

**Technical Writing: Course Offerings in Kentucky Colleges and Universities**

**(1980-81)**

**by**

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**ABSTRACT**

The number of technical writing courses and programs in institutions of higher education has increased over the years. However, during the academic year of 1980-81 a study concerning the subject in Kentucky's colleges and universities could not be found. A questionnaire was designed to determine how many of the 42 Kentucky colleges and universities offered courses in technical writing for the 1980-81 academic year. (In the mid-1950s few—if any—courses in technical writing were offered by these institutions.) Based on the responses to the questionnaire instruction in technical writing was provided by more two-year public colleges than two-year private, four-year public, or four-year private institutions. Consequently, educators at two-year private, four-year public, and four-year private institutions in Kentucky may wish to either develop or increase instruction of technical writing.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Technical writing courses are being developed in two- and four-year, public and private colleges and universities across the country. In fact, some colleges and universities are offering majors in it. According to Paul V. Anderson, “There were twenty-nine schools believed to have major programs in 1977.”<sup>1</sup> According to the *Directory of Science Communication Degrees and Programs*, there were 58 schools that had technical writing programs in 1978.<sup>2</sup> The number of colleges and universities offering technical writing apparently doubled in one year. Its importance in today’s world is evident. Businesses, scientific enterprises, engineering concerns, technological firms, industries, and the U.S. Government need additional writers. But where do Kentucky’s institutions of higher education fit into this picture?

Although Kentucky does not necessarily have numerous corporations large enough to hire large numbers of technical writers, what corporations it does have offer the aspiring technical writer a chance to practice his or her craft. Therefore, Kentucky’s institutions of higher education should offer courses in this field, preferably taught by instructors who have some technical writing experience and/or technical writing teaching experience.

**PROBLEM**

The problem of this study was to determine the status of technical writing education in two- and four-year, public and private institutions of higher education in Kentucky for the academic year 1980-81 by means of a specially designed questionnaire. Twenty-five years earlier few—if any—courses in technical writing were offered by these institutions.

The questions that were answered by the respondents pertained to the technical writing curriculum.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study was to provide information that may be used by administrators and faculty in evaluating student and community needs related to technical writing courses, curriculum, and programs.

**NEED FOR THE STUDY**

No previous in-depth research concerning technical writing education in Kentucky colleges and universities was found. However, literature revealed that technical writing courses and programs had been developed in institutions in other states. It was believed that a study of this kind could be an incentive for administrators and faculty in Kentucky colleges and universities to either develop or increase their technical writing curricula.

**LIMITATIONS**

The limitations of this study were characteristic of interpreting data obtained from respondents via questionnaires. Such interpretation is based on the selection of questions, the return of the questionnaires, and the truthfulness of respondents.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

**Technical Writing**—writing that deals with subject matter in sciences (natural and social), business, engineering, and industry.

**Technical Writer**—a person whose occupation is or has been technical writing.

**Technical Writing Course**—a course in writing for the sciences (natural and social), business, engineering, and/or industry.

**Technical Writing Curriculum**—various courses in technical writing.

**Technical Writing Program**—a group of courses that are required for a major or minor in technical writing.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Only two studies of significant length warranted attention. One study, *A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses*, was a supplement to the *Directory of Science Communication Courses and Programs*. This survey inventoried the content of some of the courses listed in the directory. It examined the types of resource materials utilized in the courses and described the number and nature of major writing assignments required by the various science writing instructors of the 58 colleges and universities listed.

This survey revealed that these courses emphasized writing skills and sociological, philosophical, and political aspects of science. It found that an extreme variety of texts and resource material were used. However, use of available science communications research was minimal. Lastly, the information in the courses' syllabi varied greatly but was minimal: text citations were incomplete and descriptions of course objectives were fuzzy.<sup>3</sup>

The second study, “Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication,” was designed to inform teachers of technical writing about the career opportunities that programs in technical communication offer.

The survey found that the number of openings for instructors of technical writing would increase through the 1979-80 academic year, if not longer. Furthermore, the faculty that would fill these positions would be treated like their equally qualified and experienced peers, at least with respect to teaching loads, salaries, promotion, and tenure.

The results also showed that four-year and graduate programs in technical communication look for experience—both in teaching and in working as a technical writer or editor—more than the formal study of technical writing. Two-year programs, however, placed a higher value on formal study.<sup>4</sup>

Ideas for questions were formed from these studies as well as from “How Important is Technical Writing? A Survey of the Opinions of Successful Engineers”<sup>5</sup> and “Evaluation of a Master’s Program in Technical Communication—Results of a Questionnaire.”<sup>6</sup>

## **METHODS OF PROCEDURE**

### **Research**

The nature of the information desired and the population (Kentucky colleges and universities) involved determined the research method used. It was not feasible for the research to be done by personal interview since the population covered the state.

