How many words make a technical writer?

From technical writer to technical communicator, a new definition of the job?

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Technical writing has undergone drastic changes from its early beginnings to the advent of the Internet, adapting to all the technological innovations that punctuated the century since its conception. One of the most important changes being that technical writers do not spend as much time writing as was formerly expected of their profession. Instead, companies ask them to broaden their working scope from writing to taking care of whole documentation systems. Technical writers have gradually become technical communicators, mastering various skills - including but not limited to writing. However, the job title has not evolved as quickly as the profession: there seems to be a discrepancy between label and reality, which could be the explanation to a lack of recognition for technical communicators in Europe.

In light of this observation, we conducted a survey on 40 French technical communication experts and analyzed the existing literature on the topic. Our objective: find out why “technical writer” has become a catch-all term of technical communication. Our journey starts at the origins of technical writing, continues with an overview of the profession's representation in Europe and provides an analysis of the gaps between technical writers and technical communicators.

Keywords: technical communication, technical writing, technical writer, evolution, recognition, definition, job titles, France, skills
Introduction

Technical writing has evolved tremendously since its beginnings in the First World War. From a writing-only profession, it has turned into an activity that does not require much writing today. Of course, technical writers still do write, and some of them even write more than others. But with many opportunities of content reuse, the advent of digital learning and the countless existing output formats, the average day of a contemporary technical writer looks nothing like the one of their forefathers. Why? Simply because a modern tech writer does not spend that much time, well... writing.

Nowadays, most technical writers update and assemble pieces of existing content, illustrate, create mind-blowing plots to catch the audience's attention, and speak DITA, XML, HTML and other languages (don't believe it stops here, the list of their talents is actually much longer). Consequently, structure is taking more and more importance. To some extent, one can say that form is gradually taking over substance in terms of how much time technical writers spend writing vs organizing their content.

However, although many new job titles have popped out on the scene of technical communication – content strategist, information developer, instructional designer or UX writer, to name a few – "technical writer" remains the most common way to refer to the-one-in-charge-of-user-guides. As if the job title had never gotten the chance to acclimatize to its era. Of course, this status quo is just an illusion. Technical writing has undergone a silent revolution throughout its history. To the extent that we believe it is no longer a job but rather an expertise within the broad landscape of technical communication.

To understand the reason of this revolution, we have conducted a survey among 40 technical communication professionals who all graduated with a Master's degree in Conception de Documentation Multilingue et Multimedia (CDMM) at Université Paris Diderot. Questions focused on their academic training, their career and technical communication in general. The main idea was to cross-analyze data to highlight the discrepancies between job titles, actual job tasks and job recognition. In parallel to this survey, we have conducted a review of the existing literature about technical writing.

Before we discuss the results of our research, we will introduce in detail the methodology we used and, of course, we will present the raw collected data of our survey's questions and answers.
Methodology

It all started from a feeling: technical writing seems little known in France. Through discussions with people of various backgrounds - not limited to technical writers - and Internet searches, we confirmed our original belief: few people know what technical writing is, and even fewer know what technical writers do.

As students in technical communication, we have on many occasions tried to explain to friends and family what we studied at university and what our diploma was preparing us for. And on many occasions, we were asked: “So you make instructions leaflets, right?” Yes, sure we can make user guides. But this is just the tip of the iceberg. So how come this area of expertise, which offers so many career opportunities and a wide range of activities, suffers from such a lack of visibility? Is it because the profession is quite new, especially in France? Or because its definition is too vague and unrepresentative of the many activities it involves? What is the role of training studies in the recognition of the profession? We had several leads to explore.

To help us guide and fuel our reflection, we first requested an interview with an expert, Marc Swanson, who also happens to be our technical writing teacher at Paris Diderot, to ask him questions about our concerns. Marc Swanson is a senior technical writer at Capsule - a globally recognized company that provides connected solutions for biomedical devices - and has been working as a technical writer for more than 30 years. In light of his many years of experience, we were eager to share our thoughts and get his opinion on the evolution of technical writing, but also on technical communication training programs in France. His answers provided us with a new perspective that encouraged us to broaden our scope of research. We were then able to refine our question: if writing is not the main task of technical writers, why are they called so?

The existing literature then helped us trace more thoroughly the evolution of technical writing from its origins, in the United States, to the present day... and answer part of the question. However, we needed another essential input to thoroughly explore the answers to our question: our peers’ views. We had many questions to ask them indeed, knowing that their answers would give us a sense of whether we were on the right track or not.

