

# FOUNDATION BOOKS: A Lone Writer's Annotated List

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Other than my manager, there are no other technical communicators at my office. I easily fit into the category that STC members commonly refer to as lone writers. Over the past few years, I've built the following collection of foundation books for guidance. I consult some frequently, many are indispensable, and there are others I may never use for my work, but I still consider valuable for learning about new trends, technologies, and tools.

## Style and Usage Guides

*Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*. 3rd Edition. Microsoft Corporation Editorial Style Board. Microsoft Press. 2004.

For companies that are closely aligned with Microsoft, this is an ideal reference to research what to include in an in-house style guide. There is a comprehensive section on general topics, including documenting the user interface, and advice on global, web, and software development content. Another section is a list of acronyms and abbreviations. The last part of the book, and the largest section, is a dictionary that explains usage for technical terms and common words and phrases.

*The Global English Style Guide: Writing Clear, Translatable Documentation for a Global Market*. John R. Kohl. SAS Press. 2007.

This is an example-driven style guide, not a textbook, intended to supplement



conventional style guides, which typically do not take translation issues or the needs of nonnative speakers into account. The Global English guidelines found in this book are designed to help colleagues around the world communicate more effectively. The Global English guidelines also show how to write documentation that is optimized for machine-translation, translators, and nonnative speakers of English.

*Read Me First! A Style Guide for the Computer Industry*. 2nd Edition. Sun Technical Publications. Prentice Hall PTR. 2003.

A group of Sun Microsystems' technical writers and editors are the authors of this guide devoted to the topic of creating technical documentation that is clear, consistent, and easy to understand. The coverage includes detailed grammar, punctuation, typographic, and legal guidelines. There is also extensive guidance on creating effective step-by-step procedures and techniques for documenting web applications and graphical user interfaces. Managers can use this book to get help with topics such as hiring writers, working with illustrators, and managing schedules and workflow.

*Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors*. 2nd Edition. Gretchen Hargis, Michelle Carey, Ann Kilty Hernandez, Polly Hughes, Deirdre Longo, Shannon Rouiller, and Elizabeth Wilde. IBM Press. 2004.

This book tells writers, editors, or reviewers of technical information how to apply quality characteristics (e.g., accuracy, clarity, and concreteness) that make technical information easy to use, easy to understand, and easy to find. Most of the chapters focus on a single quality characteristic, with a series of guidelines about how to enhance each. There are extensive before-and-after examples, illustrations, and checklists.

*That or Which, and Why. A Usage Guide for Thoughtful Writers and Editors*. Evan Jenkins. Routledge. 2007.

This is a book about the best way to use words and phrases. It is not a dictionary, a book about style, or a compendium of dos and don'ts. The main audience is print journal professionals, but there is plenty of overlap in the types of usage questions that will come up in the day-to-day work among print journal professionals and technical communication writers and editors. The book consists of

200 entries arranged alphabetically with cross-references. It is short enough to be read straight through, but also has the flexibility to be easily consulted when usage questions arise.

## "The Basics" and Management

*Technical Writing 101: A Real-World Guide to Planning and Writing Technical Content*. 3rd Edition. Alan S. Pringle and Sarah S. O'Keefe. Scriptorium Publishing Services. 2009.

A book for learning all the basics about being a technical writer: The first section explains the necessary skills and the essential tools and techniques for delivering projects on schedule and on budget. The next section describes how to procure and organize information and write content. The last section includes advanced topics; it explains XML, structured authoring with DITA, and web 2.0 technologies (blogs, wikis, and more), which encourage the sharing of information on the Internet.

*Managing Writers: A Real World Guide to Managing Technical Documentation*. Richard L. Hamilton. XML Press. 2009.

The four major sections—Getting Started, Managing People, Managing Products, and Managing Technology—provide the reader with the information needed to successfully manage documentation projects, people, and technology. The target audience is documentation managers, but the book is also meant for product development managers or marketing managers who have writers on their teams. The user-friendly structure resembles a reference guide.

*Writing White Papers: How to Capture Readers and Keep Them Engaged*. Michael A. Stelzner. WhitePaperSource Publishing. 2006.

This book is dedicated exclusively to the art of writing white papers. The author covers the four primary types of white papers and provides his extremely detailed, ten-step process for writing them. The technical communicator who is specifically assigned the task of writing a white paper for a corporation is the main audience of the book. Professors

teaching a course on white paper writing, as well as engineers, marketing professionals, and freelance writers will also find this a valuable resource.

*Managing Virtual Teams: Getting the Most from Wikis, Blogs, and Other Collaborative Tools*. Brenda Huettner, M. Katherine Brown, and Char James-Tanny. Jones & Bartlett Publishers. 2007.

This book covers two major topics: the basics of building and managing a virtual team and evaluating the types of tools currently available for collaboration, such as wikis, blogs, and RSS feeds. The authors collaborated on a wiki when writing the book, which they opened up for readers as an example of how a wiki works.

## Editing

*Technical Editing: The Practical Guide for Editors and Writers*. Judith Tarutz. Basic Books. 1992.

This book is entirely devoted to the field of technical editing and is intended for technical editors, publication managers, and students. The major sections are devoted to learning about the editor's role as a member of the product team, detailing how to do the editor's job, and exploring an editor's career. Included in the book are checklists for each type of editorial review an editor might perform and case studies that analyze problems editors might have working with writers and managing projects.

*Effective Onscreen Editing: New Tools for an Old Profession*. Geoffrey J. S. Hart. Diaskeuasis Publishing. 2008.

This is a comprehensive book on how to edit onscreen. It can be useful for those who have never edited onscreen before and need to know how and where to begin, and those who are currently editing onscreen but want hints and tips on how to be more effective. With concrete examples, the author chose Microsoft Word to demonstrate the principles of onscreen editing, but he attempts to make the techniques applicable to any word processor. The three main topics are: what onscreen editing is, what its advantages are, and how to implement it.

*Editing with Microsoft Word 2007*. Jennie Ruby. Iconlogic. 2009.

For those who learn more effectively by doing, this is a "hands-on" training book divided into several modules. Each module builds on lessons learned in the previous module. Data files necessary for the lessons are available for download on the publisher's website. The files are necessary to complete the student activities presented in the book. Module topics include: The Editorial Process, Tracking Changes and Adding Comments, Spelling and Grammar, Find and Replace, and Formatting with Styles, Macros, and Advanced Macros. (A separate version is also available for Word 2003.)

## Design and Presentation

*The Non-Designer's Design Book*. 3rd Edition. Robin Williams. Peachpit Press. 2008.

This is a useful book for anyone who has something to design, such as a newsletter, brochure, or flyer, but has no background or training in design. Four basic concepts—contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity—used in virtually every well-designed job are explained in detail. By following these basic principles, the expectation is that the work you design will look more professional, organized, unified, and interesting.

*Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*. Garr Reynolds. New Riders Press. 2008.

This is not a book about Zen, but the author argues that the principles found in Zen can be applied to our daily activities, including presentations. Presentation Zen is an approach, not an inflexible list of rules to be followed. Garr Reynolds states that the aim of his book is to "help professionals free themselves from the pain of creating and delivering presentations by helping them see presentations in a way that is different, simpler, more visual, more natural, and ultimately more meaningful." For example, the author makes a convincing case for slides to be used only as support for the speaker; they are never intended to stand on their own, so handouts of slides should never be passed out to the audience. The design section of the book includes 15 pages of "real world" slides that help illustrate the

