Online First
2021

Communication Design Quarterly

Published by the Association for Computing Machinery
Special Interest Group for Design of Communication
ISSN: 2166-1642

Rhetorical Hedonism and Gray Genres

Jimmy Butts
Louisiana State University
jbutts@lsu.edu

Josephine Walwema
University of Washington
walwema@uw.edu

Published Online May 3, 2021
CDQ 10.1145/3453460.3453461
This article will be compiled into the quarterly publication and archived in the ACM Digital Library.

Communication Design Quarterly, Online First
https://sigdoc.acm.org/publication/

Rhetorical Hedonism and Gray Genres

Jimmy Butts
Louisiana State University
jbutts@lsu.edu

Josephine Walwema
University of Washington
walwema@uw.edu

ABSTRACT
As technical genres continue to grow and morph in promising new directions, we attempt an analysis of what are typically viewed as mundane genres. We use the term gray genres, which we find useful for interrogating texts that tend to fall in categories that tend toward a blandness that is invariably difficult to quantify. We use hedonism, along with a historical accounting for this value from its classical rhetorical lineage and run it up to contemporary applications. We posit that playful stylistic choices—while typically discouraged in more technical spaces—actually improves the rhetorical canon of delivery for informative documents. We close with case studies that offer close readings of a few attempts at employing hedonistic tactics within typical gray genres.

CCS Concepts
CCS → Human-centered computing → Interaction design → Interaction design process and methods → User centered design

Keywords
Style, pleasure, delivery, technical writing

Manuscript received January 6, 2020; revised December 16, 2020; accepted February 9, 2021. Date of publication May 3, 2021.

CDQ 10.1145/3453460.3453461

> "Who today would call himself a hedonist with a straight face?"
>
> —Roland Barthes (1975, p. 64)

A REINTRODUCTION TO HEDONISM
Rhetors can't always have fun, perhaps. Especially when we write, we face the pull of more immediate gratifications—like those afforded by alcohol or sex—whatever gets the dopamine flowing. Yet, utilitarian ends must often be met, and then fun must be set aside for some other purpose. Still, we assert here that certain genres of writing and rhetoric—forms that we will call *gray genres*—seem to have fallen into a trap that consistently forego fun, or play, in favor of other dogmatic values like clarity and precision. We say seem because much technical writing has not always been this way, despite a bad stereotyped reputation for tedium. Still, the stakes are high with fun. So, we want to talk about fun, or the lack thereof, in certain forms of rhetorical work, such as technical and professional writing in the main, but other forms as well. Our critical intervention is fairly simple. Fun remains radical.

Meanwhile, much scholarship perpetuates the view that technical writers ought to sound technical, which tends to mean something like dry and unvarnished, a "transmission view of communication" (Slack et al., 1993, p. 14). This prescriptive preference for a certain style often translates into a type of language that aims for some objectively approved and idealized standard form—a generally stodgy one at that. Still, we continue emphasizing certain conventions and what Britton (1965) called a "commitment to objectivity and accuracy" (p. 113). In this article, then, we want to propose a rhetorical hedonism, or "the view that pleasure is good" (Shaw, 2015, p. 1), placed within a wider interpretive frame.

Here, we present what we are imagining as *gray genres*. For our purposes, a gray genre is any form of communication that is typically merely matter of fact and uninspired, and intentionally presents a disinterested, stylistic dullness in its conveyance of information. We have found the term *gray genre* to be an exceedingly useful designator for talking about the kinds of communicative work that

are expressionless by nature, that exist merely to communicate the core facts. We distinguish gray genres from the designator "gray literature," which includes publishing usually by organizations to promote their own ends and would include forms such as the white paper. Gray literature itself can be gray and can be read as straitlaced and unwrought. We know now, however, that a gray genre—or any writing for that matter—is never wholly without style. Technical communication certainly has a host of exciting things happening in the field and in practice. The field has blossomed. Hedonism—or the practice of fun—becomes a lens for how we are thinking of bringing color into gray genres. But in certain places, dullness is the value, and it does have its own values and uses, but for our part at least we tend to want more. We want a little lagniappe in our writing, a little something extra, a little spice.

Because technical writing plays across different fields—engineering, medicine, business, education, and even our daily lives—the emphasis upon the technical nature of specific subjects often dictates prescriptive, unsmiling writing styles. In addition, technical writing is generally preoccupied with the conveyance of facts and objectivity (cf. Miller's 1979 discussion of the "windowpane" theory of language in relation to technical writing). So that providing the necessary details calls for a specialized vocabulary that may be read as a dull kind of drudgery. In this tenor, a customary view of technical writing tends to lose the hedonistic qualities that we so often enjoy, and, as a consequence, seems boring or dry—papers rustling like dead autumn leaves. And yet technical writing itself is not always ordinary. The field has made use of clever and exciting forms that exponentiate engagement with informative texts that are designed to communicate humorously or playfully.

Many engaging forms have cropped up in the field of technical writing. For instance, several interesting, and even hedonistic texts, such as the Kama Sutra, are early exemplars from a long history of technical documents oriented towards pleasure. Purified genres—many of which are found in technical writing—have often earned a colorful list of damning adjectives, like dull, drab, and dry. In considering the long history of rhetorical practices Kennedy (1999) says plainly, "Technical rhetoric (and grammar) is technical and thus often dry. In antiquity it had to be learned by rote by teenage students" (p. 125). We like to think that we have come a long way from the kind of technical rhetoric that Kennedy describes by recognizing its growth in wildly new directions as our media have evolved. Still, while the field is forward leaning, in practice a slew of manuals every year are often stuck in their own dusty antiquities.

In practicing technical writing and teaching its forms and conventions, we've found value in playfully exploring both sides of this avenue of thought and practice. We believe that there are ways of embracing hedonism in both places: the workplace and the college classroom. Here, then, we advocate different kinds of hedonism being built into the practice of writing, with some special attention paid to technical forms and other areas that we have come to call gray genres—those colorless, lifeless genres that tend toward blandness.

We situate our thesis in the canons of delivery and style and how play facilitates knowledge delivery in areas we are calling gray genres, commonly found in technical communication. In this article, we conceive of delivery in terms of its definition as an original canon of rhetoric, which involves how rhetors present their material. Style, another part of rhetoric's original canon, works together with delivery to enact real engagement. If we invest in certain delivery elements, argues Welch (1987), we would embrace its "empathetic and participatory" (p. 24) nature. We agree with Welch that delivery frees up the writer to use language in dialectic with the reader to achieve reality. Seen this way, the rhetor as agent of delivery has narrative power, is dynamic, offers the kind of immediacy that elicits responsiveness and, perhaps, renders the content persuasive. Among the scholars who have advocated for the resurgence of delivery in technical writing, Rude (2004) has pointed out its effects in document design, noting that "delivery is essential to persuasion" (p. 274), given its performativity, immediacy, and urgency of content. It is safe to conclude that it is not always enough to write with clarity and brevity when the end goal is circulation. It is, in fact, because facts do not always speak for themselves, technical writing has to embrace increasing novelty in usability to assure that technical documents enable users to engage with the material. Placing a premium on usability, however, means that use is more important, or as Rude puts it that "the formal qualities of the genres are less an end in themselves than a means" (2004, p. 284). Usability can only go so far in its appeal to reason and its aura of acceptability. In other words, a spoonful of sugar can help the medicine go down.

We argue that hedonism aids delivery by offering a kind of dynamic engagement through which listeners can connect. Thus, in enacting hedonism, technical writers can create instructions with a more human touch and add life to complex informational texts. We analyze several examples of gray genres whose success depends upon their own hedonistic delivery, which goes a long way in increasing engagement from the audience.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION, GRAYNESS, AND STYLISTIC PLAY

Technical communication, where gray genres can persist, still employs carefully crafted rhetorical moves, or *techne* with little reference to humor as a technique in accentuating reader engagement. Task-based writing follows familiar patterns. When humor is invoked to break this familiar pattern, it offers comic relief and captures the readers' imagination (Yu, 2015, p. 45). This strategy is especially pertinent where readers' familiarity with the subject is tenuous. For example, Hurley (1996) cites research that noted humor found in college brochures on AIDS, bringing a light touch to a heavy subject. In such cases, humor closes the gap and promotes a participatory engagement (as seen in instructions that employ originality).

