

Genre Analysis of Technical Communications Materials

Liam Houston

Department of Humanities, Michigan Technological University

HU 3015: Advanced Composition

Dr. Carolyn Dekker

October 13, 2024

Table Of Contents

Table Of Contents.....	2
Background.....	3
Genre Analysis.....	3
Genre System & Diagram.....	3
Rhetorical moves analysis.....	4
Technical communications field.....	4
Genre Analysis.....	4
Genre 1: White Papers.....	5
Audience.....	5
Structure.....	6
Language.....	7
Genre Conventions.....	7
Genre 2: Technical Reports.....	8
Audience.....	8
Structure.....	9
Language.....	10
Genre Conventions.....	10
Genre 3: Press Releases.....	11
Audience.....	11
Structure.....	12
Language.....	12
Genre Conventions.....	13
Synthesis.....	13
References.....	15
Appendix A.....	18
Appendix B.....	18

Technical Communications Genre Analysis

This paper is an analysis of a few of the most common pieces of written content within the field of technical communications. Technical communications is a particularly large field with lots of variability in what writing tasks are done in any given role. For the sake of this paper, three types of written content that are often filed under technical communications have been chosen for analysis. The types of written content that will be analyzed within this paper are white paper, various forms of process documentations, and press releases. From this point forward each of these types of content will be referred to as a “genre” containing all works of that kind of content.

Background

Before moving on to the analysis itself; it would first be prudent to define a few key concepts for the understanding of this paper’s purpose and the resulting analysis.

Genre Analysis

Purdue University—on their Purdue Owl website—defines a genre analysis as, “...a way of examining a type or style of writing in order to better understand the conventions, expectations, purpose, and target audience for that genre.” (Purdue, 2024). This definition outlines the analysis being conducted within this paper. Each genre will be examined to identify its purpose, audiences, and the structure and language expectations of each.

Genre System & Diagram

A genre system is a grouping of, “Genres that support any given activity... groups of genres that support an activity begin working together as an entire "ecosystem" of individual genres interacting, feeding into, and relying on one another.” (Doug & Wardle, 2022). This idea of genre systems can be used to identify and make a diagram of the different genres that make up the workload of a given field. A diagram of the genre system for technical communicators can be found in Appendix A.

Rhetorical moves analysis

The analysis of structure for each of the genres included in this paper was done through identifying the main rhetorical moves of each genre and analyzing each document's adherence to those moves. This strategy and the resulting tables were adapted from *Make Your "Move": Writing In Genres*, a book on analyzing genre through the commonalities across the pieces within them. In short, a rhetorical move is a piece of written content that carries a specific purpose (Jacobson et al., 2022).

Technical communications field

Clearly defining the field of technical communications is also important to understanding this analysis. The Society For Technical Communications defines the field as the following:

Technical communication involves the delivery of clear, consistent, and factual information—often stemming from complex concepts—for safe and efficient use and effective comprehension by users. Technical communication is a user-centered approach for providing the right information, in the right way, at the right time so that the user's life is more productive. The value that technical communicators deliver is twofold: They make information more usable and accessible to those who need that information, and they advance the goals of the companies and organizations that employ them (STC, 2024).

The field of technical communications includes many different genres. The ones selected for analysis in this paper were selected due to their prevalence in the field and their spread across the different subsets within the technical communications genre set (Fig A). An additional deciding actor was the availability of competent examples to analyze.

Genre Analysis

The analysis for each genre primarily uses three examples as case studies of each genre in use. These examples do not encompass the entirety of each genre's conventions. There are often outliers to any claim of genre conventions made in the result of these analyses. The section on each genre will

outline the use and purpose of each genre, the audience, the structure and the language observed in each example. Afterwards, a summary of the relevant genre conventions uncovered will be presented before moving on to analyzing the next genre.

