THE REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP OCCUPATIONS AND STANDARDS CENTER OF EXCELLENCE (AOSC)

Technical Writer
National Occupational Framework

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The Urban Institute is a nonprofit research organization that provides data and evidence to help advance upward mobility and equity. We are a trusted source for changemakers who seek to strengthen decisionmaking, create inclusive economic growth, and improve the well-being of families and communities. For more than 50 years, Urban has delivered facts that inspire solutions—and this remains our charge today.

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Introduction to Using This Document

Under the Registered Apprenticeship Technical Assistance Centers of Excellence award, the Urban Institute leads the Occupations and Standards work. One of the main objectives of Urban's project is to create high-quality, well-researched, consensus-based work process schedules that are nonproprietary and widely available. This document is a product of that work and contains three sections: the occupational overview, the work process schedule, and the related technical instruction.

The **occupational overview** is a general introduction, including alternative job titles, any prerequisites, and, if applicable, the total number of hours needed to complete a time-based or hybrid program.

The **work process schedule** outlines the major job functions, competencies, and/or hours an apprentice completes in a registered apprenticeship program. It outlines what apprentices are expected to learn on the job with the support of a mentor or journeyworker (a worker mastering the competencies of an occupation in a particular industry), including both core competencies and those deemed optional by experts in the field. The work process schedule is the foundational document guiding a program.

Urban works with numerous experts to ensure the content is thoroughly researched and vetted to reflect the expectations of industry, educators, labor unions, employers, and others involved in apprenticeship for this occupation. Sponsors and employers can use the work process schedule as their program standards with assurances it has been approved by experts in the field.

The **related technical instruction** presents considerations for the coursework that apprentices will undertake to supplement on-the-job learning. It is intended to serve as a reference to sponsors exploring their options for the accompanying classroom, virtual, or hybrid training.

How to Use the Work Process Schedule

Sponsors can adapt the work process schedule to accommodate their needs for competency- or time-based or hybrid programs. In a **competency-based** apprenticeship, sponsors assess apprentices' progress across core and optional competencies listed in the work process schedule. In a **time-based** apprenticeship, apprentices complete a predetermined number of hours across major job functions and the program overall. In a **hybrid** apprenticeship, sponsors monitor apprentices' hours spent on major job functions and assess their proficiency across competencies.

Each program type has a different method of assessment:

- **For a competency-based program**, apprentices engage in activities and make progress toward proficiency in the identified competencies. Sponsors overseeing apprentices' work assess their mastery of the outlined competencies using the following rating scale:

  4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)

  3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)

  2—Completed the task with significant assistance

  1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task

  0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn't covered, etc.)

  The competencies may be completed in any order. Apprentices must perform at a level 4 or 3 in all competencies listed as "core" to complete the apprenticeship program successfully.

- **For a time-based program,** sponsors monitor apprentices' completion of hours in training across major job functions. The total number of hours recommended for this occupation is listed in the occupational overview and is based on guidance from the US Department of Labor. Generally, apprentices must have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will provide apprentices with supervised work experience and allocate the total number of hours across the major job functions to adequately train their apprentices.

- **The hybrid approach** blends both competency- and time-based strategies. Sponsors measure apprentices' skills acquisition through a combination of completing the minimum number of hours of on-the-job learning successfully demonstrating identified competencies. Sponsors will assess apprentices' proficiencies as described for competency-based programs with a rating scale of 0–4 for every core competency. Generally, apprentices have at least 2,000 hours overall for on-the-job learning, but occupations of greater complexity may require more hours. Sponsors will document apprentices' completion within a minimum and maximum range of hours assigned for each major job function.

Technical Writer Occupational Overview

Occupational Purpose and Context

Technical writers write technical materials, such as grant proposals, equipment manuals, appendices, or operating and maintenance instructions. They participate in all parts of the writing process for technical publications, including drafting, editing, and revising technical materials. They may assist with developing drawings or schematics and with digital design or print layout work.

Potential Job Titles

Documentation designer, documentation specialist, engineering writer, information developer, medical writer, narrative writer, requirements analyst, technical communicator, technical writer, technical content professional, technical editor, science writer

Apprenticeship Prerequisites

Apprentices should be able to speak and write in English (and/ or in the native language of international agency) and be US citizen or eligible noncitizens. A high school diploma or equivalent is generally required, Bachelor's degree or skills and experience equivalent are encouraged. Candidate should possess proficient standardized writing skills, an understanding of English language conventions, attention to detail, and the ability to collaborate within a team environment.

