Teaching Business, Technical and Academic Writing Online and Onsite
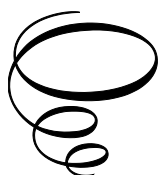
Teaching Business, Technical and Academic Writing Online and Onsite:

A Writing Pedagogy Sourcebook

By

Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam

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To my daughter
Puja Vengadasalam
Who lights up my days

To my husband
Pannir Vengadasalam
Who supports me in every possible way

To my brother
Subhas Sen
Who inspires me to better my best

And to my parents
Jagadindra Nath Sen and Chandana Sen
Who taught me that working hard is the way to being
good and great.

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PREFACE

From one writing teacher to another, this book offers pedagogical insights and instructional tools for the three key aspects of facilitating a class successfully: instructional design, participation management, and multimedia use. When instructors focus synergistically on the three aspects of class facilitation to plan, engage, and manage their classes, the courses—whether taught in face to face, blended, or online formats—become holistic learning experiences for students.

All courses begin with planning. Section One of the book titled "Pedagogics, Instructional Principles, and Syllabus Design" discusses various theoretical scaffoldings and distinguishing frameworks that underpin how writing instructors devise instructional activities. Even though the syllabus always carries the institutional and departmental stamp in its course objective, grading policy, and delivery system, so much so that the individual teacher has little say in the global framework, s/he *can* bring his or her unique signature and teaching philosophy into the local on-the-ground instruction of the course. Since it is through weekly activities, instructional methods, and actionable assignments that course objectives are achieved, the way each writing teacher envisages and plans out the course matters.

Teaching project writing in scientific and technical writing classes or in professional and business writing courses can be confounding because they need to be both real-world and academic exercises. Chapter One, titled "Superimposing R.E.A.L. Principles on the Project Writing Pyramid: A Paradigm Shift in Teaching Professional Writing," discusses how professional writing classes, which were set up to prepare students for on-the-job writing, can better accomplish their goal. To get consistent outputs from classes that require the writing of project proposals or reports, writing teachers may want to interpose R.E.A.L. principles onto the *Find-Test-Deliver* pedagogical triangle that represents the three phases of their project writing courses. When any of the R.E.A.L principles, where R stands for *Reader oriented*, E for *Extensively researched*, A for *Actionable solution*, and L for *Looped composition*, are ignored or improperly transposed on the project writing pyramid, the writing output suffers and is neither workplace oriented nor academically satisfying. The chapter offers insights into the rationale behind the principles and proffers suggestions on how instructors

could incorporate them into their teaching. Evolving out of a presentation at the University of Maryland University College's Sharefair, the chapter was first published in *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, Volume 12, Number 2 in 2020.

Academic writing teachers, too, face pedagogical challenges while instructing academic writing courses at undergraduate or graduate levels. Chapter Two, titled "Transformative Pedagogy and Student Voice: Using S.E.A. Principles in Teaching Academic Writing," describes how transformative pedagogy can be a way out since its implementation leads to the development of distinct student voices. Whether the course is taught at the undergraduate level through readings, research, and argumentative writing tasks, or at the graduate level through literature review, synthesis, and academic treatise writing assignments, teachers will find the article useful in their mission of helping students grow voices and make contributions to knowledge. The chapter expands on how principles of Scaffolding, Empowerment, and Awareness lead to the development of student expression, and usher in transformation for all stakeholders in the academic writing classroom. Growing out of a New Jersey College English Association conference presentation, the chapter was first published in the *Journal of Effective Teaching in Higher Education* in its Fall 2020 issue.

There is an urgent need to teach and popularize 'Writing for Publications' classes at the graduate and doctoral levels. While acknowledging that the debate about who should instruct such classes continues, the paper proffers methods and practices that writing instructors could use to teach such a demanding course. Chapter Three highlights how the course could encourage scholar-participants to opt for modeling as a way to familiarize themselves with disciplinary and journal conventions. Since peer reviews are central to the publication process, the chapter especially expands on the way online peer review workshops could be conducted at milestone points in the semester to elevate and formalize the peer review process. A sample syllabus, with week-by-week activity break-up, is offered. Developing out of a GlobETS conference presentation, the chapter titled "Publish or Perish!: Sharing Best practices for a Writing Instructor Led 'Writing for Publications' Course," was first published in the *Journal of Critical Studies in Language and Literature* in July 2020.

