



## Information Technology

Dream it. Find It!

[Front Page](#)

[All Classifieds](#)

[Help](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Contact Us](#)

Tech writers find help is always in demand  
By Victor Godinez / The Dallas Morning News  
Tuesday, May 28, 2002

The next time you're slogging through a confusing software program and find helpful information by clicking on the "help" thank the program's technical writer, says Susan Bilheimer.

"A good technical writer is a person who, when you click on that help button, has written something that is going to actually give you the steps to help you accomplish your task," said Ms. Bilheimer, a Florida-based technical writer and author of *How to Become a Technical Writer*.

J. Mark Kegans / DMN Rex Kurzius, president of Dallas recruiting firm psiSEARCH.com, says most tech writers come from other areas.

Ms. Bilheimer said that technical writers, who produce instruction sheets and manuals for a variety of products, fulfill a function that will be in demand regardless of the state of the economy.

"The more technology," she said, "the more need there is for technical writers."

Ms. Bilheimer and others say these workers usually don't need to be technically adept, and anyone with an aptitude for clear and concise written communication can earn a living in the field.

"Most people who are tech writers come from some other area," said Rex Kurzius, president of Dallas recruiting firm psiSEARCH.com. "They either come from writing for a technical magazine, or they come from just a general writing background."

However, there are some specific skills that tech writers need to learn to garner interest from companies in the currently subdued IT job market, Mr. Kurzius said.

"Any type of certification is particularly key with the tech writer – for example, being certified in RoboHelp," he said. RoboHelp is a Web-based technical manual authoring program that Ms. Bilheimer said has become the standard for technical manuals.

Ms. Bilheimer said that many nontechnical people who are interested in becoming technical writers are often intimidated at the prospect of having to learn the software.

"A lot of people, I've discovered, are very afraid, and you can't be afraid to learn new technology," she said, adding that most of the skills a tech writer needs can be self-taught.

Mr. Kurzius said it's important for aspiring technical writers to learn those skills, either in school or on their own, before they apply.

"It's pretty common that you'll see a lot of tech writers say 'If they're looking for RoboHelp, I can learn it,' " he said. "In the economy right now, companies aren't interested in people who can learn it. They want people who have all of the skills that they're looking for."

Being a technical writer means constant learning, Ms. Bilheimer said, because most tech writers work on a contract basis.

"There are pros and cons to that," she said. "You make a lot more money as a contractor. The benefit to permanent is you get health benefits, but a lot of the contract companies give you health benefits."

Many companies that have permanent tech writers are looking to cut costs by giving writers more responsibility, Mr. Kurzius said.

"They've had their technical writing teams formally integrated with their quality assurance teams, where they're getting two people for the cost of one," he said.

Technical writers are also seeing their salary growth level off, Mr. Kurzius said. Whereas technical writers could earn anywhere from \$40,000 to \$90,000 a year ago, median salaries now are settling in around \$50,000.

But Ms. Bilheimer said the profession brings security.

"I don't believe there will ever be an end to this demand," she said.