

Technical Writer's Checklist

Mary Westervelt

- 1. Does your writing address the assignment? Did you keep in mind your audience and speak to the audience's needs and experience?** *Avoid writing to show how smart you are. Instead, write to help your reader understand what you yourself understand about the specific topic. What questions does your audience have? How can you answer them?*

- 2. Is your point clear? Make sure:**
 - The reader can easily discover the topic of each section and each paragraph.
 - You have included necessary information to support your point.
 - You have ELIMINATED information that is not relevant to your topic or to the point you want to make.
 - You have used clear wording and have avoided technical jargon that the reader won't understand.

- 3. Did you clearly cite any sources you used? Make sure:**
 - Information is paraphrased where appropriate.
 - Paraphrased information still has a clear citation in the text, including page number(s).
 - Information that is quoted is clearly introduced as a quote. Short quotations have quotation marks before and after the quotation. Longer quotations are set apart from the body of the text. All quotes have clear citations in the text.
 - At the end of the paper you have included a complete, correct List of References.
 - In citations, you have followed the appropriate guidelines (for example, APA or IEEE).

- 4. Did you effectively and correctly use grammatical forms to express yourself clearly? Make sure:**
 - Every sentence has a subject and a verb. All subjects and their verbs agree in number.

 - Every count noun has a determiner, or is plural. Determiners include articles (*a, an, the, some, any*); possessives (*his, her, its, our, their, my, your*); pointing words (*this, that, these, those*); numbers (*three, the first, the first three, etc.*). Some determiners can go with singular or plural nouns.

 - You used appropriate sentence connectors to make your writing logical and clear.

 - Your verb time is clear:

- past time is consistently expressed with past verb forms (e.g., to talk about specific processes or experiments you completed, or to cite specific research results).
 - general truths are consistently expressed with present verb forms
 - present perfect is used with actions or states that began in the past but continue to the present, especially with *since* or *for*, but NEVER with *ago*.
 - past perfect is ONLY used to talk about states or events that occurred BEFORE a clear time in the past. There is a CLEAR logical reason for mentioning the events together.
- If you used if/then structures, you used the correct form for
 - statements of general truth: *Erosion becomes a problem if the land is overgrazed*
 - statements of prediction: *If you allow sheep to overgraze this field, you will have problems with erosion.*
 - hypothetical statements contrary to fact: *If I had a million dollars, I would retire.*
 - statements about the past that are contrary to fact: *If I had known you were coming, I would have waited for you.*
 - If you used passive, you
 - made sure you were using a verb which could take an object:
 - *The engine is made of aluminum and steel.*
(*Make* can take an object. Compare this active sentence: *People make the engine out of aluminum.*)
 - *The engine consists of an aluminum body and steel cylinders.* NO PASSIVE POSSIBLE!
 - made sure you used passive for one of these reasons: 1) you wanted to emphasize the process or object, not the actor; 2) you didn't know the actor's identity; or 3) you needed passive to connect two sentences and keep the subject clear.

4. Is your document formatted according to instructions? *Probably your instructor or editor provided a style sheet. Be sure to use it!*