

**The Elements**

**of Technical Writing**

***Reviewed by JENNIFER PARKS***

This issue features books on techni- cal writing and statements of work. The opinions expressed by reviewers are their own and do not necessarily repre- sent the views of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals.

Book review recommendations are wel- comed by book review editors Nancy Brome and Paul Giguere.

1. Correct Spelling, Punctuation, and Grammar
2. A Targeted Audience
3. Clear Organization
4. Interest.

These principles are easily overlooked in business writing. Blake and Bly urge us to remember that our audience is made up of humans, not just technical personnel.

Each chapter in this guide is broken out into sections that clearly outline the information that follows. The format is legible, succinct, and lends itself to easy reference. There are chapters regarding the use of equations and numerals, grammar and punctuation, and principles of communication, as well as a chapter regarding commonly misused words and phrases.

Chapters six through nine break away from the rules of the English language and get down to the specifics of writing proposals, technical articles and reports, letters and memos, and manuals.

Chapter six, “Proposals and Specifi- cations,” details the components necessary in a formal proposal. The authors set forth their ten principles of proposal writing, which revolve around the focal point of the client. They are:

* 1. Learn everything you can about your prospective client and the people who will evaluate your proposal.
1. Sell your ideas by fitting them into your client’s needs.
2. Don’t just solve the technical problems; empathize with the customer’s critical needs.
3. Recognize all critical factors that evalua-

tors will use in assessing the proposal.

**G**

11.

Make a list of where key resources are located if you do not have a proposal library.

Blake and Bly urge us to learn everything

ary Blake and Robert Bly, both

authorities in the field of busi-

ness and technical writing, have

we can about our clients and then tailor our pro- posals to their needs. For example, the follow- ing sentence does not tell the client what we can do for them:

*“ We have extensive experience in airlines operations and forecasting and evaluating traffic flows.”*

A better way to make the point is:

*“ Our extensive experience in airlines oper- ations and forecasting and evaluating traf- fic flows gives us insight in to the logistics of your business and will help you respond faster.”*

The second sentence focuses on what your company can do for the potential client and tells the reader how you will benefit them rather than simply stating your qualifications. The more tai- lored your proposal is to the reader, the more impact it will have.

Blake and Bly have written a useable, handy, and inexpensive style guide that is tai- lored to their audience: people who write for business. While the majority of style guides and writer’s reference books tend to be very dry, I found Blake and Bly’s book to be highly read- able. They have practiced what they preach— their writing is clear, and more importantly, interesting. *The Elements of Technical Writing* is written specifically for technical writers, but it is also a very valuable reference guide for other writers. This concise style guide is now an indis-

pensable part of my library.

provided a valuable tool in *The Elements of*

*Technical Writing*. As the cover states, this book is the essential guide to writing clear, concise proposals, reports, manuals, letters, memos, and other documents in every techni- cal field. Not only have Blake and Bly includ- ed all the necessary information concerning punctuation, grammar, and tone, they have organized the book in an easy- to-use, precise format.

The first chapter begins with the following quote and serves as a good introduction to the material in the first chapter.

*“Newspaper reporters and technical writ- ers are trained to reveal almost nothing about themselves in their writing. This makes them freaks in the world of writers, since almost all of the other ink-stained wretches in that world reveal a lot about themselves to the reader.”*

—Kurt Vonnegut, Jr. The first chapter, “Fundamentals of Effective Technical Writing,” identifies the ten principles that make technical writing good

technical writing. These principles include:

1. Technical Accuracy

1. Usefulness
2. Conciseness
3. Completeness
4. Clearness
5. Consistency

6.

Make sure your proposal addresses every element mentioned in the RFP.

Use appropriate graphics to highlight your ideas and make them easy to visual- ize.

Tailor each proposal to the needs of the specific client.

Anticipate and defuse objections.

Avoid hedging and subtlety in proposals.

7.

8.

9.

10.

**Proposal** Management

**61**

**THE ELEMENTS OF TECHNICAL WRITING**

**Gary Blake and Robert W. Bly**

**New York, NY: MacMillan General Reference: 1993.**

**165 pp. • $9.95**

**0-02-013085-6**



**How to Write a**

**Statement of Work**

***Reviewed by LISA M. MADDRY***

***PROPOSAL COORDINATOR, STRATEGIC OPERATIONS—BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANTECH SYSTEMS ENGINEERING CORPORATION***

stresses the importance of a clear and con- cise document, and how this affects future communications between the government agency and interested contractors. This is the basis for the entire book and is its strongest point. The importance of the SO W to the other parts of the solicitation or con- tract is also highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter Two discusses the SO W devel- opment planning and preparation phase. It emphasizes the need to visualize the entire project from beginning to end, ensuring that all aspects of work are covered within the SO W. This includes choosing the type of contract or SO W to be used, and distin- guishing between level-of-effort and comple- tion SO Ws, personal versus non-personal services, sole source SO Ws, and follow-on efforts and options. Cole details the prob- lems that will arise when the wrong choices are indicated in a SO W. These are the pri- mary building blocks for fully understanding and writing a successful SO W, and Cole provides exceptional information and detail to ensure that the reader understands them.

