Composing Technical Documentation as a Form of Academic Scholarship

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Overview

- Review role of technical documentation in academic research
- Discuss strategies for incorporating technical docs into scholarly publications
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- “Technical documentation” is a broad term
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Often associated with professional- or workplace-writing genres

Instruction sets, technical descriptions, RFPs (requests for proposals), etc.
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- *Solving Problems in Technical Communication*

- 2013 collection edited by Stuart Selber and Johndan Johnson-Eiola

- Rhetoric and Composition scholars, focuses on rhetorical dimensions of technical and professional writing
“[T]echnical communicators are constantly interpreting use situations and weighing possible responses” of a responsive, active audience (Johnson-Eiola and Selber, p. 3)
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- Technical writing is a two-fold process
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- Structures the design and development of new technologies
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- Structures the design and development of new technologies
- Anticipates and mediates how an active audience will apply new technologies to specific use-scenarios
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- Technical documentation $\neq$ specific genres used in workplace writing
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- Technical documentation ≠ specific genres used in workplace writing
- Technical documentation = texts that operate at intersection of technological development and audience participation
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- Revised definition can expand our understanding of what constitutes “technical documentation”
Rethinking Technical Documentation

- Technical materials for using specific equipment or processes (instruction sets, patch notes)
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- Training materials for employees, students or researchers (handbooks, company policies)
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- Training materials for employees, students or researchers (handbooks, company policies)
- Teaching materials (syllabi, assignment prompts)
Using Documentation in Research

- Researchers may not view themselves as technical writers
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- Researchers may not view themselves as technical writers.
- Professional duties may require us to produce technical documentation.
- Example: you may need to compose documents for lab equipment used by graduate assistants.
Using Documentation in Research

- How can we highlight the role of technical documentation in our publications?
Using Documentation in Research

- If a study or experiment requires documentation, you can discuss the rationale behind these docs.
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- If a study or experiment requires documentation, you can discuss the rationale behind these docs.

- Narrate the thought process used when composing docs in particular ways.

- Clarify the use-scenarios for these docs, then explain the results stemming from these docs.
Using Documentation in Research

- Hypothetical example: HR research for training employees in specific technology skills
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- When composing a manuscript for this research, you would consider the following questions...
Using Documentation in Research

- What documentation was created for training?
Using Documentation in Research

- What documentation was created for training?
- Why was this documentation written or designed in deliberate ways?
Using Documentation in Research

- What documentation was created for training?
- Why was this documentation written or designed in deliberate ways?
- What were ideal use-scenarios for these docs?
Using Documentation in Research

- What documentation was created for training?
- Why was this documentation written or designed in deliberate ways?
- What were ideal use-scenarios for these docs?
- Can we trace a connection between design of these docs and actual outcomes/results?
Using Documentation in Research

- Discussing technical docs often happens in the methods section or explanation of a study’s design
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- Technical documentation exists at intersection of theory and praxis.

- Explaining theoretical frameworks that shape tech docs can make it easier to see how abstract ideas are applied in real-world situations.
Using Documentation in Research

- Explaining role of technical docs can reinforce the real-world significance of your work
- Also demonstrate your ability to coordinate successful interactions between technology and users
Issues to Consider

- Be sure to review a journal’s standards for incorporating technical docs
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- Some journals have appendices that include entire drafts of technical docs
- Others allow for supplementary materials to be added
Issues to Consider

- One final note: intellectual property
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- IP for research has stable best practices
- IP for technical docs may pose more questions
Issues to Consider

- Example: I publish on teaching and include assignment prompts
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- On the one hand, I want others to build upon my teaching practices
- On the other hand, I want to be attributed for my work
Issues to Consider

- There are no easy answers to IP questions
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- There are no easy answers to IP questions
- Ensure that all authors for all documents are properly attributed
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- There are no easy answers to IP questions
- Ensure that all authors for all documents are properly attributed
- Incorporating technical docs into research articles can make attribution more likely
Please consult the ORS Lab website for webinars and worksheets that discuss different writing strategies.

- Resources dedicated to different research methods (qualitative, quantitative, and AI-assisted)

- Consultants available to discuss best practices for different research methodologies