Recommended Length of Apprenticeship (Time/Hybrid Programs Only)

The recommended length of time for on-the-job learning in a technical writer apprenticeship is 2,000-3,000 hours.

Work Process Schedule

Technical Writer

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Instructions for Use:

Competency-based programs: In the "performance level achieved" column of the work process schedule (see examples starting on the next page), assess apprentices' performances on each competency with the scale below. No monitoring of hours is required for this approach. See "Guidelines for Competency-Based, Hybrid and Time-Based Apprenticeship Training Approaches," US Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, Office of Apprenticeship, October 20, 2015, https://www.apprenticeship.gov/sites/default/files/bulletins/Cir2016-01.pdf.

4—Competent/proficient (able to perform all elements of the task successfully and independently)

3—Satisfactory performance (able to perform elements of the task with minimal assistance)

2—Completed the task with significant assistance

1—Unsuccessfully attempted the task

0—No exposure (note the reason—absence, skill isn't covered, etc.)

Time-based programs: In the "hours" row, specify the number of hours apprentices will fulfill for each job function. No assessment of competencies is required for this approach.

Hybrid programs: In the "performance level achieved" column, assess apprentices' performances on each competency using the 0–4 scale above. In the "hours" row, identify a range of hours apprentices should spend working on each major job function.

Job Function 1: Confers with internal and external partners on new and existing projects		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Confers with stakeholders (such as product managers, customer representatives, vendors, plant executives, and publishers) to establish technical specifications and to determine subject material to be developed for publication	Core	
B. Confers with clients and vendors to determine deliverable scope, format, and client publishing requirements as needed	Core	
C. Coordinates development of documentation and digital content with internal and external stakeholders as needed	Core	
D. Follows developments in specific fields and technological advancements of writing to determine need for revisions in previously published materials and development of new materials	Optional	

Job Function 2: Gathers information needed from a variety of sources		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Interviews clients such as program managers, subject matter experts, and production and engineering personnel, and reads industry journals and other material to become familiar with product technologies and production methods	Core	
B. Determines operating procedures and details by observing activities, including production, developmental, and experimental activities	Core	
C. Reviews background content information, statistical data, programmatic outputs, manufacturers and trade catalogs, drawings, wire frames and/or other data relative to operation, maintenance, and service of equipment	Core	
D. Develops user profile of intended audience/consumer	Core	

E. Compiles and organizes technical information or documentation from multiple sources using industry standards	Core	
F. Identifies and collaborates with technical subject matter experts to gather resources	Core	

Job Function 3: Participates in the writing process		
Hours **(time-based and hybrid programs only):**		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Writes and organizes informational materials that meets applicable quality standards related to order, clarity, conciseness, style, and terminology	Core	
B. Produces work plans, project plan schedules, implementation guides, end-use guides, and provides field, data definition, and data flow documentation in addition to other relevant materials	Core	
C. Includes all necessary high-quality technical documentation, such as specifications, requirements, designs, user guides, installation guides, and release notes	Core	
D. Expresses programmatic and/or technical information in written format that is comprehensible to the primary audience of readers, whether technical, nontechnical, or both	Core	
E. Expresses material in a clear, concise, and accessible manner using plain text, tailored to the intended audience	Core	
F. Uses verbiage that is easily translated into other languages	Core	
G. Establishes schedules for testing, drafting, and review	Core	
H. Develops or maintains documentation in the intended publication format, including print or digital, such as web content for online published print materials	Optional	

Job Function 4: Reviews and revises written work as needed		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Edits, standardizes, or amends material prepared by subject matter experts, colleagues, or client organizations	Core	
B. Reviews published materials and recommends revisions or changes in scope, format, content, and methods of reproduction and binding	Core	
C. Ensures information, including technical information, is accurate, complete, and consistent with standards for quality, graphics, coverage, format, and style	Core	
D. Creates, edits, modifies, and maintains version control of forms/documents to ensure timely updates	Core	
E. Coordinates and facilitates the review and editing of documents when using a collaborative writing and review process	Core	
F. Reviews all written communication to ensure proper formatting and style usage	Core	
G. Reviews all written communication to ensure proper usage of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and adherence to relevant style guides	Core	
H. Maintains records and files of work and revisions	Core	
I. Uses technology, project management software, and AI tools to review and revise written work	Optional	