The teacher, whether s/he is teaching onsite, online, or in a blended format, needs to use discussion spaces for instructional purposes as well as for encouraging participatory learning. Keeping students engaged and driven by using multimedia materials, as well as training them to present complex material through visuals, is the need of the hour. Section Two touches on these important areas, and is titled "Facilitating Online

Discussions, Incorporating Digital Multimedia Assets, and Using Visual Tools." It offers detailed knowhow and information on guiding online participation for writing teachers in general and online teachers in particular. It also discusses how digital multimedia assets, such as open educational resources, which are changing the face of education, may be used in the classroom. In addition, it highlights new methods and best practices in creating and using visuals, such as infographics.

Moving class discussions up Bloom's taxonomy scale is an index of a teacher's success in steering them in ways that realize the cognitive goals s/he set up for the course. Since the discussion area on a learning management system is the space where class interaction and the teaching and learning happens, Chapter Four offers tools and methods to instructors to assess discussions and information flow, not only from teacher to student, but also between student and student, and from student to teacher. The creation of threads and trees as visible and measurable indicators is discussed, even as rubrics are offered for use in the chapter. Screenshots from learning management systems used in classes at various American universities are utilized to demonstrate the use of the discussion pedagogy outlined in the article. The chapter builds off a Rutgers Online Learning conference presentation titled "Of Threads and Trees: How Less is too Less?" and was first published in *Writing and Pedagogy*, Volume 5, Issue 2, 2014, under the title "A Learner Centered Pedagogy to Facilitate and Grade Online Discussions in Writing Courses."

Chapter Five discusses open educational resource repositories, the need for curation, and the challenges facing the open educational resources movement. Best practices and outlines of a possible open educational resources taxonomy and open educational resources pedagogy are described. After offering a checklist/ rubric to help educators decide on the kind of open educational resource to choose, the chapter describes three ways of interfacing with open educational resources in writing classes in general, and business and technical writing classes in particular. The paper reviews findings before concluding that the future belongs to open educational resources for their value as multimedia assets. The chapter grew out of a presentation at the New Jersey Writers Association conference, and was first published in the Fall 2020-Winter 2021 issue of the *International Journal of Open Educational Resources* with the title: "Moving towards an Open Educational Resources (O.E.R.) Pedagogy: Presenting Three Ways of Using O.E.R. in the Professional Writing Classroom."

Chapter Six, titled "Infographics in Academic & Professional Writing," focusses on the need to use infographics in academic teaching and project writing. The special requirements of teaching to the new generation

of students are discussed, and the reasons why it has become necessary for teachers to use infographics to enhance their teaching and classroom interaction are detailed. Why teachers of academic, business, and technical writing classes need to encourage students to use infographics, which are combinations of texts and images, data visualizations and illustrations, brought together effectively by the creators' controlling visions, is pointed out. Evolving out of a North Eastern Group symposium presentation, the chapter proffers practitioner details on infographic tools, possible assignments, and best practices. An earlier version of the article was published under the title "The Why and How of the Infographic Wow: Infographics in Teaching and Writing: Best Practices" in the *DeVry University Journal of Scholarly Research* Volume 4, Issue 2, Winter 2018.

Every article has grown out of this author's diverse and variegated teaching and corporate experiences spread over twenty five plus years. As an undergraduate and graduate teacher who has taught successfully in online, onsite, and hybrid formats in over a dozen global institutions, this writer has written each article with a practitioner focus. Since the author has been a full time faculty, content expert, and visiting professor of academic, business and technical writing as well as worked as Marketing Director and Technical communicator at premier corporate houses such as the INFINITEE group worldwide, the book contains ideas that can help the writing teacher connect the classroom to the work world. Again, every stratagem discussed in this handy sourcebook has been tried and tested while teaching in online, onsite, and hybrid formats at nearly a dozen leading American institutions including Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and the University of Minnesota. Hence, writing teachers in general and the underserved online writing teachers in particular will find strategies in this handbook that will help them engage and connect to students better as well as make their classes stand out. In the post-COVID context that has forced writing instructors to explore online and blended teaching that are now poised to become the norm rather than the exception, this pedagogic sourcebook with its collection of best practices is likely to prove especially useful for teachers trying to excel in remote as well as hybrid teaching. After all, each best practice in this book is being shared from one writing teacher to another with one central objective: *to empower fellow teachers to empower students to excel both in academia and the workplace*.

For comments, speaking, and review requests, please contact the author at sarbani.dr@gmail.com.

INTRODUCTION

WILLIAM MAGRINO PH.D.

