**A Note about Models and Templates**

(from the companion website for our textbook http://wps.ablongman.com/long\_gurak\_stcw\_1/131/33668/8619226.cw/index.html)

The models and templates included in this section are intended as guides only. Too many students approach technical communication as a formulaic set of tasks that can be performed according to some kind of rule-based “cookbook,” Step 1, Step 2, Step 3, add water and stir. If this site has done its job in emphasizing the role of critical thinking in technical communication, you should understand that this subject cannot be approached like a “cookbook.”

Why not? Why can’t technical communication be operationalized by complete imitation of existing documents and templates? If it is more efficient and saves time, why shouldn’t you do it?

1. Every situation, context, and culture is different. If you rigidly follow some document model from one situation to another without understanding the nuances of your own context, you could put safety, legal protection, or your own job at risk due to miscommunication.
2. With technology these days, time moves at Internet speed. The World Wide Web and interactive media have rewritten almost all document templates overnight, from resume conventions to online reports, interactive help, and usability testing. It stands to reason that high-speed changes will continue. If you slavishly follow a model from 2002, you could be out of step by 2004.

Wouldn’t it be better to understand and be able to analyze existing document models and templates so you can note and modify your communication techniques when these changes happen?

**If we don’t believe in the use of model-driven templates, why include them here?**

In our experience, technical communication is often *so foreign* to students coming out of traditional English classes, students can’t begin to create their own document standards without looking at some kind of a model. Most students have encountered few technical documents by the time they take a class, or if they have worked with such documents, they may not have understood what went into their creation. Others may have held jobs in technical fields, but the latest trends in technical communication may not have been incorporated into the practices of their workplace.

In other words, we include these models and templates to help bring some workplace practices up-to-date, but primarily to help students develop their skills in document analysis and critique, skills that will help them adapt to future environments.

Important caveat: these models and templates are NOT perfect! Many are currently in use at various work sites. They were written by real, fallible human beings, many of whom had other duties and specialties. Most were not professional technical writers. They are geologists, engineers, and chemists. Students like you also created many of these models.

We didn’t want to hold these models up as impossibly perfect standards, standards you could never hope to strive for as a student.

If technical communication has a mantra, it would be “whatever works.” These are working documents. They had a job to do and they did it with varying levels of success. Your job is to look closely at what went right and what could have been improved. Study them with a critical eye. Watch for signs that the times and cultural contexts have changed, limiting the model's usefulness. Make comparisons. Some documents types may already be going out of date.