

# Guiding and Producing a Technical Publication

by Edline M. Chun

## Introduction

*Test Target 4.0* (TT4.0) is the result of student teamwork to publish a technical journal for a graduate-level course titled: Advance Color Management (Course no. 2081-735-03). Offered by the School of Print Media (SPM) at Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT), the course is “a platform to experiment and to realize a new digital imaging paradigm and the dynamics of teamwork” (Chung, 2004, March 8).

Team members learn scientific methodology in process control for repeatable color as well as apply ICC-based color management practices in digital workflows. They plan and conduct press run analyses reported in TT4.0, which is printed using facilities available at RIT. In producing this publication, the team learns to integrate design, content creation, digital media, and print production in a seamless workflow (Chung, 2004, March 8).

On the editorial side, team members come to understand the importance of publication guidelines and what is required within a manuscript to move writing from a student work to a professional level. The approach used in identifying a topic, conducting research, learning to interpret findings, and in publishing their work in TT4.0 helps team members prepare for dealing with their individual Master’s thesis project.

## Method

The course content of Advanced Color Management consisted of lectures, reading and writing assignments, team discussions, individual lab assignments, and a group project culminating with publication of TT4.0. Textbooks were *Real World Color Management* (Fraser, Bunting, and Murphy, 2003) and *Understanding Color Management* (Sharma, 2004). Earlier issues of Test Target publications (2002 – 2004) were reviewed; select publications issued by CGATS and ISO on process control were read and discussed. The readings and discussions provided insight to trends and standards in process control, color management technology, and graphic arts technology.

A segment on technical writing and editing gave the team an opportunity to refresh their writing skills, learn the importance of publication guidelines, and write technical reports to a set of guidelines that give articles as well as the publication a uniform appearance.

For software, students used Photoshop, InDesign, Word, and Acrobat 5.0. For hardware, a digital camera, a flatbed scanner, and a digital color printer were specified for lab assignments. SPM’s general purpose labs and the Color Management Systems (CMS) Lab were used for hands-on labs and demonstrations.

RIT’s Heidelberg Sunday 2000 web offset press was used for process capability studies, to print color-managed images, and to produce the 80-page *Test Targets 4.0*.

## Discussion

RIT’s “writing across the curriculum” policy (Institute Writing Policy, 2002, May) and requirements of the Graduate Program of the School of Print Media (School of Print Media, 2002, December) act to ensure that a graduate possess a certain level of writing competency before graduating.

This writer teaches an undergraduate course titled: Professional and Technical Writing (Course no. 2082-303). It is a foundational course for all SPM students who usually take it during their second year of study. The course is an elective for graduate students, some of whom are advised to take the course to familiarize themselves with American professional and technical writing practices. For some graduate students, the editorial aspect of Advanced Color Management acts as a bridge to a higher level of writing in preparation to undertake their Master’s thesis project.

The Advanced Color Management course allowed a student to experience an entire process from identifying a problem, doing the research, preparing a document that undergoes review for publication, to printing and finishing the publication. This approach not only gave the student the opportunity to learn about process control in a hand-on environment, but also exposed the student to some qualitative issues that could occur during the process of working on their Master’s project.

During the second week of the course, the writer demystified publication guidelines with an explanation of purpose, form, and content. The second part given in Week 3, continued with form and content, focusing on items to be aware of during the writing process. This was helpful for the first lab assignment, which required that a previously written technical report be edited so its contents conformed to a tem-

plate the team had chosen after analysis of layout and content in previous *Test Targets*. In Week 6, a group feedback session was held to discuss errors noted in Lab 1 submissions; the writer also responded to editorial questions the team had that might affect individual reports or the final publication. A schedule was developed to keep the writing, review, and publication processes on track.

The creative process included technical reviews by Professor Robert Chung and Senior Research Associate Franz Sigg and an editorial review by Adjunct Faculty Edline M. Chun. A final editorial check occurred when the InDesign files were ready for proofs just prior to platemaking.

### Purpose

In addition to planning an audience-centered report, the team was reminded that early in the creative process one needs to think about the type of work or document that will be produced; the objectives of the writer in undertaking the work; and how the work fits with the writer's vision, career goal, or objectives. The results of brainstorming "purpose" need not be shared with others, but knowing what the purpose is, gives clarity and motivation.

### Form

Form is another term for specifications or author's guidelines, which give the written piece an overall organized look; facilitates reading; makes it easy to access information; and gives credibility to the work. Team members were instructed to familiarize themselves with the specifications or guidelines that they are writing to, so the work is created from a position of awareness.

The following mnemonic was provided to help the team remember "FORM."

#### For the Writer:

F      Facilitates  
 O      Organization  
 R      Readability  
 M      Makeup and Makeready

#### For the Reader:

F      Facilitates  
 O      Orderly  
 R      Reading, Reinforcement, and Recall  
 M      that is Meaningful

### Content

Specifications for TAGA publications, SPIE guidelines, and the differences between academic and technical/

scientific reports were discussed in detail to ensure the team understood the template and its various parts that Greg Zolan had developed to expedite the layout and makeready phases.

Writing points that might be problematic were also covered. This included point of view (writer's relation to the information being presented as reflected in the use of person, i.e., first, second, or third person); shift in tense (use of verb forms that indicate time distinctions); and positive/negative writing.

## Conclusion

The ability to write a clear, succinct technical or scientific report is a skill that one develops over time with "practice" and guidance or feedback from colleagues, friends, mentors, and reviewers. This writer often tells students that every paper written as a student is "practice" similar to a dress rehearsal. However, the process involved in publishing articles in *Test Targets* is more than a transition stage because the publication is available to the public.

For the majority of students taking the course, it is the first opportunity to test their ability to move their writing to a professional level. This environment of a safe, nurturing "safety net" may not be accessible to them when writing that first article in the real world. Time to evaluate the entire process for improvement and discussing lessons learned is also a luxury that is not always available in industry. If team members meet the goals of the course, the journey from this point on will be that much brighter.

## References

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