Therefore, the questionnaire was the best means of obtaining the needed information.

### **Population**

The colleges making up the population were two- and four-year, public and private institutions in Kentucky (Appendix A). The 42 institutions were selected from the state pamphlet *Facts 1979-80*<sup>7</sup> and *Yearbook of Higher Education—1980-81*.<sup>8</sup> Business schools, theological seminaries, and schools of mortuary science were excluded from the survey.

### **Instrumentation**

A questionnaire designed to determine the status of technical writing education was prepared (Appendix B).

### **Data Collection**

A cover letter that explained the study, along with a copy of the questionnaire, and a self-addressed, stamped envelope was mailed to the appropriate person at each of the colleges and universities. Twenty-five (59.5%) of the 42 questionnaires were returned before the deadline. A follow-up letter was mailed to each of the remaining 17 colleges. Within two weeks four additional questionnaires were received, making the total 29 (69%).

### **Tabulation and Analysis of Data**

Each questionnaire's responses were recorded on a tally sheet. The data on these sheets were tabulated and percentages, where appropriate, have been presented in tables. An analysis accompanies each table. If a table does not exist for a particular question, the question has been discussed in detail.

## **FINDINGS**

### **Number of Courses in Technical Writing**

The first question asked for the number of courses in technical writing offered at each institution. Of the 29 responding, 20 (68.9%) offered a total of 28 courses. Fourteen (70%) offered one course, four (20%) offered two courses, and two (10%) offered three courses. Table 1 shows by college classification the distribution of these courses.

The second question asked for a listing of each technical writing course by number, title, level, number of sections per quarter or semester, and credit per quarter or semester. For a breakdown of the information received look at Tables 2 through 6. (Note that Tables 2 and 3 give all of the information; Tables 4 through 6 present titles, levels, and sections.)

Of the 28 courses offered, 22 (78.5%) were housed in English departments. Two courses (7.1%) were in business departments. Four courses (14.2%) were in communication departments.

### **Textbook Requirements**

The third question asked for the required textbook titles and the corresponding course numbers. Tables 7 and 8 present this information.

The most popular text was *How to Write for the World of Work* by Pearsall and Cunningham (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978); it was used in five courses. There was a four-way tie for second. These included *Technical English* by Pickett and Laster (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), *The Practical Craft* by Sparrow and Cunningham (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1978), *Technical Report Writing Today* by Pauley (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1979), and *Modern Technical Writing* by Sherman and Johnson (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1975). Each of these texts was used in three



courses. Five texts tied for third. These included *Basic Business Communication* by Lesikar (Homewood, Ill.: Irwin, 1979), *Occupational English* by Pickett and Laster (New York: Harper and Row, 1977), *Least You Should Know* by Glazier (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1979), *Elements of Style* by Strunk and White (New York: Macmillan, 1978), and *Technical Report Writing* by Souther (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1977). Each was used in two courses. The remaining 11 texts were used in 11 courses, or a text in each course.

### **Textbook Supplements**

Question number four asked for a listing of the supplementary textbook titles and the corresponding course numbers. Since Communications 151 and 152 are considered related only six courses (21.4%) required additional reading from other texts. One respondent (3.5%) wrote that the question was not applicable. Four respondents (14.2%) wrote “None,” while nine (32.1%) drew a line through it (apparently to indicate “None”). See Table 9.

### **Required Readings**

The fifth question asked for the required supplementary outside readings. Of the 20 colleges offering courses in technical writing, nine (45%) required readings. Another nine (45%) did not. Two respondents (10%) drew a line through it (apparently to indicate “None”). Eight (40%) of the respondents were affiliated with two-year public institutions. Of these eight, four required readings from business periodicals, books, journals, and handouts. Two (10%) of the respondents were affiliated with two-year private institutions. Of these two, one required readings of specific articles, advertisements, and newspapers. Six (30%) of the 20 were affiliated with four-year

public institutions. Of these six, three required readings from business periodicals, scientific publications, and journals in the students' majors. Four (20%) of the 20 were affiliated with four-year private institutions. Of these four, one required readings from a variety of sources.

### **Recommended Readings**

Question number six asked for the recommended supplementary outside readings. Respondents at five colleges (25%) recommended supplementary outside readings. Eight (40%) did not. Six (30%) left the question blank (apparently to indicate "None"). One (5%) wrote "Not applicable."