Genre 1: White Papers

White papers are commonly used as proposal documents for various business applications and legislative policy. They are not bound to this role by any strict confounds. There are many cases where the basic formatting of a white paper can be used for other types of documents, which will be discussed later. The overarching purpose of a white paper is to identify a problem and propose viable solutions to said problem (STC, 2024).

This paper will draw from three white papers to make its inferences on the genre as a whole. It is important to note that all of these papers were retrieved from the same source; they come from a website where technical writer Gordan Graham provides industry insights into crafting an effective white paper (Graham, 2023). Although Graham worked on all of these examples, there is no bias in regards to his personal writing style. This is because each paper was written by a group of writers and had to follow the needs and constraints posed by the company they were written for.

Audience

Nailing down the audiences of a white paper is a difficult undertaking. Since a white paper is mostly concerned with proposing a solution to a problem, every white paper is directed to the audience most relevant to the topic. For example, the Exact Flat paper looked at in this analysis is almost strictly an advertisement for their services (ExactFlat). The problem in the case is an issue with other softwares flattening industrial fabrics. The product itself is the solution to the identified problem. It is because of this specific technical application that the audience for this paper is engineers working with modeling industrial fabrics. From this example it is easy to see how widespread and specific the different audiences of a white paper can be.

The best way to define the audience of a white paper is as a customer. No matter the specific topic of a white paper, the audience will always be an individual or group who needs to be convinced to “buy” a solution. The purchasing of the solution does not necessarily involve money, in cases where the white paper is proposing a solution to a policy issue to a legislative body.

This general audience definition carries over to the other two white papers analyzed. Google’s paper on real time bidding is directed at current and prospective customers of Google’s services who might benefit from doing real time bidding through the Google Display Network (Google, 2012). The white paper from Hyperledger is more generally targeted at an audience looking to understand how to develop and measure blockchain metrics (Hyperledger, 2018). The solution being sold in their paper is a methodology for the audience to buy into rather than a physical product to buy monetarily.

Structure

Despite the varied audiences of white papers, the structure of the genre is fairly standard. As shown in Table B1, there are some features that are obligatory within the genre and others that appear to be optional. All white papers have some form of executive summary or overview of the paper’s purpose and content. This section is almost always followed by some form of table of contents (Table. B1). The goal of these sections is always to prep readers with what content is to follow and what they can expect from the paper. The logical value of these rhetorical moves makes it obvious why they are obligatory in the genre. All white papers also have a section that defines important terms related to the papers’ topic. The existence of these sections across all white papers is also self explained. Since a white paper is a proposition of a solution, building an understanding of the surrounding context is imperative to ensure understanding.

As far as the rhetorical moves that are not always present, it seems to be the case that some rhetorical moves suit different purposes for a white paper differently. This would explain why the Hyperledger is the only paper with an appendix despite all of the white papers using figures. It is because

Hyperledger is not selling a product for which they are the primary source of information. They need to prove to their readers that their strategy for developing blockchain metrics works, and for that they need sources outside of themselves (Hyperledger, 2018). The Google paper does cite its own sources, but it is done in the form of footnotes (Google, 2012). It is also interesting that the Hyperledger paper does not have a dedicated section for any sort of conclusion. This section is likely ill fitting for the type of paper that Hyperledger produced. While the other papers need to conclude why you should buy their product, the Hyperledger paper is introducing a process backed by a modicum of research. These example papers allude to there being potentially more common rhetorical moves associated with white papers that are interchanged like puzzle pieces depending on what goal the white paper needs to achieve.

Language

The final piece of the white paper to be observed is the use of language in the genre. There are two aspects of a white paper that constrain the type of language used. The expected audience of the white paper first defines what language is used. As evident from the obligatory rhetorical move of an explanation of relevant terms, it can be surmised that while the audience of a white paper is specific, a common level of understanding is not assumed. The legislative and business spaces in which these papers occupy also takes great effect on the writing seen in the genre. The tone of white papers is objective and clear. There is an apparent emphasis on writing for comprehension. The writing in all three of the papers analyzed takes on a passive, third person voice.