William Magrino is an Associate Teaching Professor in the Writing Program at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. He is also the lead author of *Scientific and Technical Writing: From Problem to Proposal* **and** *Business and Professional Writing: From Problem to Proposal,* **now in their fourth editions. Dr. Magrino is the longest standing faculty director of the Business & Technical Writing division at Rutgers University, having headed the advanced specialized program from September, 2007 through January, 2020.**

As someone who has worked in the writing classroom for the better part of the last three decades, Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam has composed an insightful and vital text for anyone interested in the direction of professional writing pedagogy in the 21st century. Whether you have been a life-long innovator in the teaching of the discourses and genres of workplace communication, a fledgling academic trying to break into the field, or a member of the business or technical professional worlds with a desire to share your wealth of knowledge with a new generation of future professionals, in the traditional classroom setting or online, this guide will be of imminent value.

Over the past ten to fifteen years, the changing landscape of the American academy, in accord with the proliferation of shared computing and new media, has necessitated a reevaluation of the traditional classroom space. Online instruction, once an 'experiment' among a select number of graduate programs and members of the for-profit educational arena, has become commonplace at all levels of higher education as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. Now that we have been able to take into account the 'digital divide' between access and exclusion, once prevalent among our populations, more students from diverse educational, socioeconomic, and geographic backgrounds have had the opportunity to take advantage of the added flexibility of distance learning, along with its wealth of resources. However, as with any new educational technologies, especially those that seem to offer so much potential and promise, administrators and instructors

are frequently quick to attempt to adopt these tools and apply the related methods, without conducting the appropriate research in light of the needs of their students, their colleagues, and the purported mission of their respective institutions. This is where Dr. Sen Vengadasalam's practiced approach offers insight to anyone interested in expanding the boundaries of their learning spaces, for online, hybrid, or blended approaches, or as merely a complement to the current limitations of their traditional classroom environment.

The need to reconsider the parameters of the classroom, while taking advantage of relevant emerging technologies in a carefully considered way, has been a principal concern in the professional writing academic fields, in which we desire to train students to develop documents and projects in the ways they will be expected to produce these deliverables once they enter the world of work. In this way, Dr. Sen Vengadasalam's 'real-world' approach to online teaching dovetails with the philosophy I have advocated for the past ten years. Communicating, collaborating, and producing text and images within the virtual classroom in the same way as they will complete these tasks in their future workspaces, are among the most important skills we can impart to our professional writing students.

Honing her knowledge after twenty-five years of teaching professional writing around the world, both physically and virtually, Dr. Sen Vengadasalam offers us a unique view into the practices of the 21st century higher education classroom facilitator. Not only is Dr. Sen Vengadasalam acutely aware of the current state of instruction of our professional writing population, at both undergraduate and graduate levels, she has been at the forefront of its evolution, and will assist us in leading our students and colleagues into its inevitable next stage. An expert in all styles of instruction—from face-to-face, to hybrid, to blended, and with native speakers, as well as non-native speakers of English—Dr. Sen Vengadasalam is uniquely qualified for this task. I can attest to Dr. Sen Vengadasalam's expertise, professionalism, and teaching excellence. She has been one of the leaders and most innovative members at our Business & Technical Writing division of the Rutgers Writing Program, and you will quickly identify that many of the principles, observations, and techniques in this book are derived directly from the fine work she produces in our program.

In Part One of this text, titled, "Pedagogics, Instructional Principles, and Syllabus Design," Dr. Sen Vengadasalam offers us an insight into the primary tension faced by all teachers of professional writing–the need to foster real-world veracity–while at the same time, refusing to compromise a given assignment's academic credibility. On one hand, in our classrooms, we all aim for our students to experience the demands of professional

writing and practice the discourses we want them to master, while composing authentic and viable documents that would fulfill, and even exceed, the expectations of a given workplace. At the same time, in our colleges and universities, there is always the more immediate demand that the work of our students fulfills the academic requirements which we all agreed on when deciding to teach, develop, or take a given course. I specifically encounter the need to strike this balance in my research proposal writing classes, especially with students who are currently members of the professional arenas. In response to this tension between the 'real' and the 'academic,' Dr. Sen Vengadasalam offers us the R.E.A.L. principles of project-based writing courses. Here, R.E.A.L. refers to R for *Reader Oriented*, E for *Extensively Researched*, A represents *Actionable solution*, and L is for *Looped Composition*. In her assessment, Dr. Sen Vengadasalam makes a strong case for this approach in light of the writing and communication skills expected by prospective employers in the existing, and emerging, 21st century workplace.