Job Function 5: Creates and compiles technical drawings and visuals for publication		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Studies drawings, specifications, mockups, and production samples to ensure clarity, accessibility, and concision for the intended audience	Core	
B. Reviews details of technical drawings or specifications and ensures that they are accurate, accessible, easy to	Core	

understand, and match the style and nomenclature of the document		
C. Selects photographs, drawings, sketches, diagrams, and charts to illustrate material, ensure simplicity, and understanding for the audience	Core	
D. Draws sketches or captures screenshots to illustrate specified materials and assembly sequences	Optional	

Job Function 6: Participates in the technical content production process		
Hours **(time-based and hybrid programs only):**		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Arranges for typing, duplication, compilation, and distribution of materials as needed	Core	
B. Assists in compiling and laying out material for publication including any content architecture creation (i.e., GitHub, MadCap Flare, and RoboHelp)	Core	
C. Coordinates with teams across departments to prepare and troubleshoot materials for production and submission/publication	Core	
D. Collaborates with marketing and communications colleagues to determine a publication dissemination strategy as needed	Core	
E. Supports project managers and business analysts in tracking documentation deliverables, milestones, and deadlines, and ensures timely completion of all documentation tasks	Core	
F. Coordinates logistics and personnel for final documentation and/or product release	Optional	
G. Gathers user feedback via first-hand experience and technical tools to improve user engagement	Optional	
H. Develops user profiles and user experience journey	Optional	

Job Function 7: Demonstrates professionalism and customer service acumen		
Hours (time-based and hybrid programs only):		
Competencies	**Core or optional**	**Performance level achieved (0–4)** (competency-based and hybrid programs only)
A. Demonstrates professional communication etiquette when interacting with colleagues, including responding in a timely manner	Core	
B. Effectively manages time on assigned tasks, monitoring and tracking deadlines	Core	
C. Demonstrates familiarity with organizational policies and processes including confidentiality	Core	
D. Shows a willingness to learn and adapt to changes in work, priorities, deadlines, and team environment	Core	
E. Complies with and demonstrates understanding of company policies about inclusivity and equity	Core	
F. Incorporates Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) and Section 508 compliance and accessibility into final public-facing deliverables	Core	
G. Identifies challenges and develops solutions for addressing them independently, and with assistance from supervisors, as needed	Core	
H. Works fairly, honestly, and with integrity	Core	
I. Leverages principles of effective communication to collaborate and come to mutually beneficial solutions	Core	

Related Technical Instruction

Technical Writer

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Instructions for Use:

Registered apprenticeships must include at least 144 hours of related technical instruction (RTI). Courses offered by accredited colleges and universities may be assigned a credit hour determination rather than a contact hour determination. In general, an academic credit unit is the equivalent of 15 clock hours of instruction.

Development and Use of This RTI Outline: Employers and academic institutions may approach RTI in markedly different ways. Our goal was not to identify the single best way to provide RTI or to identify a single provider whose content we deemed to be superior. Instead, our goal was to survey numerous education providers, including employers, institutions of higher education, high schools, private continuing education providers, labor organizations, professional associations and, in some cases, municipalities that provide worker training, to identify topics or courses common among those providers that align with the job functions included in this work process schedule. Those common topics or courses are reflected in the RTI outline provided below, which may be useful in developing your RTI program or communicating your needs to an educational partner.

Licensure or certification requirements:

Although there are no state occupational licensure requirements for technical writers, voluntary certifications are available for technical writers who specialize in software, science, engineering or business.

Other voluntary certifications are available to technical writers, such as those offered by the Society for Technical Communication. This organization offers three levels of certification for technical writers, including the Foundation Level Certification (Level 1), which is designed for entry-level professionals (https://www.stc.org/certification/).

Medical technical writers are often required to hold the Medical Writer Certified (MWC) credential from the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA). To qualify for this certification, individuals must hold at least a bachelor's degree and have two years of experience.

Degree requirements for licensure or certification, if applicable:

Individuals seeking the Medical Writer Certified credential must hold a bachelor's degree or higher.

Accreditation requirements of instructional provider for licensure or certification, if applicable:

The MWC credential can be earned only by those who completed a bachelor's degree or higher at an accredited college or university.

Anticipated changes in licensure or certification requirements, if known: None

Examples of state licensure or certification requirements: Not applicable

Examples of RTI providers for this occupation

Professional associations and labor organizations:

There are several trade associations for technical writers that offer short courses and continuing education opportunities for technical writers. These include the Society for Technical Communication, the American Medical Writers Association, and the National Association of Science Writers.