Genre Conventions

For the three examples analyzed, we can infer the conventions of white paper genre. This genre is written for the purpose of communicating a solution proposition to relevant audiences. These audiences are primarily a general consumer group with variable levels of understanding of the problem context and proposed solution.

Because of the broad audiences, white papers are written for understanding. The language used is always professional and objective. The present tense and third person verb tense is always used in order to effectively address a wider audience and communicate an authority over the subjects written about.

The general structure of this genre is somewhat fluid. The beginnings of papers all follow a set structure of a summary and definition of terms to ensure it can effectively communicate an understanding. The rest of the structure is composed of interchangeable rhetorical moves that are each chosen depending on their value to a paper's overall goal. Regardless of the specific rhetorical move chosen, every section within a white paper aims to communicate a solution proposition.

Genre 2: Technical Reports

Technical reports are very similar to scientific reports and share a considerable overlap. The primary difference between a technical and scientific report is the subject matter and the inclusion of certain sections. A technical report often always reports on what can be considered technical subject matter. This can often coincide with scientific matters, as evident by two of the examples here. One is a report on the use of alternate technologies to ultrasound (Chandola et al., 2022). The other is reporting on a toxicology study (NTP, 2024). Although technical writers are often also a part of creating scientific reports, these two are technical reports for one key reason; the topic of a scientific report is a research experiment conducted by qualified scientists, a technical paper communicates the same kind of information for non experimental inquiries and is not restricted to topics of scientific interest.

Audience

The common audiences of technical reports vary depending on their purpose. One primary audience is high level participants within the field the report resides in. This is where most of the overlap with scientific writing happens. In order to continue the conversation around a research topic within a given field, professionals report their findings and the shortcomings of their research to each other

through these reports. This audience also includes employers who have requested certain studies and require debriefing on the outcomes. The major separating factor of this audience is the level of outside information that it holds on the topic of the report. The M-mode ultrasound technology report shows the prevalence of this audience as it directly addresses practitioners in the medical field on their findings(Chandola et al., 2022).

The second primary audience is policy makers. The Water-safe cities report, like the M-mode report, directly shows the appeal to this audience through directly addressing them within the report (Stolte et al., 2022). The importance of some reports information to members of legislative bodies makes them an important audience for some technical reports.

A third, but not necessarily primary, audience for technical reports is the general public. Technical reports often involve topics of public interest. Which often makes the general public a consideration when the report is crafted. The Water-safe Cities report appeals to the general public as an audience just as much as the city legislators that it directly addresses. With flood and drought prevention being a great concern for citizens in cities with a c40 classification, the report becomes a call to action for the general population as well (Stolte et al., 2022). This is also apparent in the case of the NTP toxicology report. Although the paper is not written with the general public in mind, the importance of the results of a toxicology and carcinogenic study to U.S. citizens was recognised and the report was released to the public rather than remaining an internal document in the Department of Public Health and Human Services (NTP, 2024).

Structure

The structure of a technical report follows a general standard for the type and order of information presented. All reports contain an abstract and introduction to summarize and prep the audience on the purpose, contents and result of the report. It is also common for papers to have a table of contents if the length of the report warrants it (Table B2).

Two of the most important sections of a technical report are the outline of methodology and the results. These sections are used to report on what actions were taken in a study and what they resulted in. Communicating the results of any study and their implications is primarily the purpose of these reports, which is why all of them contain some form of this section. In Table B2, the M-mode report is shown to not have a results section. This is because the paper does not have a dedicated section for this information, but it does still include the results in the report's discussion of the data (Chandola et al., 2022).

All forms of a technical report also include some form of references. This is commonly done within its own dedicated section, but it certainly is not always the case. Nevertheless, The important research, figures and references are always included to back up the claims of the report (Table B2).

Language

The language common within technical reports is objective and informative. It is written to be understood by its intended audiences. The intended audience changes the degree to which topic-specific jargon is used. This language is also constantly written in the present tense with third person verb conjugation.

