and let it guide you as you go. It's not iron-clad - if a new organization presents itself while you're writing you can change it - but don't do it too much or you'll defeat the outline's purpose.

Writing the Rough Draft

10. Here's the key to writing your rough draft: Just Do It. Write without thinking about it. Paste in random chunks of text from your research. Write some more. Write in any bizarre, random order. All you want to do at this point is get down large masses of information onto paper.

11. Keep going until you've got 2–3 times the words you actually need, then you can stop.

12. Once you have your mass of information on paper, you can organize it into your outline. No big deal - just cut and paste paragraphs under the points they best fit.

13. Now that you've slapped all of your rough text and research into your outline, guess what? The draft is done. Congratulate yourself and take a break.

Subsequent Drafts

14. Now it's time to whip this rough mass into shape. Start by saving your rough draft under a different name. You're going to be doing a lot of deletions in this stage, and you don't want to accidentally delete something you meant to use.

15. Working with the new copy, start your edits. Paraphrase the notes you have from other sources --- memos, product briefs, other articles, brochures. (Journalists do it all the time. It's called "research.")

16. I'll often download online research but mark it in a different color, so as not to commit the embarrassing - not to mention illegal --- mistake of repeating someone else's writing. When I've learned what I need to from the research, I capture the facts in my own words and delete the original notes.

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17. Borrow freely from your client's Website and other materials. Don't repeat the text - that's bad policy and bad writing - but you're not going to be accused of plagiarism. Laziness maybe, but not plagiarism.

18. Music can be helpful on writing assignments. Personally, I like Vivaldi for drafting and movie scores for revising. Quite the combo. (As I write this sentence, *The Last of the Mohicans* is playing. Baroque is better for the draft stage.)

19. You might find that dictating works better for you at the rough draft stage. Probably not the old-fashioned kind, where the hard-bitten boss called in his trusty secretary to "Take a memo!" You're more likely to use an application like *Naturally Speaking*. This type of application needs a lot of training beforehand - the application, not you - but can be very helpful for writers who try to critique themselves out the gate.

Writing the Final Draft

20. You've done the rough draft, 1st draft, and are into the 2nd draft. You've put everything in your own words and are observing your outline structure. The article is starting to sound less like something

you'll get blamed for, and more like something you might actually claim.

21. Edit for readability, grammar and style.

22. Use active voice in all your writing. "Active voice" is a sentence construction where the subject performs the verb action. Don't go to sleep on me, this is important. Example: "The dog bit the boy." Quick, active, easy. Here's an example of passive voice: "The boy was bitten by the dog." Yikes!

23. Technology writing is full of hideous passive voice construction. Here's another example from a technology marketing document: "This successful vendor interoperability was demonstrated at the Summit in Chicago." Ack! Instead, write: "Vendor teams successfully demonstrated interoperability at the Summit in Chicago." See how easy that was? PLEASE use active voice. Everyone will be so much happier.

24. If you learn nothing else about business writing in all your born days, learn to write in active voice. Subject all of your sentences to this simple little exercise and you will improve your writing 100%.

25. Please don't be boring, but don't get too cute. I will stick in something funny every once in a while --- mostly because I get a big kick out of myself --- but don't get too chummy.

Final Draft

26. You're almost there - you see light at the end of tunnel, and it isn't a train. Now is the time to polish sentence structure and word choice, and punch up your paragraphs.

27. Polish your opening paragraphs. Add a snappy lead, define what you're talking about and why it's

important, and list the three or so points you're going to make.

28. Read through your article and make sure you've made those points. If you did an outline, the main points should already be subheads. (See why an outline is so great?)

29. Polish your conclusion. The conclusion doesn't have to be undying prose, but do restate your points and conclusions.

30. Read through one more time for overall readability.

31. Run your spelling and grammar check.

32. Save and send - but be careful to send the right file! I accidentally turned in my rough draft once instead of the completed final. Luckily this was with one of my oldest clients, so they contacted me and asked me for the real article. A new client would simply have assumed complete incompetence on my part.

33. And for the final tip: everything gets easier with practice. Good thing, too.

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What Are The Benefits Of Outsourcing Your Technical Writing To India?

By James Marriot

You know that you need the help of a technical writing service when you don't have employees with technical documentation experience, when your in-house technical publications group is overloaded and understaffed and you don't have the time to hire and train new technical writers, and when your engineers don't have the time to write customer-focused end user documentation in addition to creating your products. In such a situation, it's only inevitable, not to mention sensible to hire the services of a technical writing service.

And since your documentation is the first thing that visitors to your organization will scrutinize, you need technical documentation that reflects the organization's quality and compliance activities. And unlike other pieces of writing, in technical writing of any documentation the use of words play have an important role. Technical writing is not the same as creative writing where use of action verbs and colorful adjectives and imagistic metaphors are encouraged. So, you need a good technical writing

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service to help you out of the tight spot. And, now you have the option of outsourcing technical writing services to India.

And there are many benefits to outsourcing technical writing services to India. Technical Writers in India are trained for clarity of presentation and materials, thus making the information more easily understood and processed. Also, if you get many people to write your technical documents for you, there's bound to be inconsistency. Some technical writers will be better than the others and so different documentation will show different levels of quality. But, a technical writer in India can prepare or edit documentation to ensure consistency among the processes.

Also, a paper trail of documented events allows you to monitor and improve your processes, products, and services. And, technical writing in India includes the preparation of forms and other documents related to the completion of work. And finally when you employ a technical writer to prepare or edit your documents, you'll have more time to spend on your job or with your clients.

However, if you're not sure whether to trust a technical writing service with your valuable documentation or not, then you can just hire the technical writing service for a small project and see how it works out for both of you. And if you've a large project, you can first ask the writer to write on some small topics for your software for free, as a part of the proposal.

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