

Collaborating with Tech Pubs: Top 10 List for SMEs

Technical publications teams are committed to providing complete, well-written, just-in-time documentation to internal and external customers. To achieve the high-quality form and function that technical documents provide, publications groups utilize a number of complex enterprise authoring tools. These authoring tools give writers the ability to create, track, and deliver world-class documentation to users in both print and electronic formats.

In your role as a Subject Matter Expert (SME), you are asked to contribute your product or technical expertise to your company's documentation effort. Because your expertise is essential to your company's success, this list provides the top ten things a SME needs to know when collaborating with your Technical Publications department.

1 Put Your Name and Date on Top of the Paper

You've heard every teacher since Kindergarten say this, and it remains the single, most important part of managing publication projects. Attachments and their respective email are quickly parted. Your name and date is essential to our ability to research, track, and manage the editing process. Want to be a hero? Left-click on the file, and then populate the *Properties* menu.

2 Remember Your Audience: Someone Not as Smart as You

You were tasked with writing or reviewing documentation because you are more experienced and knowledgeable than the intended audience. Err on the side of providing more explanation and detail than you – yourself – would need to complete the task. With that said, keep in mind your colleagues' basic skill set. There's no need to detail how to use a screwdriver or download an attachment.

3 Repeat Yourself

Ensure your document's title and file name are *exactly* the same. If the title of your document is *Adding a New User*, don't save the file as *New Add*. Employ the same consistency when you title your graphics, images, and figures. Remember: You might have seven or eight graphics or procedures; technical writers catalog and track hundreds of them.

4 Lose the Pronouns

Are you copying "it" or are you copying the *sys19.bat* file? Are you tightening "them" or are you tightening "the left and right thumb screw"? Before you submit your document, run a quick Find (Ctrl+F) for pronouns like *it*, *them*, *those*. Replace the pronoun with the proper noun to which it refers.

5 Don't Try to be Eloquent

The purpose of technical writing is to inform, not persuade. Focus on being thorough and complete, and don't waste time struggling to write eloquent prose. User manuals and service guides are designed for engineers and technicians. No one is reading for enjoyment. If you feel the need to express your limbic pentameter, update your Facebook page or personal blog.

6 Steal, I Mean, "Leverage" Existing Information

If it exists, and you think you can find it, don't hesitate to leverage graphics, text, photos or anything else you think of that can help to illustrate and illuminate the topic. Plagiarism is encouraged! Now is the time to include not just yours - but everyone's - best practice suggestions, tips-n-tricks, and troubleshooting insights.

7 Don't Embed Circles or Text in Your Graphics

Many publications are localized in other languages, so don't embed text on your image. Use Word's graphic toolbar to add a circle on top of the image. Graphics should give the reader a mall-map "You are here" point of reference. Screen shots and equipment pictures without a circle, arrow, or other clear reference point don't focus the reader on the illustration. If you're creating a new graphic component, we prefer .gif for screen shots, .jpg for photos, and .wmf for drawings.

8 Follow your Review Procedures

The purpose of a SME's technical review is to provide technical input and verify the accuracy of the technical content. Review the notes and comments provided by the technical writer; focus your feedback on resolving those issues or providing missing information. Unless you can clearly identify a dependent clause and articulate its punctuation rules, do not correct your writer's grammar, punctuation, or the document's formatting.

9 Be a Tidy Roommate

Be sure to notify your writers whenever you add or change a file. Discovering a missing file is upsetting; finding it is very time consuming.

10 Learn More

Technical publications uses Microsoft's Manual of Style for Technical Publications (v3) as a basis for its publication style guide. If you want to know more about Technical Publications styles and standards, check out our Intranet site.