Colleges and universities: Many two-year and four-year colleges offer degree and certificate programs in technical writing. In addition, many universities offer graduate degrees or certificate programs in technical writing or provide technical writing education through their non-credit business and professional development programs.

No-cost online providers: Google provides instructional courses in technical writing for individuals with prior experience in software engineering, computer science, or a related field to help them better communicate sector-specific information and ideas. EdX , Udemy, and Coursera offer multiple courses in technical writing. Although these courses are available online at no cost, for students who seek academic credit for their work, they must enroll and pay applicable tuition and fees charged by the providing institution. Other no-cost short-term courses in technical writing can be found through providers such as edapp (https://www.edapp.com/10-technical-writing-training-courses/).

Continuing education or specialty education providers: There are numerous firms that offer short courses in technical writing.

Prerequisite knowledge, skills or experience typically required by RTI providers for this occupation

Individuals may be required to demonstrate strong writing skills. Those working in scientific, engineering, computer technology, or the medical field may need to complete postsecondary education, have prior work experience in those fields, or at least provide evidence of an understanding of key underlying concepts and vocabulary.

Introduction to Technical Writing

Hours: 20–30

Sample learning objectives

- Explain the ethical responsibilities of a technical writer.
- Describe the process that technical writers use to identify their target audience.
- List and describe the types of reliable resources that are available for conducting research.
- Explain the challenges of relying on web-based content for accuracy and reliability.
- Describe the techniques used to assess written materials for bias.
- Explain the importance of identifying one's audience and the techniques used for producing documents that speak to that audience.
- Discuss the purpose and general format of memos, white papers, research papers, instruction guides, employee manuals, user manuals, and grants.
- Discuss the key elements of working in a UX environment.
- Explain the unique challenges and opportunities available to technical writers who work in engineering, technology, software development, and medical fields.
- Identify and correct errors in grammar and structure in written materials.
- Explain the basic steps involved in technical writing, including planning, organizing, writing, editing, and revising technical writing.
- Discuss the writing guidelines for social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and other electronic media.

Basic Grammar and Usage

Hours: 30–40

Sample learning objectives

- Demonstrate proper use of periods, commas, parentheses, colons, dashes, hyphens, and semicolons.
- Demonstrate the ability to identify and properly use the following parts of speech: nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections.
- Use subjects and verbs that agree.
- Explain basic rules of capitalization and demonstrate the ability to follow those rules in written materials.
- Explain the proper use of pronouns including possessive pronouns.
- Identify and correct ambiguous pronouns by clearly linking the pronoun to the correct antecedent.
- Explain the difference between a numbered and a bulleted list.
- Demonstrate the ability to select appropriate homonyms, homophones, and homographs from a list of commonly confused or misused words.
- Demonstrate proper use of tense in writing.
- Properly spell and punctuate singular and plural collective nouns.
- Identify and revise idioms.

Sentence Structure

Hours: 30–45

Sample learning objectives

- Explain the key components of well written sentences.
- Identify key elements of sentences, including dependent and independent clauses, subjects, verbs, objects, and prepositional phrases.
- List strategies for creating well written and properly punctuated compound and complex sentences.
- Explain and demonstrate the ability to use various strategies to shorten sentences.
- Differentiate between dependent and independent clauses.
- Identify and correct instances of run-on sentences, subject-verb disagreement, and unnecessary repetition.
- Describe the basic structure of a well-written paragraph.
- Create clear, concise, and appropriately structured paragraphs.
- Distinguish between active and passive voice and between first, second, and third person writing.

Project Planning for Technical Writers

Hours: 15–20

Sample learning objectives

- Describe the importance of a well-designed project plan for creating a technical document.
- Identify the likely members of a technical writing project team and the role that each member will play in developing, editing, finalizing, and producing a technical document.
- Explain the importance of copyright laws in developing print and electronic documents.
- Describe the writing process and the different genres of technical writing.
- Develop a project plan for a technical writing document and track progress against that plan.
- Describe the processes used for reviewing and editing technical documents.
- Describe the appropriate use of social media to distribute or draw attention to technical documents.

Research Techniques for Technical Writers

Hours: 20–30

Sample learning objectives

- List and explain the information gathering techniques used by technical writers.
- Differentiate between primary and secondary research.
- Describe how surveys and interviews can be used in performing research.
- Explain the importance of sample size, response rate, and selection techniques in developing or identifying relevant and reliable surveys and interviews.
- Identify examples of survey research that lacks validity due to poor methodology or low response rate.
- Explain the proper techniques for identifying and interviewing subject matter experts.