In the section on "Facilitating Online Discussions," Dr. Sen Vengadasalam advances the use of electronic media regardless of class design. As I exhort, "In the 21st century, if you want to teach professional writing in the way that will benefit your students to the greatest extent possible, even the traditional brick-and-mortar classroom needs to be presented in a hybrid format." As Dr. Sen Vengadasalam illustrates, today's ingenuity in terms of classroom design and delivery is rooted in the integration of new media in original and thoughtful ways. Here, appealing to both the innovator and the traditionalist, Dr. Sen Vengadasalam dutifully points to effective uses of the discussion tools of any learning management system (L.M.S.), while explaining how they could help our students climb the levels of Bloom's taxonomy. Even the most cautious of classroom educators will find a significant amount of practical value in Dr. Sen Vengadasalam's techniques and resources.

Part Two of this original and timely volume, "Incorporating Digital Multimedia Assets & Using Visual Tools," looks ahead to the rapid proliferation of Open Educational Resources. Here, Dr. Sen Vengadasalam identifies the current state of O.E.R.s, how they have changed higher education, and their potential for the future. Evaluating these resources through the lens of the 'Six P's' of proposal writing, from my work at the Rutgers Writing Program, one can see how an assiduous instructor should be able to evaluate, integrate, and curate O.E.R.s based on the criteria of an individual assignment, while simultaneously enhancing their students' engagement with a larger world.

I truly hope you find Dr. Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam's book as relevant, astute, and practical as I did. Rooted in the traditions and discourses of professional writing instruction, while remaining open to the opportunities for the future, this text directs us toward new and, at times, necessarily, winding, pedagogical avenues in our rapidly evolving academic and electronic landscapes. As someone constantly looking for ways to enhance my students' experience in becoming proficient in professional writing, as well as increasing their chances for employment based upon mastery of these skills, I am certain that this text will remain one of my most valuable resources for years to come.

PART ONE:

PEDAGOGICS, INSTRUCTIONAL PRINCIPLES, AND SYLLABUS DESIGN

CHAPTER ONE

SUPERIMPOSING R.E.A.L. PRINCIPLES ON THE PROJECT WRITING PYRAMID: A PARADIGM SHIFT IN TEACHING PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Abstract

Institutions of higher education introduced professional writing classes as a way of preparing students for on-the-job writing. To better accomplish the goal, as well as to get a more consistent output from these classes that require the writing of a project proposal or report, writing teachers may want to incorporate R.E.A.L. principles onto the *Find-Test-Deliver* pedagogical triangle that marks the three phases of their project writing courses. When R.E.A.L principles, where R stands for *Reader oriented*, E for *Extensively researched*, A for *Actionable solution*, and L for *Looped composition,* are used, the writing output becomes both academically sound and workplace appropriate. The article delves into the rationale behind the principles and proffers suggestions on how teachers could incorporate them into their teaching. It concludes that such an approach is a paradigm shift in professional writing instruction. The chapter was first published with the same title in the *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction*, Volume 12, Number 2 in 2020.

1.1 Introduction

Colleges and universities began to offer professional writing classes as a way of preparing students to write in the real world. Though they go by different appellations, these undergraduate courses can be

grouped into two buckets: technical and business writing classes. While technical writing courses offer exposure and training in preparing technical proposals, user manuals, and scientific papers to students majoring in the sciences; business writing classes give students majoring in business, social sciences, and the humanities opportunities to gain expertise in writing official memos and letters, resumés and feasibility studies, proposals and reports. While these Writing Across the Curriculum (W.A.C.) courses include assignments on different forms of technical and business writing, with varying weight, they all feature a proposal or report writing assignment that requires students to write about how the implementation of their research-backed plans solves real-world problems.

To contend that college graduates can learn to do this realistically, with only on-the-job training, is to assume that universities can play no role in, or have no understanding of, the broad contexts of activity their graduates are bound for. Since business and technical writing classes are specialized Writing Across the Curriculum (W.A.C.) courses, their development not only reflects revisions of local assumptions about the place of writing in and across the curriculum in higher education, but also highlights the evolving realization that academic institutions need to cater to corporate developments and workplace requirements. What W.A.C. professional writing courses need to do is to be very explicit about connections between real world needs, real world information, and real world skills to be learned. In this context, it becomes necessary to find how far that has happened, and probe into principles that can help instructors to help their students acquire mastery in business and technical discourses, while reifying the social relations and expectations of which those discourses are a part.

This paper focuses on the project writing component of W.A.C. professional writing courses, and offers fellow instructors a teaching methodology based on R.E.A.L. principles that can be superimposed on the three vertices or phases of the find, test, and deliver apices of the project writing pyramid. The paper discusses how such project writing instruction is different from product-based professional writing, and may be successfully taught in online and hybrid courses, as much as in onsite modes of instruction. The paper finally concludes that the paradigm shift in project writing instruction that R.E.A.L. introduces leads to students successfully receiving training in college in the kind of on-the-job writing they will need to do when they join the workforce.