The traces of these values can be found scattered through the annals of technical communication. For example, in an article from the days of early personal computer manuals called "In Defiance of Humorless Manuals," Elizabeth Weal (1986) concludes, "Finally comes the most convincing argument of all for humor: it makes learning more tolerable. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that a manual with personality, even if it's a personality you're not fond of, will be a better teacher than a manual with no personality at all." (p. 184). For his part, Lynch (2002) established humor as a communication act because it functions on various levels. Lynch cautions that communicating with humor is dependent on the audience's ability to shift from a "reality frame" to a "play frame" (p. 431). To illustrate this point, Malone (2019) shows how the US Navy designed humor-driven training manuals, in which a misfit pilot named Dilbert became a recurring motif, against which the caution "don't be a Dilbert" was reinforced (p. 217). Appreciating

this reference of course depended on the audience's ability to make connections from play to reality (see also Malone, 2008). Similarly, Cohen (1992) sees in humor the ability to humanize a text. Doing so, he offers, can add a "light touch" (p. 469) to otherwise dour subjects.

Why is the dour so ingrained? One might consider Markel's seminal textbook *Technical Communication* (2012), which lists the following qualities of good technical writing that have become overbearingly dogmatic to the practice.

> Honesty
>
> Clarity
>
> Accuracy
>
> Comprehensiveness
>
> Accessibility
>
> Conciseness
>
> Professional Appearance
>
> Correctness (p. xix)

Note that play, cleverness, fun, and even style are missing from this little list, despite the fact that they are valuable to the audiences of gray genres such as cell phone manuals and, lately, social media based risk communication (Vraga et al., 2019). Humor adds an emotional appeal when combining levity with concrete examples to convey information (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Because Markel's list is itself gray, however, it suggests the kind of values that (re) produce gray texts. Despite this, the field of technical writing has drawn a lot from the playful lineage of rhetorical thought to inform its theory and practice.

MOVING TOWARD HEDONISM: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

So, what is hedonism, really, and why should we embrace it?

Hedonism comes from *hēdonē* (ἡδονή), pleasure, and was, for some groups of ancient Greeks, simply a valuing of pleasure as the highest good, above all else. It is, in that sense, an ethical stance. Aristotle (367–322/2007a) himself explores pleasure in *On Rhetoric* explaining that "ease and freedom from toil and carefreeness and games and recreations and sleep belong among pleasures; for none of these is a matter of necessity" (p. 88). Aristotle (350–340/2007b) explores different qualities of pleasure in Book X of *The Nicomachean Ethics*. There he warns against too much pleasure, but still values it as a good that gives us *eudaimonia*, or happiness. Along with Aristotle, however, Epicurus, who later came to be known for the Epicurean worldview, valued a moral hedonism that sought a kind of virtue in the mental pleasure of prudence to be found in the future from right action (Annas, 1993, p. 237). We understand that for Aristotle *pathos* is a *technoi pisteis*, an artistic proof. However, Aristotle (367–322/2007a) also has *atechnoi pisteis*, inartistic proofs, not provided by the speaker.

In *The Republic*, Plato suggested that instruction, particularly in writing, should intrinsically be made fun. He enjoins us, "Do not use compulsion, but let early education be a sort of amusement" (2004, p. 126). He also comments on the problem of rhetorical pleasures. In *The Gorgias*, we know that Plato discounted rhetoric's status as a *techne* and compared it to the pleasures of cookery, as opposed to the utility of medicine (2003, pp. 32–33). Nevertheless, here we are seeking to conflate pleasure and use, and see them working together.

Beyond the Greeks, utilitarians John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham (1987) later picked up pleasure and its uses. Bentham famously writes "Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, pain and pleasure. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do" (p. 1). Ulmer (2012) also speaks to working along a pleasure-pain axis in composition—even in the composition of a good life (p. 41). There is something Freudian about our seeking pleasure.

The thinking of pleasure can go deeper. Having mentioned Freud, we can wonder at the desire for pleasure being primarily psychologically motivated. Why must anything be fun, after all? Roland Barthes too expresses a longing for pleasure. *Plaisir* is the term he uses. In *The Pleasure of the Text*, Barthes (1973/1975) announces, "No sooner has a word been said, somewhere, about the pleasure of the text, than two policemen are ready to jump on you" and "An old, a very old tradition: hedonism has been repressed by nearly every philosophy; we find it defended only by marginal figures" (p. 57). As such, the police here are the finicky (and boorish) technical writers who continue to long for merely transparent language, who long for clarity and accuracy alone. Thankfully, it's hard to find a truly stilted curmudgeon of language today, largely because technical writing has grown and flourished in a number of different ways, yet we have our history, and some of these related tensions remain.

In these tensions, we still face a conflict that reverberates out into the disciplines of writing from expressivist pedagogies to more traditional ones. We do not suggest here that expressivist writing pedagogies are the only way to have fun, but there does certainly seem to be a tendency towards play there. Geoffrey Sirc (2002), that wonderfully roiling radical expressivist, pushes the tension further, saying "there will always remain this simple opposition: online chats as glitzy funhouse in the arid Mojave of university writing. As such, then, it resembles nothing so much as Las Vegas. And Venturi reminds us that there's another name for scenes like Las Vegas, oases of fun and enjoyment in the midst of a harsh climate: *pleasure zones*" (p. 223). Critiquing our disciplinary shift over time, Sirc adds—with a quick nod to some lyrics by The Stooges—that our discipline "means *no fun*" (2002, p. 250). How do we respond? What, then, would an expressivist pedagogy look like in a technical writing course? Is there room for fun in a rigorous writing pedagogy? Of course. We believe that there are potentialities in each of these options.

After considering the influences of pleasure, we can begin to see certain unchecked values within technical writing—such as clarity, comprehension, and simplicity. Those assumed values are challenged here as both skills, *techne*, and limitations, *atechne*—a term modified from Aristotle and brought into contemporary thought by Victor Vitanza (2003), among others. Meanwhile, John Poulakos (1983) suggests in "Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric" that the pre-Platonics believed rhetorical *techne* rightly aimed for a kind of aesthetic pleasure, or *terpsis* (p. 36).

Richard Lanham (1976) also outlines a rhetorical binary in *homo rhetoricus* and *homo seriosus*. In this delineation, Lanham explores the pleasure—oh, let us say *jouissance*!—of practicing rhetoric. Lanham works in commentary from Werner Jaeger who suggests,

"There are two contrasting types of life, two *bioi, […] the rhetorical ideal of life*. Its purpose is to create pleasure [...] The other, its opponent, is the philosophical life [...] so it is a real techne" (as cited in Lanham, 1976, p. 3). Lanham also suggests that "we play for pleasure, too. Such a scheme is galvanized by the Gorgian prime mover, *ἡδονή*, pleasure. Purposeful striving is invigorated by frequent dips back into the pleasurable resources of pure play" (p. 5). For our own purposes, hedonism is a kind resistance to rigid correctness. Rather than confine writing—particularly technical genres—to mere utilitarian needs, hedonism confers value in attending to a human need beyond mere use. Still, the obligation of necessity remains, so we end up doing unpleasurable tasks—in this case written work—for their utility, especially in the domain of technical and professional writing. The work of writing, however, need (or can) not be done without affect. Samuel Johnson once wrote, "What is written without effort is in general read without pleasure" (as cited in Sontag, 2001, p. 263). Given that what is written without pleasure is often read without effort or care, we argue that we can reverse this perception of drudgery in technical writing by adding something in.

