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“Careers In Technical Communication”

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jpgassoc.com



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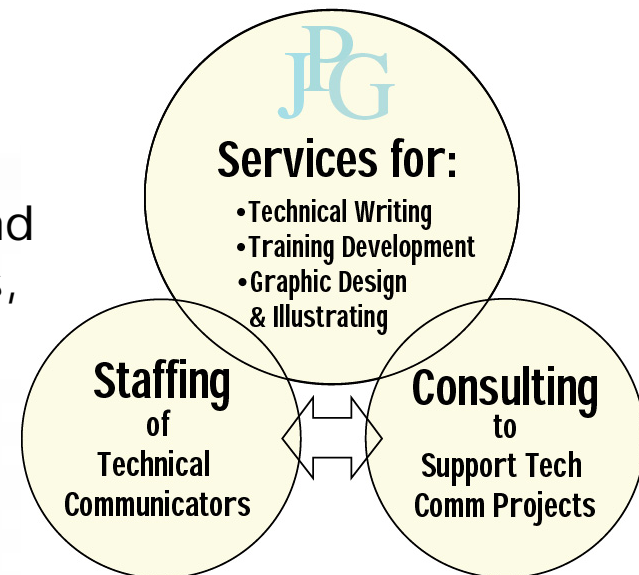
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About JPG & Associates, Inc.

- Full-service technical communication firm providing:
 - Staffing options for providing technical communication resources.
 - Consulting services to support tech. comm. projects.

Over the past 23 years, JPG has served more than 150 companies and completed more than 5,000 projects, along with filling hundreds of requisitions.





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Background of Jerry Grohovsky (Presenter)

- University of Minnesota- BA in Journalism.
- News editorial openings scarce.
- Explored the technical writing profession as an alternative.
- Enrolled in technical writing course at the U of M.
- Upon graduation: Began working as entry-level technical writer for local manufacturer.
- Staff writer at several large and small companies—for the next decade.
- In the mid 1980s, started freelancing evenings and weekends—while employed full-time at 3M company.
- After four years as a technical writing contractor at 3M, left the company in 1993 and co-founded JPG with spouse (3M was our first client, and only client).

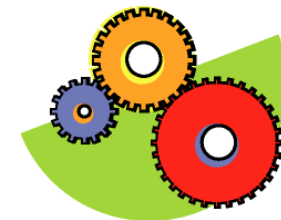




Definition Of A Technical Writer

Looking back at the 1950s, 60s, and 70s:

- Technical writer (as the term is commonly used) wrote user manuals and/or specifications for “hardware” products.
- Common types were: Operator’s manuals, installation manuals, troubleshooting manuals, parts manuals, etc.
- Opportunities were more limited: main frame computers, auto industry, agriculture, heavy machinery, aviation, defense, and government.



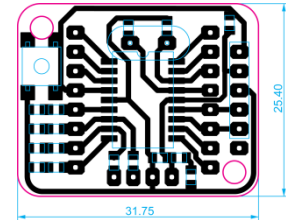


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Definition Of A Technical Writer (Cont'd)...

- In the mid-1980s, technology exploded:
 - Introduction of microprocessors creates a flood of new products.
 - New technology products = New documentation needs.
 - “Technical writer” evolves as a subset of a newer term: “technical communicator”.
 - Desktop computer becomes the new writer’s tool .





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New Types Of Technical Communicators Emerged

- Software technical writer.
- On-line help (user assistance) developer.
- Web content developer.
- E-learning (online training) developer
- Content management system (or single-sourcing) specialist.
- Global translation coordinator.
- Content strategist.
- User-experience specialist.
- User-interface designer.





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Opportunities Have Multiplied For Technical Communicators

- Medical device and bio-tech. 
- Enterprise software (IT.)
- Web-based commerce.
- Quality assurance departments.
- Manufacturing processes.
- Internal policies and procedures.
- Compliances (FDA, ISO, Sarbanes Oxley, global import standards.)
- Training (employee, sales, customer, distributor). 
- Global markets (compliance, translations, training). 



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Explosion Of Deliverables...

