



# How Much Education Does a Tech Writer Need?

*by Bill Sullivan*

The question of how much education a technical writer needs presumes you can learn anything just by going to school. This is not exactly the case. The most important part of being a writer, technical or otherwise, has to come from within yourself.

Good technical writing begins with a desire to explain things, to help people do their jobs effectively and efficiently and without frustration. In fact, many tech writers recall with a smile how they became TCs by vowing that the frustration they encountered hooking up their VCRs, or some other device, should not befall other mortals.

Schools cannot teach you the desire to write as if it were bird cataloging or brain surgery. However, in addition to the desire to write, you need learned skills. Tech writing skills have increased mightily over the past decade or two and if you want to work in the field, it behooves you to keep your skills sharp and up-to-date.



How do you know what to learn? Probably the easiest way to get this week's answer is to check the help wanted ads in the newspapers to see what skills employers are looking for. If you currently have a job, be pro-active in keeping up-to-date with trends and current thinking in the hi-tech community. Consider the following:

- Join the STC. As an investment in your career, it's a bargain. Read the STC Journal of the Society for Technical Communication and Intercom to keep up with current thinking. Join special interest groups (SIGs). Attend chapter meetings and get involved in activities.
- Build a library. Books are a solid and comparatively inexpensive investment. See the reviews in each issue of the STC Journal.
- Subscribe to e-mail discussion groups. There are at least two general groups for TCs and several specialized ones.
- Use the web and look for the sites of authors, consultants and educators. They are often springboards to other sites where you can find tips, articles, and papers.
- Enroll in classes; go to seminars.

Technical writing is a complex and demanding field and successful TCs advance their education with each new job. Anyone currently looking for a job in technical writing should consider that it should not only provide a good income; it should also provide opportunities to learn. ■