



TECHNICAL WRITING COURSE

KNOWLES TRAINING
INSTITUTE



CONTENT PAGE

- Overview of Technical Writing



OVERVIEW OF TECHNICAL WRITING



WHO IS A TECHNICAL WRITER?

- A technical writer explains the product to the end user, by creating:
 - technical and software manuals
 - handbooks
 - technical guides
 - online help

5 BASIC TYPES OF DOCUMENTS



Description Document



Installation



Configuration



User Manual



System Reference

LEVEL OF IT SKILLS

Technical writers do not need to know how to program computers or have more than a general understanding of the technology

but they must have the ability to learn about a new product and then explain it to others.

ENJOYS LEARNING AND READING



Technical writers enjoy learning and reading.



They find writing comfortable, though they aren't perfect, and typically revise their work many times.



They are both creative and orderly. Most importantly, they put themselves in the end user's position.

WHAT DO TECHNICAL WRITERS DO?



When technical writers approach a new piece of technology, they are inwardly observing their own lack of knowledge.



As they interact with and learn the software, they identify the information needs of the software users.



They must be able to communicate well with programmers and customers, and extract information from them in a professional and personable manner.

5 ESSENTIAL SKILLS OF A TECHNICAL WRITER



Facility with technology



Ability to write clearly



Talent in showing ideas graphically



Patience in problem-solving/troubleshooting



Ability to interact with SMEs (Subject Matter Experts)

THE BASICS OF TECHNICAL WRITING

The process of developing information products in technical communication begins with ensuring that the nature of the audience and their need for information is clearly identified.