In order to fill this gap, we conducted a survey among graduates of the Master’s degree in Conception de Documentation Multilingue et Multimedia, at Paris Diderot University. This sample allowed us to question experts with different levels of experience, working in different environments and holding different positions. The survey included a wide range of topics, as we needed to know about their academic trainings, their experiences, their job titles, and their views on technical
communication and its forthcoming evolutions. And last but not least, we wanted to know if they saw the same discrepancy as we did between their job titles and their daily tasks.

We eventually analyzed and crosschecked the survey’s raw data to try and identify trends. Although we are aware that this survey cannot be completely representative since it was conducted on 40 persons who all received the same training at the same university, the results of this analysis, detailed in the next chapter, were the final touch we needed to discuss our initial theory, that technical writing has become a skill more than a profession.
Results

We have conducted an online survey of 40 technical communicators who all graduated from Paris Diderot’s Master’s degree in *Conception de Documentation Multilingue et Multimédia* (CDMM). The participants were asked about their training experience, their current job activities and their thoughts about technical communication in general. All percentages are rounded to the nearest whole value.

**Participants on their job titles**

The first question of our survey concerned the participants’ current job title, to differentiate the ones who are labeled technical writers from other technical communication job titles.

Among the 40 participants, we listed a total of 21 different job titles (including senior technical writer), that can be grouped into these five categories:

- **Technical Writing**
- **Technical Communication**
- **Digital Learning**
- **Knowledge Management**
- **Others**

Out of the 40 participants, 21 (53%) are called technical writers (including senior technical writers).

29 participants (73%) believe that they do not know all the job titles of technical communication.

In order to know if technical writers write more than other technical communicators, we asked if writing is at the heart of their daily tasks.
Overall, 16 participants (40%) answered negatively to this question. Looking at the technical writers’ answers, 7 (33%) are negative, while 10 (53%) of the other technical communicators’ answers are positive.

After asking them about their job titles, we wanted to have our participants’ opinion on whether their job title reflects their activities. To the question “does your job title reflect your activities?”, 31 participants (77%) answered positively. If we look at the 21 technical writers’ answers only:

6 technical writers (29%) answered negatively.
Now that we have asked about job titles, we wanted to know whether they reflect the participants’ work activities. This is why we asked participants if they managed to explain their job easily to other people.

I can easily explain my job to my acquaintances

- **Totally agree**: Overall - 9, Technical Writers - 6, Technical Communicators - 3
- **Agree**: Overall - 16, Technical Writers - 7, Technical Communicators - 9
- **Disagree**: Overall - 14, Technical Writers - 9, Technical Communicators - 5
- **Totally disagree**: Overall - 1, Technical Writers - 1, Technical Communicators - 0

63% positive answers
37% negative answers
Participants on their Master’s Degree

We wanted to know whether the participants would have liked to learn more and specialize their training in a particular subject during their Master’s degree. 35 participants (88%) answered that they would have liked to study further certain subjects. We then asked these 35 participants what these subjects would be.

What subjects would you have liked to deepen during your Masters Degree? (multiple choice answer)

- Computer languages: 32.8%
- Digital learning: 18.8%
- Technical Writing: 14.1%
- Web design: 10.9%
- Softwares: 7.8%
- Knowledge Management: 6.2%
- Project Management: 4.7%
- Communication: 4.7%

Participants on technical communication

We interviewed Marc Swanson, senior technical writer at Capsule, and asked him about the next challenges of technical communication. According to him, technical communication has to cope with the growing presence of new technologies, leading companies to ask more and more documentation in an ever shorter period of time. Therefore, the challenge for technical communicators would be to learn faster to inform better. After this interview, we wanted to see if other professionals shared the same opinions. Thanks to our interview with Mr. Swanson, we thought of 4 different answers to define the next challenges of technical communication.
Two answers stand out from the others: 16 participants (40%) believe that the next challenge of technical communication is to become known and recognized. 16 participants (40%) believe that it is to adapt to new technologies.

We then asked the participants to share their thoughts about technical communication’s current position on job markets:

28 participants (70%) believe that technical communication jobs are not well valued on the job market.
Discussion

A brief definition of technical writing

A quick glance at Wikipedia gives you the overarching definition of technical writing as "any written form of writing or drafting technical communication used in a variety of technical and occupational fields, such as computer hardware and software, engineering, chemistry, aeronautics, robotics, finance, medical, consumer electronics, and biotechnology."

