

Technical Communications Industry Survey 2006 Results Summary

Produced by TechWriter Placements & Services in association with the Australian Society of Technical Communication NSW and Australian Society of Technical Communication Victoria.



Introduction

This report summarizes the results of an online survey conducted over 2 months at the end of 2005. More detailed information is available from the ASTC and Techwriter web pages. The survey is an attempt to better understand the technical communication industry and asked employers for information about technical communication in their organizations and what they were looking for when hiring technical communicators.

Some key findings are that:

- the majority of respondents use Word as their authoring tool
- the main documents produced are user manuals and training materials.
- the key competencies necessary for success are skills in dealing with people and managing own performance.
- when hiring, employers place most emphasis on performance at an interview and consideration of past experience.

Details

A representative sample of employers was invited to participate in the survey and respondents from NSW and Victoria dominated with 50% from NSW and 37% from Victoria. Respondents were managers (37%), team leaders (11%) and technical communicators (7%). Main industries involved were IT 32%, Government 15%, and Financial Services 15%. The majority (55%) of respondents were from large organizations with greater than 500 employees. The majority (71%) had a dedicated in-house documentation team and 76% had hired a technical communicator in the last 2 years.

The main tool used by documentation teams is MS Word which is used by 82% of those surveyed, with 21% using only this tool. The next most frequently used tools were Framemaker (used by 27%) & Robohelp (32%).

The top 3 work items produced are user manuals (84%), training materials (67%) and online help (64%). The work produced varied according to the industry with the percentages as follows:

Industry	User manuals	Training materials	Online help	Policies and Procedures	Web content
Overall	84%	67%	64%	56%	56%
IT	96%	61%	87%	35%	65%
Government	82%	64%	46%	91%	55%
Financial Services	55%	55%	64%	46%	55%

The majority (76%) of respondents had hired a technical communicator during the last 24 months. The main means of assessing a person's suitability was the interview (92%), followed by consideration of a person's past experience (80%) and a review of work samples (64%).

The main item of additional information that managers would have liked was some indication of commitment to the profession.

The information related to qualifications is mixed. Many respondents (52%) indicated that team members had an undergraduate degree or better. However, when asked ideally what qualifications team members need, the responses indicated that experience and good writing ability were most sought after. Possession of an undergraduate degree was seen as an advantage rather than necessary for most roles. There was low awareness of the technical communication courses on offer especially in NSW where most respondents were unable to name a course.

Respondents were asked to rate the top competencies required to be successful in their organizations. A summary of the results is shown below:

Competency (selection)	Critical	Very Important	Important	Ranking
Collaboration with subject matter experts and coworkers	75%	25%	0	1
Write clearly for specific audiences	70%	28%	2%	2
Write edit and test documents	55%	42%	2%	3
Self-starter and work unsupervised	43%	45%	12%	4
Evaluate one's own work and the work of others	27%	53%	20%	5
Assess and learn to use new technology	17%	48%	32%	7
Project management	12%	23%	40%	13
Single sourcing	5%	22%	42%	14

Conclusion

Employers want someone who is good at technical communication and who is the right fit for their organization. The main way that they will assess this is via an interview, so how a candidate presents is critical. This suggests that a good strategy might be to demonstrate how the job seeker meets the top 5 competencies.

