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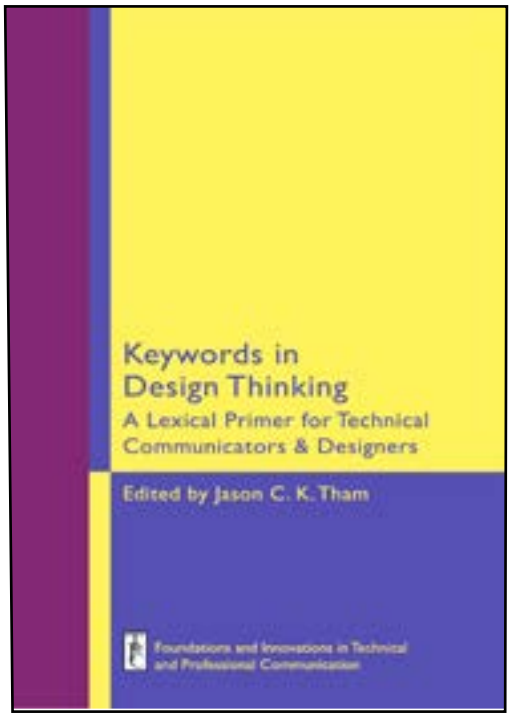

Keywords in Design Thinking: A Lexical Primer for Technical Communicators & Designers

Edited by Jason C.K. Tham

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Keywords in Design Thinking: A Lexical Primer for Technical Communicators & Designers, edited by Jason C. K. Tham, contains a glossary of critical design thinking terminology, each selection connecting the theory and practice of this concept and demonstrating its usefulness to technical and professional communicators in academia and industry. Since its formalization in the early 2000s via Stanford University's d.school, design thinking as a problem-solving framework continues to grow in popularity across many contexts, including business, healthcare, and education. While valued for its adaptability and human-centered methodology, the concept is also regularly critiqued as being obscure and difficult for professionals to define. By providing design thinking keywords and their developed meanings, each centered in technical and professional communication (TPC), Tham's selected terms alleviate this known ambiguity and maintain practical application to the technical communication classroom or workplace.

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Many contributors to this collection are academics in TPC, but Tham thoughtfully includes industry professionals to his roster as well. This choice allows diverse viewpoints on the theory and application of design thinking to be represented. For example, chapter authors Krys Gollihue and Jack T. Labriola each hold positions in the field of technical communication, with careers in technical marketing and content writing, as well as UX research, respectively (p. 162). This text is organized into two sections: the first providing additional nuance to the established and easily recognized terminology in design thinking, and the second offering new terms for TPC to consider as the field incorporates design thinking into professional work or teaching practice. While individuals familiar with the framework may be tempted to skip ahead to terms found in Part 2 due to established familiarity with the core elements found in Part 1, it should be noted that Part 1 considers the established terms inside new perspectives, which may expand notions of how they align with TPC. However, this text may be read in any number of ways, allowing for professionals to enter the conversation with the chapter of their choosing.

Part 1: The Design Thinking Phases

In this section, contributors fully expand and define each of the essential components of design thinking. These established terms are as follows: to empathize, define, ideate, prototype, test, and iterate. While each term would be expected in a collection on design thinking, Tham's contributors carefully apply the lens of technical communication to each one. It should be noted that each chapter of this entire collection follows a distinct format containing three subsections. First, the author provides a stable definition and background for the selected term. Next, the author makes connections between the term and the design application. And finally, at the close of each chapter, the author makes suggestions for pedagogical integration. This layout is usefully organized for all TPC professionals, since the text may be approached differently depending on what readers are prioritizing in their work. If a senior technical writer reads through Chapter 3, "Ideation," she might be drawn to Sano-Franchini's suggestion to writers "working to develop user documentation" and how they "might begin by considering the problem(s) the documentation is meant to address" during an ideation phase, thus bringing ideation and problem definition into closer relationship (p. 33).

Conversely, academics may pay closer attention to practical pedagogical advice such as Bradley Dilger's suggestions in Chapter 5, "Testing," in which he suggests "testing can be situated as a module or course unit or can be integrated into larger projects to encourage iteration and data-driven thinking" (p. 43). In Dilger's chapter on testing, he also connects his term to the first tenet of design thinking, empathizing, among others. The harmonious examples of layered connections are representative of the entire collection in which authors define their own terms, all while remaining cohesively in conversation with one another and with the field.

Part 2: Concepts and Applications

This section covers more nuanced terms that may help TPC readers to define the design thinking process more carefully in the academy and the workplace. While

a few of the terms in this section may first appear isolated apart from design thinking, the consistent format of the book lends itself to demonstrating the relationship of each term to its umbrella framework. By broadening connections through new terminology, this section makes the case for a more capacious understanding of design thinking within TPC. For example, in Chapter 15, "Edge Cases," MIT's Mary E. Caulfield explains how the study of conditions that fall outside our preconceived intentions might be directly related to the design thinking principles of prototyping and testing and suggests how instructors might incorporate an assignment on edge cases into a TPC course.

Zarah C. Moeggenberg's chapter, "Inclusion," asks TPC professionals to consider questions like, "How am I present in the design? How are my team members? How might that be affecting the design?" to further the connection between design thinking and its foundational tenet, empathy (p. 117). Tham draws additional conclusions on how we may prioritize these questions in his penultimate chapter on "User-Centered Design" in which he explores "activities such as contextual inquiry, journey mapping, and participatory design" in the classroom (p. 153). He acknowledges that academics may encounter difficulty in allowing their students to research actual users of a classroom-based theoretical design; however, he points to the usefulness of TPC programs which make effort to align with UX field research, allowing for reciprocal learning for a variety of stakeholders and improved outcomes for users. Within each chapter there are numerous nods and references to keywords from other chapters, making this text feel like a constellation of definitions, each supporting the collection as a whole.

Readers interested in furthering their understanding of this topic may find Tham's book, *Design Thinking in Technical Communication* (2021, Routledge), of particular usefulness. However, further reading is not needed in order to fully understand this keyword collection. In all, *Keywords in Design Thinking: A Lexical Primer for Technical Communicators & Designers*, can be a great introduction to design thinking as a framework for TPC, or may serve as a resource for TPC professionals to deepen their understanding and application of the concept. As a TPC text, *Keywords in Design Thinking* is pioneering, foundational, and highly recommended.

Author Information

Christina Davidson is a third-year PhD student in Rhetoric and Composition, currently serving as a BizComm coach and instructor of business communication in the University of Louisville's College of Business. Her primary research areas include workplace writing and professional communication. Currently, her research is centered around the use of GenAI tools in the workplace, how they may potentially transform employee writing processes and practices, and any potential impacts that may follow as a result. Additionally, she is exploring how university instructors may best prepare ourselves and our students as these changes impact our daily writing lives.