1.2 The Employers Weigh In: The Problem

Business and technical writing programs were set up to prepare students for the workplace. However, as far back as 1982, Faigley and Miller's surveys of employers in businesses and industry found that the required composition courses and elective courses in business and technical writing were not producing competent writers, with 78% of the upper-level managers in business and industry commenting that the writing done by new graduates on the job was poor. The finding was backed up by Bizell (1982), who pointed out that a wide gulf had crept in between what colleges were delivering and what industries expected their students to know.

> We want our students to succeed in the dominant culture. The theoretical question suggested by this conflict–and it is especially urgent for researchers and teachers of professional and non-academic writing–is the relation of discourse to social practice…I am not condemning research and teaching in professional writing; rather, I am making the claim that this research and pedagogical practice do not go far enough. If we recognize and explore the challenge presented by the relationship between discourse, teaching, and social reproduction, we may be able to discover ways to intervene…This would, of course, require that we expand our research goals and significantly alter our teaching. (p. 7)

The alteration did not happen, and the gulf continued to grow, prompting Herndl (1993) to warn that current pedagogical practices were producing "students who are not aware of the ideological development of discourse and who do not understand the cultural consequences of a dominant discourse or the alternate understandings it excludes" (p. 349). To bridge the chasm and to ensure greater levels of "job readiness among graduates" (p. 11), Lee Harvey (2000) called for renovations of higher education curricula. There was not only an evolving perception that a new methodology was required, but also the realization that it is necessary to listen more keenly to the feedback from, and be more sensitive to, the requirements of the workplace.

To many, a college education is as good as the way it prepares students for their careers and their professional roles. As industries increasingly monitor how effectively universities are fulfilling their roles, they find that institutions of higher education are not able to endow students with satisfactory communication, especially writing skills. A McKinsey & Co.-sponsored survey (2012) found that less than half of employers believe that new graduates "are adequately prepared for entry-level positions" (Mourshed et al., 18). In contrast, 72% of educational providers consider their graduates to be work-ready. Given the difference in the perceptions,

the authors affirmed that the two sectors seem to "live in parallel universes" (Ibid.). The report's summary of recommendations noted the desire of businesses to see greater alignment between university curricula and the needs of industry, and a greater emphasis placed on the development of specific employability skills such as communication skills in university programs (p. 209). Jackson (2013) took the point further when she highlighted that "there is a need for role and attitudinal changes to the assumption of transfer" as well as to perceptions that workplace skills can only be acquired in "workplace settings" (p. 776). The absence of these changes not only holds graduates back from gaining satisfactory employment, but, as Moore & Morton (2017) point out, it also has an inhibiting effect on the performance of employing organizations, and ultimately the broader economy (p. 591). Hence, the 2018 National Association of Colleges and Employers survey went so far as to say that, "when it comes to the types of skills and knowledge that employers feel are most important to workplace success, the large majority does NOT feel that recent college graduates are well prepared" (Bauer-Wolf). The AAC&U report (2018) goes on to add, "This is particularly the case for applying knowledge and skills in real-world settings, critical thinking skills, and written and oral communication skills–areas in which fewer than three in ten employers think that recent college graduates are well prepared" (Ibid.). The emergent consensus is that college students need to develop proficiency in various workplace document types for them to be successful.

Since professional writing programs had taken up the task to prepare students for workplace writing, a best-practice approach was one that required all prescribed assignments to be written in the format of business documents. As Hancock et al. (2008) put it:

> The most common feature of workplace writing was the need for brevity and concision. A related area was the need to avoid the frequent use of academic and technical language in one's writing. It was pointed out that in the professions, the recipient of any written communication–both within an organization and outside–will typically not share the same technical background & expertise as the writer, so there is a need to constantly monitor and adjust one's language…[A]nother parameter was the action-oriented nature of writing in the professions, such that all messages are somehow concerned with prescribing or responding to some form of action…, hence an important written communication 'skill' that needs to be developed in students is the ability to recognize the specific circumstances and constraints that shape any writing episode (purpose, audience, etc.), and to be able to 'adapt' their writing to suit such contexts. (p. 11)

While it is clear as to what the goal of the new kind of professional writing instruction is, the change, even if necessary, brings several pedagogical challenges that need to be both explored and overcome.