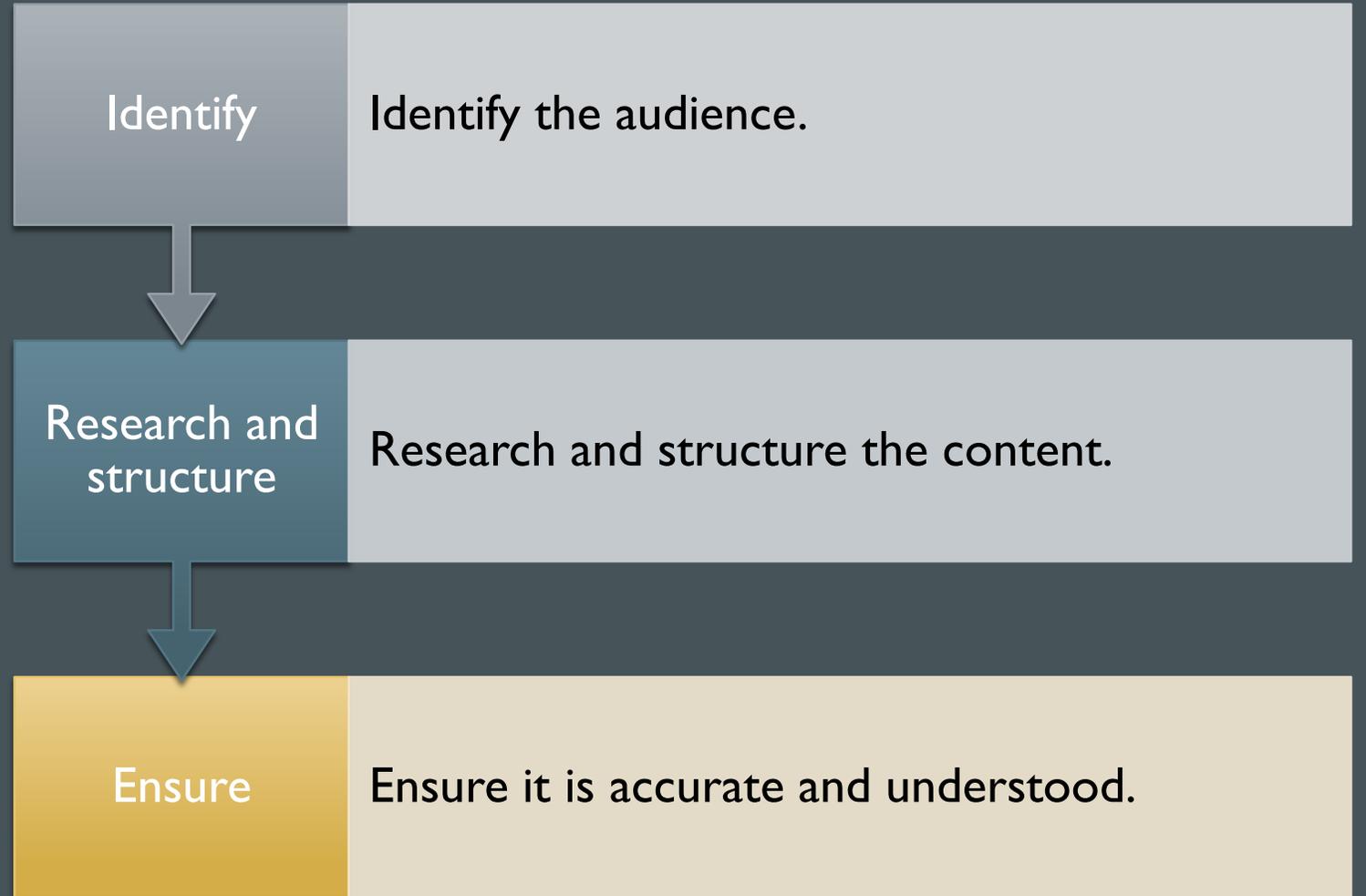


From there, the technical communicator researches and structures the content into a framework that can guide the detailed development.



As the information product is created, the paramount goal is ensuring that the content can be clearly understood by the intended audience and it provides the information that the audience needs in the most appropriate format.

THREE STEPS IN
EVERY
DOCUMENTATION
PROJECT:



CLIMBING UP THE LADDER AS A TECHNICAL WRITER

- Junior Technical Writers produce the following types of documents:
 - Product brochures, web sites, and other marketing tools that explain the benefits of the software to buyers.
 - User Guides, manuals, tutorials, and step-by-step task lists that guide new users learning the software.
 - Installation and maintenance guides that show the administrator and experienced user how to configure and troubleshoot the software.

CLIMBING UP THE LADDER AS A TECHNICAL WRITER

- **As you advance in your career you may find yourself writing more advanced documents:**
 - Requirement Specifications that document the needs, goals, and environment of the users of the software.
 - Design documents that describe the workings and interactions of the system.
 - Control documents that communicate project standards, configuration, schedule and work tasks.
 - Test cases that detail the required functionality so the software conforms to the specifications.



AUDIENCE ANALYSIS



WRITING FOR THE AUDIENCE



Documentation is a form of support and product marketing for the audience it targets.



Good technical writers have the ability to transfer the knowledge of subject-matter experts to the end user through their documentation.



It is important to research the product for which you are writing and communicate with the person for whom you are writing.

HOW CAN YOU RESEARCH POTENTIAL READERS?



A good starting point in research is the observation of people.



Observe your peers and determine common attributes.

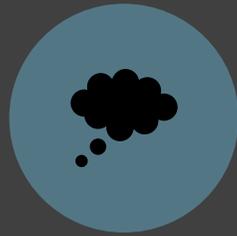


Writing for a skilled audience relies on technical accuracy; therefore, an understanding of the business environment, technology, and theory is essential.

TOOLS WE CAN USE TO HELP US IN OUR RESEARCH INCLUDE:



SURVEYS AND
QUESTIONNAIRES



POPULAR OPINION
AND STEREOTYPES



PERSONAL
EXPERIENCE



BRAINSTORMING
DOCUMENTATION
EFFORTS



AUDIENCE
FEEDBACK



Additional research tools are found in the business environment.



For example, a marketing department usually has a clear idea of intended buyers of software.



To best utilize their skill sets, determine if a designated resource is accessible and arrange a meeting with them.



A good resource can provide marketing analysis, possible pitfalls of terminology usage, and demographics in detail.



This information is a good first step in understanding audience analysis.

MORE RESEARCH TOOLS

END USER ANALYSIS



Their level of experience with similar products



How they intend to use the software



The jargon they use in their work



ENVIRONMENT AND EXPECTATIONS

- Your reader's environment affects what you write, and its format.
- This leads to some basic questions:
 - What does your reader need to know?
 - Where does s/he need to know it?
 - When does s/he need to learn it?

PERSONAS



While creating a fictional character may seem to be an odd start to the process of documenting technological products and processes, it usually works.