Genre Conventions

For the three examples analyzed, we can infer the conventions of the technical language genre. This genre is written for the purpose of communicating important findings to relevant audiences. These audiences are primarily a specific entity with some level of base knowledge in the subject, although the writing of these reports always assumes a lack of background info for the sake of ensuring it can be understood. This makes the genre accessible to sub audiences without any base knowledge in the topic.

Because of the professional relationship between author and audience, the language used is conventionally very professional and uses specific verb tenses to improve its apparent authority over the

content it contains. The language is also written for understanding, avoiding technical jargon or defining it if necessary.

The general structure of this genre follows a standard organizational structure that deviates slightly only to fit the amount and type of content contained. This structure is separated into sections for the sake of understanding and the chunking of related information.

Genre 3: Press Releases

A press release is a fairly standard article of writing within the business world. Most substantial product releases are accompanied by an official press release. These press releases are an announcement of each product's release with specific information about the product from the producer that can be referenced later by consumers seeking information on products. They also serve as a form of documentation on the new product itself and an official statement for use by members of the press. Any article about an interesting new product often references the press release of that item as its primary source. This section looks at three press releases from Apple, Chevrolet and NVIDIA.

Audience

The audience for a press release is fairly straightforward. Since they are an accompaniment to a product, naturally, their audience becomes potential consumers of the product within the general public. Press releases are intended for consumption by prospective buyers and returning customers alike. Which is why the audience is so broad. There is surely some tailoring of press releases to the consumer base of a company itself, but this is very little. The press release is not a piece of advertisement targeted at specific market segments. It is an overarching, one size fits all announcement of a product's availability in the market. These facts are apparent when looking at where a press release can be found. Every press release used in this section came from the official site of each company. Each company had a specific page titled "newsroom" where press releases and other news from each company is hosted. Individuals

have to seek out these press releases, they are not targeted at anyone outside of the product release event itself.

Structure

The structure of a press release is almost entirely uniform, as shown by Table B3. Press releases almost always start with an introduction of the company and the product they released. These introductions all introduce the company, the product, and when the release event originally took place. This intro sets up all the baseline information needed to understand what the press release is discussing in the text afterwards (Apple, 2024; Chevrolet, 2022; NVIDIA, 2022).

The following section in each press release varies in length and complexity, but they all fall under the same rhetorical move. Each company in this section is highlighting the important capabilities and new features of their product. Anything they consider important or useful for the consumer to know is included. This results in the variability of length, which alters to fit the complexity and improved capabilities of the product showcased (Apple, 2024; Chevrolet, 2022; NVIDIA, 2022).

Each press release also includes a section that debriefs the reader on the outlets where the product in question can be purchased and how much it costs. Prices of accessories and additional features are also explained here in the cases of Chevrolet and Apple (Apple, 2024; Chevrolet, 2022).

The final section in each press release is a short blurb about the company behind the new product. This section serves as a sign off by the company and additional context on the organization that developed the product discussed in the release (Apple, 2024; Chevrolet, 2022; NVIDIA, 2022).

Language

The language common within press releases is very objective and informative. It is written to be understood by anyone. There is some deviation into more technical information in the case of the Chevrolet press release, but this is in addition to the more standard language used in earlier parts

(Chevrolet, 2022). The language in all of these press releases is written in the third person and uses primarily the present tense. The only deviations are when past events are being referenced.

Genre Conventions

For the three examples analyzed, we can infer the conventions of the press release genre. This genre is written for the purpose of advertising and documenting the release of new products to the market. The audience of a press release is always the general public, making clear and brief communication imperative.

Writing for maximum understanding and brevity is key for a press release given the incredibly broad audience. The language convention is to write with few specific terms to increase understanding. An objective tone is always used to state the features of the new product being unveiled. Language is always written in the present tense of the product, since it is describing features of an object that is in current existence. Past tense language is used in reference to the release event itself, as the press release accompanies and is primarily accessed after such events.

