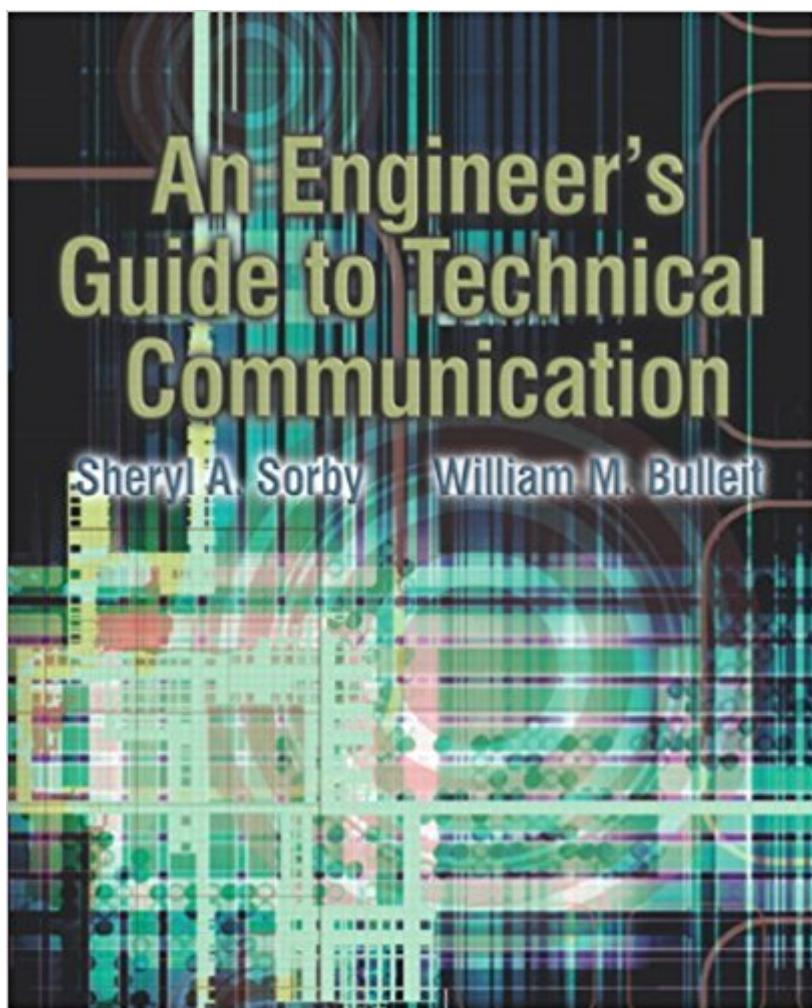


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# An Engineer's Guide To Technical Communication



## **Synopsis**

Written by engineers for engineers, this book is designed to provide a complete, practical, engineering-specific introduction to communicating effectively on the job. It helps readers develop the communication skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Real engineering documents are included in each chapter providing helpful guidelines to the preparation of documents. Features comprehensive coverage of the types of written and oral communications used by engineers. Features detailed coverage on the communication of calculations -- design calculation documentation, a critical part of design, experimental and other types of technical reports. A full chapter on visual communication provides detailed coverage of how to present data visually using graphs, charts, tables and drawings. A complete chapter on communication in job searches provides up-to-date coverage of print and electronic job search communication. Also features coverage of grammar and style. For engineers who want to sharpen their basic writing skills for on-the-job documents.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Written by engineers for engineers, this book is designed to provide a complete, practical, engineering-specific introduction to communicating effectively on the job. It helps readers develop the communication skills needed to be successful in the workplace. Real engineering documents are included in each chapter providing helpful guidelines to the preparation of documents. Features comprehensive coverage of the types of written and oral communications used by engineers.

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This is a well written book (I guess), I can't help but think that this is one of those subjects that the writer needs to provide a lot of examples of the topics and they do but that makes for a really boring at times read. This book did a great job at getting across the topics, but the topics are generally quite simple or follow common sense guidelines and so reading it can often feel like busy work. Overall:- Good book, but for those of us well versed in English and communications, this book will be quite boring.

