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Sheryl Lindsell-Roberts

*Author of Business Writing
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**by Sheryl Lindsell-
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About the Author

I'm fortunate to have a job that would be my hobby if it weren't my profession. I love to write. Between freelance business writing assignments and business writing seminars, I've written 18 books for the professional and humor markets.

Beyond that, I wear a lot of hats, just as you do. I'm a wife and the mother of two wonderful sons — Marc, an award-winning California architect, and Eric, a dedicated Maryland chiropractor. I live with my husband, Jon, in *Parnassus*, the incredible home in Marlborough, Massachusetts (outside of Boston), that Marc designed. However, if home is where you hang your hat, my hat is a cap of the New York Yankees.

When my life gets more complicated than it needs to be, my warm-weather nirvana is my 30-foot sailboat, *Worth th' Wait*. Jon and I are on board every weekend that the temperature rises above 60° — if the seas aren't too treacherous. (We've also been out there when they were too treacherous, but not by choice.) I don't bring my suitcase stuffed with clothes because there isn't room to put too much; I've learned to minimize. All I need is sunscreen, a few pairs of shorts, some T-shirts, and a good book. Columbus wanted to prove that the world was round, and Captain Kirk wanted "to boldly go where no man has gone before" — Jon and I merely want to leave our obligations and our harried lives on shore.

Everyone needs a nirvana, even if it's a spot under a tree or the corner of a room.

When I'm not writing or sailing, I travel, paint (watercolors, not walls), garden, photograph nature, read, ski, eat strawberry cheesecake, and work out at the gym (after the cheesecake, I really need to). I try to live each day to the fullest!

Sheryl Lindsell-Roberts, M.A. and T.W.E.*

*Technical Writer Extraordinaire

Dedication

I dedicate this book to Jon — my truly wonderful and very patient husband. Everyone needs one special person who loves them for who they are and helps them to know that dreams do come true. To me, Jon is that special person. And our boat, *Worth th' Wait*, is the personification of our lives together. Jon is my anchor, and I'm the wind in his sails.

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I want to express my heartfelt thanks to my family (blood and extended) and to my dear friends. Without their love and support, I wouldn't be the person I am today — and I wouldn't be realizing my dreams.

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Introduction

Man is still the most extraordinary computer of all.

—John F. Kennedy, 35th U.S. President

All technical people are called upon to write technical documents at some point in their careers. Therefore, your career depends on your ability to write and present your information clearly and distinctly. So this book is for you if . . .

- ✓ You're an engineer, scientist, computer programmer, or information technology specialist.
- ✓ You're involved in any other technical field.
- ✓ You're a professional technical writer.
- ✓ You're a college student who will enter a technical field.
- ✓ You shake and grunt like an unbalanced clothes dryer when you're asked to write a technical document.

Not all companies enjoy the benefit of having a technical writer on staff, and technical people struggle through the rigors of writing these documents on their own. Although this book won't reveal the formula for turning lead into gold and it won't unlock the secret of perpetual motion, it will serve as your easy-to-understand guide through

the maze of writing technical documents — paper and electronic.

This book is also for professional technical writers. Professional technical writers come from all walks of life: teachers, musicians, journalists, scientists, and more. Technical writing services are sought in the United States, Europe, Asia, and Latin America. So whether you're a technical person who finds that technical writing is something you must do to advance your career or you're a professional technical writer looking to fine-tune your skills, you'll find this book to be invaluable to your professional growth and survival.

Skills, Not Frills

In Internet time, what's cutting edge today is history tomorrow. Therefore, this book isn't about software or applications. *This book is about strategy* — learning the skills you need to write energized technical documents that have the impact you want on your readers.

Even if technology didn't change so quickly, the most sophisticated software wouldn't generate a high-quality technical document; that's the responsibility of the writer. For example, if legendary writers such as Shakespeare, Chaucer, Poe, Twain, or Longfellow had computers, would they have been more successful? Of course not. They were all successful because they mastered the tools of their trade. *Technical Writing For*

Dummies will help you master the tools of your trade and develop the skills you need to excel.

Preview of Coming Attractions

In each of my *For Dummies* books, I use interesting opening quotes to begin the chapters. Therefore, each chapter starts with a technology quote by one of the sages through the ages. When you read them, you may shake your head, wrinkle your brow, and just wonder what they were thinking. Here's a sneak preview of the five parts of this book:

Part I: What It Takes to Write Technical Documentation

Learn about the red-hot market of technical writing and how masterful technical writing will enhance your career — whether you're a technical person who's called upon to write documents or you're a professional technical writer.

This part introduces the Technical Brief — a key element in writing dynamite technical documents. The Technical Brief gets you jump started. Just as you wouldn't take a cross-country car trip without a map, you shouldn't start a technical writing project without filling out a Technical Brief. Once you use it, you'll wonder how you ever did without it. It will help you to get to know your readers (the term I use for paper documents) and users (the term I use for electronic documents), identify the key issues, and understand the executional considerations.

Part II: The Write Stuff

Most technical documents are a collaborative effort — even if it's just two people (a technical writer and reviewer). This part walks you through the steps of preparing an ironclad production schedule, brainstorming, outlining, drafting, editing, rewriting, and testing.

Also, in order to write technical documents that are valuable to your readers, your documents must have a strong visual impact and an appropriate tone. Whether your documents are paper or electronic, visual impact is what grabs the readers' attention, and a befitting tone gets the message across clearly. Last but not least, you want your documents to be remembered for the “write” reasons. Proofread! Proofread! Proofread!

Part III: Types of Technical Documents

In this part, you find tips for whiz-bang user manuals, abstracts, spec sheets, evaluation forms and questionnaires, executive summaries, and presentations that leave your audiences clamoring for more.