The structure of a press release is short and to the point. Every press release introduces the product and follows up with the interesting features that make it desirable. Every press release covers price and where to purchase the product and closes with a sign off from the manufacturer which usually contains background information on the company itself.

Synthesis

With each of the genres presented in this paper a few commonalities have become apparent. Across all three genres, the conventions around language are essentially the same. These conventions and the purposes behind them reflect the primary role of a Technical communicator as an intermediary communicator on behalf of entities with specialized and complex knowledge bases to their audiences. This connection by language alludes to a larger language convention that connects all genres within the technical communications genre system.

The structure within each genre is also similar in some regard. Each genre segments information in order to communicate specific information in a specific order. The white paper and technical report genres are more similar when it comes to the specifications of these segments and the order they appear in. The order of information in the structure of these two genres is organized to ensure accessibility and understandability of the information involved. Both begin with summaries of the material that prep readers for the flow and contents of what they will read. Both also set aside a section to define important terms for this same reason, to develop a baseline of understanding before the reader begins with the actual content.

As for the relation between these different genres, none of them are necessarily related to each other directly. It is possible for a white paper to lead to an eventual product which would receive a press release, or for the results of a technical report lead to the need for a solution proposed by a white paper. It would have been easy to analyze different genres that did directly lead into each other, but this would confine this analysis to too specific a subsection of the genre system of a technical communicator. This field encompasses too many genres to get a feel for the depth of writing done within it to be seen by analyzing a more confined set of genres. The user focused style of communication within the field of technical communications also makes many genres lack a consistent form entirely, as they are built from the ground up every time to fit the requirements of the audience. The only factor combining them into a genre being their end goal.

Ideally from this genre analysis readers should have gotten a better understanding of some of the most common genres in which technical communicators engage in. As well as gained an idea of the writing conventions that commonly dictate the writing of these genres and the work of technical communicators across other genres.

References

Apple. (2024, September 9). Apple introduces iPhone 16 and iPhone 16 Plus. Apple Newsroom.

Retrieved October 8, 2024, from

[https://www.apple.com/cm/newsroom/2024/09/apple-introduces-iphone-16-iphone-16-plus/#:~:text=of%20this%20article-,CUPERTINO%2C%20CALIFORNIA%20Apple%20today%20announced%20iPhone%2016%20and%20iPhone%2016,for%20what%20iPhone%20can%20do.&text=iPhone%2016%20starts%20at%20%24799,%2437.45%20\(U.S.\)%20per%20month.](https://www.apple.com/cm/newsroom/2024/09/apple-introduces-iphone-16-iphone-16-plus/#:~:text=of%20this%20article-,CUPERTINO%2C%20CALIFORNIA%20Apple%20today%20announced%20iPhone%2016%20and%20iPhone%2016,for%20what%20iPhone%20can%20do.&text=iPhone%2016%20starts%20at%20%24799,%2437.45%20(U.S.)%20per%20month.)

Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, & Christine M. Tardy, "Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres,"

Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing vol 4. Ed. by Dana Lynn Driscoll et. al. Anderson, South

Carolina: Parlor Press 2022, p. 223.

Chandola, S., Jana, M., Naranje, P., & Bhalla, A. S. (2022). M-mode ultrasound as a portable alternative to

fluoroscopy in evaluation of diaphragmatic motion: Technical note. Indian Journal of Radiology

and Imaging, 33(02), 232–234. <https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0042-1758200>

Chevrolet. (2022, October 12). 2024 Chevrolet Trax Delivers Beyond Expectations. Chevrolet Newsroom.

Retrieved October 8, 2024, from

<https://news.chevrolet.com/newsroom.detail.html/Pages/news/us/en/2022/oct/1012-trax.html>.

Downs, Doug and Elizabeth Wardle. "Sets and Systems: How Genres Circulate and Respond to other

Genres," Writing About Writing. 5th edition. New York: Bedford 2022. p. 40.

