CHERRYLEAF

Trends in technical communication

Welcome

This is part of our intermediate and advanced training course bundle

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Overview

What is the traditional approach to technical writing?

Why is change happening?

The trends

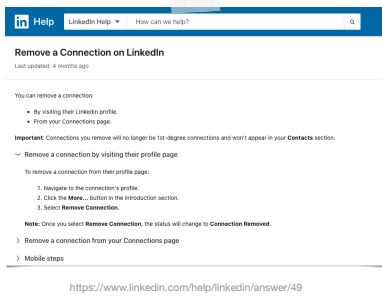# What is the traditional approach to technical writing?

Overview

A recap of the standard technical writing techniques

Here is an example

in Help   LinkedIn Help ▼   How can we help?   🔍

Remove a Connection on LinkedIn
Last updated: 4 months ago

You can remove a connection:

- By visiting their LinkedIn profile.
- From your Connections page.

Important: Connections you remove will no longer be 1st-degree connections and won't appear in your **Contacts** section.

˅ Remove a connection by visiting their profile page

To remove a connection from their profile page:

1. Navigate to the connection's profile.
2. Click the **More...** button in the introduction section.
3. Select **Remove Connection.**

Note: Once you select **Remove Connection,** the status will change to **Connection Removed.**

› Remove a connection from your Connections page

› Mobile steps

https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/49

Development of technical communication standards

Writing standards and conventions emerged in aerospace, defence and IT

From the 1950s-80s

NASA
APOLLO 11
1969 (including Saturn V, CM-107, SM-107, LM-5)
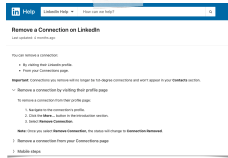Owners' Workshop Manual

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Information Mapping

The beginning of topic-based writing, and information types

Topic-based writing

You have one piece of information with a heading that describes the topic

Each topic has a single purpose or describes a single piece of information

Minimalism

Based on research by John Carroll at IBM, in the late 1980s

Minimalism

When people got stuck, they weren't really interested in learning

What they want to do was just solve their problem

Minimalism principles

Use an action-oriented approach - telling the reader to do tasks

Show how the application can be used as a tool to help users achieve their own objectives

Describe what should happen when they complete a task. This helps the reader to recognise errors and recover from them
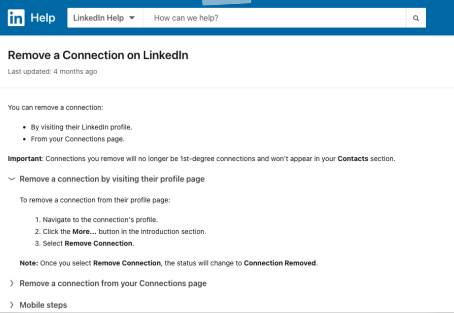
Enable different types of reading
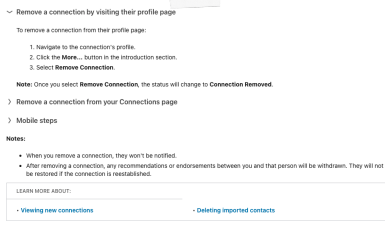
Here is an example

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› Remove a connection from your Connections page

› Mobile steps

Remove a Connection on LinkedIn
Last updated: 4 months ago

Action orientated →

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Error recognition →
Note: Once you select **Remove Connection,** the status will change to **Connection Removed.**

Minimise the amount of reading →
› Remove a connection from your Connections page

› Mobile steps

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Note: Once you select **Remove Connection,** the status will change to **Connection Removed.**

› Remove a connection from your Connections page

› Mobile steps

Notes:

- When you remove a connection, they won't be notified.
- After removing a connection, any recommendations or endorsements between you and that person will be withdrawn. They will not be restored if the connection is reestablished.