There is very little about this book that can be criticized. One of the few exceptions is Chapter Two, *Planning and Preparation*, which covers a great deal of information on the development of the SO W. More exam- ples on interrelating planning and prepara- tion, and the many aspects that fall under each of these categories would be helpful.

Overall, Cole gives very effective, solid, insightful, and abundant examples. In Chapter Three, for instance, he illustrates the process of writing a Performance Work Statement (PWS) using a fictitious Agency’s decision to contract out one of the functions of its Transportation Department. He provides a figure to show where this function fits into the overall department structure, and explains

each part of the PWS using this same exam-

ple to strengthen the reader’s understanding. This consistent use of examples is evident throughout the book. Cole completes the learning process by walking the reader through a sample SOW and showing how to correct it (Appendix A). He proves throughout that he is a consummate instructor, leaving no issue untouched or unexplained.

Peter S. Cole has more than 34 years of experience in acquisition and contract man- agement. After retiring from the Navy in 1979, he started developing textbooks and offering training programs to government and commercial clients. Based on his exten- sive experience, Cole has become a leader in consulting services. Cole has written 15 manuals and handbooks for government agencies, including the Department of Treasury, the Department of Interior, and the Central Intelligence Agency.

I recommend *How to Write a Statement of Work* very highly. Although SO Ws are not an easy topic to understand, this book discusses them in a manner both informative and, in its own way, very enjoyable. It should be required reading for anyone in the government contracting and procure- ment fields. Despite the steep price tag, its value far outweighs the publisher’s list price, and the book is much better than sim- ilar, more inexpensive examples. I have found *How to Write a Statement of Work* to be an invaluable resource. Its wealth of information provides contractors with a bet- ter understanding of the government’s SO W goals, and with the legal ramifications that affect both sides in government contracting.

This book will be an asset to anyone preparing SOWs for either government agen- cies or for commercial purposes. *How to Write a Statement of Work* presents SOWs clearly and concisely. I believe it will become

a valued, timeless resource for your Library.

**H**informative manual. It is divided

*ow to Write a Statement of*

*Work* is a very detailed and

into six chapters and one appendix, and

includes a Table of Contents detailed enough to warrant the absence of an index. The book’s target audience is government person- nel who write Statements of Work (SOW) for contracts or solicitations. *How to Write a Statement of Work* also applies to govern- ment contractors who must read, interpret, and respond to SOWs, and to contractors who write SOWs for commercial contracts. The target audience must be kept in mind, because *How to Write a Statement of Work* is definitely NOT appropriate for individuals outside of the government contracting and procurement fields. If not already experienced in writing or reading SOWs, the reader will be lost almost immediately.

Cole has written a very informative and concise manual, and kept his target audience in mind every step of the way. He indicates in the *Preface* that the emphasis of the book is to provide “practical, detailed guidance on writ- ing and preparing SOWs.” He accomplishes this and more. Cole also includes a short bib- liography of other sources in the *Preface,* and these sources provide further guidance in developing SOWs and Performance-Based Service Contracts (PBSCs).

The first two chapters of *How to Write a Statement of Work* are the most important.

Chapter One, an overview of the SO W,

**62**

**APMP**

Spring 2000

Proposal Management is the professional journal of the Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP), an organization dedicated to advancing the arts, sciences and technology of proposal management and promoting the professionalism of those so engaged. The material in this reprint is protected by copyright and may not be reproduced without the express written permission of APMP. Though all journal articles are peer reviewed, APMP cannot warrant the competencies of its contributing authors or the research, services and products they describe.

**HOW TO WRITE A STATEMENT OF WORK — FOURTH EDITION**

**Peter S. Cole, CPCM Vienna, VA: Management**

**Concepts Incorporated, 1999**

**241 pp.**

**$98.00 (Hardcover)**

**$68.00 (Softcover)**

**1-56726-081-0 (Hardcover)**

**1-56726-082-9 (Softcover)**