A respondent at one of the two-year public institutions recommended supplementary outside readings. These readings were to help each student with his/her research paper. Respondents at two of the two-year private institutions recommended supplementary readings of current periodicals and texts in business communications. Only two respondents affiliated with four-year public institutions recommended supplementary readings. These readings consisted of journal articles in the students' majors. None of the respondents affiliated with four-year private institutions recommended supplementary readings.

### **Summary**

The data gathered indicated that most of the colleges offered at least one course in technical writing. The data also indicated that technical writing was popular in two-year public institutions. Perhaps this is because of the two-year public college's curriculum, which is typically technological in nature. Since many of the programs offered are for the world of work, a course like technical writing is extremely beneficial. When it comes

to offering courses in technical writing, the two-year public college (and in certain cases the two-year private college) appears to be a step ahead of the four-year public and four-year private college in Kentucky.

### Notes

1. Paul V. Anderson, "Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1978, p. 176.

2. Sharon Dunwoody and Ellen Wartella, *A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses*, Document No. 163 477 (Washington, D.C.: Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC), August 1978), p. 3.

3. Dunwoody and Wartella, *A Survey of the Structure of Science Writing Courses*, pp. 18-19.

4. Anderson, "Career Opportunities for Teachers of Technical Writing: A Survey of Programs in Technical Communication," p. 191.

5. Richard M. Davis, "How Important is Technical Writing? A Survey of the Opinions of Successful Engineers," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communications*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 1978, pp. 207-216.

6. Jay R. Gould, "Evaluation of a Master's Program in Technical Communication—Results of a Questionnaire," *Journal of Technical Writing and Communications*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1977, pp. 55-73.

7. *Facts 1979-80* (Frankfort, Ky.: Kentucky Council on Higher Education, 1979), pp. 1-2.

8. *Yearbook of Higher Education—1980-81*, 11<sup>th</sup> ed. (Chicago, Ill.: Marquis Academic Media, 1979), pp. 195-205.

## **Appendix A: Institutions**

### **Two-Year Public**

Ashland Community College, Ashland, Ky.

Elizabethtown Community College, Elizabethtown, Ky.

Fort Knox Community College, Fort Knox, Ky.

Hazard Community College, Hazard, Ky.

Henderson Community College, Henderson, Ky.

Hopkinsville Community College, Hopkinsville, Ky.

Jefferson Community College, Louisville, Ky.

Lexington Technical Institute, Lexington, Ky.

Madisonville Community College, Madisonville, Ky.

Maysville Community College, Maysville, Ky.

Paducah Community College, Paducah, Ky.

Prestonsburg Community College, Prestonsburg, Ky.

Somerset Community College, Somerset, Ky.

Southeast Community College, Cumberland, Ky.

### **Two-Year Private**

Alice Lloyd College, Pippa Passes, Ky.

Lees Junior College, Jackson, Ky.

Lindsey Wilson College, Columbia, Ky.

Midway College, Midway, Ky.

Saint Catharine College, St. Catharine, Ky.

Sue Bennett College, London, Ky.

**Four-Year Public**

Eastern Kentucky University, Richmond, Ky.

Kentucky State University, Frankfort, Ky.

Morehead State University, Morehead, Ky.

Murray State University, Murray, Ky.

Northern Kentucky University, Highland Heights, Ky.

University of Louisville, Louisville, Ky.

Western Kentucky University, Bowling Green, Ky.

**Four-Year Private**

Asbury College, Wilmore, Ky.

Bellarmino College, Louisville, Ky.

Berea College, Berea, Ky.

Brescia College, Owensboro, Ky.

Campbellsville College, Campbellsville, Ky.

Centre College, Danville, Ky.

Cumberland College, Williamsburg, Ky.

Georgetown College, Georgetown, Ky.

Kentucky Christian College, Grayson, Ky.

Kentucky Wesleyan College, Owensboro, Ky.

Pikeville College, Pikeville, Ky.

Spalding College, Louisville, Ky.

Thomas More College, Ft. Mitchell, Ky.

Transylvania University, Lexington, Ky.

Union College, Barbourville, Ky.

### Appendix B: Questionnaire

For the purpose of this questionnaire, think of technical writing as writing that deals with subject matter in science, social science, engineering, technology, and business; in short, the writing that is done in the world of work.

RESPONDENT, please provide the requested demographic information.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

Current Courses Taught \_\_\_\_\_

1. How many different technical writing courses are offered? \_\_\_\_\_

2. Please list these technical writing courses by number, title, level, number of sections per quarter or semester, and credit per quarter or semester.