LEARN MORE ABOUT:

• Viewing new connections   • Deleting imported contacts

Enable different types of reading →

Minimalism principles

Uses the imperative verb

Assumes the user is competent
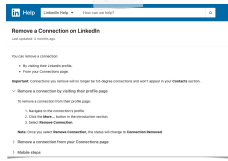
Uses progressive disclosure

The content is succinct

Exercise

✍ Write down some adjectives to describe this example

https://www.linkedin.com/help/linkedin/answer/49

Possible Answer

Succinct

Clear

Unambiguous

Unemotional

Directing/instructional

Accurate

Credible

Semantic authoring methodologies

DITA was developed to solve complex documentation challenges

For example: where organisations have to manage multiple publishing formats, product releases, versions of the same product, and languages

Its aim is to enforce consistency and enable content to be reused across different documents

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Why change?

Exercise

✍ Write down the strengths and weaknesses of the current approach to technical writing

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Exercise

Strengths	Weaknesses

Strengths

Easy to understand

Easy to find?

Translatable

Accurate

Reusable

Weaknesses

A monologue

"No one reads the manual/Help"

Cannot adapt to people's moods

It hasn't changed for 30+ years

Can be out of date

The traditional model

People fail and seek Help

We tell them what to do

We're succinct

We're calm and objective

The traditional model is good for

Safety

Risk

Anxiety

Why change?

Change in products

Change in marketing

Flickr image: Hans & Agnel

Software as a Service

Subscription model

Try before you buy

App abandonment

Software as a Service

"No software"

Browser-based

salesforce

How we purchase technology has changed

Stimulus

ZMOT

First
Moment of Truth
(Shelf)

Second
Moment of Truth
(Experience)

Which becomes the
next person's ZMOT
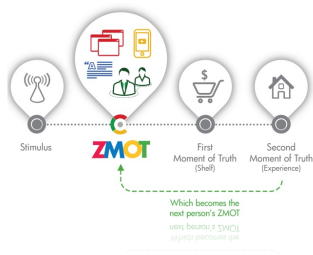
Image: Google

How we purchase technology is changing

Know

Like

Trust

Try

Buy

How we purchase technology is changing

Know

Like

Trust

Try

Buy

Technical
content

User Assistance

Mobile apps

Tend to do just one thing

They are generally intuitive

They don't need much Help

APIs

Used by developers

"Docs or it didn't happen"

The trends

Software as a Service

Applying design thinking to technical writing and instructional design

Make User Assistance part of the product design (or UX design)

The entire customer journey instead of just the "product usage"
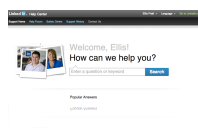
Software as a Service

Move away from failure

Towards a positive feeling

Nurture new customers
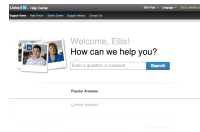
Software as a Service

Provide guidance in the app

Emphasise onboarding and UI content
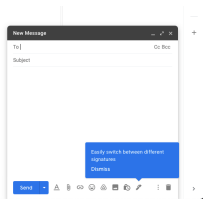
The five pillars of product onboarding

1. Defaults
2. Inline help
3. Proactive help
4. Reactive help
5. On-demand help
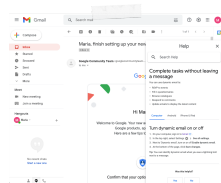
You still need on demand help

Space is limited in the user interface

There are edge cases

The product isn't always intuitive

Personalisation

Content specific to the user's context and intent

Illumina Custom Protocol Selector
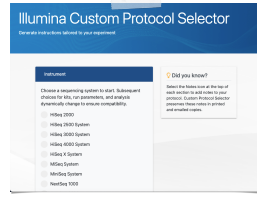
Help as a sales tool