1.3 Pedagogical Challenges: The Background

That professional writing classes have to train students to write to audiences both inside and outside the office has various implications for professional writing teachers. Signposting and structuring become very important since, as Faigley and Miller (1982) rightly point out, lack of clarity and poor organization of messages in the workplace lead to wasted time, misunderstandings, and poor public relations (p. 564-69). As per Price (1985), business and technical writing instructors need to accept the following:

> 1) teachers have an obligation to make sure their students leave professional writing classes with the writing skills and composing strategies they will need after graduation, and 2) teachers must design courses that expose students to the various forms they will use and to the rhetorical considerations they will encounter in on-the-job writing. (p. 3)

Composing strategies (such as signposting), which need to be taught, are direct outputs of audience centeredness. Unlike academic writing classes, the instructor—a member of the academic community—is not the audience. Instead, s/he and the student writer are working together to compose messages and produce writing for corporate and workplace use. It can be pedagogically challenging for both the instructor and the writer to remember to be conscious of the external audience. The need to teach students to be audience centered, where the audience comprises of institutional decision-makers, cannot be overemphasized. As professional, or on-the-job writing is conscious of organizational objectives and targets, it is always cognizant and clear about what it wants the audience (the reader) to do. Since it wishes its reader to give an order, reply with a clarification, connect to someone, and so on, workplace writing needs to be more audience-oriented and reader-friendly than academic writing. Since workplace writing caters to, and seeks to persuade its audience to take action, teachers need to work on the development of a persuasive skillset and acute audience consciousness in their students. To present and teach this to professional writing students is important, even if it entails teachers taking up the challenge of having to put themselves in the shoes of their students' intended audience.

Several discourse studies have focused on the types of contrasts noted between written communication in academic writing and professional writing domains. As Lannon and Gurak (2013) point out, "Proposals attempt to persuade an audience to take some form of action: to authorize a project, accept a service or product, or support a specific plan for solving a problem or improving a situation" (p. 582). The persuasion has to be done through targeted research that involves the ability to perform investigations into theoretical domains, case studies, and best practices. Student writers, consequently, need to be guided through, and develop, expertise at research methods that not only include academic writing research into library academic databases, but also interviews, surveys and other modes of primary research. The challenge of professional writing curriculum design, therefore, is to evolve one that bridges domains of academia and industry as well as theory and application. What is needed in our professional writing courses is not just instruction in the writing of specific workplace genres, such as emails, letters, memos, instructions, white papers, proposals, reports, and so on, but also exposure to a range of experiences and tasks that will help student writers learn how to shape their acquired knowledge and expressive discourse in distinctive and communicatively appropriate ways. Hence, the assignment of writing a real-world proposal or a report offers exposure and opportunities to be trained in multiple communication tasks which prepare students for their workplace writing very well. However, the challenge is to evolve and break up the assignments into looped deliverables that do not overwhelm learners.

Proposal or report writing, henceforth referred to as project writing, is often a significant part of a larger course in technical and professional communication. Research on course design finds that there are not many courses solely dedicated to teaching this important area of technical and professional communication, and they almost always include other forms of professional writing. As the differences between technical writing and business writing courses are often arbitrary, and are always accompanied by assignments that involve the drafting of a letter or a memo, a resumé or a manual, a technical description or a white paper. As dissertation researcher, Price (1985) puts it, both classes could feature "a memo to a subordinate, a letter to an irate customer, instructions to a consumer on how to assemble a bicycle, or a written advertisement for a computer," and be classified as professional writing practice (p. 1). If a technical writing course often includes the writing of a technical guide or a user manual, a product description or a technical paper aimed at informing readers, so they can understand the parts, operate a device, know a product, or understand an issue; business writing classes require students to write website comparisons,

social media analyses, or position papers that require them to learn how to evolve parameters, understand content & design principles, and take stands. Even if courses differ across universities in the number of assignments and student deliverables, they all feature a project writing component that is the focus of this article. While there is a consensus that all courses have a project writing component, there is little agreement on whether these projects are to be simulations or implementable solutions, or on how these projects are to be taught and graded. Moreover, the trend is to teach project writing in a vacuum because it is pedagogically easier to do so. This can be self-defeating, because the outputs students produce cease being like on-the-job writing, and the importance of customizing writing to an evolving situation stops being a course objective. Realism definitely needs to be reinstated into the proposal writing pedagogy if the courses are to fulfil their mission of being academically sound while teaching students to write in ways that are relevant to, and required in, the workplace.

