

**Spilka, Rachel. *Digital Literacy for Technical Communication: 21st Century Theory and Practice*. New York: Routledge, 2010. Kindle Edition. 288 pp. ISBN 0805852745. \$31.96**

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In many popular and even in more reputable information and business industry publications, writings on emerging technologies and sea changes sometimes have a glib tone; writers and readers, both professional and not, refer to and think of digital technologies there are current and certainly here to remain instead as things that are tenuous and only becoming rooted rather than things that are strong and flourishing. This is most likely because this is how people think of them in reality; it is true that not everyone prefers digital means of communication. However, continuing to speak of technologies as emerging when they are in fact well-established does help to perpetuate the idea that they are new and not yet the standard while this idea will in the near future no longer be true. *Digital Literacy for Technical Communication* seems to not have this problem, and that makes it an excellent choice for anyone who wishes to approach this subject with *gravitas*.

The book is available in print and on the Amazon Kindle, which is appropriate given the subject matter of the book, which deals with communication and media and transition. The version reviewed here is the Kindle Edition. The foreword of the book, by JoAnn T. Hackos, begins with a few paragraphs on the Kindle itself and the reactions of others to the writer's use of it. It is a tangible example of change in publishing and the business of technical writing. "As the authors of this anthology clearly demonstrate, people who need technical information and communicators responsible for developing that information are both faced with a challenging new environment."

This book is an anthology of writings on technical communication with multiple authors, which means that there is input from a wide range of authorities and variation throughout the book. They are all current working in academia and have in common backgrounds in writing, technology, and technical communication. The authority of the authors and what they have written is assured by variety of means. There are editor and Contributor Biographies at the back of the book that provide the backgrounds and credentials of the authors, and their recent information in particular. The editor's Preface describes a kind of peer-review process for determining what pieces would go into the book, ensuring that each chapter was reviewed by "at least three practitioners," even listing the different sources which were used to find these practitioners, how the reviewers were chosen, and describing the review process. The chapters themselves include notes and references.

The preface outlines clearly what audience *Digital Literacy for Technical Communication* is meant for and what the different chapters of the book are meant to achieve.

The book is intended for persons who study and work in technical communication. This audience includes both persons who are new to the field and those who are experienced in technical writing but not the emerging technologies, as well as people in managerial positions. People who are not working in technical communication are not the intended audience of this book, yet it may be useful to those who are not. Appropriate for the subject matter, the literal structure of the writing is clear and specific, with the book consisting of nine chapters divided in three parts. The preface describes how and why the book was created in great detail. The editor also explains why the term

"Digital Literacy" was used instead of other words such as and librarian favorite "information literacy." "'Information Literacy' is strong in reflecting the breadth of our work and our goals, but this term could refer to traditional print media and does not necessarily refer to technology or to digital forms of communication." This is an accurate assessment of the word.

The first Part of the book, "Transformations in Our Work," has two chapters written by Saul Carliner and R. Stanley Dicks. It appropriately starts the main part of book by assessing how the field of technical communication has been changed by digital writing over the past thirty years. Carliner truly begins with the beginning and includes the past history of mainframe computing and how it fit into organizations doing technical writing, its eventual change to Personal Computing during the 1970s and 1980s, and later the introduction of the internet. This chapter explains what it has been like to be a technical writer over the past few decades and how the roles have changed in organizations. This history is welcome as it provides background to those who are new to the field. R. Stanley Dicks' chapter is about the larger-scale changes in the profession such as economics and changes in the work force.

Part II, "New Foundational Knowledge For Our Field," is about not only emerging technologies, but new ways of thinking of them. Dave Clark spends much of his chapter writing not only about Twitter and what it is, but what we mean when we analyze it and other such things, even analyzing others' analyses of the micro blogging services. In a sub-section titled "Technology Transfer and Diffusion," he writes on how technological changes happen. "In basic terms this is the study of how new technologies are moved into organizations and then used, implemented, and in some cases, rejected."

Michael J. Salvo and Paula Rosinski's chapter "Authoring Text to Architecting Virtual Space," is about "Information Design," deals with the complex ways in which we interact with information physically and semantically. This includes active uses of text such as organization of data and increasing the usefulness of search results. William Hart-Davidson writes about "Content Management" and Content Management Systems as a new way of thinking of information and publishing it. "Today's technical writer, with expertise in writing, editing, and communication, typically is expected to create templates, establish editorial guidelines, create metadata formats, and perform a host of other tasks that relate directly related to the management of content and not necessarily to its creation. In short, today's technical writer could very well be a content manager."

The third and last part, "New Directions in Cultural, Cross-Cultural, Audience, and Ethical Perspectives" gives broader context to the changes in the field of Technical Communication and beyond. Bernadette Longo writes about how digital mediums change our understanding of and experience with culture and community, while also taking the time to consider seriously what these really mean. Many modern commentators on the subject do not do this, and as Longo points out, "the idea of an all-inclusive, universal community does not make sense. So it is curious how some information designers and theorists continue to perpetuate an enduring desire to form such an acultural community." Questioning of this idea continues in the next chapter as Barry Thatcher Digital literacy across cultures, using as evidence and narrative glue an actual project on which he worked with persons from different countries. In the penultimate chapter, Ann M. Blakeslee writes on "Addressing Audiences in a Digital Age" and makes use of cases studies to show how writers and organizations can attempt

to identify and understand the needs of their intended users. "We have not questioned traditional approaches to analyzing audiences and to carrying out audience adaptation... we have yet to reexamine the notion of audience to determine if anything is changing or needs to change in response to the field's shift to digital communication."

Finally, Steven B. Katz and Vicki W. Rhodes end the content portion of the book with "Beyond Ethical Frames of Technical Relations: Digital Being in the Workplace World," an exploration of ethics in modern technical communication. This discussion goes so far as to examine how digital life changes how we think of our work, the world, and ourselves. "Employees view themselves, think of themselves, and live as resources, even outside of the organization. The digital and technical has become the personal (e.g., Blackberry devices, Facebook), and extend around the wired world. We exist everywhere with technology as a technology; we stand with resources as a reserve."

Such profound consideration of the meaning of digital literacy is what sets this book apart. The tone of the text throughout the book, despite its many authors, is academic and thoughtful. This is not a topical buzzword-laden account of what is new and what people might be using in the future, but a serious and often specific analysis of information tools specifically for those working in Technical Communication. Despite the focus on that type of writing, those who are not technical writers can appreciate the attention to detail concerning the experience of reading, writing, living, and *existing* within a digital medium, and thus *Digital Literacy for Technical Communication: 21st Century Theory and Practice* will be enlightening to those who desire substantial reading on our digital future, librarians included.