More Help content is findable by Google

(Or people will be reading content you can't control)
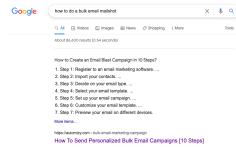
Example
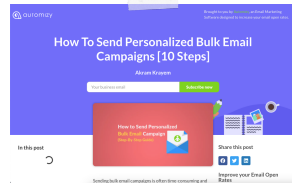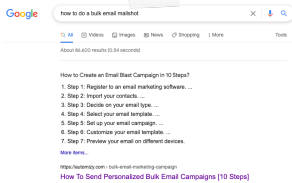
APIs

Growth of developer portals

What it does

Why use it

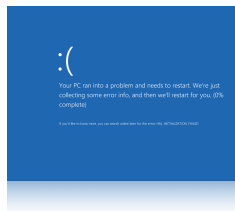Installation

Code samples

"Try it out"

Tone and voice

"No more robot speak"
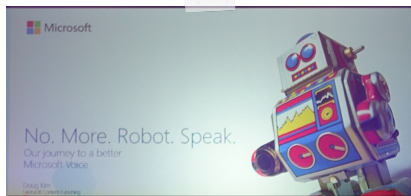
Microsoft's complete change of culture

Bringing down the level of formality

Using plain English

Microsoft's complete change of culture

Writing Microsoft's voice

Warm and relaxed

"We're natural. Less formal, more grounded in real, everyday conversations. Occasionally, we're fun. (We know when to celebrate.)"

Crisp and clear

"We're to the point. We write for scanning first, reading second. We make it simple above all."

Ready to lend a hand

"We show customers we're on their side. We anticipate their real needs and offer great information at just the right time."

https://docs.microsoft.com/en-us/style-guide/welcome/

Voice principles

Get to the point fast

"Start with the key takeaway. Put the most important thing in the most noticeable spot. Make choices and next steps obvious. Give people just enough information to make decisions confidently. Don't get in the way."

Simpler is better

"Everyone likes clarity and getting to the point. Break it up. Step it out. Layer. Short sentences and fragments are easier to scan and read. Prune every excess word."

Talk like a person

"Choose optimistic, conversational language. Use short everyday words, contractions, and sentence-style capitalization. Shun jargon and acronyms. And never miss an opportunity to find a better word."
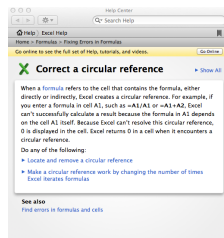

Example

It includes a resolution

There's no blame

It uses everyday words
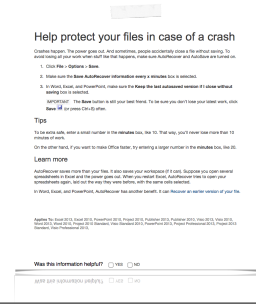
Fewer links in Help

Example

Auto save

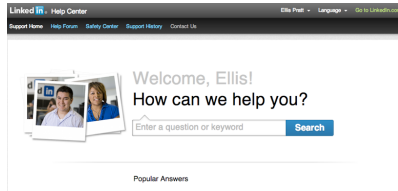Old version - tells you you should have saved your work, when user is in a state of grief
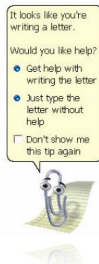
New version - empathy then task

30% smaller

LinkedIn

Beware the wrong tone for the context

The Affective Context Model

A way of understanding a user's emotions in a particular situation or context

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What is the Affective Context Model?

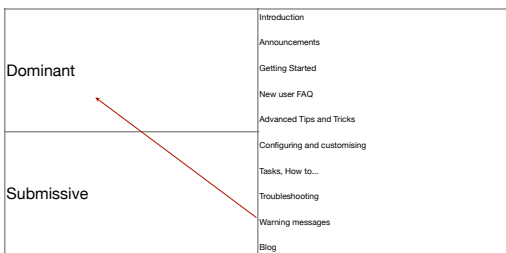| Value	Behaviour	Friendliness (we are attracted to)
Anxiety	High motivation	Dominant
Boredom	Low motivation	Submissive

Exercise

✍ Draw a line from the information type to the the tone of voice you think is best for it:

