Anthony Mathai

PB&J Challenge - Thinking about Technical Writing

One of the challenges this video highlights about precision of language and communication is, in my eyes, the challange of human beings to communicate a set of directions with so many distinct steps like one is communicating with a robot on how to execute a set of steps. Along with precision, there must be accuracy as to not have an error, and organization matters a lot, because if one misplaces one of the steps, it screws up the entire "program." Another thing that matters is choice of words; writers must use the correct jargon because the interpretation of words is in the mind of the beholder.

For example, there is a difference between saying "Call me Anthony" and "Call me, Anthony" so it is clear the choice of words and punctuation can have a drastic role in how the audience interprets a message. Writers must maintain formality in their writing as well, as to remain professional in their communication and within the workplace. This Youtube video relates to the concept of technical writing because the accuracy is required just like one is programming a robot. Instructions must be written word for word, maintain formality, and be completely organized. In addition, technical writing is designed more to the workplace needs, so the common person will not be able to understand it as well. The technical descriptions are written with the audience as the people in a workforce. So, the formality in the writing, organization, and the complicated jargon are written for the people in the workplace, which is another important component of technical writing.

This video changes the way I view technical communication drastically because I once thought that certain steps were implied as the children thought in the video, and did not have to be written out word for word. However, one of the main facets of technical writing is that it maintains the precision and accuracy, everything is written out word for word formally and professionally, keeping in mind that the audience is the people in the workplace. For example, I did not know that before one takes the knife out of the peanut butter jar, the instructions had to say to get peanut butter on the knife first. This would make the person apply the peanut butter on the bread without having any peanut butter. So, every step matters in technical communication, no matter how implied it would be in real life.

Reply

Navdeep Badhan   2 months ago

RE: PB&J Challenge - Thinking about Technical Writing

The analogy of being specific in instructions as with coding or communicating with a robot is great because that is how it is. They only follow the directions we give to it, and they follow it to a tea. Also I appreciate your inclusion of the impact of punctuation. On top of being worried about the precision of our language, punctuation is another aspect of great importance that can prove to hinder communication. And yeah, like you say, every step matters in technical communication. This also brings me to a point where because PB&J requires a degree of common sense (no one would eat a physical jar), the PB&J does not fully reflect the gravity of miscommunication in more complex settings. Nonetheless, the example still reaffirms what we have to be careful with.

Benny Wen   2 months ago

RE: PB&J Challenge - Thinking about Technical Writing

I loved how you related this so amazingly back to a real life engineering example. Learning to write in a specified sequence is extremely crucial in this field, and in real life, as demonstrated in the video. I agree that in some cases we have to be precise like a robot. But do you think the takeaway from the video might be to understand and learn to put ourselves in other people's shoes when writing instructions or any form of technical writing, rather than trying to sound precise like a robot? Ultimately, I guess it depends on who the audience is. If we're attempting to communicate with someone in the same field and with the same educational background as us, I would assume that skipping over some basic stuff is acceptable.

Julia Golovina   2 months ago

RE: PB&J Challenge - Thinking about Technical Writing

Hi Anthony,

When you wrote, "did not have to be written out word for word", this reminded me of the preference for being consice when writing a lab report. Therefore, it can almost be said that technical writing is the opposite, even though it appears that they are very similar, if not nearly the same thing. This makes me wonder how to strike the balance between being clear and writing too much to the point that the work is impossible to get through. Then the concept of precision in itself is not prescise when it comes to technical writing. There are general guidelines, which is not consistent with the common idea of precision. Precise writing is often long and clunky, which is not what is associated with streamlined precision.