- Hardware documentation
- Software documentation
- Operator's guides
- Troubleshooting guides
- Maintenance manuals
- Installation manuals
- Paper-based
- On-line
- Web-based
- On-line help (local)
- Web-based help
- Remove-and-replace procedures
- End-user (external) documentation
- Internal documentation
- Field service notes
- Installation notes
- Test plans
- Test procedures
- Proposals
- Newsletters
- Reports
- Manufacturing procedures
- Process documentation
- White papers
- Trade journal articles
- Quick reference cards or guides
- Help desk tip sheets
- Functional specifications
- Product descriptions
- Feature/benefits marketing sheets
- Technical brochures
- Interactive technical manuals
- Equipment technical manuals
- Video scripts
- IFUs for medical devices
- Templates for formatting
- Research studies
- Style guides
- Medical device labeling
- Quality assurance documentation
- Training documentation
- Classroom training
- E-learning training
- Compliance documentation
- Sarbanes-Oxley compliance
- Motivational
- ISO
- FDA clinical trials documentation
- Intended-for-use statements
- Compliance documentation
- Procedural
- Descriptive
- Persuasive
- Standard operating procedures (SOPs)
- Step-by-step
- Policies and procedures
- Disaster recovery documentation
- Military spec.
- Parts lists
- Change management documentation
- Knowledge management documentation
- Software development/life-cycle documentation
- Business process requirements
- Software/system requirements
- Design documents
- Workflow documentation
- Presentations
- Network infrastructure doc.
- Cloud-based documentation
- Wiki authoring
- Mobile device delivery



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...And More Ways To Deliver

- User manuals in a variety of forms, including portable/removable memory, and on the web.
- On-line help systems (local computer and web-based).
- Web-based training (E-learning).
- Documentation translated from English to other languages.
- The newest devices: tablets, notebooks, smart phones.





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“Cross-Over” Professions For Technical Communicators

- Journalism
- Marketing communications
- Engineering
- Software development
- Computer science
- IT
- Healthcare
- Teaching, education
- Customer service
- Field service





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Education, Skills, And Experience Noticed By Hiring Managers

- Technical communication majors.
- English, journalism, marketing comm. Majors.
- Engineering and computer science courses.
- Two-year technical degrees or certificates (supplemented by writing courses).
- Any writing courses; software courses/certifications.
- Technical writing & training development courses.
- Software authoring, web development courses.
- Professional certifications.
- Advanced degrees.
- Familiarity with widely accepted tools, new tools, and new methodologies.



Software Tools

- Knowledge of software tools have become a very important skill for today's technical communicators
- Long-standing traditional tools still matter:
 - MS Office®
 - Adobe InDesign®
 - Adobe FrameMaker®
 - Adobe Acrobat®
 - Adobe PhotoShop®
 - Adobe Illustrator®
 - Adobe RoboHelp®
- Other newer tools for technical writing and training development:
 - Madcap Flare®, Adobe Presenter®, Adobe Captivate®, Camtasia Studio®, Articulate Studio®, XML (markup languages for content management), and so on.



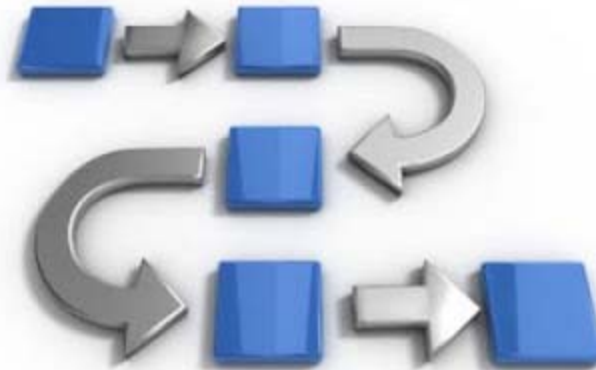


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New Methodologies And Tools Continue To Emerge

- Wiki or open source content development.
- Agile or collaborative project management.
- DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) for XML environment.





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Do Companies Provide Training?

10+ years ago (pre-recession):

- Very common for medium to large size companies to provide software training, product training, etc.

Currently (post-recession):

- Less common for all companies due to cost-cutting and less resources; would be more inclined to do product training than software training.*

*Note: Due to increasing pressures of decreasing talent pool, there are preliminary signs that companies are trending back to pre-recession training.



