

Kara Alexander
English

Writing Matters: Technical and Professional Writing in Careers

The primary goal of my proposed research project is to analyze written reports and interviews by students entering careers in technical and scientific professions in which they discuss the role of writing in their future careers. Research has shown that most college students entering technical professions underestimate the amount of writing they will do as part of their jobs. To help these students realize how much writing actually occurs in these jobs, technical writing professors often require students to conduct research (both primary and secondary) and write a report on the types, quantity, and genres of writing completed on the job. Students read through journals in their academic disciplines and interview and observe professionals in their career to find out this information. They then write a report explaining the writing completed in these arenas. At the end of the report, they also reflect on these findings by assessing their own skills in relation to the writing requirements they discovered.

Not much is known, however, as to whether students are really impacted by their findings, or if they view writing differently after conducting such research. This project, therefore, seeks to discover how students perceive technical writing in a professional workplace context, the functions writing serves, and the dominant narratives students tell about writing in professional contexts. This project also analyzes how students characterize what they still need to learn about writing in order to be successful in their profession. I will examine students' written reports and conduct interviews with students about this research. This research is important because it will help us better understand how students regard writing—including the assumptions they have about it—and what role writing has in their daily professional lives. Such a project is useful for composition scholars to better understand the function of writing in professional contexts and for teachers to improve pedagogy and instruction in technical and professional writing.