Course No.	Course Title	Course Level	Section (Q/S)	Credit
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

3. Please list the required textbook titles and the corresponding course numbers.

Textbook Titles	Course No.
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



4. Please list the supplementary textbook titles and the corresponding course numbers.

Textbook Titles

Course No.

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5. What are the required supplemental outside readings?

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6. What are the recommended supplemental outside readings?

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**Table 1****Distribution of Technical Writing Courses by College Classification**

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<b>College Classification</b>	<b>1 Course</b>	<b>2 Courses</b>	<b>3 Courses</b>	<b>%</b>
Two-Year Public	6	1	1	40
Four-Year Public	3	2	1	30
Two-Year Private	2	0	0	10
Four-Year Private	3	1	0	20
<b>Total</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>100</b>

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**Table 2****Technical Writing Courses Offered in Two-Year Public and Private Institutions**

<b>Course No.</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Section (Q/S)</b>	<b>Credit</b>
<b><u>Two-Year Public</u></b>				
Eng. 203	Writing for Business & Industry	Sophomore	4/Sem.	3
Eng. 103	Business English	Fresh./Soph.	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 203	Writing for Business & Industry	Sophomore	1/Sem.	3
Com. 151	Writing for Technical Students	Freshman	1/Sem.	3
Com. 152	Writing for Technical Students	Freshman	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 103	Writing for Business & Industry	Freshman	1-3/Sem.	3
Eng. 103	Writing for Industry & Business	Freshman	3/Sem.	3
Com. 151	Writing for Technical Students	Freshman	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 103	Writing for Industry & Business	Fresh./Soph.	2/Sem.	3
Com. 152	Writing for Technical Students	Freshman	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 203	Writing for Business & Industry	Sophomore	1/Sem.	3
<b><u>Two-Year Private</u></b>				
Mgmt. 210	Business Communications	Sophomore	1-2/Sem.	3
Bus. 218	Business Communications	Sophomore	1/Sem.	3

**Table 3****Technical Writing Courses Offered in Four-Year Public and Private Institutions**

<b>Course No.</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Level</b>	<b>Section (Q/S)</b>	<b>Credit</b>
<b><u>Four-Year Public</u></b>				
Eng. 225	Technical Writing for Industry	Sophomore	2/Sem.	3
Eng. 325	Technical Writing	Jr./Sr.	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 216	Technical Writing	Sophomore	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 300	Technical & Professional Writing	Junior	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 303	Technical Writing—Business Ad.	Junior	1-3/Sem.	3
Eng. 303	Technical Writing—Eng. Tech.	Junior	1-3/Sem.	3
Eng. 192	Technical Composition	Freshman	8-10/Sem.	3
Eng. 591	Technical Writing I	Sr./Grad.	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 592	Technical Writing II	Sr./Grad.	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 307	Technical Writing	Jr./Sr.	3/Sem.	3
<b><u>Four-Year Private</u></b>				
Eng. 102	Business & Technical Writing	Fresh./Soph.	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 3334	Technical Writing	Junior	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 3329	Advanced Bus.—Tech. Writing	Senior	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 281	Practical Communications	Fresh./Senior	1/Sem.	3
Eng. 231	Business Communications	Senior	1/Year	4

**Table 4**  
**Course Titles Used for Technical Writing**

Title of Course	No. of Courses so Titled
Advanced Business—Technical Writing	1
Business Communications	3
Business English	1
Business & Technical Writing	1
Practical Communications	1
Technical Composition	1
Technical and Professional Writing	1
Technical Writing	4
Technical Writing I	1
Technical Writing II	1
Technical Writing—Business Ad.	1
Technical Writing—Eng. Tech.	1
Technical Writing for Industry	1
Writing for Business & Industry	4
Writing for Industry & Business	2
Writing for Technical Students	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 5**  
**Course Levels of Technical Writing Courses**

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<b>Course Level (Freshman-Graduate)</b>	<b>No. of Courses</b>
Freshman	7
Sophomore	7
Junior	4
Senior	2
Freshman-Sophomore	3
Junior-Senior	2
Freshman-Senior	1
Senior-Graduate	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>28</b>

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**Table 6**  
**Number of Sections Per Quarter or Semester**

No. of Sections	Quarter	Semester	Year	No. of Courses
4		X		1
1		X		17
1-2		X		1
2		X		2
1-3		X		3
8-10		X		1
3		X		2
1			X	1
<b>Total 21-26</b>		<b>20-25</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>28</b>