Although we know that browsing Wikipedia is not the most accurate way to retrieve reliable information, the online encyclopedia remains one of the most used mainstream sources of knowledge. And since our research brings the perception of technical writing by the general public together with the experienced vision of professionals, we thought it was interesting for this very reason.

Halfway between the two, we, as students in technical communication and tech writers in the making, could not help but notice one semantic paradox in the generally accepted definition of technical writing. In our dawning professional career, why is it that most of us are labeled "technical writers" when our daily activities do not revolve around writing? Or, to be more accurate, why are some of us, who spend days without writing a line, named "technical writers" the same way those who do write also are? Starting from this first observation, we wanted to go deeper into the subject and find out the reason of this discrepancy. Before we discuss the results of our research, a short retrospective on technical writing is helpful to fully understand how the profession evolved throughout the century.

At the roots of technical writing

From Antiquity to the Age of Enlightenment, technical writing has always existed as the medium between people who created a technology and the people who used that technology. Aristotle's "The Doctrines of Pythagoras", Geoffrey Chaucer's documentation on the Astrolabe (an instrument used to identify stars or planets and to determine local latitude) or Isaac Newton's compiled documents on his scientific discoveries are among the first pieces of technical writing history has left us as a legacy. However, technical writing has thrived as a discipline in its own right from the beginning of the 20th century. As nuclear technologies developed, as medical and aero-spatial innovations gained ground in daily life, the need to document these technologies grew quickly. Wars, especially World War II, unintentionally accelerated the recognition of the discipline.
After World War II, the United States helped to rebuild Western Europe through the Marshall Plan leading to a 30-year post-war boom in France known as Les Trente Glorieuses. The driving force of this phenomenon? Consumerism, partly fostered by technological breakthrough. Household appliances and electrical devices hence entered the lives of millions of people, triggering an increased need for technical writers to document these consumer goods and facilitate their use when in the hands of consumers.
In 1947, technical writing was deeply impacted by the invention of the transistor. This new technology, which allowed a cheaper production of computers, gradually made them affordable to the general public and shaped the computing landscape as we know it. Along with this new technology, the need for public documentation skyrocketed.

At this point in history, it is important to say that technical writing was still focused on writing, the content being completed by pictures or illustrations, made by professional artists.

One little revolution took place, however. With the broadening of the target audience, the tone and voice of manuals, which were neutral and distant so far, followed the lead of advertising during its golden age in the 1950’s. Brands took advantage of storytelling to get closer to their audience, and user guides thus became fully-fledged marketing tools, especially in the field of household appliances.

Of course, "raw" technical writing still existed - and still exists today, particularly in the medical or industrial fields - but the advent of storytelling within user manuals opened a brand new path to technical communication as opposed to hard technical writing in the way that it started taking into account a certain form of customer experience.
A frame for technical writers

When the growth of technology, particularly in the electronics, aeronautics, and space industries skyrocketed, technical writers saw a golden opportunity to promote their skills. But companies were not so eager to pay people to write what their engineers could write… for free. This was the first fight technical writers had to wage in order to gain recognition. In 1953, they organized themselves into the Society of Technical Writers (STW) and the Association of Technical Writers and Editors to set a frame for their profession and build a bigger influence and presence on the job market. The two organizations eventually joined forces and merged in 1957 to become the present Society for Technical Communication (STC) that is still, today, a referent organization for technical writers worldwide.

In the 1960s, several American authors (W. Earl Britton and Gordon H. Mills, to name but a few), strove to define technical writing, but also the scope of technical writing, as it was still confused with engineering writing, science writing or medical writing. The stake of this definition? To obtain an official professional status for technical writers. This goal would only be reached in 1980, when the U.S Department of Justice announced technical writing a legal and official profession.

The European exception

While American technical writers had to fight for the status of their profession, European technical writers inherited the framework built by their American fellow colleagues: the profession was already defined and recognized in big international companies. In other words, American technical writers paved the way for European technical writers. Unfortunately, this advantage also turned out to be a drawback. European technical writers, as they were already hired as such and known for their specific skills, did not feel the need to join forces to strengthen their status and gain full recognition on the job market.

This lack of organization and cohesion from European technical writers probably explains why technical writing in Europe has always lagged behind the United States in terms of development and recognition. While American tech writers could rely on the Society of Technical Communication (STC), which already gathered technical writers and other technical communicators, Europeans did not succeed in creating such a big community. Some European initiatives like the French Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques (Council of Technical Writers) or the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators in the United-Kingdom did emerge, but no real common goal for technical writing in their respective countries could be identified like it did in the United States with the STC.

