CHAPTER 1

Introduction

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Now is an exciting time to be involved in technical editing, whether you are a practitioner, a teacher, or a student. Consider the following developments:

- The widespread adoption and adaptation of the levels of edit concept, enunciated most familiarly by Van Buren and Buehler [1], tells editors and clients alike that this technical editing business is complex and deserves careful planning and management.
- Job advertisements typically stress the responsibilities and challenges of editing positions in today's workplace.
- In day-to-day work environments, technical communicators fulfill such editorial roles as developmental editors, copyeditors, and proofreaders. You can choose the type of work that best suits your temperament and skills.
- Technical editing involves closely working with other individuals, sometimes in a one-on-one arrangement, sometimes in a team environment.
- The editor is the gatekeeper of quality for information products developed by the client or team. For many editors, this central responsibility makes the work particularly rewarding.
- A corpus of high-quality research has evolved and grown during the past 30 years.

As used in this book, *technical editing* refers to the planning, analysis, restructuring, and language changes made to other people's technological or scientific documents in order to make them more useful and accurate for their intended audiences. The effective technical editor enjoys paying rigorous attention to nuance and detail, finessing the intricacies of language, and negotiating with

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authors. Note that our scope excludes *revising*, which involves changing one's own writing, a related but very different activity that lacks the elements of negotiation and seeing documents through the eyes of someone besides the original author.

PURPOSE

New Perspectives in Technical Editing is designed, first, to help you better understand the discipline by examining multiple ways of approaching technical editing. Like other maturing disciplines, technical editing is rich enough that we can look at it through various critical lenses, gaining a deeper understanding as we shift from one lens to another. Each contributor in this volume takes a particular fruitful approach to thinking about the field, offering informed, highly personal research findings, interpretations, and recommendations. The chapters, all strong contributions to the research literature, together constitute a varied and balanced combination of ways of viewing the depth and possibilities of technical editing.

The collection is designed to help you take action. We hope that after reading the essays, you will have the resources to

- Add more value to your organization as you edit with greater efficiency, closer attention to the exact environment within which you work, and expanded awareness of processes that can bring you success versus those that can get you into trouble.
- Effectively support technical editing within your work environment.
- Teach the subject with understanding and rigor.
- Apply and add to the body of research literature on technical editing.

The audience for this book includes teachers and students in upper-division and graduate technical communication courses, researchers, and practicing editors, all of whom want to go beyond the rehashing of commonplaces and gain an understanding of the depth and rich diversity of approaches to technical editing. The writing style for this diverse audience, even when a contributor is discussing theoretical issues, is straightforward and readable. We discuss issues, trends, and best practices; we do not target readers looking for step-by-step tutorials on daily editing procedures.

Note: If you are teaching a technical editing course, you will find that this book complements a textbook such as Carolyn Rude's *Technical Editing* [2]. You could well have your students follow the textbook for its straightforward how-to advice and exercises and then delve into *New Perspectives in Technical Editing* for supplementary reading that will further develop their skill sets and suggest areas for individual research.

THE ESSAYS

The contributors are recognized editing authorities who exercise considerable independence of judgment and creative speculation. The sequence of their chapters within the collection is basically from the general to the more particular. Each chapter includes

- Introduction to the perspective
- History and review of the specialized literature
- Where we stand today and the future
- Special approaches and concerns, best practices, and tips
- References

Research within the field of technical editing is coming into its own. But how can you best pursue that research? Researcher Angela Eaton argues that our understanding and practice will reach their full potential only with greater involvement in research by both practitioners and academics. Pointing out how much past research has been anecdotal, she recommends that you instead follow such methodologies as the case study, meta-analysis, textual analysis, survey, and experiment. She looks into the strengths, flaws, and fine points of these approaches. The uses of the various approaches become concrete with her analyses of specific research projects on such topics as the levels of edit, the effect of editing on the final quality of a document, gender bias, electronic editing, the use of editorial guidelines, and editorial comments. Eaton makes a strong case that we must continue to expand our research and provides the tools to do so.

To understand current practices and the future of technical editing, you must understand its past. Professor emeritus and historical scholar Thomas L. Warren provides hints in his engaging interpretation of historical trends in our field. Focusing on what he terms the Beginning Period, the Middle Period, and the Modern Period, Warren teases us with questions about when editing as we now define it really began, why early authors allowed editors to make changes on their own, how different environments in different times led to changing mixes of generalist and specialist editors, to what degree such factors as rationalism and user-focused psychology brought changes to editing, and how research methodologies and educational initiatives are shaping the student of editing in new ways. His sweeping investigation brings us to the inescapable conclusion that technical editing is becoming more complex. If you enjoy historical mysteries, this chapter is for you.