T. R. Johnson's book *A Rhetoric of Pleasure* (2003) is a thorough and thoughtful enjoiner for us to incorporate pleasure into the teaching of writing; it is an invaluable guide into "how students *take pleasure in learning to write*" (p. viii). Meanwhile, Worsham (1999) does take the step to counter Johnson's positive perspective on pleasure, which remains a through line in much of his work. Worsham argues that we must at times do unpleasurable work and write careful, disciplined writing, while assuring us, "Make no mistake, I am not against pleasure (who could possibly be against pleasure?)" (p. 717). She offers, nevertheless, a more stringent alternative to a perspective that values pleasure as a primary value.

RETHINKING VALUES

We still offer that valuing fun alongside, and sometimes counter to, the monotonous values of clarity, accuracy, and precision above all else may allow technical writing to become pleasurable. We do not want our readers to be dismissive of the important thought that is conveyed in technical communication as being drab. Further, as Britton (1965) encourages us, "The fact that scientific writing is designed to convey precisely and economically a single meaning does not require that its style be flat and drab. Even objectivity can be made attractive" (p. 115). We heartily agree that this has always been the case, even if it is sometimes deferred. This drab, flat thinking, we argue, often ends up creating what we call *gray genres*. A gray genre is simply a kind of medium that exists for mere factual transference, lacking in *pathos* or cleverness, colorless as it were—the black and white writings of our most banal everyday functions. Gray genres include—but are not limited to—certain kinds of technical writing such as vacuum cleaner instruction manuals, workplace writing such as performance reviews, some kinds of academic writing such as those dreadful five-paragraph essays against abortion, and other kinds of writing from the everyday such as grocery lists.

But any gray genre may be made colorful through a bit of rhetorical intervention. One can imagine a jokester in a moment of impish play, adding something ridiculous to a grocery list.

Milk

Bread

Butter

Polka Dot Underpants

The moment a gray genre is fiddled with, it can become colorful. Of course, objections exist where playful interruptions too strongly distort clear communication. But if clarity as an essentialized value can be interrogated, any space then, any rhetorical site, becomes a space for potential hedonistic intervention. As such, hedonistic moves might inevitably find corollaries in the moves associated with rhetorical invention. The technical writer's art begins with invention. Because invention brings forth novel discourse and substance, it is here that the writer can discover ideas and determine what will work in various possible situations. Here, then, the writer can produce sentences and words that will make an appropriately favorable impression on readers. We believe this: structural play lies at the heart of finding satisfying moments in compositional texts. From this perspective, many writers working in gray genres—who may feel the obligation of generating serious and lifeless content—can find avenues of pleasure. We take ourselves too seriously. We have fallen prey to the trappings of *homo seriosus*, as Lanham warned about (1976, p. 6).

Meanwhile, true advances have arisen in the field studying technical writing, as well as in practice. For example, while we know of interesting instances such as idiosyncratically unique IKEA manuals, there are numerous specimens that are both technological and ludological. These include the Vauxhall Motors maintenance handbook for British military technicians from World War II, *For B.F.s*, or For Bloody Fools. More recently, various examples have proliferated, from a funny British public service announcement about CPR staring tough guy Vinnie Jones to the now famous Australian Metro Trains PSA about being careful near public transit known as *Dumb Ways to Die*. Still, almost no user's manual in your local hardware store is going to contain a joke or use a flippant tone. While some companies may embrace a playful ethos, typically companies like Troy-Bilt or Bosch maintain a serious one, except perhaps in the occasional advertisement.

The other main reason playfulness doesn't appear in these manuals is that these companies see their user's manuals as a protection from *liability*. In this sense, the documents are not technically written for the end user at all, but to protect themselves in the event of a future lawsuit. The fact that much technical documentation, or gray genres in a broader sense, still feels surprising or jarring when it adopts a playful approach, is telling.

Humor works based on a few foundational theoretical principles. Two of those are incongruity theory and relief theory connected to our understanding of propriety and our social anxieties (See Critchley, 2001, pp. 2–3). Under the first framework, a technical manual can especially grab one's attention when it takes a fun, incongruous approach precisely *because* audiences do not expect playfulness to be present in these spaces. The very fact that it is unusual to find play within technical communication supports our overarching thesis. In the second case, we have a collective social anxiety about doing things correctly because we (rightly) have fears about messing around with instructions for connecting powerlines or measuring radiation. Relief may be found by inserting play in otherwise gray scenarios. Danger means no fun, except as an exception to the rule. Meanwhile, humor, or serious play, can create a kind of safe space where one might breathe easier.

The aim of technical writing isn't generally critical thought, as

Horace explains of the poet, "to inform or delight, or to combine together, in what he says, both pleasure and applicability to life" (as cited in Payne, 1976, p. 93). The concession is this: of course, every piece of writing attempts to communicate in some sense and is also styled, even if that style is gray, or black and white, or colorless. Indeed, most writing strives to convey the kind of meaning intended by the writer. Here then, we concede that even the grayest genres—our vacuum cleaner manuals—must explain factual information and are written in their own idiomatic, ostensibly appropriate style. This both/and of fun and fact is what is always-already at the heart of all rhetoric and writing; the grayness, then, is also a blur of Horace's *dulce et utile*, pleasure and use, with more emphasis on the latter. Hence, every expression need not be adorned (although they *are* always-already…). The style is there, and may be thought upon, brought in, reconsidered.

Ulmer (1985) proposed an alternative theory of invention that explores the "non-discursive levels—images, puns, or models and homophones—as an alternative mode of composition and thought applicable to academic work, or rather play" (p. xi). This discursive play happens because documents have become a forum for conversation. They are no longer ends in themselves but a basis for further interpretations, open to other perspectives. The vacuum must be used, after all. This even occurs in the drabbest manuals—language games may yet be found in those dull places.

And yet, as Tebeaux (2004) notes, viewing technical writing as purely practical diminishes it to a mere vocation that is not informed by the theory it has worked so hard to align with. In this vein, Smith (2007) explores the connection between rhetorical theory and technical writing to suggest that technical and professional communication scholars draw on rhetoric because of its reliance on language to get things done.

Howard's textbook *Design to Thrive* (2010) does, in fact, attempt to balance these tensions in technical communication. In his discussion of "Business before pleasure," "Play," and "The dilemma of control vs creativity," he offers that play has its limits but also suggests "creative freedom and *joy* [emphasis added]" (p. 84). Technical writing can be challenging to do *well*. It takes a good bit of linguistic know-how, but it can be written and read easily enough with pleasure. Various gray genres need not be consigned or cemented to beleaguered styles. Fun styles can still bring about clarity of meaning.

PLEASURE DELIVERY

If we consider that stylized delivery is a key component (or goal) of technical writing, that delivery is primarily affective, and that hedonism creates a pleasurable affective delivery for users, then we can make the case for hedonism.

As earlier noted, technical writing is a disciplined discipline. It often attempts to control language through clarity and brevity. However, as Welch (1987) observed, this dominant culture of prescription renders the language of technical writing "banal, boring, and not central to anyone's life" (p. 279). Similarly, Lay (2000) finds that "a sense of humor and playfulness are a legitimate tool to be used by skillful technical communicators" (p. 132). For while some spaces are still dithering on humor, others have incorporated humor in rendering various kinds of instructions. Humor can show up in different instructional manuals (typical among which are the Dummies manuals) and is meant to ease the uneasy public into performing tasks they otherwise consider too technical. With humor, users feel less threatened. Disregarding humor, technical communication limits and constrains our ability to present the world in full color, while recent playful work among practitioners mark an interesting turn in technical writing trends—trends that the discipline can sometimes overlook. A consideration of the field can further examine how gray genres facilitate knowledge delivery in technical and professional writing contexts. This is nothing new.