Why? Because having a persona allows you to think deeply about your audience and cater the information to their needs.



Then you can select the appropriate "natural" metaphors and data structures they will understand.

PERSONAS

- Personas are hypothetical archetypes, or "stand-ins" for actual users that drive the decision making for interface design projects.
 - Personas are not real people, but they represent real people throughout the design process
 - Personas are not "made up"; they are discovered as a by-product of the investigative process
 - Although personas are imaginary, they are defined with significant rigor and precision
 - Names and personal details for personas are made up to make them more realistic
 - Personas are defined by their goals
 - Interfaces that satisfy personas' needs and goals are built

EXAMPLE I

-
- Write "How to make instant coffee" steps for Wing Lee.
 - Coffee is an important part of the morning for many people.
 - Unfortunately, there are times when a coffee maker is not available. Luckily, it is still possible to make coffee using hot water and instant coffee.
 - This will show you how to make some.
 - Total time: 5 minutes

STEPS



Boil some water.



Add 2 teaspoons of coffee powder in your coffee mug.



Add a teaspoon of sugar.



Add some cocoa powder or chocolate syrup if you want to.



Now add the boiling water to your mug and stir.

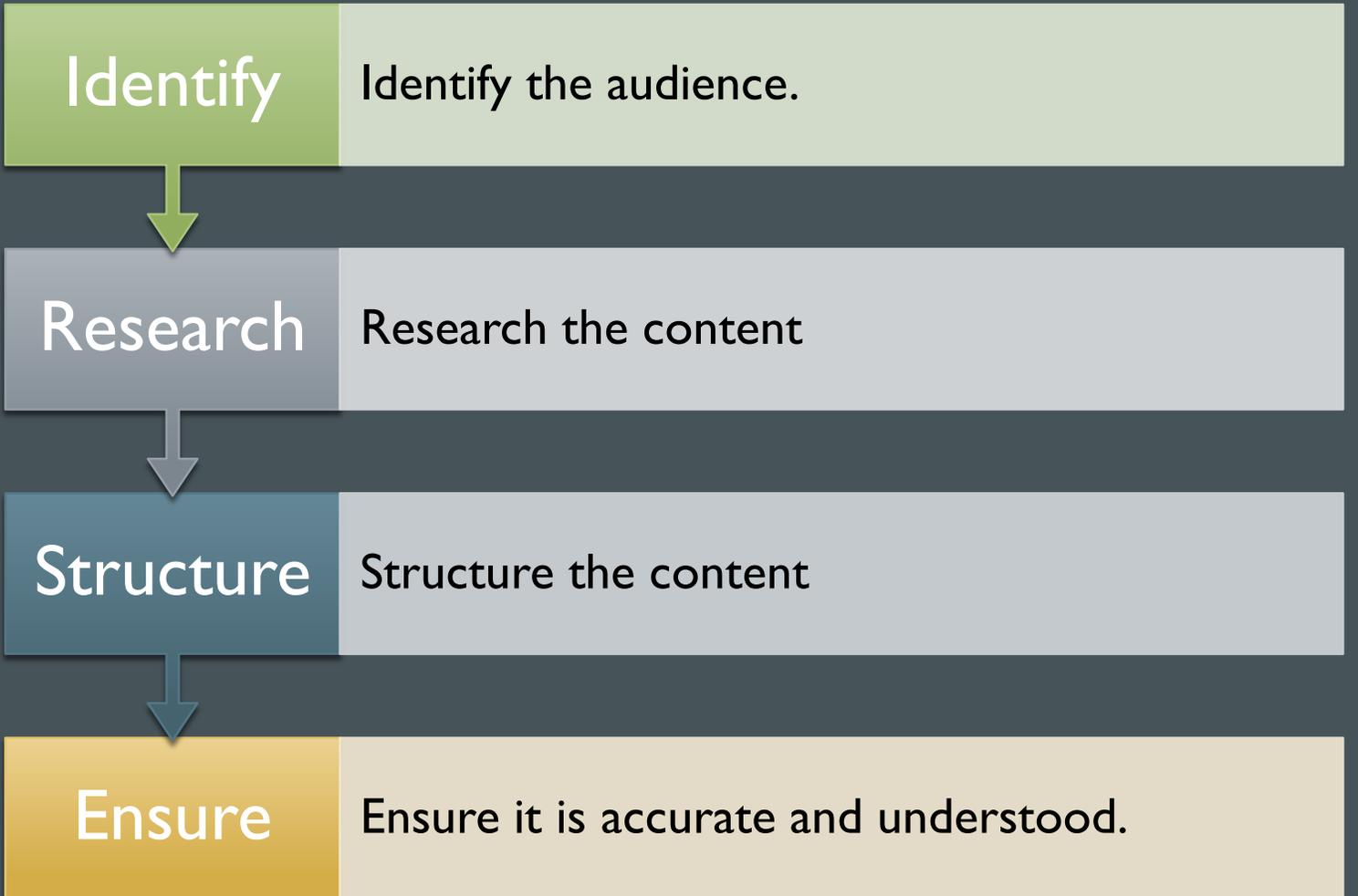


Add some milk or cream, stir, and your coffee is ready.

EXERCISE I

HOW TO MAKE
2 MINUTES
MAGGIE MEE

REMEMBER THE 3
STEPS OF
TECHNICAL
WRITING



AUDIENCE ANALYSIS CONSISTS OF 4 STEPS



1: THE 3 BASIC
QUESTIONS



2: IDENTIFY
PERSONA

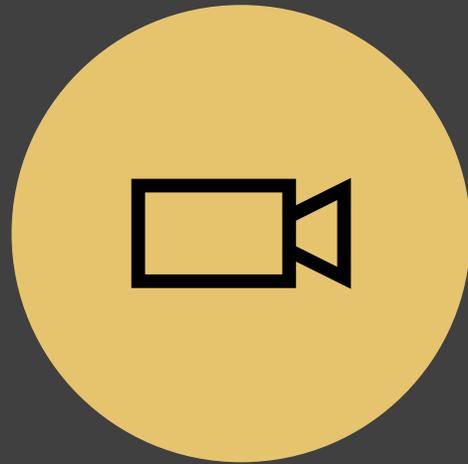


3: IDENTIFY
NEEDS

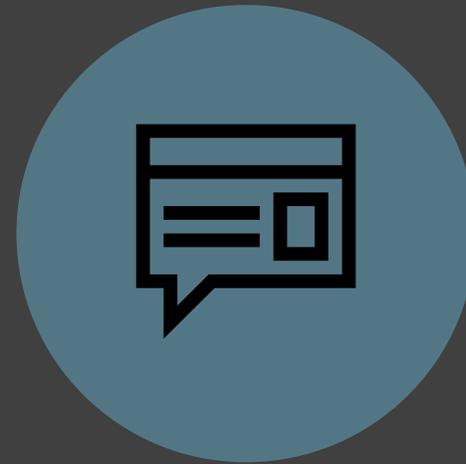


4: IDENTIFY
ATTITUDES

RESEARCH



THE B'S OF
INTERACTING WITH SME



CONDUCT SME
INTERVIEW

STRUCTURE

Choose between
linear vs non-
linear structure

Important
information first

Use audience
vocabulary

Sentence
structure

Five rules of
concise
communication

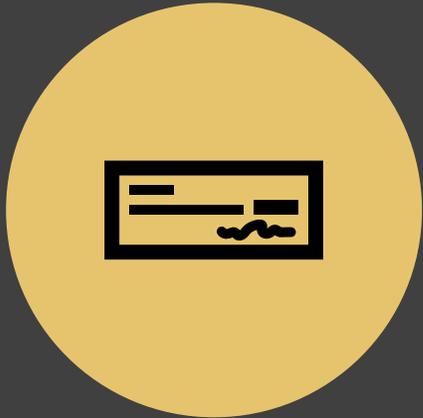
Write clearly

Use active voice

Write for
application
consistency

Specifying
Gender

ENSURE



CHECK WITH SME



INNER CIRCLE TEST



FOCUS GROUP TEST

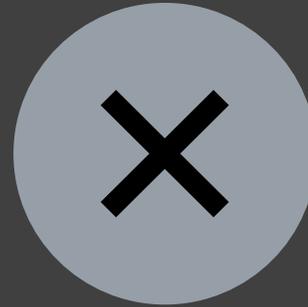
COMMON PITFALLS



INSUFFICIENT
RESEARCH



BEING POORLY
PREPARED



IRRELEVANT
VISUALS



TRYING TO BE
TOO CLEVER