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Hiring Options Available

- Contract (typically, through an agency, at the client site).
- Contract-to-hire.
- Full time direct.
- Consulting—aka: freelancing, independent consultant (via an agency, or direct with the client).





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Industries Offering Best Opportunity

- Medical device*
- Bio-tech
- Healthcare
- Banking and finance
- Engineering
- Software development
- High-technology
- Manufacturing
- Web-based commerce



- *Note: Minnesota is near the top of the list for number of medical device companies.



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Compensation Rates



- Employee--Annual Salary:
 - U.S. Annual Mean (2015): \$73,350
- Independent Consultant:
 - Consultant compensation (hourly rates) are typically 15-20% higher than salaried positions because consultants usually do not receive any benefits.
 - Compensation well into the \$six figures is attainable for senior-level technical communication consultants—especially those with a niche skill.

* Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics



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Getting Your “Foot In The Door”

- If in last year of college: Try to get an internship that involves any type of writing (technical, marketing, training).
- If you are currently in any “cross-over professions,” you may be able to get into technical writing easier if you:
 - Apply for a contract or consulting position.
 - Re-organize your resume so as to focus on “strengths” versus “chronology”.
 - Take a course in technical writing, or in specific tools areas (i.e., FrameMaker, InDesign, etc.).
 - Network: Go to meetings of organizations that promote technical communication.





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Opportunities Will Be Heating Up Because...

- Demographics: Boomers will be retiring in the next 10-15 years.
- More demands for documentation in healthcare and medical device.
- Increasing demand in bio-tech.
- Increasing variety of deliverables (i.e., tablets, notebooks, smart phones, cloud storage, file sharing, etc.).
- Increasing use of new technologies and tools (i.e., translation software, content management, web-based software, etc.).
- Training development (instructional design and e-learning) will continue to be in demand.



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What Are The Future Trends?

 change ahead.

- Tools and methodologies will continue to evolve and change for content development, translation, and delivery.
- New industries will continue to emerge and expand on the waves of technology, thus creating new needs and new roles for technical communicators. (Social media, for example.)
- Web will remain strong, and get stronger.
- Paper will not go away, but will probably become less important.
- Writers will increasingly become project managers.
- Rapid pace of changing technology requires continue retraining and staying in tune with changing technology.



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What Are The Future Trends? (Cont'd)...

change ahead.

- Virtual office (working from home office) should get stronger as ways of communicating become better and more diverse, and as companies try to save on “brick and mortar.”
- Due to the increasing talent shortage and skills gap, companies will continue to adapt and find more creative ways to secure talent (i.e., part-time, remote, flexible schedules, more in-house training.)
- Although more technical writing jobs are done outside U.S (due to globalization), companies will prefer to have the writing resources on-site or close to site.



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The Future Looks Bright

- Opportunities will continue to expand.
- Compensation will remain strong.
- Part-time, flexible, and telecommuting more common.
- Good profession, even after retirement.





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Profiles That Catch The Hiring Manager's Attention

- 4-year degree in Tech Comm., English, Journalism; some requests call for an advanced degree .
- Internships, projects, or related job experience while in school are very helpful.
- Solid writing ability.
- Good verbal skills.
- Quick study (learning about client products)
- A creative problem solver (can adjust to changing landscape).
- Basic software tools familiarity.
- Works well with people, departments, and stakeholders.





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Use The Tools Of Effective Job Search

- Resume (or curriculum vitae).
- Create a portfolio of samples (may also include samples on-line).
- Join LinkedIn and create a profile page.
- Watch the on-line job posting sites.
- Post resume on reputable sites.
- Person-to-person networks still important.
- Work with agencies that specialize.





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Communication Is Important

- Have all vital contact information on resume.
- Check e-mail and voice mail on a regular basis.
- Return e-mail inquiries and missed phone calls promptly—sometimes a day or even hours can make the difference.
- Be proactive and check in with your agencies or contacts periodically—shows interest, energy, and professionalism.





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Organizations And Memberships

- Society for Technical Communication (STC)
 - www.stc.org
- American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)
 - www.amwa.org
- LinkedIn specialty groups
- Networking groups, training, seminars, expositions, etc.