We can also look back to comical historical documents such as a tank diagram entitled "How's Your Sherman, Herman?" (1944) or a pamphlet about resisting malaria from mosquitos called *This Is Ann: She's Dying to Meet You* published by the U.S. Goverment (1943) and created by Theodor Geisel, otherwise known as Dr. Seuss, and Munro Leaf who also wrote *The Story of Ferdinand* (1936). The use of engaging and even childlike language and illustrations in what would otherwise be gray spaces enlivens the communicative text. Even the handbook on sobriety, *Alcoholics Anonymous* (2001), has its moments of levity.

In this vein, Britton's (1977) "Personality and Humor in Technical Writing" begins, "THE PRIMARY REQUIREMENT of scientific and technical writing is precision" (p. 1). He continues, appropriately enough with the following insight:

> Perhaps our question then is not whether there should be personality in scientific writing. If personality is inevitable in any communication that involves the selection and grouping of words, the more meaningful question may well be: what kinds of personality traits are appropriate to scientific writing, and to what extent are they acceptable?
>
> Where humor is relevant, it can certainly relieve the tedium of much technical writing. Engineers are often criticized for their high tolerance of dullness. Perhaps their sensitivity has been blunted by long contact with routine presentations, but life is so brief that acceptance of avoidable dullness seems inexcusable. If they could develop the capacity to be bored more easily, they might insist upon a more pleasant and inviting style. Where a personal approach is appropriate, the writing can be made more readable. (p. 3)

It is evident enough that hedonistic delivery methods have power. Delivering something beyond mere data recognizes the humanity of instructions—that they are made for and by humans.

PEDAGOGICAL HEDONISM

So, we want to explore two avenues that are conceptual stop-gaps for technical writing: the workplace and the college classroom.

First, the classroom.

Students respond positively to creative expressions in writing and processing technical information (Brown, 2015). Thus, it is not surprising that when they see tedious instructions, diagrams for light fixtures, even hundred-page manuals for an iPhone, they balk. Sometimes they say, who would do this for a job?! And we understand, because we've been there. So, what do we do? In a quest to make writing technical content creative, we use fun, cutting-edge technologies. We have our students make and write game instructions. Game day is always a blast. We play them. We laugh. A good time is had by all.

Instructors have turned to gaming, storytelling, and zombie-themed

technical writing classes (Luce, 2014). Even the CDC has issued its own zombie apocalypse preparedness document. Apocalyptic themed technical writing classes might be seen as the cosmic bowling of the field. Maybe this analogy will be helpful. Some people don't really like bowling. But it can be made fun, especially if adorned with gimmicks such as flashing lights or dressing up in silly costumes. And that's sort of what we've done with technical writing, and other forms of writing as well. We've dressed it up. And some of that is okay, but there are other ways of injecting life into technical writing. Isn't it interesting that we must turn to the *apocalypse* of all things to try to have a little fun in our classes? After all, things like bowling can be fun, in another sense, if the player learns to do it well. We have to get students to learn to love the craft of writing itself. To get excited about finding the right verb. They kind of have to like punctuation and talk about it after class. But *then*? Students may go on to graduate and do technical writing, often without the zombies, with Microsoft Word, in a cubicle or in their living rooms late at night. This is a real exercise in the communicative aspect of composing, which echoes Fish's (2011) analogy of learning to love sentences the way painters love paint (p. 1).

To address the perspective that there seems to be a dearth of hedonism in the practice of certain gray genres of writing, we find some uniquely interesting support for pedagogical hedonism in a wrongly forgotten article. Runciman (1991), whose spirited little essay "Fun?" explored the matter of fun within the utilitarian practices of teaching writing laments, "We don't talk much about enjoyment, about the rewards of thinking and writing well. Maybe we do discuss such things within the informal confines of our classrooms, but we don't write articles about enjoyment nor do many textbooks mention it" (p. 158). He goes on to explain how much we talk about the writing process as "hard work" and how we continually seize upon the *problems* of writing, adding, "One trouble with pleasure […] is that it's squishy, it's difficult to predict, and talking about it seems vaguely unprofessional. . It seems frivolous" (p. 159). Nevertheless, he concludes, "Maybe we do need to professionally address the question of fun, of writing's satisfactions. Maybe we need to encourage student writers to discover and even savor the range of large and small rewards which attend their own writing and thinking" (p. 161). The conflicted perception of fun is a useful dualism that allows us to find approaches to performing well and with pleasure. The possibility of attending to fun in practice has not been as readily embraced as some might imagine. Why? Since Runciman, we have continued to struggle for fun, and we are still working on it. Fun is no easy matter. It cannot just be achieved willy-nilly, as it were.

Indeed. Why not?

We can also see this fun, hedonistic approach to writing in Weathers (1980), whose work in Grammar B wholeheartedly enjoined us to embrace a fun, playful style with developing writers. It is a pleasure to seek out the moments when we can find engaging differences and develop gray genres into having something like Technicolor in technical spaces. As Weathers (1970) writes,

> I think we should confirm for our students that style has something to do with better communication, adding as it does a certain technicolor to otherwise black-and-white language. But going beyond this "better communication" approach, we should also say that style is the proof of a human being's individuality; that style is a writer's revelation of himself; that through style, attitudes and values are communicated; that indeed our manner is a part of our message. (p. 144)

He goes on to lament, "We teach only one 'grammar of style' and we provide only square/rectangular boxes. We don't teach students other games with other options" (1976, p. 7). The other games—the playful moves afforded by stylistic perspectives such as Grammar B—are only rarely present in gray genres. The traditional model regularly stands. French (1985) attempted to employ Weathers' Grammar B in a classroom with some difficulty, however. She reported the difficulty that her students had with playing in their writing, urging them, "Have fun with it. See what happens" but shares that her "freshmen would not be moved" (p. 190). It is still difficult to get people to become hedonists, especially as students of writing. Perhaps we are still too nervous about other things to enjoy ourselves. We are scared rule followers. Nevertheless, something pleasurable entices us about rule breaking, or at least rule bending, and students and technical writers can get there if they learn to find the sites of play within their texts.

Fun should be our *modus operandi*. And this has been the case in various veins of technical communication, but it is often squelched or remains at the fringe of both learning and doing technical communication. It may tend to remain at the fringes; however, it can be introduced as a more common practice provided that it still advances the aims of communication design.

One approach to a type of assignment that produces a kind of writerly hedonism is to have students write intentionally seemingly boring guides such as simple how-tos for silly everyday tasks like how to put on deodorant. There, they can intervene in places tempered with hedonistic rhetorical intervention. Tactics can include shifting tone or register and simply using humor to lighten and make a complicated issue accessible.

We can generate prompts drawn from examples of real-world technical writing to show students what kinds of fun have been practiced and how we might learn from those deployments. Such prompts can show how emphasizing friendly communication that help people engage in particularly, kairotic moments would go a long way in inculcating hedonistic technical writing. And, in the spirit of gray genres, these responses need not be long form traditional instructions. They can fit the medium of the Tweet, Instagram, or text message as the WHO did in its coronavirus communication (see Walwema, 2020). Prompts can be as succinct as "Look for an example and modify it." or "Find a good example and emulate it."

Writers can communicate while keeping an ear to the humor and irreverence available to catch the eye of a disinterested audience. An added element in user engagement is "retention of technical information" (Connor, 1988, p. 12). Connor found that poetic devices, such as a neat turn of phrase, render technical information memorable (pp. 12–15). And because they are fun and unexpected, they temper the monotony of particularly instructional content. Rutter's "Poetry, Imagination, and Technical Writing" (1985) suggests, "Designing reports, like designing anything else, is an imaginative act" (p. 704). Rutter explores unique approaches such as reading William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow" on the first day of a tech writing class. He bemoans, "When I began teaching technical writing, I found the task exciting and the definitions of the subject inadequate and dispirit" (1985, p. 706), and that has been true. He concludes with this insightful

consideration of the classroom:

> As teachers we need to free our students from the essentially dead task of piling up facts in the name of objectivity and to help them understand that progress and new knowledge in any discipline result only from the exercise of imagination—from a poetic approach to whatever work is at hand. Science and technology, insofar as they are human activities, are essentially poetic endeavors because they shape disparate bits of information into truths about the behavior of matter. Given this fact we can hardly doubt that writing about science and technology is likewise a poetic process, and for the same reason—because the writer by imagination transmutes inert statements of bare fact into lively communications of the truth. (p. 709)

We are interested in moving beyond dead tasks into something livelier. There's more possible beyond the surface, or rather the surface of writing contains more nuance and possibility than what we tend to first imagine.