        Even though realistic project writing is so necessary, analyses of course syllabi and assignments reveal a need to redress the limited spaces in which project writing is being taught today. A scrutiny of business and technical writing textbooks, as undertaken by Lawrence et al. (2019), reveals the need for texts and courses to fully explore proposal writing through active and practical experiences, so it can achieve the following:

    1. Textbooks offer rhetorical advice about proposals, describing them as persuasive documents that must be attentive to the audience and the needs the proposal is meant to address.
    2. Textbooks offer practical advice about proposals, which emphasize the multiple modes of communication required in a proposal, as well as the basics of proposal components and the proposal process (identifying, reading, and responding to a solicitation, modulating texts and projects to an audience, and producing ethical, impactful results or changes). (p. 36)

While course texts need to discuss how proposals function across various spaces ranging from basic requests for institutional or workplace policy changes to generation of business and sales development tools, what the teaching needs to emphasize is how the proposals' complexity, range of purposes, and audiences, impact the writing. Encouraging students to write about campus-wide or township improvement initiatives may be effective ways to teach the rhetoric of proposal writing in terms of its persuasive functions, while incorporating realism and real world factors into the writing project.

If the teaching of technical and professional discourse is to be successful, the classes need to build abilities of students to persuade readers to take purposive rational action and resolve institutional and organizational problems. As Lawrence et al. put it (2019), "Instead of a form-based conceptualization, proposal writing instruction and research must emphasize the differences in the rhetorical situations in which proposals are written in order to equip student writers and researchers with a wide set of rhetorical tools for analyzing and understanding the writer's role, audience, resources, limitations, and intended proposal action, in the development of a proposal" (p. 44). The proposal writing assignment in an undergraduate course replicates the rhetoric of proposals in corporate environments when it offers an opportunity for students to evolve and practice the skills they will be called upon to use in developing on-the-job writing proposals and workplace reports in the future. To help enhance proposal instruction and to bring in synchronization with how project writing operates in the workplace, it may be worthwhile to explore the methodology of superimposing the principles of *Reader orientedness*, *Extensive research*, *Actionable solution*, and *Looped composition* on the three aspects or vertices of the proposal writing pyramid: search, test, and deliver. This superimposition may be the way to bridge the gulf between proposal/ report pedagogy and real world proposal/ report writing practices.

1.4 Methodology: The Project Writing Pyramid: Search-Test-Deliver

Business and technical writing are taught in face-to-face, hybrid, and online formats. Irrespective of the mode of delivery, instructors may want to center their teaching, not on telling students what to do for their current projects, but on developing a skillset that will help them write project documents in the future. All projects and project writing broadly follow the three phases of 'find,' 'test,' and 'deliver.' If the writing task is envisaged as a triangle with three vertices, it begins with a search, climbs up to testing, and devolves into composing a plan that is delivered and presented in proposal, report, or presentation formats.

In the real world, the project writing process begins with 'Request For Proposals,' or R.F.P.s. Hence, the student's writing task begins with the search for a project to write out a proposal or report for. The question to spark off the search is this: What is the key problem that my project proposal needs to find a solution to write about? When students search for possible topics, they *find* one that is in line with their professional interests, career goals, and disciplinary knowledge. At the beginning of the semester, the

answer to their question is indeterminate. As students search, investigate, and probe into disciplinary matrices, case studies, and best practices, their research converges towards what could be a solution. As their research coalesces, the question around the midpoint of the assignment sequence becomes: Are the solutions I am recommending and the plan I am evolving from my research feasible? In order to be able to answer that question, students need to be tutored in *testing* procedures or feasibility investigations, such as surveys, interviews, and other instruments of primary research. When the feasibility testing is completed, the *delivery* stage sets in. In this phase, student writers offer their research and their feasibility results, their recommendations and their action plans in written format as well as in presentations. In this stage, students practice conceptualizing, organizing, and structuring their data in a real-world environment such that it answers the question in the audience's mind: What is the guarantee that the solution will work?

Even when the class is taught remotely, all business and technical writing classes feature a formal presentation component using synchronous tools like Skype, Zoom, and WebEx or asynchronous tools like VoiceThread, Voice enabled PowerPoint, and Screencast, so students learn how to present their projects using technology. Project presentations, like project documents, must have an official tone and take place in a formal setting. Each student practices his or her persuasive skills in presentations where each attempts to convince the class (who stand in for the real-world audience) that their data and their recommendations are sound. Facilitating presentations sessions, which are followed up with question and answer exchanges that are either live or recorded, become occasions to proffer suggestions to presenters, and are valuable opportunities for students to prepare for their future role as workplace presenters.