Eventually, with the advent of the digital age and the rise of technical communication as a broader domain of activity including technical writing, European technical communicators started to feel the
effects of this lack of representation. Why? Simply because their work environment and scope of activities were completely transformed when they did not have a status for technical communicators, nor a solid representation for European technical writers.

European technical communicators eventually built their own large-scale organization in 2013, the European Association for Technical Communication, also known as tekom Europe. This organization was founded by representatives of the German association, tekom, and now gathers more than 9,000 professionals of technical communication worldwide.

**Tech writers today**

Nowadays, although technical documentation is required in every field - from construction to food processing and preservation - computer science remains one of the largest fields of application of technical writing since the first computer user manual was created in 1949 with the BINAC (Binary Automatic Computer, the first electronic computer ever intended for an end user).

Of course, computing has since undergone overwhelming changes. Hardware and software innovations, Internet and the World Wide Web revolutions in the 1990's have introduced the digital era in which we have stepped a few decades ago. And along with the potential applications of the Artificial Intelligence, it is safe to say that we have no idea what awaits us.

**New challenges**

At the core of technical writing, contents have changed dramatically over the century. As computing has gone more and more virtual, contents are now available in a multitude of formats. The volume of paper-based written content has proportionally lost ground in favor of conceptual and scripted contents, requiring parallel skills falling under the domains of technology (software, markup languages, programming) as well as creativity (design, script writing, teaching).

Along with the multitude of new output formats, modern technical writers also have to consider the life cycle of the contents and documents they work on. What should be done with these contents and documents once they have reached their audience? Should they be stored, reused, deleted? Project management has therefore become a collateral activity of technical writing, including translation, content reuse or single sourcing.
Writing VS communicating

In light of these evolutions, we can state that contemporary technical writers are no longer restricted to writing but contribute to the elaboration of a global editorial project, requiring an increasing number of skills and tools. In North America, technical writers have naturally become technical communicators, adjusting to the reality of the market. In this respect, the definition of technical communication by the STC seems perfectly in tune with the reality of the profession: "Technical communication is a broad field and includes any form of communication that exhibits one or more of the following characteristics:

- Communicating about technical or specialized topics, such as computer applications, medical procedures, or environmental regulations.
- Communicating by using technology, such as web pages, help files, or social media sites.
- Providing instructions about how to do something, regardless of how technical the task is or even if technology is used to create or distribute that communication."

In France, the title of technical writer has not evolved to that of technical communicator, as it did across the Atlantic. A quick search for "communication technique" on the French version of Wikipedia returns empty whereas "technical communication" on the English Wikipedia returns a lengthy article. This has no qualitative value but simply proves that technical communication is not as well-known in France as it is in North America.

The job is in the title

Let’s start with a little digression. You would probably say that you have a “doctor’s appointment” if you wanted to justify an absence at work. But would you browse the Yellow Pages for a “doctor” if you had toothache or needed foot surgery? No, you would be more likely to retrieve accurate results if you looked for a “dentist” or an “orthopedist”, wouldn’t you? Of course, since everybody needs a doctor sometimes - dentist, orthopedist or veterinarian - people know how to name them. Indeed, it is unlikely that anyone spends an entire life without visiting a doctor. But a technical writer?

As Albert Camus said, “Misnaming things adds to the evil of the world”. So the first question we asked in our survey was about job titles. Why? Because a job title is, in essence, what defines a profession. It is what gives credit, representation, stability, and visibility to the profession in the public eye. But most importantly, it is what allows professionals to determine what the profession is truly about, what skills it requires, and what working environment it covers.

So, do the 40 participants to our survey believe that their job title is accurate? Well, 31 of them think their job titles do reflect their daily activities. Therefore, technical communication seems to need these different job labels to cover the wide range of activities involved in technical communication. However, if we look closer at the responses, 21 of them are labeled as “technical writers”. How many words make a Technical Writer?
If we look back at technical writing’s evolution, it turns out that technical communication has slowly and naturally become the parent field of technical writing, as technical communication includes but is not limited to technical writing. In the United States, for example, this seems to be the rule on the current job market thanks to a strong community of technical communicators. In spite of that, French companies seem comfortable with sticking to “technical writer” as a generic job title, covering the broad spectrum of technical communication.