We close this section with a list of five things that seem to help us make the teaching of writing pleasurable in the sense that we are seeking here.

1. *Embrace style.*

Even if you are trying to write the most mathematical, scientific concept, we remember that style is already there. So, embrace it. Even if the style is razor-sharp clarity or an interesting word choice, decisions exist; experiment. Twist a sentence. Play with a word.

2. *Shift the genres by shifting the tone.*

Genres are moldable, hence, potential sites for intervention, yet they often follow their own tired patterns. If writing a technical manual, how wonderful to make it into a comic book (see, for example, the graphic adaptation of the 9/11 Report (Jacobson et al., 2006) and John Lewis' March series(2013)). These shifts can occur anywhere, and may allow for novelty, and increased engagement with a text.

3. *Write imperfectly*.

You already are doing it imperfectly. Own that. At least feel as if you're breaking some rules. It is the drive to write perfectly polished prose that injures much writing. We write too well sometimes, perhaps. When we are free to write badly, to fail, to break protocol, then we are free to have fun as well.

4. *Change the objective.*

If you think you are aiming for one thing, then try aiming for another. Shifting not only the genres, but goals and objectives of writing keeps things fresh and novel. New tasks, or familiar tasks taken toward new trajectories, offers the promise of playful moves.

5. *Destabilize*.

Destabilization lies at the heart of interesting rhetorical moments. If you begin to stabilize, follow patterns, follow rote paths, then change should come—disruption. Through such ruptures of languages, genres that have become gray may be revitalized.

We can teach students to write clearly and accurately. We can teach them where to put their commas. We certainly can. But can we also explain that there is the possibility of something fun there in that formal writing space, that often-restricted space? To this end, we are pedagogical hedonists. Fun lies at the heart of our philosophies of education.

SO, WHAT ABOUT TECHNICAL WRITING IN THE REAL (BORINGLY GRAY) WORLD?

A vacuum cleaner often does not have the most interesting documentation (Figure 1). However, they are necessary, and offer

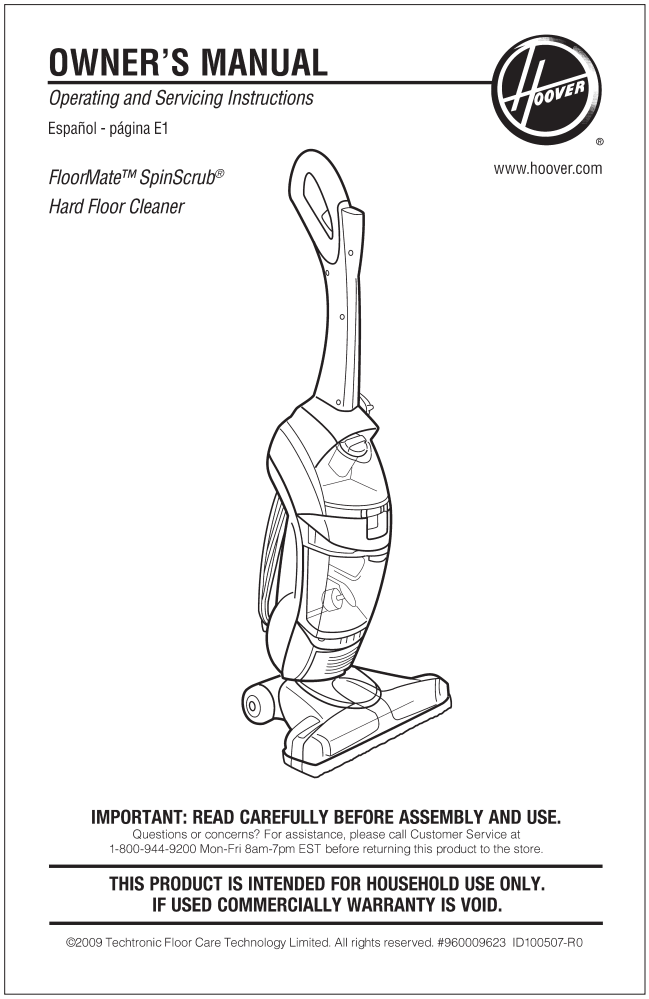


Figure 1: Hoover vacuum cleaner manual

a space of possibility.

Rhetorically, companies are seeking avenues for presenting an ethos their customers can enjoy, even in their technical documentation. Yet, stacks of unread pages will be shipped with millions of products this year—each manual destined for the trashcan, saying nothing interesting at all. Rote writing is what's at stake here. Rice (2008) insightfully observed that "if we dismiss this technical work as rote mechanics, we risk calcifying a distinction between the *production work of texts* (including the operations of buttons, cords, and wires that cut and record texts) and the produced texts themselves" (pp. 367–368). Here, we risk reconsidering, then, this

rote and mechanical work of writing and its potential for play.

A vacuum's documentation, more playfully, might look something like this:

Hi. I'm your vacuum. With two u's.

You can push me around as much as you like.

I use electricity, so be careful with me.

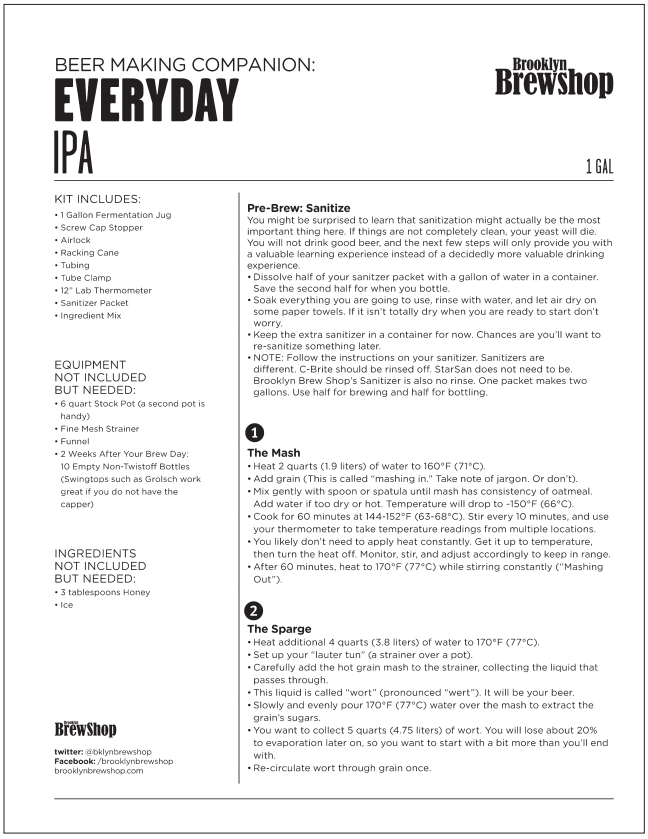
If I don't suck enough, then practice a little hygiene: clean me out.

Happy to be your faithful servant,

Your new vacuum.

Here, we are asking students and professionals to find language fascinating, playful even, even if that language is describing how to use a vacuum. We have to get to a place where there are more benefits to a technical writing job than communicating technical information.

