

Technical Writing Workshop

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Meredith Angwin presented this workshop at Lebanon College several times in 2006 and 2007. This short document includes a partial list of workshop topics and the outline for one of the topics.

Workshop Topics

(Partial list)

Part A: The Document

- Business Purpose of the document

- Type of Document: How-To or Sales

- Separating types of information within the document

 - Conceptual information with concrete examples

 - Procedural information: writing clear procedures

 - Reference information

Part B: The Words

- Active voice

- Preparing for translation

Type of Document: How-To or Sales

There are two basic types of technical documentation. Your first job as a writer to determine the type of document you are writing.

- **How-To** documents teach how to do something: software manuals, recipes.
- **Sales** documents persuade the reader to believe something or take action: proposals, white papers, newsletter articles, reports.

The How-To Document

The center of the how-to document is the **task**.

How-to documents teach the readers about tasks they want to perform.

A task is not a menu or a screen shot. A task is something the user wants to do.

Using the Address Window No! This is not a task.

Finding an Address Yes! This is a task.

The Sales Document

The center of the sales document is the **benefits statement**.

The benefits statement describes how the item or result benefits the user.

Our computer program is the best and fastest fluid dynamics program on the market.

No! This is not a benefits statement. It is about your program, not about how the user will benefit.

Our fluid dynamics program predicts turbulent flow in a pipe containing liquids, gases or a mixture.

Yes! This is a benefits statement. It describes what the program can do for the user.

A report is also a sales document. While nothing is for sale, a report persuades the reader that its conclusions are valid.

Note: both **tasks** and **benefits statements** are user-centric. They refer to what the user wants to do, or the benefit the user will receive. Always remember the user.