Do companies use this metonymy because they are used to hiring technical writers and never took time to address this issue? Or is it really that technical writers and other technical communicators share the same activities to the extent that it is useless to differentiate them? Our study points out that many French companies still use “technical writer” as a default title to refer to technical communicators in general, as nearly 30% of our surveyed “technical writers” believe that their job title does not reflect their daily activities.

This discrepancy reveals confusion as to what it means to be a technical writer today, and what differentiates them from other technical communicators.

What makes a technical writer then? Well, writing... obviously. But our study reveals that 33% of our surveyed “technical writers” do not consider writing to be their core activity. What is even more surprising is that 53% of other technical communicators do consider writing as being central to their job. It seems that companies do not manage to determine the most accurate naming for our technical communicators either.

This overview of job titles in the French technical communication landscape reveals several confusing points. Some professionals are labeled “technical writers” and do not write so much, while other technical communicators are not labeled technical writers but write extensively for their jobs. The lack of a clear naming convention on the technical communication job market makes it difficult for professionals to understand what technical writers and other technical communicators do and what their common features and differences are.

What is even more striking is that 73% of our participants admit that they do not know all the job titles that are related to technical communication. This is probably one of the main reasons why technical communicators have difficulty uniting under one organization: how can you possibly recognize someone as a professional peer if it seems they hold a totally different job than you do?
An unstable nomenclature

European technical communicators seem to be trapped in a catch-22. Since they did not manage to coordinate and set naming conventions to obtain an accurate representation on the job market, it is now hard for professionals to assess the activities that belong to a technical writer and those which make a technical communicator. Eventually, jobs relating to technical communication have become unstable because they are constantly shaped and transformed by the market. Companies, without official references to rely on when issuing a job offer, take on unilateral initiatives to name technical communicators with all sorts of job titles, defining themselves the skills they think are essential for a technical communicator to master.

Companies, obviously, took this opportunity to broaden the scope of technical communicators’ activities, asking for more and more skills, thus making the job more and more complex… and blurring its contours. Indeed, 38% of our participants find it hard to explain to friends and family what their jobs consists in. This blurry image could also be explained by the fact that, as shown previously, some of our participants themselves believe their job titles are not relevant.

The TecCOMFrame initiative

This gap between naming conventions and daily tasks has become a major problem to technical communication associations. In 2015, tekom Europe has launched the TecCOMFrame project, which aims at defining an international framework of skills for technical communication. The main objectives of this framework? Help higher education institutions develop new curricula and therefore increase the number of training programs in technical communication throughout Europe. Yet, other positive impacts are expected through this project: a new and thorough definition of technical communication would also mean a better comprehension of the job and all the skills it requires, not only for higher education, but also for students, engineers, employers and any other stakeholders. It looks like the technical communicators community is slowly growing aware that they must identify solid and official conventions to improve professionals’ understanding of technical communication and identify what skills make a technical writer and what skills make a technical communicator.

tekom Europe’s framework classifies all relevant skills needed in technical communication under 6 categories and 22 sub-subjects. Taking a closer look, we notice that “technical writing” is not referred to as the defining skill of a technical communicator. Writing is, however, one of the skills that compose the “content” category, under the sub-subject “content development”. Is this what technical writing has become: one of the many skills used by all technical communicators to develop content?

To check whether this idea is shared by our participants, we asked them what subjects they would have liked to study further during their master’s degree. Surprisingly, technical writing is one of them, ranking third behind computer languages and digital learning, showing that our surveyed sample
group seems to consider technical writing as a practical tool that can help them progress in their professional environment. This begs the question, is technical writing a simple component of technical communication?

**Technical writing, nucleus of technical communication**

Considering technical writing as a simple skill - among many others - required for technical communication, would be like denying the historical relationship that links them together. Technical communication would not exist if it were not for technical writing. As a matter of fact, technical writing is not just one skill. Technical writing is the core skill that any technical communicator should master, no matter what his or her job title is. Why? We believe there are two reasons for that.

First, because technical writing is what creates content. And content is the kernel of technical communication. Let’s illustrate this with a tasty allegory. See an egg? Shell, white, yolk. Now imagine all the wonderful things you can make with what is inside the shell. An omelet, a poached egg, a soufflé, mimosa eggs, mayonnaise, mousseline sauce, a floating island, to name but a few. So many different things yet one same ingredient. Eggs have this wonderful ability to transform, in capable hands, into the most amazing and tasty things. Eggs can change from one form to another simply by increasing the speed of the blender or the temperature of the hotplate. Content, like an egg, is the unavoidable ingredient of many recipes. The ingredient that makes a whole difference between success and failure.