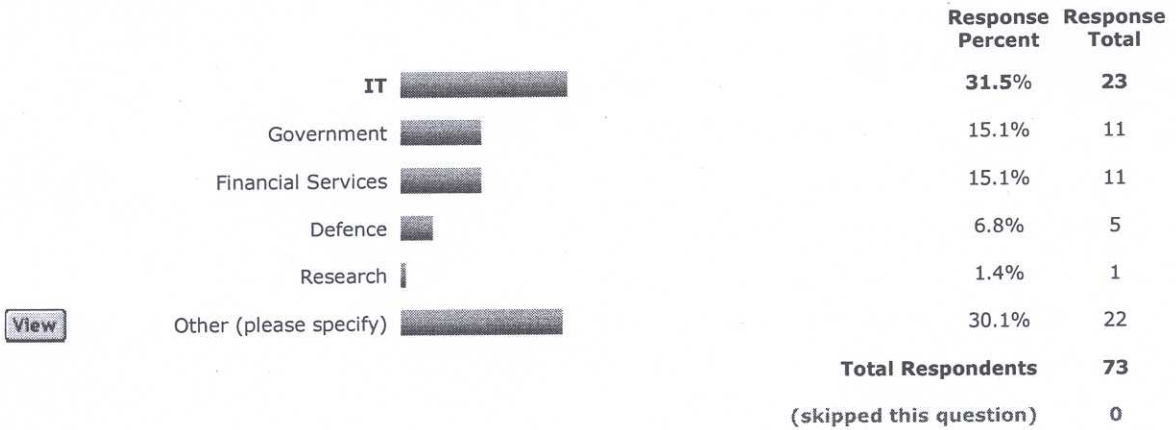
Other ways to enhance success are having a good range of relevant experiences and a detailed portfolio of work samples. It is a good idea to ensure that the resume is optimal for each job – this may mean preparing one tailored especially for a role. Remember the resume is the first piece of a technical communicator's work that the potential employer sees.

Technical Communications Industry Survey 2006 Statistical Analysis

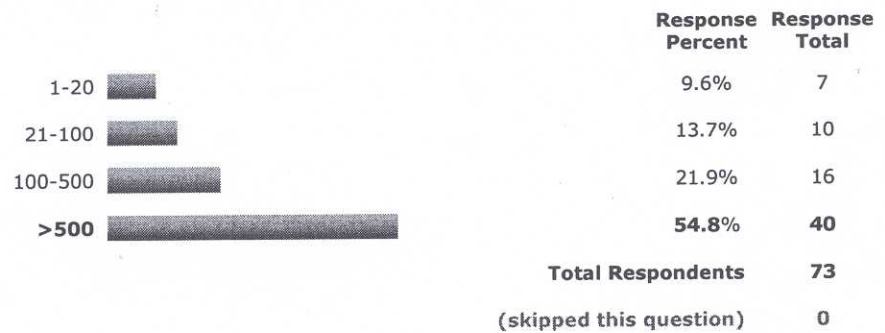
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About technical communication in your organisation

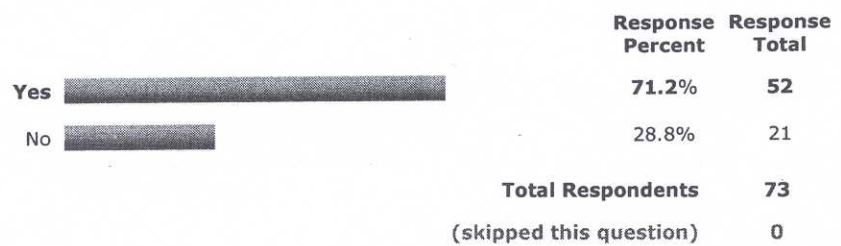
1. Which industry is your organisation in?



2. How many employees are there in your organisation?



3. Is there a dedicated in-house documentation team (i.e. more than one person)?



4. Which of the following do you or your team produce? (tick all that apply)

	Response Percent	Response Total
Business requirement documents	31.5%	23
IT specifications	26%	19
User manuals	83.6%	61
On-line help	64.4%	47
Training materials	67.1%	49
Web content	56.2%	41
Web design	31.5%	23
Marketing materials	28.8%	21
Tenders	17.8%	13
Policies and procedures	56.2%	41
View Other (please specify)	12.3%	9
Total Respondents		73
(skipped this question)		0

5. What authoring software do you use? (tick all that apply)

	Response Percent	Response Total
Word	82.2%	60
Framemaker	27.4%	20
Robohelp	31.5%	23
AuthorIT	6.8%	5
Pagemaker	9.6%	7
Dreamweaver	26%	19
View Other (please specify)	38.4%	28
Total Respondents		73
(skipped this question)		0

Staffing

6. Have you hired a permanent or contract Technical Communicator in the past 24 months?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Yes	75.7%	53
No	24.3%	17
Total Respondents		70
(skipped this question)		3

Hiring staff

7. Which method succeeded in finding this person?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Word of mouth or referral	40%	20
Agency	54%	27
Advertised for self	16%	8
View Other (please specify)	8%	4
Total Respondents		50
(skipped this question)		23