A+

An Engineer's Guide is a technical communications textbook written by two engineering professors. In the introduction, they state that "the text was written by engineers, for engineers" (xi). Its target audience is engineering students who are just starting their undergraduate programs; the authors explain the format, purpose, and use of many documents that are considered common in professional engineering situations. Because these documents are also used in other math and science fields and these students often share the analytical mindset that engineering students have, this book would be ideal for all Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) undergraduate students. Textbook authors have to choose between breadth and depth. In this case, the authors choose to briefly cover the primary forms of communication that STEM careers require. One of my favorite things about this book is its title, which is also the book's focus: technical communication, not technical writing. One weakness of the documents produced by the scientists and engineers I have worked with is that they have difficulty communicating the ideas that seem so clear to them and so confusing to the rest of us. Because of those experiences, this book's focus on communication rather than writing seems particularly apropos. I love that this is its focus, almost as if the authors are trying to coax reluctant cave-dwellers out to interact with the other natives. It is not a book about writing, but a book about how engineers can prepare themselves to use the various

forms of communication that they will be required to use in their professional lives. The book is divided into ten sections: an introduction plus nine types of communication requirements. The first two chapters give an overview of how the writing process differs from the engineering design process. Chapter 2 also covers rudimentary audience analysis and gives basic information about grammar and style. Chapter 3 discusses ethical issues in technical communication, most of which are unique to STEM fields. Chapter 5 gives an overview of the basics of document design. It is interesting to note that this chapter is treated as a form of visual communication but is given its own chapter in the middle of the book; the other visual design content is presented in Chapter 9. This is the only large organizational oddity. Other than splitting the visual design segments, Chapters 4-10 are in a logical order; however, the authors state that these chapters can be presented in any order desired. I think it would be particularly interesting to structure an introductory course that presents these concepts in an order that would reinforce the curriculum of one of the early core classes in the undergraduate Engineering program. Each section is divided into documents and/or tools that are commonly used to fulfill the stated communication need. For each document, the information given includes function, form, and mechanics. These elements are followed by interesting, well-written exercises.

**Weaknesses** For any book, publishing costs constrain the author into making compromises. In this case, the authors chose to print without color, so that made the section on information architecture at once awkward and innovative. The authors obviously were concerned that the page count should be low enough to avoid intimidating learners, which had the added advantage of keeping the price down. Because of the page count constraint, the authors had to choose the content carefully; only the items that they considered vitally important were retained. This leads to some interesting glimpses into the minds of these engineers. For example, the section on proposals and reports is only 18 pages long - barely enough space to discuss the most general characteristics of each form. The section on RFPs doesn't even mention grant proposals. In contrast, there are 20 excellent pages devoted to a discussion of how to communicate calculations. I have never seen more than a few paragraphs at a time on this subject, yet it is something that would be crucial to the credibility of engineering design documents. In general, that is how I ended up viewing most of the things that I would consider flaws if I saw them in other kinds of technical writing textbooks. At first I thought they were weaknesses (and in fairness, maybe they were), but after looking closely at them I inevitably saw the logic in the treatment of these elements. Invariably, the choices the authors made were based on the viewpoint that engineers' primary responsibility is to design things and write about those designs. I think that's why grant proposals aren't included in the list of other kinds of proposals: grants aren't an intrinsic part of the design process. This is a very

interesting way to look at the world and may explain why STEM students have such a difficult time communicating with other kinds of technical writers. **Strengths** This book is written from an engineer's viewpoint. As such, it addresses communications issues that are unique to engineers and others who have similar mindsets. I have always been surrounded by scientists, mathematicians, and engineers, so I have been intrigued by this kind of analytical mind for several decades. In my current classes, my STEM students are the ones who both fascinate and confuse me. This book has helped me understand, for example, the engineering student who recently wrote a paper on the merits of video game music. To him, this music is digital, repeats in easily discernible units, and aurally illustrates a highly analytical game. The illustration on p. 187 looks very much like the chart he drew to diagram the sequence of events in his favorite video game. Almost every page has something that makes me smile because my mind would not have phrased it that way because I am not an engineer. I have discussed most of the book's content in previous sections of this memo, but I think an examination of the exercises is appropriate here. Like most textbooks, each chapter ends with a set of exercises to help the student synthesize what they read. These exercises are not unusually analytical for an introductory text, but they discuss the kinds of problems engineers and scientists are required to solve. For example, the chapter on visual communication has a question that requires the student to graph data about aircraft speed against power required and power available. The next question is about the best way to represent data about fluid dynamics. These questions are representative of the kinds of exercises found throughout the book. Even though several subjects are given only lip service, *An Engineer's Guide to Technical Communication* is a superb resource for engineering students. They won't learn how to write any type of document perfectly, but they will be able to identify the key characteristics, tools, and audience for most of the documents they will encounter in their professional lives. This textbook is an ideal choice for an introductory course in writing for engineering undergraduate students, as well as for math and science students.

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