- Explain the use of on-site research techniques (field, lab, or simulation) to collect and validate information.
- Explain the role of using a product to inform technical writing.
- Identify types of reference materials that are reliable sources of information.
- Differentiate between causality and correlation and provide examples of research materials that inappropriately attribute causality where mere correlation exists.
- Demonstrate the ability to conduct a search for valid, accurate, and reliable resources and references.
- Demonstrate the ability to identify potential sources of error or inconsistencies in resource materials and references.
- Explain the challenges and limitations of using scientific models to predict outcomes.
- Use proper format to cite resources and references in work.
- Explain the relevance of statistical significance and identify examples of research findings that meet acceptable standards for statistical significance.

Using Visual Images to Communicate Technical Information

Hours: 20–30

Sample learning objectives

- Explain the importance of using tables, charts, graphs, Gantt charts, diagrams, and infographics to provide clear and concise information.

  Differentiate between the various types of graphics that are used to convey information. Interpret simple and complex graphics.
- Explain the benefits and disadvantages of different types of graphics used to present data.
- Explain the process for selecting visuals based on a document's purpose, audience, and situation.
- Develop proper labels and captions for visual images.
- Use Excel to create data tables, PivotTables, and graphics.
- Describe the ways in which colors and fonts can optimize visual images.
- Demonstrate the ability to insert diagrams, tables, and figures into electronic documents.
- Explain the ADA Section 508 compliance requirements and the importance of using visuals that meet those requirements.

Document Design and Layout

Hours: 25–35

Sample learning objectives

- Identify target audience and explain key considerations in developing written materials that serve the needs of the target audience.
- Describe the strategies for creating well-organized, visually appealing, and user-friendly documents.
- Create templates for memos, employee manuals, technical manuals, flow charts, grants, and policy manuals.
- Describe the basic format for training manuals and demonstrate the ability to use software tools (Microsoft Word, Adobe Acrobat, etc.) to create documents that are searchable, contain tabs, a table of contents, and are properly indexed.
- Demonstrate the ability to break long topics into consumable sections.
- Demonstrate the ability to use software tools to design and create publication-quality documents.
- Demonstrate the ability to insert images, tables, graphics, and figures into publication-quality documents.
- Demonstrate the ability to create electronic documents that are properly tabbed, indexed, and searchable.
- Demonstrate the ability to set up and/or post documents to organizational websites.
- Demonstrate the ability to obtain final approval for technical documents.
- Demonstrate the ability to finalize and distribute technical documents.

Technical Editing

Hours: 20

Sample learning objectives

- Describe the levels of editing and how they are applied to technical documents.
- Describe the different kinds of usability testing available to technical writers.
- Demonstrate the ability to use and interpret appropriate style guides, editing techniques, terminology, abbreviations, and symbols.
- Demonstrate the ability to use Cloud based or other document sharing systems to edit technical documents.
- Discuss the techniques used for effective collaborative writing and editing.

Relevant military experience

Various military occupations require training in technical writing. A sample of military occupations that include technical writing responsibilities include the following:

Army

- Combat Documentation/Production Specialist (MOS 25V)
- Visual Information Operations Chief (MOS 25Z)
- 7040 Technical specialization writer
- 7050 Product design and development officer

Marines

- Personnel and Administration (01)
- Public Affairs (43)
- Maintenance Management Production (2R)XX, 2R1XX)
- Information Management (3A)
- Munitions & Weapons (2W)
- Education and Training (3S2XX)

Air Force

- Information Protection Technician (255S)

Navy

- Mass Communications (MC)
- Personnel Specialists (PS)
- Yeomen (YN)

Diversity, equity, and inclusion

There is gender parity in the technical writing field, with 50 percent of technical writers identifying as males and 50 percent identifying as females. However, there is overrepresentation by white workers in this field (71.6 percent) as compared with Asian workers (8.7 percent), Hispanic workers or Latinx workers (7.8 percent), Black workers (6.6 percent), and American Indian or Alaska Native workers (0.3 percent). Starting in 2019, there has been a slight increase in the percentage of technical writers who are Asian or Hispanic. Currently 72 percent of technical writers hold a bachelor's degree, 12 percent hold a master's degree, 11 percent hold an associate's degree and 1 percent hold a doctoral degree (https://www.zippia.com/technical-writer-jobs/demographics/).

Works Consulted

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STATEMENT OF INDEPENDENCE

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