

Career Profile

Laura Hood, Technical Writer

An English or History Degree – Not Just For Teaching!

As a double major in English and history, Laura Hood always envisioned herself pursuing teaching following graduation in 2007. Without being 100% convinced that teaching would be the most optimal fit for her along with some strong concerns about the competitiveness of teacher's college, Laura challenged herself to broaden her horizons and avoid subscribing to the idea that teaching was the only career path available to an English and history major.



Laura identified enrolling in co-op as single-handedly one of the best decisions she made as it allowed her to gain access to many eye-opening experiences that in turn helped her to realize the variety of career options available to arts students. As a co-op student, Laura worked as a Junior Technical Writer with Research In Motion, which eventually led her to secure a full time Technical Writer position with the high-tech firm.

As a Technical Writer, Laura is responsible for creating and maintaining Getting Started Guides that accompany BlackBerry products. Laura jokes that if it came in a box with a BlackBerry device, chances are she's worked on it! Technical writing involves numerous creative as well as detail-oriented tasks such as authoring instructions and descriptions of products in the most succinct and effective manner, designing posters to depict tips and tasks for BlackBerry users, maintaining content to ensure it reflects customer requirements and current technology, as well as updating screenshots taken of RIM's various BlackBerry devices. Laura's team employs DITA (Darwin Information Typing Architecture) and a tailored content management system to create, maintain and publish the materials themselves. This is a huge feat in the high tech world as many companies continue to use off the shelf software that is not scalable or customizable to their needs.

Laura feels that technical writing is a dynamic field that boasts opportunities in a variety of industries that may match your area of interest. For instance, if you are keen on health issues, you can target eye wear companies and write documentation regarding how to insert contacts. If you are passionate about health care, you can work on documentation that outlines the proper usage of pharmaceuticals for patients or complex medical equipment for doctors. The first step is truly evaluating your own interests and then conducting research on organizations that develop products or deliver services akin to your passions.

There are many educational paths that can be taken to secure a role in the technical writing field. A degree in English or communications is certainly desirable; however, thorough knowledge of a company's products and solid writing skills accompanied by any undergraduate degree can make you a prospective candidate for entry-level positions following graduation. Laura suggests seeking out summer jobs or volunteer positions during your studies that will help you hone research skills and begin creating a portfolio to highlight your writing capabilities.

If you once thought that an English or history degree only permitted a career path in teaching – think again! Technical writing is a profession that is gaining much momentum and is potentially an amiable fit with the skills and knowledge accrued through any undergraduate degree.

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