



Keywords in Technical and Professional Communication

Authors: Han Yu & Jonathan Buehl

Place of Publication: University Press of Colorado

Publisher: WAC Clearinghouse

Date of Publication: 2023

Number of Pages: 336

Reviewed by
D-Jay Bidwell

Michigan Technological University

Keywords history of TPC, keywords, research agendas, rhetoric, technical and professional communication, writing studies

The field of technical and professional communication (TPC) has a deep and evolving history, and the editors of *Keywords in Technical and Professional Communication*, Han Yu and Jonathan Buehl, have added to not only the history of the TPC field but also the keyword essay genre with this edited collection. The editors note that “The keyword essay collection has emerged as a unique academic genre composed of short essays that discuss the multiple and sometimes conflicting uses of words central to a discipline” (p. 7). In this collection, the editors aim to document the evolving complexity of TPC terminology while also serving as a resource for scholars unfamiliar with certain keywords in TPC and their usage across the field’s theories, disciplines, types, practices, and features. Rather than presenting a traditional bibliography or anthology, this work conveys this knowledge through a collection of keyword essays.

Yu and Buehl have also assembled a list of well-established TPC scholars to help contribute to this collection of keywords. They found the contributors through

Book Review: Bidwell on Yu & Buehl

survey suggestions, literature searches, and expertise in TPC. Additionally, the editors conducted literature searches in TPC journals and books to identify scholars with extensive publications on each keyword. Moreover, contributors followed structured guidelines to ensure consistency, addressing their assigned keywords' historical context, key debates, and future implications. Furthermore, the editors acknowledged potential biases against emerging and marginalized voices.

The forward, written by Johndan Johnson-Eilola and Stuart A. Selber, offers a thoughtful reflection on TPC, emphasizing the field's complexity, interdisciplinarity, and adaptiveness. The authors build on Carolyn Rude's (2015) chapter on the keyword "technical communication," published in *Keywords in Writing Studies*, where they agree the future of TPC "depends on articulating and delivering on comprehensible research agendas" (p. xii). Moreover, this collection of keywords for the field can aid those in TPC in formulating their research agendas.

In their editors' introduction, to frame why the field of TPC needs a collection of keywords, Yu and Buehl outline a thorough history of how TPC has been organized in the past. For example, a 1966 bibliography was published to help those interested in learning more about technical writing. The editors show an example of how the bibliography was organized to highlight why this collection of keywords is needed. What's more, the editors note, "the key terms of the field we now call technical and professional communication (TPC) have a rich history that is worth both documenting and updating" (p. 3). "For example, forms of the word *rhetoric* appear only five times in the 1966 bibliography but 45 times in the 1983 bibliography, which suggests the increasing importance of rhetoric as a framing concept for the field" (p. 3). Also, this collection helps advance the field of TPC, as the editors updated the various keywords found in Johnson-Eilola and Selber's (2004) *Central Works in Technical Communication* as the twentieth anniversary approached.

There are other keyword books for different fields of study; this collection is not much different, as it does not provide definitions from a dictionary but goes into great detail about the histories and how the keywords are used in specific fields. Yu and Buehl argue that "it is not our intention here to define or redefine "TPC" vis-à-vis "writing studies." We merely hope to demonstrate that the field of TPC has considerable depth, width, complexities, and nebulousness on/in its own terms. Given decades of development and processes of professionalization, it has accumulated its own share of thorny keywords that are well worth documenting and unpacking" (p. 9). Technical communication is much more complex than just a keyword found in a chapter, and this collection of keywords that have been integrated into the field shows the importance of keyword studies in tracing the field's disciplinary boundaries, key debates, and evolving terminology.

This collection includes 39 keyword chapters arranged alphabetically in the table of contents. The editors have thoughtfully grouped and organized the keywords into thematic categories such as (theoretical orientations, disciplinary orientations,

Book Review: Bidwell on Yu & Buehl

types of TPC, TPC practices, and features of TPC). This collection of keywords can serve as a guide to show how far the field of TPC has come and continues to evolve. This book helps to push and inform research agendas with its in-depth explanation of each keyword. For example, if a TPC practitioner is interested in how research has evolved in TPC, chapter 28 on the keyword *research* written by Chris Lam, emphasizes research in TPC as a systematic, purposeful process—not just a product or data activity. New and experienced instructors alike, whether embarking on their journey in technical and professional communication pedagogy or seeking to refresh their approach, will find chapter 22 on *pedagogy* written by Tracy Bridgeford helpful with the evolving pedagogies of technical communication, from skills-focused instruction to complex, theory-informed practices shaped by rhetorical, cultural, and social justice turns. It highlights how shifts in technology, workplace needs, and academic theory have influenced what and how we teach, positioning pedagogy as a central, dynamic force in the field. Chapter 1 on *accessibility* by Sushil K. Oswal helps TPC practitioners by offering a framework for an understanding of accessibility beyond compliance. Unpacking evolving definitions of *access* and *accessibility* reveals how design often excludes disabled users when they aren't included from the start of the design process. The afterword, *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Through Citation Practice*, by Kristen R. Moore, Lauren E. Cagle, and Nicole Lowman is a good reminder that technical communication as a field needs to keep practicing DEI even when all DEI efforts are under attack. The authors offer a compelling and critical reflection on the politics of citation and inclusion in shaping disciplinary identity.

The book offers an excellent collection from leading scholars like Steven Katz who wrote chapter 12 on *ethics*. Natasha Jones and Rebecca Walton wrote chapter 32 on *social justice*. Chapter 16 is on *information* by William Hart-Davison. J. Blake Scott wrote chapter 30 on *risk communication*. This collection ultimately reflects diverse perspectives and deep expertise within TPC. I recommend this book to TPC administrators, faculty, and graduate students, as well as technical communication industry professionals.

References

Johnson-Eilola, Johndan, & Selber, Stuart A. (2004). *Central Works in Technical Communication*. Oxford University Press.

Rude, Carolyn. (2015). Technical Communication. In Paul Heilker & Peter Vandenberg (Eds.). *Keywords in writing studies*. (pp. 165–168). University Press of Colorado.

Author Information

D-Jay Bidwell is a fourth-year Ph.D. candidate in the Rhetoric, Theory, and Culture program housed in the Department of Humanities at Michigan Technological University. His research focuses on technical and professional communication (TPC), usability, accessibility, and disability studies, with a particular interest in how these topics intersect and are taught in TPC classrooms.