One particularly good example of real-world technical writing to consider, appropriately enough for the topic of hedonism, can be found in some beer brewing instructions. Brooklyn Brew Shop sells kits for homebrewing that make the process of making your own beer ridiculously simple, and fun. The instructions for making an IPA are accessible, understandable, and playful. The company's writing is good (Figure 2).



BEER MAKING COMPANION:

EVERYDAY IPA

Brooklyn BrewShop

1 GAL

KIT INCLUDES:
- 1 Gallon Fermentation Jug
- Screw Cap Stopper
- Airlock
- Racking Cane
- Tubing
- Tube Clamp
- 12" Lab Thermometer
- Sanitizer Packet
- Ingredient Mix

EQUIPMENT NOT INCLUDED BUT NEEDED:
- 6 quart Stock Pot (a second pot is handy)
- Fine Mesh Strainer
- Funnel
- 2 Weeks After Your Brew Day: 10 Empty Non-Twistoff Bottles (Swingtops such as Grolsch work great if you do not have the capper)

INGREDIENTS NOT INCLUDED BUT NEEDED:
- 3 tablespoons Honey
- Ice

Brooklyn BrewShop

twitter: @bklynbrewshop
Facebook: /brooklynbrewshop
brooklynbrewshop.com

Pre-Brew: Sanitize
You might be surprised to learn that sanitization might actually be the most important thing here. If things are not completely clean, your yeast will die. You will not drink good beer, and the next few steps will only provide you with a valuable learning experience instead of a decidedly more valuable drinking experience.
- Dissolve half of your sanitizer packet with a gallon of water in a container. Save the second half for when you bottle.
- Soak everything you are going to use, rinse with water, and let air dry on some paper towels. If it isn't totally dry when you are ready to start don't worry.
- Keep the extra sanitizer in a container for now. Chances are you'll want to re-sanitize something later.
- NOTE: Follow the instructions on your sanitizer. Sanitizers are different. C-Brite should be rinsed off. StarSan does not need to be. Brooklyn Brew Shop's Sanitizer is also no rinse. One packet makes two gallons. Use half for brewing and half for bottling.

1

The Mash
- Heat 2 quarts (1.9 liters) of water to 160°F (71°C).
- Add grain (This is called "mashing in." Take note of jargon. Or don't).
- Mix gently with spoon or spatula until mash has consistency of oatmeal. Add water if too dry or hot. Temperature will drop to ~150°F (66°C).
- Cook for 60 minutes at 144-152°F (63-68°C). Stir every 10 minutes, and use your thermometer to take temperature readings from multiple locations.
- You likely don't need to apply heat constantly. Get it up to temperature, then turn the heat off. Monitor, stir, and adjust accordingly to keep in range.
- After 60 minutes, heat to 170°F (77°C) while stirring constantly ("Mashing Out").

2

The Sparge
- Heat additional 4 quarts (3.8 liters) of water to 170°F (77°C).
- Set up your "lauter tun" (a strainer over a pot).
- Carefully add the hot grain mash to the strainer, collecting the liquid that passes through.
- This liquid is called "wort" (pronounced "wert"). It will be your beer.
- Slowly and evenly pour 170°F (77°C) water over the mash to extract the grain's sugars.
- You want to collect 5 quarts (4.75 liters) of wort. You will lose about 20% to evaporation later on, so you want to start with a bit more than you'll end with.
- Re-circulate wort through grain once.

Figure 2: Brooklyn Brew Shop Everyday IPA instructions

The instructions begin:

> *You might be surprised to learn that sanitization might actually be the most important thing here. If things are not completely clean, your yeast will die. You will not drink good beer, and the next few steps will only provide you with a valuable learning experience instead of a decidedly more valuable drinking experience.*

Notice the 2nd person along with the simple, but almost playful stylistic approach and the addition of humor.

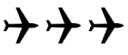
And then…

> *Heat 2.5 quarts (2.4 liters) of water to 160°F (71°C).*
>
> *• Add grain (This is called "mashing in." Take note of jargon. Or don't).*

By playing with the formal/informal tensions (and there is quite an informal sentence fragment at the end there), the company establishes a respectable—but relatable—ethos. And finally:

> *• Put beers in the fridge the night before you drink them.*
>
> *• Drink. Share with friends if you're the sharing type.*

The directions are familiar, friendly, and fun. They use simple language and a flip tone to lessen the fears of trying this out. This slightly unconventional phrasing creates a uniquely engaging experience for users, and it's relatable.



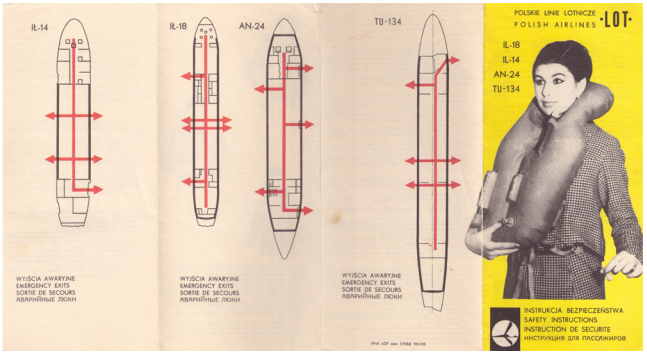


Figure 3: Diagram from LOT Polish Airlines from 1968. *Public Domain.*

And then there are flight safety instructions (Figure 3):

Flyers get an oral briefing over the public-address system during taxi on the runway. The ordinary passenger is typically disinterested in this covering of safety belt instructions, location of emergency devices, safe handling of baggage, etc. These procedures, because they occur between boarding and take-off, while taxiing, settling into the seat, and so on, place competing demands for attention on passengers. Flight safety briefings are "mandated by the government, supplied by industry, and read by anyone who is capable of flying commercially" (Blackburne, 2014, p. 89). This means that because they have been rigorously edited for brevity and clarity and tested for usability, they meet the standards of technical writing. And yet for meeting all those metrics, flight safety

instructions are proof of this mismatch between the effectiveness of technical documentation and the consistent playful interventions with which they are injected. As Rude (2004) noted, placing a premium on usable technical documentation shows that "the formal qualities of the genres are less an end in themselves than a means of encouraging their use" (p. 284).

Below we excerpt and analyze language from standard and not-so standard flight safety instructions. Our analysis picks up on the flaw inherent in safety communication models of linearity and "their failure to consider audience and other contextual issues" as posited by Grabill and Simmons (1998, p. 415). We maintain that the social component of communication tied to delivery and hedonism is key. Consider some sample instructions culled from a *Snopes* report.

> *We ask that you take the Safety Information Card out of the seat pocket in front of you and follow along as we perform our safety demonstration.*
>
> *Your seat belt has been designed for easy fastening and release. To fasten, insert the metal fitting into the buckle, adjust to fit snugly with the loose end of the strap and simply lift the buckle release to unfasten. Your seat belt should always be worn low and tight across your lap.* (Mikkelson, 2007)

Of these instructions, the NTSB notes, "Despite efforts and various techniques over the years to improve passenger attention to safety briefings, a large percentage of passengers continue to ignore preflight safety briefings" (as cited in Blackburne, 2014, p. 78). It is evident that the instructions perform elements of clarity and brevity. They also come across as impersonal. Blackburne's study, which analyses various forms of safety instructions—oral, video, and printed, found them to have met generally acceptable levels of comprehension. While they largely meet all the formal qualities of technical documents, in their most standardized form flight safety instructions tend to fail at the delivery level.

Contrast the standard instructions with ones where the product's functionality is broadened to a pleasurable experience. There, the instructions stress that relationship between the user and the text. It is interesting to observe that this particular delivery style at once demonstrates audience awareness and recognizes users' agency in cooperating with the instructions by using humor.