8. Which is your preferred method and why?

View Total Respondents	42
(skipped this question)	31

9. How did you assess their ability and suitability?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Interview	92%	46
Work samples	64%	32
Qualifications	42%	21
Past experience (i.e. previous employment)	80%	40
Recommendation	50%	25
Referees	46%	23
View Other (please specify)	6%	3
Total Respondents		50
(skipped this question)		23

10. How important to you are the following methods of assessing suitability?

	Critical	Very important	Important	Not important	Response Average
Interview	51% (25)	31% (15)	16% (8)	2% (1)	1.69
Work samples	21% (10)	53% (25)	21% (10)	4% (2)	2.09
Qualifications	7% (3)	18% (8)	55% (24)	20% (9)	2.89
Past experience (i.e. previous employment)	29% (14)	53% (26)	16% (8)	2% (1)	1.92
Recommendation	30% (14)	38% (18)	26% (12)	6% (3)	2.09
Referees	18% (8)	24% (11)	47% (21)	11% (5)	2.51
Total Respondents					50
(skipped this question)					23

11. What additional information (if any) would you have liked?

View Total Respondents	11
(skipped this question)	62

Qualifications

12. Tick the academic qualifications you and your technical communicators have.

	Response Percent	Response Total
None (learnt on job)	34.4%	22
Short courses	39.1%	25
Diploma	23.4%	15
Degree	59.4%	38
Post-graduate degree	29.7%	19
Graduate diploma	17.2%	11
Total Respondents		64
(skipped this question)		9

13. Are you aware of specific courses in technical communication? Which ones?

View Total Respondents	37
(skipped this question)	36

14. Ideally, what qualifications would a person working in your team need?

View Total Respondents	49
(skipped this question)	24







6. Competencies

15. How important are the following competencies for a technical communicator to be successful in your organisation?

	Critical	Very Important	Important	Not Important	Response Average
Collaboration with subject matter experts and coworkers	75% (45)	25% (15)	0% (0)	0% (0)	1.25
Write clearly for specific audiences	70% (42)	28% (17)	2% (1)	0% (0)	1.32
Assess and learn to use technologies	17% (10)	48% (29)	32% (19)	3% (2)	2.22
Self-starter and work unsupervised	43% (26)	45% (27)	12% (7)	0% (0)	1.68
Evaluate ones own work and the work of others	27% (16)	53% (32)	20% (12)	0% (0)	1.93
Using relevant technology	23% (14)	47% (28)	23% (14)	7% (4)	2.13
Write, edit and test documents	55% (33)	42% (25)	2% (1)	2% (1)	1.50
Usability testing	22% (13)	33% (20)	32% (19)	13% (8)	2.37
Single sourcing	5% (3)	22% (13)	42% (25)	32% (19)	3.00
Content management	12% (7)	35% (21)	33% (20)	20% (12)	2.62
Instructional design	13% (8)	35% (21)	33% (20)	18% (11)	2.57
Project management	12% (7)	23% (14)	40% (24)	25% (15)	2.78
Research, analysis and reporting	12% (7)	37% (22)	37% (22)	15% (9)	2.55
Presentation skills	13% (8)	42% (25)	35% (21)	10% (6)	2.42
Total Respondents					60
(skipped this question)					13

Demographic information







16. What is your role in your organisation?

	Response Percent	Response Total
Manager 	36.7%	22
Technical Communicator 	13.3%	8
Documentation Manager 	11.7%	7
HR Manager	0%	0
Project Manager 	3.3%	2
Team Leader 	16.7%	10
View Other (please specify) 	18.3%	11
Total Respondents	60	
(skipped this question)		13

17. To which job role or department do you report?

View Total Respondents	52
(skipped this question)	21

18. In what state is your organisation located?

	Response Percent	Response Total
ACT 	1.7%	1
New South Wales 	50%	30
Northern Territory	0%	0
Queensland 	6.7%	4
South Australia 	3.3%	2
Tasmania	0%	0
Victoria 	36.7%	22
Western Australia 	1.7%	1
Total Respondents	60	
(skipped this question)		13