Exact Flat. Save time and money with fast, accurate 3D to 2D flattening for industrial fabrics [white

paper]. That white paper guy.

https://thatwhitepaperguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ExactFlat_Customer_White_Paper.pdf

Google. (2012). The arrival of real-time bidding and what it means for media buyers [white paper]. That White Paper Guy.

<https://thatwhitepaperguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Google-real-time-bidding.pdf>

Graham, G. (2023, March 6). Award-winning White Paper Writer, Gordon Graham. That White Paper Guy.
<https://thatwhitepaperguy.com/>

Hyperledger. (2018). Blockchain performance metrics [white paper]. That white paper guy.

<https://thatwhitepaperguy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Hyperledger-Blockchain-Performance-Metrics.pdf>

NTP Technical Report on the Toxicology and Carcinogenesis Study of Triclosan (CASRN 3380-34-5)

Administered Dermally to B6C3F1/N Mice. (2024). (). Research Triangle Park: U.S. Public Health Service, National Toxicology Program. Retrieved from SciTech Premium Collection

<https://services.lib.mtu.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/reports/ntp-technical-report-on-toxicology-carcinogenesis/docview/3086984195/se-2>

NVIDIA. (2022, September 20). NVIDIA delivers quantum leap in performance, introduces new era of neural rendering with GeForce RTX 40 series. NVIDIA Newsroom. Retrieved October 8, 2024, from

<https://nvidianews.nvidia.com/news/nvidia-delivers-quantum-leap-in-performance-introduces-new-era-of-neural-rendering-with-geforce-rtx-40-series>.

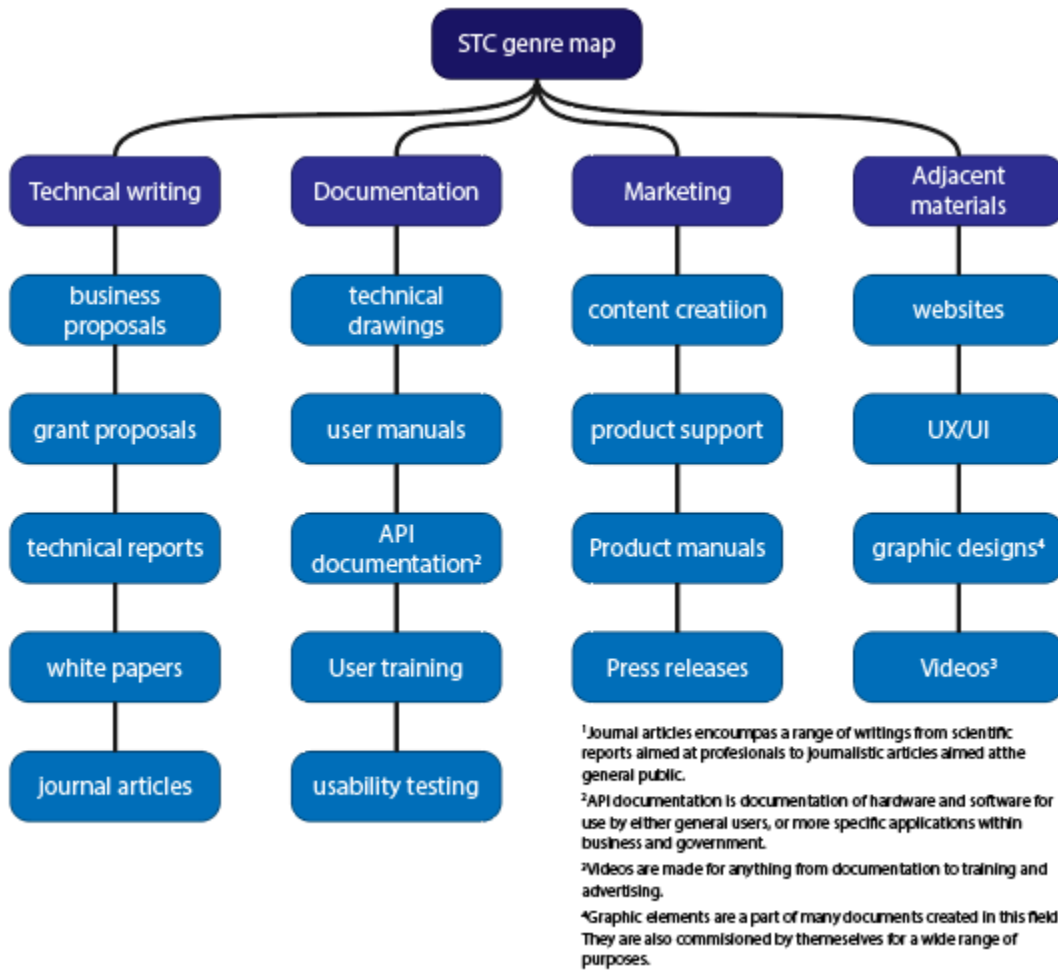
Purdue College of Liberal Arts. (n.d.). Genre Analysis & Reverse outlining. Genre Analysis & Reverse Outlining - Purdue OWL® - Purdue University.

