

## Chapter 1

# In a Nutshell

Here are the basics for getting started in technical communication:

**Focus on your audience.** Your audience needs to get work done. You help them. To help them, you must stay aware that your goal is to enable them to act.

Think of audiences as members of your community who expect that whatever happens will happen in a certain way and will include certain factors—your proposal is expected to include certain sections covering specific topics. When you act as members of the community expect other members to act, your message will be accepted more easily.

**Use design strategies.** Presenting your message effectively helps your audience grasp your message.

- ▶ Use the top-down strategy (tell them what you will say, then say it).
- ▶ Use headings (like headlines in newspapers).
- ▶ Use chunks (short paragraphs).
- ▶ Establish a consistent visual logic by making similar elements in your document look the same.
- ▶ Use a plain, unambiguous style that lets readers easily grasp details and relationships.

These strategies are your repertoire. Master them.

**Assume responsibility.** Because readers act after they read your document, you must present a trustworthy message. In other words, readers are not just receptacles for you to pour knowledge into by a clever and consistent presentation. They are stakeholders who themselves must act responsibly, based on your writing. Responsible treatment of stakeholders means that, among other things, you will use language and visuals with precision and hold yourself responsible for how well your audience understands your message.

**Think globally.** Much technical communication is distributed to audiences around the world. To communicate effectively, you must learn to localize. Radical localization allows you to consider the audience's broad-based cultural beliefs, taking into consideration thinking patterns that they use. General localization allows you to present the details of your document in accord with locally expected methods of description, for instance, designating the date as Day/Month/Year, or weights in kilograms.