> *Please take a moment and look around and find the nearest exit. Count the rows of seats between you and the exit. In the event that the need arises to find one, trust me, you'll be glad you did.* (Mikkelson, 2007)

Aware of the short window of time in which to convey important safety information, the flight attendant's playful repartee gets the needed attention and mediates the information with the listener. In a serious yet thoroughly playful and witty manner, this banter provides relief and connection for nervous flyers. Ingenious flight attendants have captured passenger attention through other hedonistic means, as in:

> *In a moment we will be turning off the cabin lights, and it's going to get really dark, really fast. If you're afraid of the dark, now would be a good time to reach up and press the yellow button. The yellow button turns on your reading light. Please do not press the orange button unless you absolutely have to. The orange button is the seat ejection button.* (Mikkelson, 2007)

Here, the flight attendant proceeds on the implicit assumption that flyers "recognize certain consistencies in the language of airline safety briefings" (Blackburne, 2014, p. 102) and is not afraid to experiment with humor. And it is that humor in the moment of oral delivery that connects with the flyer.

> *Please remain seated until the plane is parked at the gate. At no time in history has a passenger beaten a plane to the gate. So please don't even try it.* (Mikkelson, 2007)

Again, humor in delivering cautionary information helps flyers put things into perspective, demonstrating that hedonism gives us room to adopt language that renders instructions more human. Moreover, this excerpt exhibits audience awareness—flyers are bored and anxious to get to their destination. But they still need to be present in every moment. And then, in the midst of this, we see lines like "*Please be careful opening the overhead bins because shift happens*" (Mikkelson, 2007). A play on language use, like replacing shift for shit, punctuates the content and illustrates an important safety element—and also helps with the tedium of the message's delivery and reception.

The hedonistic take on flight safety instructions above is emblematic of not limiting technical writing to its interpersonal objective form. Instead, through *techne* this typically gray genre allows for unique characteristics of argument, which are embedded in clear and coherent text. Shifting the focus from the product's functionality and broadening it to a pleasurable experience stresses that relationship between the user and the text in an interpolative act.

Recent techniques in risk communication have successfully deployed these tactics to communicate about the coronavirus. Take Washington State's secretary of state voter instructions in the March 2020 primary election published on Twitter.

> As recommended by @WADeptHealth, please use alternative methods to seal your ballot return envelopes, such as a wet sponge or cloth. Washington's Presidential Primary is March 10. Use a ballot drop box to return your ballot by 8 p.m. Election Day.

That language is accompanied by visual text worded in a memorable slogan:

> "Whether healthy or sick, please don't lick!" (2020).

The instructions reference the expertise of @WADeptHealth in the context of coronavirus to warn the public not to lick ballot-return envelopes when sealing them (as they might), but rather to use an alternative like "a wet sponge or cloth." The use of hedonism to inform, instruct, and caution the public takes a genre that is inherently serious (risk communication) and makes it accessible. Levity comes from the recognition that some of it is inconsistent with the conventional manner of public communication.

Similarly, officials in the city of Round Rock, Texas, crafted a public service message on proper handwashing by drawing from common topics shared by the people of Round Rock. "Wash your hands like you just got done slicing jalapeños for a batch of nachos and you need to take your contacts out" (City of Round Rock, 2020). Evoking jalapeños and nachos along with the tagline "That's like 20 seconds of scrubbing, y'all" is both user-centered and oh-so-relatable for the primary audience. And it is an apt use of hedonism in public communication, witty and pleasurably couched in shared meaning. The gray genres referenced above engender affects that

help evoke certain sensibilities among readers, including pleasure.

Finally, we want to note as a final case in point, the occasional interjection found in otherwise straightforward documentation from larger companies like Google. As a last quick example, in a page for Google Product Forums, a note appears at the top of the page:

> *Welcome to the new version of Google Product Forums! You can switch to the old design if you'd like (but really why?).*

The addition of the exclamation point in this informative notice is one thing. But the addition of the cheeky aside "(but really why?)" is quite another. It is obviously playful, but persuasive. It keeps Google's users from resisting their technical moves, decisions, and modifications. The ethos is crafted and deployed quite effectively. Shifting the focus from the product's functionality and broadening it to a pleasurable experience promised in the new design, stresses that relationship between the user and the text. Google is at once demonstrating audience awareness and recognizing users' agency in choosing the new interface. Larger companies are increasingly looking for clever and creative language in the most banal of places—commonplaces.

To return to our vacuum cleaner's bland documentation, we will say this. Anything can be made interesting with enough thought. People do still read Shakespeare for fun, after all, despite the fact that they were never written to be read at all. People study and do all sorts of boring things that fascinate them, but that would make for poor conversation at dinner. The secret here is *looking hard*, thinking critically about the banal things of the world—that is, most of the world—and finding interestingness there in spite of itself. The examples of technical writing we have used confirm the value of hedonism as a form of delivery that takes the responsibility of accurately disseminating information and is concerned with making it accessible. Because invention brings forth novel discourse and substance, it is here that the writer can discover ideas and determine what will work in various possible situations. Here, then, the writer can produce sentences and words that will make an appropriately favorable impression on readers.

CONCLUSION: A LABOR OF LOVELESSNESS

Lastly, we want to acknowledge that technical writing is a kind of labor. And labor is often unpleasant. It can be, no matter what the job is. We would even say that more so-called creative styles of writing are sometimes unpleasant to do. Even embracing things like standing desks, plants in office spaces, good lighting, and nice break rooms with good coffee are elements of the good life for a tech writer. So, we should advocate some of that.

As we move forward, we must look for more than correct heaps of text written by some humble writer who sits in front of a computer for over forty hours a week in a cubicle. While she could read something interesting during a lunch break, where she eats canned soup, and could chat with a coworker in passing, a technical writer's job generally involves filling in the blanks, creating gray rhetorical genres.

The authors of an Apple iPad manual don't generally get a byline. They likely have a sense of humor, but they aren't generally encouraged to use it.

So, what do we do with these frustrations? We must love the language and get our students, future professional and technical writers some of them, to love it too. We can take the advice of Mary Poppins: "In every job that must be done, there is an element of fun" (Stevenson, 1964). We have to continue to resist the deeply rooted practices that conventionalize tech writing. "Stalk the gaps," as Annie Dillard says (2013, p. 274). "Habit is a great deadener," we learn from Samuel Beckett (1954, p. 339). Stay at the fringes of propriety. Bend some rules. In this way, technical writing may become increasingly pleasurable in its own right.

We have to, like Epicurus perhaps, find the balance between stoical performance of necessity and pleasure, or discover Aristotle's virtuous golden mean, and maximize the pleasure of writing, even technical writing. Further, we should not simply assure ourselves that content is enough. Technical writing can be pleasurable; we just need to find the right examples of teaching and practice that can be aligned with more sybaritic values. Who will breathe new life into these values? Perhaps, the only remaining question for ourselves is this: Why *aren't* we having more fun writing?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We'd like to thank several friends as well as our reviewers, whoever you are, for reading drafts of this piece and offering helpful feedback including offering other references we would have otherwise overlooked. Their comments have made this piece much better than it would have been otherwise.

NOTE

All images published with permsission.

REFERENCES

Annas, J. (1993). *The morality of happiness*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/ 10.1093/0195096525.001.0001

Anonymous. (2001). *Alcoholics anonymous* (4th ed.). Alcoholics Anonymous World Services.

Aristotle. (2007a). *On rhetoric*. (George Kennedy, Trans.). Oxford University Press. (Original work published ca. 367–322 BCE)

Aristotle. (2007b). *Nicomachean ethics*. The Internet Classics Archive. (Original work published ca. 350–340 BCE) http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html

Army Motors. (1944). How's your Sherman, Herman? *Office of Chief of Ordinance, 5*(1).

Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasure of the text* (R. Miller, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1973).

Beckett, S.(1954). *Waiting for Godot*. Grove Press.