https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/graduate_writing/thesis_and_dissertation/genre_analysis_reverse_outline.html#:~:text=Genre%20analysis%20is%20a%20way,seeks%20to%20address%20those%20gaps.

Stolte, T., Ward, P., de Moel, H., Farhad, N., Garg, S., Huxley, R., van Veldhoven, F., Boon, E., & Staal, D.

(2022). Water Safe Cities - Technical Report. C40.

Appendix A



Appendix A. This diagram outlines the genre system of the field of technical communications. Adapted from Downs, Doug and Elizabeth Wardle. "Sets and Systems: How Genres Circulate and Respond to other Genres," Writing About Writing. 5th edition. New York: Bedford 2022. p. 40.

Appendix B

Rhetorical Moves Tables

Rhetorical move	Articles			Prevalence of moves
	Google	Hyperledger	ExactFlat	

Overview/summary	✓	✓	✓	obligatory
Table of contents	✓	✓	✓	common
Definition of terms	✓	✓	✓	obligatory
Identify problem			✓	optional
Solution proposition	✓		✓	optional
Conclusion	✓		✓	optional
Figures	✓	✓	✓	common
Appendix		✓		optional

Table B1. A table showing the presence of rhetorical moves in each of the three white papers analyzed. Adapted from Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, & Christine M. Tardy, "Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres," *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing* vol 4. Ed. by Dana Lynn Driscoll et. al. Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press 2022, p. 223.

Fig A2. Process documentation genre moves table

Rhetorical move	Articles			Prevalence of moves
	Water-safe report	NTP report	M-mode ultrasounds	
Abstract	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Table of contents	✓	✓		Common

Introduction	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
About report	✓	✓		Common
Methodologies	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Results	✓	✓		Comon
Discussion	✓	✓		Common
Conclusion		✓		Common
Figures/tables	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
References	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Appendix	✓	✓		Common

Table B2. A table showing the presence of rhetorical moves across all technical reports analyzed.

Adapted from Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, & Christine M. Tardy, "Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres," *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing* vol 4. Ed. by Dana Lynn Driscoll et. al. Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press 2022, p. 223.

Rhetorical move	Articles			Prevalence of moves
	Apple	Chevrolet	NVIDIA	
Introduction	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Product details	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
Highlighted features	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory

Pricing	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory
About company	✓	✓	✓	Obligatory

Table B3. A table showing the presence of rhetorical moves across press releases analyzed. Adapted from Brad Jacobson, Madelyn Pawlowski, & Christine M. Tardy, "Make Your "Move": Writing in Genres," *Writing Spaces: Readings on Writing* vol 4. Ed. by Dana Lynn Driscoll et. al. Anderson, South Carolina: Parlor Press 2022, p. 223.