You may well know Carolyn D. Rude for her frequently adopted textbook [2]. But now she looks at technical editing from the perspective of a master teacher addressing fellow teachers. Drawing upon both her own experience and feedback from teachers using her textbook, she reflects on the value of the editing course within the technical communication curriculum, the evolution of the course in

response to changing environments, effective teaching methods (including the use of electronic tools), and possible ways to set up the course. She makes clear that the effective instructor thinks well beyond clever class exercises and stories from the trenches when developing and teaching the modern technical editing course.

Michelle Corbin addresses difficult and sometimes controversial issues that affect technical editors within today's various organizational structures. Working from practices and trends within both her own workplace and other organizations, she challenges you to make a strong case for editorial resources, dissects the present-day scenarios for editors, offers advice on building a smart career track, and details possible future writing environments. This might be an excellent chapter for human resources specialists to read.

A seasoned professional, Jean Hollis Weber offers insights into the complex art of copyediting. She argues for not only the copyeditor's pivotal role in quality control, but also the extent to which copyediting on the job stretches to include activities associated with other types of editing. You'll find a full bag of tools for avoiding doing the wrong things with grammar, smoothing out the copyeditor-author relationship, and taking advantage of the changing rules and new opportunities in copyediting online material.

Computer tool guru Geoffrey J. S. Hart places modern editing within the context of increasingly rapid technological change. Reminding us that technical editing remains what it long has been, he shows the subtle ways in which computers have changed the rules by which we edit. He introduces possible editorial solutions to new problems caused by non-linear and nonverbal content, communal creation of information, and single sourcing. Refreshingly, Hart shares with you his optimism that technology is not replacing the technical editor.

Barbara Gastel provides a thorough grounding in what it means to be a science editor. If you're not familiar with the field, you might be surprised by the number of niches that she describes within science editing. She persuasively demonstrates the importance of specialized ethical requirements, medical publication standards, and certification for many practitioners. If you're just moving into science editing, consider the many sources of education listed in the chapter. Look particularly at the details on the activities, services, and publications of the Council of Science Editors, in which Gastel has been deeply involved.

Longtime journal editor George F. Hayhoe, working from his experience within STC and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers as well as other research, scrutinizes what it takes to edit a technical journal. His close-up details show the complexity of the task in the many editorial and production roles that various people fill, the strict recordkeeping that keeps the operation going, and the intricate interpersonal relationships that ensure long-term viability. He prepares you to grapple with difficult, often controversial issues, such as the place of acceptance rates and citation frequency in determining a journal's value, second-language authors, and the political chemistry within a journal

published by one kind of organization versus that within one published elsewhere. If you want specific hints about how to keep records, ensure you have enough content to put out issues, and prepare for a new editor, you'll find them here.

Finally, the annotated bibliography, compiled by Avon J. Murphy and Thomas L. Warren, presents critical summaries of approximately 100 significant books, articles, and other resources for today's technical editor. While the References sections of individual chapters contain resources appropriate to the perspectives in those chapters, the bibliography approaches the research literature from a broader perspective.

You'll note some fruitful overlap among chapters. Both Barbara Gastel and George Hayhoe, for example, go into the editing of professional journals. But their contexts differ greatly: whereas Gastel is sorting out career paths open to science editors, Hayhoe is laying out explicit, often day-to-day details for the editor of any type of professional journal. Similarly, several authors look at such areas as the nature of technical editing, the future of our discipline, the levels of edit, and electronic tools within the contexts of their chapters. And you'll find frequent mention of people who have contributed significantly to the practice of and research on technical editing, including Mary Fran Buehler, Donald W. Bush, Michelle Corbin, David Dayton, David K. Farkas, Judith A. Tarutz, and Lola M. Zook.

We hope that the essays in this volume serve to enrich the growing body of literature on technical editing. We invite your feedback and continued discussion.

REFERENCES

1. R. Van Buren and M. F. Buehler, *The Levels of Edit* (2nd ed.), Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, California, 1980.
2. C. D. Rude, *Technical Editing* (4th ed.), Pearson Longman, New York, 2006.