Even if the pedagogical pyramid, with its vertices of search, test, and deliver, is useful in course planning, teachers need to be offered strategies to use in the three phases. In Ballantine's (2010) words, "Public works require public words…The best way is to offer an open and flexible professional and technical writing curriculum" (p. 236). Each aspect of the pedagogical pyramid presents instructors with unique challenges and may require instructors to create a subset of assignments that leads to the final project document. As the student writers needs a lot of handholding before they reach the final delivery stage, business and technical writing textbook writers and teachers may need to create mini-lessons and lead up assignments in the 'find,' 'test,' and 'delivery' stages. Again, workshops and instructional aids may be required to help students through the cycles

of drafting, reviewing, and revising, before the project documents can actually be delivered to the patron.

Given the onerous responsibility on them, instructors may require a pedagogical set of principles to help them in their teaching of workplace writing. Integrating R.E.A.L. principles onto the 'find,' 'test,' and 'deliver' vertices of the pedagogical triangle, which mark the three phases of their project writing courses, is empowering for the teacher as well as a way to get consistent and workplace-appropriate project writing assignments. To advance the purposes of the class and the needs of the students, the teaching pedagogy and syllabus may need to incorporate R.E.A.L. principles where R stands for *Reader oriented*, E for *Extensively researched*, A for *Actionable solution* and L for *Looped composition*.

Before going into the details of the method and offering some practitioner tools for incorporating each principle into the teaching methodology, it may be necessary to explore how these principles map to the 'find,' 'test,' 'deliver,' instructional pyramid. *R* or *Reader orientation* is the first principle of R.E.A.L. that project writing and project writers are likely to find helpful. Being conscious of the needs of the audience, or *reader orientedness*, is what makes or breaks on-the-job writing. Being mindful, knowledgeable, and aware of the audience—whether it is an institutional entity or a corporate/ technical reader—not only influences the way students conduct their upcoming research, but also impacts the tone and techniques they choose while writing, and their ability to successfully persuade their audiences. If in the 'find' stage, students zero in on a problem in their workplace or institutions, or in their schools or communities, they embark on the search for a solution in the stage that follows. Examining theoretical frameworks and illustrative case studies helps writers to identify ways and means to both scaffold and *test* their solutions This is what the second postulate or the E for *Extensive research* principle is all about. Students need to be guided to *find* a problem in their disciplines or their communities, as also when they attempt to *test* the feasibility of their solutions through library explorations, market research, and survey projections. The *Extensive Research* principle maps onto both the 'find' and 'test' vertices of the triangle, as they offer writers a validation opportunity for their proposed plan. As students move on to the *deliver*y stage, the *Extensive Research* principle needs to work in tandem with the *Actionable solution* postulate, since the critical differentiating principle between academic writing and project writing outputs is that students write in the latter about how an actionable solution was, or can be, implemented. Writing teachers not only need to instruct students about how to cite their research, but also teach them how to validate their proposed solution

through local level fieldwork. The fourth principle of *Looped composition* guides students in arguing for the workability and actionability of their proposals. The need to bring in opportunities for constructive critiques and peer feedback in conferences and workshops in the 'delivery' stage cannot be over-emphasized. Put differently, the looped composition principle is necessary in all phases, but particularly impacts the 'deliver' phase of project writing instruction when the project documents are being made ready for the patron or audience. Going through multiple drafting rounds, review workshops, feedback cycles, and presentation sessions, makes it possible for student writers to come up with detailed, well-supported, actionable plans in presentation, proposal, or report format.

While it is easy to see how R.E.A.L. principles coalesce into each other and impact every phase of project writing instruction, it is necessary to explore the method by which the four principles may be introduced and integrated into professional writing instruction in more detail.

1.4.1 R.E.A.L.: R for Reader Oriented

At the cost of being repetitive, it must be emphasized that professional writing is *reader-oriented*. Put differently, professional writing is writing with a 'you' attitude that focuses on reader benefits. As project-writing teachers need to find opportunities to make students aware of different writing tones and the need to write differently for different audiences and for different purposes, a suggested mini-assignment is an audience analysis summary. A P.A.T. (Purpose-Audience-Technique) brainstorming lesson, followed by an audience analysis micro-assignment, can be helpful, since students study their audiences against their purpose with the intent to understand what kind of an argument would be most effective for them. As students explore what the best Technique could be, given their Purpose or objective in their project writing, an analysis of the Audience's needs helps them to not only develop *reader orientedness* but also arrive at a successful methodology for argumentation. Appealing to the need to surpass competition might work with one audience, while return on investment, adding brand value, or being compliant with laws and regulations might work with others. Introducing audience awareness during their 'find' process leads to students adopting and adapting their styles and content to audience tastes, requirements, and situations.

Just as creating a new drill user manual for a novice requires more explanations in contrast to composing one for a drill press operator in a maintenance shop, project writers, too, need to learn to write in different styles for the different audiences they deal with while they work on their