Professional Technical Writing Program - Personal Retrospective

PTW changed my understanding of technical communication from delivering accurate information to designing useful content around what people need to accomplish. I entered the program with experience in business analysis, writing web content, and front-end coding, but PTW helped me see those skills through a more user-centered lens. Some of my existing skills were expanded, others were substantially reframed, and I also discovered new approaches and tools that I expect to use throughout my technical communication career.

Scaffolds

Project Planning

Before PTW, my experience with project planning was at a higher, project-wide level, with a focus on project management concerns such as delivery dates, schedules, and other logistics. PTW expanded my understanding by shifting the focus from managing the overall project to planning the communication deliverable and understanding the people who will use it. I learned to incorporate user needs, audience analysis, problem statements, content formats, and tools into the planning process. This more focused approach will help me create technical communication that is purposeful and designed around what users need to accomplish rather than simply what needs to be delivered.

Resets

Audience Analysis

Before PTW, audience analysis was largely absent from my work. Projects focused on the features to be delivered and their technical requirements, with little analysis of why those features were needed or who they were intended to help. PTW reframed my understanding by showing me that audience analysis should be at the core of content, product, and business decisions. Understanding users, their goals, and the problems they need to solve can directly contribute to a product's success. Products and communications that miss their intended audience can also result in expensive mistakes and rework. This understanding will make me a more effective technical writer, while also expanding the skills I can bring to business analysis, product development, and other areas of my career.

Accessibility

Before PTW, I had worked in environments where website accessibility standards were sometimes overlooked or treated as an afterthought rather than a core requirement. PTW expanded my understanding of accessibility and, more importantly, convinced me that I should

not simply conform to that approach. Technical communicators have a responsibility to advocate for content that is accessible to all users. Going forward, I will consider accessibility throughout the content design process rather than as a final compliance check or a "nice to have." This approach also supports a broader principle that has become increasingly important to me: effective technical communication should empower users to accomplish their goals.

Localization, Globalization, and Internationalization

Before PTW, my understanding of localization, globalization, and internationalization focused primarily on translating content into different languages. PTW reframed my understanding by showing me that communicating with global audiences involves much more than translation. Effective global content must account for cultural differences, legal requirements, local conventions, and other factors that can change how people understand and use information. This broader perspective will help me create technical content with global audiences in mind from the beginning rather than treating localization as a final step in the publishing process.

Discoveries

Docs-as-Code and Markdown

Before PTW, I was aware of Markdown but had never used it, and Docs-as-Code was entirely new to me. The Docs-as-Code approach immediately made sense because I have always viewed coding as a creative process with many similarities to writing. I especially value Markdown because its simple, portable format allows content to move across different tools and platforms. Docs-as-Code showed me how writing can become more integrated with software development through shared tools, workflows, version control, and collaboration. I expect both Markdown and Docs-as-Code to be valuable skills in my technical writing career, particularly when working with software development teams.

Jobs to Be Done

Jobs to Be Done (JTBD) opened my eyes to a practical path for creating effective writing and documentation. By focusing on what users are trying to accomplish rather than simply what information to provide, JTBD gives technical writers a clear purpose for their content. I especially value it as a tool a writer can return to when a project becomes complicated or the direction is unclear: What is the user trying to do, and what information will help them do it? I expect JTBD to become a useful guide in my technical writing career because it keeps content decisions focused on helping users accomplish their goals.

Moving Forward

The PTW program has given me more than a collection of new writing examples, skills, and tools. It has changed how I think about the purpose of technical communication and strengthened the connection between my previous experience and my future career goals. My background in business analysis, web content, and technology gives me a strong foundation, while PTW has added a more deliberate focus on users and what they need to accomplish. Going forward, I want to bring these perspectives together to create technical content that is useful, accessible, and designed around real user needs.