

Memorandum

To: May Field

From: Kent M. Vensland, PMP

CC: Tien Pham; Julia E. Romberger, PhD

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Subject: Technical Writer Job Description, Core Competencies, Employment Outlook, and Typical Compensation.

The purpose of this memo is to present information about the job of a technical writer. This memo will inform the reader about the typical job description for a technical writer, the core competencies of a technical writer, the national demand for technical writers, and how much compensation a technical writer should expect to receive.

Technical Writer Job Description

Technical writers will typically work in an office environment and is usually a full time salaried employee (PayScale Human Capital, 2015). Technical writers must develop, research, or otherwise receive information from subject matter experts. Technical writers are expected to compose documents that take very complex and complicated information and translate that information into a non-technical language, graphics, or audio/visual format which will allow the end user to understand or complete a task with minimal difficulty (PayScale Human Capital, 2015). Technical writers typically work with deadlines which requires excellent time management and multitasking skills. The skills that are in the most demand for technical writers are experience or certifications in FrameMaker, XML, RoboHelp, Technical Writing, and Writing procedures and Documentation (PayScale Human Capital, 2015).

In summary, the technical writer should be able to organize data from many sources around one particular subject, evaluate the needs of the sponsor and the needs of the audience to produce the desired outcome, and then select the appropriate media to convey information to the audience in a convenient and comprehensible format (United States Department of Labor [USDOL], 2014). The resulting product should transform highly complex information into a form that can be more easily understood and synthesized by the audience for practical use.

Core Competencies

Technical writers or technical communicators are expected to be competent in a variety of areas. In summary, technical writers should be accomplished interpersonal oral and written communicators, be highly organized, and be excellent researchers. Specifically, technical writers are expected to have a bachelor's degree in journalism, English, or communications and to have a specialized knowledge and experience within the industry where they are to work or to have excellent written and verbal communications skills in addition to a bachelor's degree pertinent to the specific industry for which they will be performing their duties (USDOL, 2014). Additionally, some technical writers may have a certification from a professional organization to prove that they have achieved some level of expertise (USDOL, 2014). Some examples of the certifications that a technical writer might hold include either a foundation, a practitioner, or an

expert level professional certification from the Society of Technical Communication. Other certificates that are relevant to nearly all organizations and related to the technical writing process might include the Certified Performance Technologist credential from the International Society for Performance Improvement or the Scheduling Professional, the Professional in Business Analyst, the Certified Associate in Project Management, or perhaps the Project Management Professional credential from the Project Management Institute.

Employment Outlook

Technical writer, technical communicator and positions within related fields of expertise are expected to grow by fifteen percent between 2012 and 2022, which is faster than the national average of eleven percent (USDOL, 2014). There is a high degree of likelihood that a qualified applicant for a technical writer position will have numerous job opportunities.

After a quick web search I discovered 8,535 open positions within the technical writer category and 12, 920 open positions within the technical communicator category. Among the positions for technical writers I found a diverse array of career development paths. Some of the positions that a technical writer might hold or could be expected to eventually hold include jobs like instructional designer, technical publications manager, proposal writer, documentation manager, business analyst, project manager, and program manager. With such a demand for technical writers one can imagine that the applicant pool might be somewhat limited.

Compensation

According to the USDOL (2014) "The median pay for a technical writer is \$65,500 per year or \$31.49 per hour". However, according to PayScale Human Capital (2015) "The average salary for a technical writer is \$53,797 per year". Based upon experience, technical writers with zero to five years of experience should expect a median pay around \$47,000 while those with five to ten years of experience should expect a median pay of \$59,000 and those with ten or more years of experience can expect upwards from \$67,000 per year in compensation (PayScale Human Capital, 2015).

Contact Information

If you have any questions concerning the content of this memo, please contact me at kvens001@odu.edu or 757-563-3884.

References

- PayScale Human Capital. (2015). Research. *Technical Writer Salary (United States)*. Retrieved from http://www.payscale.com/research/US/Job=Technical_Writer/Salary
- United States Department of Labor. (2014, January). Occupational Outlook Handbook. *Technical Writers*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/Media-and-Communication/Technical-writers.htm>