

Book Review

Vengadasalam, S. S. (2021). *Teaching Business, Technical and Academic Writing Online and Onsite: A Writing Pedagogy Sourcebook*. Newcastle Upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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ABSTRACT: Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam’s latest book offers troves of immediately applicable tools through her scholarly articles on technical and academic writing, whether courses are taught online or in a traditional classroom setting. The valuable tools, processes, and procedures Sen Vengadasalam presents are invaluable teaching assets, both to the graduate student reader who is new to the profession as well as the experienced, seasoned veteran teacher of undergraduate and graduate professional writing courses. Sen Vengadasalam grounds her toolkit in sound theoretical foundations for the practices espoused and how-to explanations for their implementation.

Keywords: Professional writing; Pedagogy; Graphics

As technical and professional writing teachers, wouldn’t it be a treasure to discover a resource that offers tested classroom practices that enable professional writing students with hands-on practice to sharpen their skills before they join the workforce? Through her seasoned examples and detailed models, Sarbani Sen Vengadasalam’s *Writing Pedagogy Sourcebook: Teaching Business, Technical and Academic Writing Online and Onsite: A Writing Pedagogy Sourcebook* offers exactly that. She shows us how to teach professional writing so our students are fully prepared for the writing and workplace communications they will perform on the job. Her book offers readily available strategies for scaffolding the lessons that in turn, provide transformative processes for writing students, including a comprehensive classroom discussion management pedagogy that is well-suited for all learning management systems.

This book compilation presents some of Sen Vengadasalam’s best articles on how to teach professional writing to undergraduate and graduate

level college students. The book illuminates the needs of today’s students to meet workplace writing expectations, before they start the job. Part One, Chapter One explains the

workplace expectations of college graduates who have been trained in the R.E.A.L. principles of workplace writing, which is writing that is Reader Oriented, Extensively Researched, has an Actionable Solution, and has Looped Composition principles. Sen Vengadasalam states the importance of R.E.A.L. principles clearly: “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 (p. 8). Allowing students to focus on local initiatives, or those that involve their hometown communities, will ensure a more passionate engagement with their projects.

Chapter Two explores student voice and empowerment, with teachers helping to prepare

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students with the often-difficult task of “exhibiting connective, interdisciplinary, and change-oriented thinking” (p. 33). This chapter investigates the need to develop student voices, while recognizing that the absence of their voice in their own writing negates the student’s identity (pp. 25-26). This may silence student voices and “deny students their basic humanity, teaching students—including those from marginalized communities—to acquire voices and usher in change through their writing, restores equity into the classroom and academic writing that include W.A.C. and W.I.D. writing” (p. 26). Furthermore, Sen Vengadasalam argues “[s]ince the classroom is a microcosm of the world outside, and our writing reflects the way we think, fostering voice, whether the student is interpreting readings or writing professionally, is not only integral to the development of the students’ persona but can even lead to social transformation (p. 26). She feels strongly that the empowerment of students happens when “students write about what they like, like what they write, and share it with others” (p. 33). I couldn’t agree with her more.

Chapter Three presents an inviting how-to explanation for an instructor-led course on teaching graduate students how to write for scholarly publications. This chapter also delves into peer review processes, with scholar-participants exploring academic and non-academic journal conventions. Further discussion highlights how these courses “contribute consciously to this interdisciplinary interchange in the same way that Writing Across the Curriculum courses do at the undergraduate level” (pp. 45-46). Furthermore, she encourages the “use of online peer review workshops that require reviewers to fill out review forms that posit questions that are at the cognitive level of evaluation” (p. 46). To capitalize on this exercise, Sen Vengadasalam contends that the peer review questionnaires can be so devised that they help the reviewer develop opinions that they justify in their response pieces (p. 46). What a powerful way to elicit a thought-provoked response, instead of a simple regurgitation of the original author’s point. This type of response is required in workplace settings, so the more practice students can receive in the classroom, the more prepared they will be, once on the job.

Moving on to Chapter Four, Sen Vengadasalam provides tools and methods to assess online discussions, with a fresh and insightful perspective that provides applicable methods for use. Multimedia assets and the use of visual tools are also explored. Additionally, there is a focus on “Facilitating Online Discussions” in light of today’s online learning management system discussion tools. Within the

discussion segment, Sen Vengadasalam highlights that the importance of student voice is through scaffolding, empowerment, and awareness, leading to the development of student expression which ultimately helps students find their authentic voices, (which is not always an easy task) (78). She cites Liam Rourke and Terry Anderson (2002) on peer led online discussions. Those authors share details from student responses about what was learned in the peer-led online discussions. A student explained: “When you’re dealing with knowledge, with real learning, that’s about applying a concept: it’s about applying an idea to a situation. When that’s the case, the online discussion becomes very valuable” (78). Sen Vengadasalam expounds further, saying the higher-order objectives “[suggest] that the new learner-centered discussion management pedagogy might aim not just to encourage multiple, and sustained posting by both teachers and students, but also to push the discussion upwards on the knowledge scale” (78). This is a valuable (and hopeful) insight that will encourage many instructors and make them keen to practice this pedagogy.

Chapter Five discusses the use of open educational resource repositories, including an incredibly useful checklist that aids instructors in deciding on the best resource for them to use. The author argues that “[t]he use of open educational resources from reputed repositories, like O.E.R. commons or university repositories, is that teachers and students alike are assured of their authenticity, accuracy, and educational value” (p.106). Critical to the understanding of an open educational resource repository is the difference between Bloom’s Taxonomy of segregated learning into 6 levels (knowledge, comprehension, analysis, application, synthesis, and evaluation) to the taxonomy of open educational resources use (collect > connect > curate > contribute) (pp. 108 & 109). As an especially useful and special bonus, Sen Vengadasalam offers a tested rubric (with parameters and weightage) that she has refined throughout her years as an O.E.R. instructor (p. 112). She finishes the chapter with a detailed and personal explanation of three ways O.E.R. is used in the Business and Technical Writing Classroom at Rutgers University, New Jersey.

Lastly, Chapter Six covers the use of infographics and the need for technical writing students to learn how to create elegant graphical images to convey the significance of the data they present in their infographics. Sen Vengadasalam remarks that “[s]tudents of this generation are informovores. Surrounded and bombarded by visual information, they thirst for a way to learn that satisfies their visual instincts and increases their ability to retain data” (p. 133). She offers best practices like knowing the

audience, remembering that less is more, and she encourages becoming familiar with the numerous tools to create infographics that allow faster and easier creation,

even for novice creators (p. 135). While it may appear to be a daunting and time consuming task for instructors, by learning about the available tools and choosing those best suited to each student population, the students will be empowered with critical and marketable skills before entering the workplace. To help, Sen Vengadasalam provides details on programs that offer templates and examples for ease of creation, and she also highlights the infographic creator's need to respect intellectual property rights since "it is easy to commit plagiarism unconsciously while using infographics" (p. 136). This tip is a critical component when planning lessons on infographics.

Professional writing instructors are always looking for models and how-to guides for teaching students the best ways to write for workplace audiences. The difficulty lies in the quality of the models, as they vary considerably. Sen Vengadasalam's book offers numerous unique and tested strategies for incorporating "realism and real-world factors" into classroom writing projects (p. 8). She provides the reader with explicit, classroom-tested strategies and procedures to follow to prepare students with the skills, processes, and mindset they need not only in undergraduate school, but in graduate studies and in the workplace, as well. The end result is even more than the title hints: it is a writing pedagogy Guidebook, with proven strategies to practice and experiment with, when teaching students business, technical and academic writing for the college classroom, business settings, and wherever their job opportunities take them.