Enabling college-level teaching of structured authoring

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Agenda

1. Problem statement
2. What we know . . .
3. How can we help?
4. Committee setup and deliverables
5. What went well? slowly? poorly?
6. We'd love to collaborate

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Problem statement

How can TechComm industry professionals and university writing program instructors collaborate to promote the teaching of structured content in the college curriculum?

What we know . . .

- Before AI and business cut-backs, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated in July 2025 that US positions in tech writing would not increase more than 1% by 2030 (# positions).

Summary

Quick Facts: Technical Writers	
2025 Median Pay	$90,390 per year $43.46 per hour
Typical Entry-Level Education	Bachelor's degree
Work Experience in a Related Occupation	Less than 5 years
On-the-job Training	Short-term on-the-job training
Number of Jobs, 2025	46,400
Job Outlook, 2025–35	1% (Slower than average)
Employment Change, 2025–35	400

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What we know . . .

- The overall number of US colleges offering any course focus on structured authoring has decreased by 70% over the past 15 years. Current surveys suggest only 11 of 2628 4-year institutions has offerings. Boston = 0 (down from 6).

- In-house AI systems have displaced entry-level writers performing tasks such as maintaining legacy content, updating documentation for minor feature enhancements, updating support documentation, or converting content between source formats. See GitBook State of the Docs.

What we know . . .

- With few exceptions, current programs focus on traditional/rhetorical pedagogy. Without exposure to structured authoring or docs-as-code, graduates are less attractive in this hyper-competitive market.

- Accurate and available textbooks are inadequate.

- GenAI can provide some instructional content, but not all.

- Current academic programs neither recruit for nor reward (tenure) instructor expertise in the areas of structured content and docs-as-code.

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How can we help?

- Break down the respective industry and academic silos:
  - Conferences
  - Committees, working groups
  - Publications, presentations
  - Language and culture

- Create inclusive teams:
  - Make best-effort contributions from both ends
  - Embrace differences in priorities and opinions
  - Publicize progress

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Setup: ACM SIGDOC Structured Authoring Committee

- **Credibility**: Official recognition/support for ACM SIGDOC. See Charter.
- **Recruitment**: 9 full-time professors, 12 full-time industry people.
- **Infrastructure**: We had to fund and build our own web presence. See https://acm-sigdoc-structured.org.
- **Roadmap**: 2026 activities and deliverables. See 2026 Roadmap.
- **Outreach**: We developed numerous mailing lists and LinkedIn pages.



Deliverables

- **Ready-to-download, licensed-to-modify instructional resources:**
  - Concept articles (4)
  - XML/DITA articles and tutorials (11)
  - Docs-as-code articles (4)

  See Curriculum resources.

- **Online workshops**: For instructors. See Workshops.

- **Special projects**: To engage students and instructors.
  - Project Martini: Mentoring, testing new content.
  - Project TBD: Mentoring, update existing articles.

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What went well?

- **Industry member recruitment:** Writers, managers, architects, and tools mavens
- **Academic member recruitment:** Professors, adjuncts, administrators
- **Technical content development**: Many articles, useful peer review process
- **SIGDOC support:** Journal articles, listserv promotion, conference support
- **Online workshops:** See Workshops.
- **Industry promotion**: STC, CIDM, OASIS



What went slowly or poorly?

- **Slowly:**
  – Instructor engagement with our materials (feedback, adoption)
  -- Published "learning paths" for our materials

- **Poorly:**
  -- SIGDOC rank and file interest
  -- SIGDOC student engagement
  -- Committee web site traffic
  -- Resource downloads
  -- Industry speaker bureau (Zoom into the classroom)

We'd love to collaborate . . .

- **Instructors:**
  -- Interested in learning more about our committee?
  -- Interested in reviewing the content?

- **Students**:
  -- Interested in our special projects?

- **Industry professionals**:
  -- Want to contribute or review content?

Email: contact@acm-sigdoc-structured.org

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Thank You!

See the Committee on Structured Authoring and Content Management page of the ACM SIGDOC website to learn more about committee activities, available resources, and volunteer opportunities.

Contact Committee Chair Stan Doherty at sjdoherty.acm@gmail.com to learn more or to get involved.

