

Application of Technical Communication to API Documentation

Eric Lewis

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A very important topic in the technical field is APIs. Almost all services provide APIs and many pieces of software do too. It is essential for any startup planning on providing a service to also provide an API. APIs allow services to be used by other services or software. Failing to provide an API can greatly damage the ability for a service to gain traction in the industry. Of course, a good API is nothing compared to a well documented API. The documentation is the only view a developer has for an API. As a result, an API without good documentation is useless to developers and a service without a useful API tends to be too.

This course looks into the application of technical writing skills to API documentation. Developers will be able to create effective documentation for APIs by applying this knowledge.

The following projects will be created in the course to practice technical writing skills:

- An Instruction Manual
- A Product Description
- A Feasibility Report
- A Proposal

The technical writing skills that you will learn is:

- Write according to your audience. Avoid using technical terms that your audience may not know. If needed, provide definitions, descriptions, and/or a glossary.
- Use effective sentence structure by avoiding passive voice and writing concisely. Use active voice by turning phrases like “Jim was kicked by Bill” to “Jim kicks Bill”. Avoid stacked modifying nouns to keep writing concise and clear.
- Use white space and margins properly.

- Use colors and fonts to:
 - Make your documentation visually appealing and easy to digest.
 - Emphasis sections of the documentation.

All these skills are essential in technical writing and can be applied in any technical field. Taking this class and learning these skills can not only prepare you for documenting APIs, but also for any form of communication needed in the technical field. This class is therefore useful for anyone in the field or planning to enter it.