**Table 7**  
**Textbooks Required for Technical Writing Courses in Two-Year Public  
and Private Institutions**

Title	Course No.
<b><u>Two-Year Public</u></b>	
<i>Basic Business Communications</i> by Lesikar	<u>Eng. 203*</u>
<i>Technical Writing</i> by Lannon	<u>Eng. 103</u>
<i>Business English for the Eighties</i> by Barry	<u>Eng. 203</u>
<i>Occupational English</i> by Pickett and Laster	Comms. 151 & 152
<i>Least You Should Know</i> by Glazier	<u>Comms. 151 &amp; 152</u>
<i>Business Writing &amp; Comm. Strategies</i> by Brown and Reid	<u>Eng. 103</u>
<i>Communication for Business &amp; the Professions</i> by Treece	<u>Eng. 103</u>
<i>Basic Business Communications</i> by Lesikar	<u>Eng. 103</u>
<i>Technical English</i> by Pickett and Laster	<u>Comms. 151 &amp; 152</u>
<i>How to Write for the World of Work</i> by Pearsall and Cunningham	Eng. 203
<i>The Practical Craft</i> by Sparrow and Cunningham	<u>Eng. 203</u>
<b><u>Two-Year Private</u></b>	
<i>Practical Correspondence for Colleges</i> by Perkins and Robertson	<u>Bus. 218</u>



**\*Notice that a line under the prefix and number indicate that this course/these courses is/are offered by a specific college or university. For instance, Eng. 203 has a line under it. This means that this course is the only course offered by this college.**

**Table 8**  
**Textbooks Required for Technical Writing Courses in Four-Year Public**  
**and Private Institutions**

Title	Course No.
<b><u>Four-Year Public</u></b>	
<i>The Stockwell Guide for Technical Writing</i> by Stockwell	Eng. 225
<i>Modern Technical Writing</i> by Sherman and Johnson	<u>Eng. 325*</u>
<i>Technical Report Writing Today</i> by Pauley	<u>Eng. 216</u>
<i>Technical Report Writing Today</i> by Pauley	<u>Eng. 300</u>
<i>Communication for Management and Business</i> by Sigband	Eng. 303
<i>Technical Writing</i> by Mills and Walter	<u>Eng. 303</u>
<i>How to Write for the World of Work</i> by Pearsall and Cunningham	Eng. 192, 591, & 592
<i>The Practical Craft</i> by Sparrow and Cunningham	Eng. 591 & 592
<i>Technical English</i> by Pickett and Laster	<u>Eng. 192</u>
<i>Designing Technical Reports</i> by Mathes and Stevenson	<u>Eng. 307</u>
<b><u>Four-Year Private</u></b>	
<i>How to Write for the World of Work</i> by Pearsall and Cunningham	<u>Eng. 102</u>
<i>Modern Technical Writing</i> by Sherman and Johnson	Eng. 3334 & 3329
<i>Technical Report Writing Today</i> by Pauley	Eng. 3329
<i>Elements of Style</i> by Strunk and White	Eng. 3334 & 3329
<i>Technical Report Writing</i> by Souther	<u>Eng. 3334 &amp; 3329</u>

No Textbook Required

Eng. 281

*Communicating in Business* by Bonner and Voyles

Eng. 231

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**\*Notice that a line under the prefix and number indicate that this course/these courses is/are offered by a specific college or university. For instance, Eng. 325 has a line under it. This means that this course and the one above it are offered by the same college or university.**

**Table 9**  
**Supplementary Textbooks Required for Technical Writing Courses**

Title	Course No.
<b><u>Two-Year Public</u></b>	
<i>Reporting Technical Information</i> by Houp and Pearsall	Eng. 203
<i>A Manual for Writers of Term Papers</i> by Turabian	Eng. 203
<i>Strategies for Business and Technical Writing</i> by Marty	Eng. 203
<i>The Elements of Technical Writing</i> by Alvarez	<u>Eng. 203*</u>
<i>The Gregg Reference Manual</i> by Sabin	<u>Eng. 103</u>
<i>Handbook for Technical Writing</i> by Brusaw and Alred	<u>Comms. 151 &amp; 152</u>
<b><u>Two-Year Private</u></b>	
<i>The Gregg Reference Manual</i> by Sabin	<u>Bus. 218</u>
<b><u>Four-Year Public</u></b>	
Various Texts	<u>Eng. 300</u>
<i>Handbook of Technical Writing</i> by Brusaw and Alred	<u>Eng. 307</u>

**\*Notice that a line under the prefix and number indicate that this course/these courses is/are offered by a specific college or university. For instance, Eng. 203 has a line under it. This means that this course and the three above it are offered by the same college or university.**