

Top 10 Tech Writing Tips



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On several occasions, I've been asked to talk to technical writing classes at the University of Montana College of Technology (COT). To establish credibility, I typically show them the Developing Drivers with Windows Driver Foundation book that I co-wrote with Guy Smith. After that, I engage them in a discussion on types of tech writing. My favorite example is cookbooks, because the COT has a regionally renowned culinary program that requires a semester of technical writing. Then I describe a typical work day and try to explain why writing about arcane topics suits my temperament. I end the talk with ten rules for tech writers (with apologies to David Letterman).

Top Ten Rules for Tech Writers

10. **Never be afraid to sound like an idiot when you ask questions. It's better for you to ask basic questions than for your readers to ask them.**
9. **Another pair of eyes always helps.**
8. **Sometimes you have to smear the words on the page before you can figure out what order they belong in.**
7. **KISS: Keep It Simple, Stupid!**
6. **If you don't understand it, you can't explain it.**
5. **If it's too complicated to explain in text, use a graphic.**
4. **If it's too complicated for a graphic, use two graphics.**
3. **Always do a final read-through to make sure you haven't missed anything.
Corollary: You always miss something.**
2. **A good editor is your best friend.**
1. **Don't worry—you can fix it in the next release!**

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