✍ Draw a line from the information type to the tone of voice you think is best for it:

Dominant	Introduction
	Announcements
	Getting Started
	New user FAQ
	Advanced Tips and Tricks
Submissive	Configuring and customising
	Tasks, How to...
	Troubleshooting
	Warning messages
	Blog

Possible answer

Dominant	Tasks, How to... (and anything else)
Submissive	Introduction Announcements
	Getting started
	Advanced tips and tricks
	Configuring and customising
	FAQs
	What's new
	Concepts

Pathfinder topics

Every Page is Page One

Treat every Help page as the Home Page

Because users arrive via Google

Developed by Mark Baker

Pathfinder topics/Knowledge bases

Free-standing online topics

Provide contextual, preview information at the start

Still follow minimalism rules

They serve a specific and limited purpose

Every Page is Page One

http://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes

Exercise

✍ Look at http://codex.wordpress.org/Using_Themes

Highlight the parts that:

Provide the big picture

Orientate the user

Illustrate the meaning of the task or goal

Provide contextual information

Documentation Operations

DocOps

Continuous integration, and either
continuous delivery or continuous
deployment (CI/CD)

Managing complexity

Iterate and improve frequently

Make sure you have the capacity,
resources and technical flexibility to
iterate and improve the content
frequently

Analytics

Analytics

Organisations that treat "docs" as part of the design are applying design measurement techniques to them

Design principles

Define what success looks like, and publish performance data

"Work out what success looks like for your service and identify metrics which will tell you what's working and what can be improved, combined with user research."

GOV.UK Service Manual

https://www.gov.uk/service-manual/service-standard

Understand the user

Determine the user's intent

Where is this in the customer journey?

What happens before?

What happens next?

When does it appear?

Discover intent

Microsoft used search data from office.com and Windows. com (long tail search data)

Lots of searches for "Bold"

Thought they meant to bold text in a cell
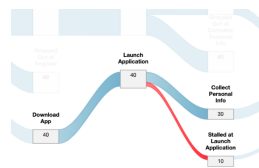
They meant to bold a border
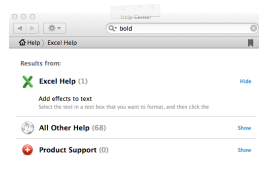
Tracking user behaviour

Which features do specific users/a target group use the most?

Segmenting users

You can identify users who:

- Are using a feature for the first time

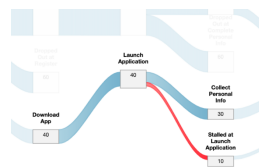- Have stopped using a feature

- How have never used a feature

Segmenting users

You can use that activity data to:

- Segment or personalise content at key moments in the user journey (in the product or externally)

- "Proactively intervene" at key moments in a user's journey (with content in the product or externally)

Tracking user behaviour

You can observe your users (recordings)

You can see which pages they visited

Screen Visits, Session count, length etc

You can see which search terms they used

Voice of the Customer Data/Textual analysis

You can identify the words and phrases your customers use by analysing any typed content about your product or service, or sector:

- Support tickets

- Instant Messaging

- Product reviews

- emails from users and prospects
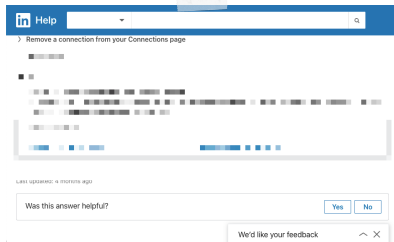
Number of deflected calls

Deflected support tickets

ServiceNow

Zendesk

Knowledge Base ROI Spreadsheet

Usefulness ratings

Summary

Summary

What is the traditional approach to technical writing?

Why change?

Summary

Software as a Service

APIs

Personalisation

Tone and voice

Pathfinder topics

Analytics

Summary

Greater empathy with the user

More measurement of the value of your work

More information

For more information

Cherryleaf podcast

Our training courses

info@cherryleaf.com

End