Technical Writing for CRM Professionals

a workshop from the **SRI Foundation**

As cultural resource management (CRM) professionals, our product is information. To be competitive, we must be able to produce the needed information clearly and quickly.

- How much does it cost you to have reports virtually rewritten in the editing process?
- How much time do you lose fixing the same writing problems over and over in every report?
- Does the quality of writing in your reports make a positive impression on clients and regulatory agencies or a negative one?

Creative writing is an art, but technical writing is a skill. No one is *born* with the ability to write clear, logical, comprehensible prose, but it can be learned. Writing ability varies from person to person, but everyone's writing can be improved by instruction and intensive feedback.

The SRI Foundation's ***Technical Writing for CRM Professionals*** course combines:

- an on-site, one-day workshop,
- a specially designed resource handbook, and
- detailed review of follow-up writing exercises

to teach basic writing skills and techniques. The course was designed by CRM professionals and editors with years of experience in writing, editing, and producing CRM reports. We've seen it all—the good, the bad, and the ugly. The workshop and the exercises are based on our experience and designed to build the needed skills and correct the common errors.

The workshop focuses on four problem areas—problems of logic, problems of organization, problems of language, and problems of usage. In-class exercises address each of these, and the participants receive a handbook of information, tools, and hints organized around the four problem areas. After the workshop, participants work together on specially designed, self-paced writing exercises. As a group and with writing partners, they critique and coach one another and receive detailed feedback from the Foundation's writer-editor team.

For additional information about ***Technical Writing for CRM Professionals***, contact Lynne Sebastian, program manager for the SRI Foundation, at (505) 892-5587 or e-mail lsebastian@ srifoundation.org.

Technical Writing for CRM Professionals

THE WORKSHOP

Three Basic Rules for Better Writing

Focus on the Reader
> Who is the reader?
> What does the reader know or not know about the subject?
> Organize to make the reader's job easier
> Watch your language!

Remember What You Started Out to Accomplish
> Remember your research goals
> Remember how this report will be used
> Remember that you have to prove, not just assert
> Remember that cultural resource management is about people

Write More Like You Talk
> Simple, short, and plain are always better than complex, multisyllabic, and highfalutin
> Acknowledge "whodunit"—passive voice does not make something scientific
> Would reading this out loud embarrass you?
> Would your parents understand this?

Why Bad Prose Happens to Good People

Problems of Language
> Wordiness and redundancy
> Sorry, wrong word
> Jargon and hackneyed phrases

Problems of Usage
> Grammar, spelling, and punctuation
> Sentence structure

Problems of Organization
> Organize *before* you write
> Choose a clear organizing principle
> Give clues to help the reader follow your argument and identify key points

Problems of Logic
> Build your argument
> Weave the lines of evidence together
> Support your conclusion

THE POSTWORKSHOP EXERCISES

The key to improving writing skills is detailed, individualized feedback. The postworkshop exercises provide this feedback. The exercises combine distance learning, in which writing projects are intensively reviewed by Foundation instructors, and in-house group exercises with writing partners and peer review. Participant groups will receive packets containing detailed instructions for the writing exercises and suggestions about how to make the most of group discussions and peer review. This component of the course is self-paced; participant groups determine the schedule for completing the exercises.

Each participant also receives a copy of the course handbook, *Technical Writing for CRM Professionals*.

Cost: $3,500 for the basic package, plus $150 per course participant