Blackburne, B. (2014). Overcoming workplace writing norms. *Programmatic Perspectives, 6*(2), 81–112. https://cptsc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/vol6-2.pdf

Britton, W. E. (1965). What is technical writing? *College Composition and Communication, 16*(2), 113–116. https://doi.org/10.2307/354886

Britton, W. E. (1977). Personality and humor in technical writing (No. 770564). *SAE Technical Paper*. https://doi.org/10.4271/770564

Brown, S. A. (2015). Creative expression of science through poetry and other media can enrich medical and science education. *Frontiers in Neurology, 6*(3). https://doi.org/10.3389/fneur.2015.00003

City of Round Rock. (2020). Round Rock coronavirus prevention flyer. Retrieved from https://patch.com/texas/round-rock/texas-city-devises-novel-way-toward-coronavirus-prevention

Cohen, G. (1992). Humorize to humanize. *Technical Communication, 39*(3), 468–469. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43090122

Connor, J. (1988). Poetry at work: Historical examples of technical communication in verse. *Journal of Technical Writing and Communication, 18*(1), 11–22. https://doi.org/10.2190/CMLH-MAQ8-3JYJ-LEAG

Critchley, S. (2001). *On humour*. Routledge.

Dillard, A. (2013). *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. HarperCollins.

Fish, S. (2011). *How to write a sentence and how to read one*. Harper.

French, T. (1985). A good crot is hard to find. *Rhetoric Review, 3*(2), 190–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/07350198509359093

Grabill, J. T., & Simmons, W. M. (1998). Toward a critical rhetoric of risk communication: Producing citizens and the role of technical communicators. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 7*(4), 415–441. https://doi.org/10.1080/10572259809364640

Howard, T. (2010). *Design to thrive*. Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-374921-5.00005-X

Hurley, K. A. (1996). *Humor and technical communication: The culture, the texts, the implications* (Proquest ID. AAI9626043) [Doctoral dissertation, Iowa State University]. https://doi.org/10.31274/rtd-180813-10253

Jacobson, S., Kean, Thomas H., Colón, Ernie, Hamilton, Lee, & National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States. (2006). *The 9/11 report : A graphic adaptation* (First ed.). Hill and Wang.

Johnson, T. R. (2003). *A rhetoric of pleasure: Prose style and today's composition classroom*. Heinemann.

Kennedy, G. A. (1999). *Classical rhetoric & its Christian and secular tradition* (2nd ed.). The University of North Carolina Press.

Lay, M. (2000). *Technical communication* (2nd ed.). Irwin/McGraw-Hill.

Lanham, R. (1976). *The motives of eloquence*. Yale UP

Leaf, M. (1936). *The story of Ferdinand*. Penguin.

Lewis, J., Aydin, A., & Powell, N. (2013). *March*. Top Shelf Productions.

Luce, A. V. (2014). "It wasn't intended to be an instruction manual": Revisiting ethics of "objective" technical communication in gaming manuals. In J. DeWinter & R. M. Moeller (Eds.), *Computer games and technical communication: Critical methods and applications at the intersection* (pp. 87–106). Ashgate Publishing Company.

Lynch, O. H. (2002). Humorous communication: Finding a place for humor in communication research. *Communication theory, 12*(4), 423–445. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2002.tb00277.x

Malone, E. (2008). The use of playing cards to communicate technical and scientific information. *Technical Communication, 55*(1), 49–60. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43092395

Malone, E. A. (2019). "Don't be a Dilbert": Transmedia storytelling as technical communication during and after World War II. *Technical Communication, 66*(3), 209¬–229.

Markel, M. (2012). *Technical communication* (10th ed.). Bedford/St. Martin's.

Mikkelson, D. (2007, January 19). *Pilot light: Flight crew makes humorous in-flight announcements to airline passengers*. Snopes. https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/pilot-light/.

Mill, J. S., & Bentham, J. (1987). *Utilitarianism and other essays*. Penguin.

Miller, C. (1979). A humanistic rationale for technical writing. *College English, 40*(6), 610–617. https://doi.org/10.2307/375964

Payne, M. (1976). Taking poets seriously. *College Literature* 3(2): 83–93.

Plato, 2004. *The republic*. Penguin.

Poulakos, J. (1983). Toward a sophistic definition of rhetoric. *Philosophy & Rhetoric, 16*(1), 35–48.https://www.jstor.org/stable/40237348

Rice, J. E. (2008). Rhetoric's mechanics: Retooling the equipment of writing production. *College Composition and Communication, 60*(2), 366–387. https://www.jstor.org/stable/20457063

Rude, C. D. (2004). Toward an expanded concept of rhetorical delivery: The uses of reports in public policy debates. *Technical Communication Quarterly, 13*(3), 271–288. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15427625tcq1303_3

Runciman, L. (1991). Fun? *College English, 53*(2), 156–162. https://doi.org/10.2307/378194

Rutter, R. (1985). Poetry, imagination, and technical writing. *College English, 47*(7), 698–712. https://doi.org/10.2307/376975

Shaw, J. (2015). *Plato's anti-hedonism and the Protagoras*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107110618

Sirc, G. (2002). *English composition as a happening*. Utah State University Press.

Slack, J. D., Miller, D. J., & Doak, J. (1993). The technical communicator as author: Meaning, power, authority. J*ournal of Business and Technical Communication, 7*(1), 12–36. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651993007001002

Smith, T. (2007). What connection does rhetorical theory have to technical and professional communication? In J. MacLennan (Ed.), *Readings for technical communication* (pp. 114– 120).

Oxford University Press.

Smith, A. & Anderson, M. (2018). Social media use in 2018. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2018/03/01/social-media-use-2018-methodology/

Sontag, S. (2001). *Where the stress falls: Essays*. Picador.

Stevenson, R. (1964). *Mary Poppins* [Film]. Buena Vista Distribution Company.

Tebeaux, E. (2004). Pillaging the tombs of noncanonical texts: Technical writing and the evolution of English style. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 18*(2), 165–197. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651903260738

Ulmer, G. L. (1985). *Applied grammatology: Post(e)-pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ulmer, G. L. (2012). *Avatar emergency*. Parlor Press.

Walwema, J. (2020). The WHO health lert: Communicating a global pandemic with WhatsApp. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication, 35*(1), 35–40. https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651920958507

War Department. (1943). *This is Ann: She's dying to meet you.* U.S. Government Printing Office.

Washington Office of the Secretary of State [@secstatewa]. (2020, March 3). *As recommended by @WADeptHealth, please use alternative methods to seal your ballot return envelopes, such as a wet sponge or* [Tweet]. Twitter. https://twitter.com/secstatewa/status/1234976593224720384

Weal, E. (1986). In defiance of humorless manuals. *Technical Communication, 33*(3), 184. https://www.jstor.org/stable/43089660

Weathers, W. (1970). Teaching style: A possible anatomy. *College Composition and Communication, 21*(2), 144–149. https://doi.org/10.2307/356552

Weathers, W. (1976). Grammars of style: New options in composition. *Freshman English News*, 4(3), 1–18. Retrieved March 26, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/43518778

Weathers, W. (1980). *An alternate style: Options in composition*. Hayden.

Welch, K. E. (1987). Ideology and freshman textbook production: The place of theory in writing pedagogy. *College Composition and Communication, 38*(3), 269–282. https://doi.org/10.2307/357747

Yu, H. (2015). *The other kind of funnies: Comics in technical communication*. Baywood Publishing Company.

Vitanza, V. J. (2003). Abandoned to writing: Notes toward several provocations. *Enculturation, 5*(1). http://www.enculturation.net/5_1/vitanza.html

Vraga, E. K., Kim, S. C., & Cook, J. (2019). Testing logic-based and humor-based corrections for science, health, and political misinformation on social media. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 63*(3), 393–414. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2019.1653102

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Josephine Walwema is with the English Department at the University of Washington, Seattle. She teaches and researches issues in technical communication and rhetoric.

Jimmy Butts is the Director of the University Writing Program at Louisiana State University. He teaches postmodern composition strategies, new media, rhetorical criticism, and writing pedagogy.