

Revision

(who? what? why? WHAT?!)

Wally Holland
BE writing tutor

What I'm good for

- MIT '01 (6/CMS), '03 (M.S. in CMS)
 - teaching sci/eng with video games
- Freelance writer/editor
 - The textbook industry is doomed
 - *Creative solutions to technical problems*
- Course 20 in-house writing tutor
 - By appointment anytime; open hours...?
 - Bring me *any written work*, we'll tear it apart and put it back together

All writing is 'technical'

- Has a specific purpose
- Acknowledges reader expectations
 - 'characterize a problem + its solution'...
 - ...or 'tell me a story about Batman'
- Maintains formal consistency
 - ...as aid to understanding
 - (if you slow my reading you damage my comprehension)

OK, so what is 'technical writing'?

- Explicit audience expectations
- Strict formal rules
 - Form aids comprehension
 - Comprehension (yours, ours) is everything
- Shared prior knowledge
 - i.e. some tech vocab is OK
 - You're here to learn *which*



**Read the guidelines. Read your journal articles.
*Know them!!!!***

First drafts: internal documents

- They're always bad
- It is OK to make mistakes here
- **IT IS OK TO MAKE MISTAKES HERE**
- The first draft is for *you*
- **Revision** is translation from you-language to public-language

Revision: easier than it seems

- Revision is *not* optional
 - It continues a process of discovery
- Incorporating feedback is a *solved problem*
- Do you have a workflow?
 - Know your tools
 - Budget *time* for revision
 - This neat thing called *paper*...
 - ...and the human voice

A writing/editing example

- Highly formal, tight spec
- Extensive but *invisible* jargon
- Density/skimmability are paramount
- You're already expert readers

Rough draft

Preparation of cookies with chocolate chips

Materials

2C flour, 1 teaspoon baking soda, 1 teaspoon NaCl, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C sugar, 3/4C brown sugar, bowl, oven...

Procedure

Ovens enable the heating of raw foods. I whisked all ingredients but chocolate chips using Rubbermaid-brand kitchen products. Stirred the chocolate chips into bowl. Heat 350degrees. Serve.

Ouch.

Still, you could cook from it, right?

Headings aid comprehension

Preparation of cookies with chocolate

Searchable?
Skimmable?
Readable?

Materials

2C flour, 1 teaspoon baking powder, 1/2C salt, 1/2C sodium chloride, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C sugar, 3/4C brown sugar

Know the norms
(expectations):
"Ingredients"

Procedure

Ovens enable the heating of raw foods. I whisked all ingredients but chocolate chips using Rubbermaid-brand kitchen products. Stirred the chocolate chips into bowl. Heat 350degrees. Serve.

If the procedure is divided,
divide your representation of it:
why not (1) Mix (2) Bake, or
(1) Prep (2) Heat?

What are the functional units
here?

Consistency aids comprehension

Preparation of cookies with chocolate chips

Direct, active voice = readable

Materials

Verb tense!
Who is the reader?

“Rubbermaid,”
really?

Inconsistent
nomenclature

Procedure

Ovens enable the heating of raw foods. I whisked all ingredients but chocolate chips using Rubbermaid-brand kitchen products. Stirred the chocolate chips into bowl. Heat 350degrees. Serve.

Inconsistent *scale*: the actions you call out should more or less have the same scale, so choose useful abstractions: “I poured unicorn milk into the beaker, I lifted it, I sipped” is less useful than “I drank unicorn milk.” The *beaker* part can be hidden without penalizing the reader. But “*unicorn*” can not.

Density aids comprehension (notice a pattern here?)

Preparation of cookies with chocolate

“Chocolate chip cookies”

Materials

Which sugar? Don't leave things out, *compress*.
Dense ≠ short.

2C flour, 1 te, 1/2 C NaCl, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C sugar, 3/4C brown sugar, bowl, oven...

Know what's relevant; be clear on prior knowledge

Procedure

Ovens enable the heating of raw foods. I whisked all ingredients but chocolate chips using Rubbermaid-brand kitchen products. Stirred the chocolate chips into bowl. Heat 350degrees. Serve.

Know who's reading and write to their expertise

This “I” is out of place.
Reading aloud will make this obvious!!!!

I got 7th in the National Spelling Bee

Preparation of cookies with chocolate chips

Materials

200g flour, 1/2 cup baking soda, 1 teaspoon NaCl, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C sugar, 1/2 cup chocolate chips, 1 egg, 1/2 cup milk, 350 degrees oven...

Procedure

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. I whisked all ingredients but chocolate chips in a large bowl. I used name-brand kitchen products. Stirred the mixture for 2 minutes. Baked for 10 minutes. Serve.

If you waste brain
on spelling errors
**WE WILL
DESTROY YOU
WITH ROBOTS**

MS WORD CAN NOT BE
TRUSTED. USE YOUR OWN
EXPERTISE: **READ ALOUD,**
REREAD, REWRITE, TRUST
YOUR GUT.



Should've listened to Wally.

Should've checked my
spelling.

This sort of thing really does happen.

Changes to our first draft

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients

2C flour, 1tsp baking soda, 1tsp NaCl salt, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C white sugar, 3/4C brown sugar, bowl, oven...

Prep

~~Ovens enable the heating of raw foods.~~ Whisk all ingredients but chocolate chips using Rubbermaid brand kitchen products. Stir the chocolate chips into bowl.

Bake

Heat Bake at 350F til golden brown (9-11m). ~~Serve.~~

Final draft?

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Ingredients

2C flour, 1tsp baking soda, 1tsp salt, 2 sticks butter, 3/4C white sugar, 3/4C brown sugar...

Prep

Whisk all ingredients but chocolate chips. Stir chips into bowl.

Bake

Bake at 350F til golden brown (9-11m).

Your moment of Zen

- 1st draft: ego (your experience, your language)
 - It's an internal document: your thoughts on paper
- Revision: giving away the work
 - Translating into *shared* language
 - Problem solving is ongoing
- Final draft: **shapes someone else's thoughts**

Further revision? (optional)

Chocolate Chip Cookies

Whisk *[ingredients]*. Stir in 1 bag chocolate chips. Bake 350F til golden brown (9-11m).

- Wonderful density
- Note prior knowledge
 - Not chronological presentation
 - What's 'whisk'? Where?
 - Know your oven!
- Note total absence of 'style'
- *You* the author don't matter here – 'good' text *works*. Period.

To recap

- Tech writing is a well-understood problem
- We have several *programmatic* solutions
- Effective writing processes will help
 - Less cramming
 - Clearer, more useful writing...
 - ...which better reflects *your* understanding
- Email/call anytime: waxbanks@gmail.com, (617) 909-7324.