Secondly, because technical writing is, beyond a simple skill, a necessary thought structure. Writing for technical purposes requires empathy. Technical communicators gather information, build an architecture, create the planning according to the product lifecycle, evaluate the user experience, follow rules, use controlled languages… and put themselves into the end-user’s shoes.

As Bernadette L. Cash pointed out in her research paper *Beyond Audience Analysis: Conceptualizing Empathy for Technical Communication*, “Having an empathetic regard for users fulfills a vital role in the work of technical communicators when they know how their audience thinks, feels, and acts while interfacing with a product or information”¹, adding that “a variety of situations positively show the obligation for technical communicators to understand the emotions and mental processes behind a user’s experience and interaction with information. Being able to adapt information necessitates the strategy of empathy because users will come from varying contexts, whether it be abilities, attitudes, or cultural backgrounds.”²

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¹ Bernadette L Cash., *Beyond Audience Analysis: Conceptualizing Empathy for Technical Communication*, page 3
² Ibid., page 15
In light of these observations, it seems crucial for European technical communication associations to gather together and set clear borders to the profession. A sharp map of technical communication jobs, an updated list of skills, and a solid network of associations throughout Europe will improve the representation and recognition of technical communication on the job market. What is at stake is to provide professionals with clear information on technical communication jobs, so they know what skills and job titles it suggests.

Tekom Europe’s project TecCOMFrame has already taken a step forward in this approach by listing all the relevant skills that make a technical communicator, which confirms tekom Europe as the most successful referent European community in the field of technical communication.

However, European technical communicators must take a step further to promote technical communication in their respective countries. And it seems that French technical communicators are eager to defend and promote their activity: 70% of our participants believe that technical communication jobs are not well valued on the French job market. On top of that, 40% of the surveyed persons believe that the biggest challenge of technical communication for the next few years is to become known and recognized: another 40% believe that this challenge would be to adapt to new technologies. These results seem to point out that a growing awareness for better representation is shared between our participants.

To conclude this discussion, a quote from expert technical writer Marc Swanson sums up the challenges that awaits all technical communicators: “More. Companies want more. More content, more technologies, more skills. In less time.” In light of this, it is urgent for technical communicators to find some rallying point to get better recognition.
Conclusion

As an epilogue to our article, we would say that our research started with the idea that technical communicators were very often labeled as “technical writers” even when their daily activities did not revolve around writing. We thought this metonymy did not reflect accurately the complexity of technical communicators’ work. We then explained why this title was perfectly legitimate back in the days when technical communicators were only writing and why this title is still perfectly legitimate for technical communicators who only write. Over the century, technical writing has thus evolved from being a work field of its own to being a core component of technical communication. Our study showed that job titles do not seem to follow an established nomenclature but seem to be very much company-dependent, which leads 23% of the surveyed technical communicators to consider that their job title is not accurate.

We showed that the probable reason to that is because companies and technical communicators themselves find it difficult to define the scope of technical communication and the skills it requires. When technical writing evolved into technical communication as it did in the United States, European technical communicators did not manage to gather and map the new jobs that came out of this new field.

Companies then took on two different solutions when hiring technical communicators: naming them technical writers, which is a safe and historic choice, or naming them with their own job titles. Consequently, the market is now filled with a cloud of numerous job titles, “technical writer” being the standard choice for many companies. As a collateral damage, this multitude of job titles spawns confusion among companies and individuals: some technical communicators are not technical writers, but do write, while others are technical writers, but do not write as much.

What about technical writing then? As our study went on, we realized that technical writing has slipped from being a professional field to a core component of technical communication. Nowadays, most technical communicators do master technical writing and use it more or less often as part of their work.

However, can we consider technical writing as a mere skill amongst others? Certainly not. Technical writing is the skill that makes a good technical communicator. Why? First because written content is at the source of a technical communicator - whether written by them for not. And secondly because technical writing involves structured empathic thinking, which allows technical communicators to adapt to their users, a must-have quality to master as a technical communicator. In other words,
writing may have become optional for some technical communicators, but working with technical
written content and knowing how to structure information remain unavoidable.

To ensure technical communicators are rightfully and precisely represented and recognized on the
job market when facing professionals that do not know much about technical communication, we
believe that technical communicators must gather like they did in the United States when American
technical writers created the Society for Technical Communicators (STC). In this respect, the success
of the European Association for Technical Communication – tekom Europe, created in 2013, proves
that there is a tremendous need and opportunities for technical communicators to organize and
obtain better recognition on the market.
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