tion of the topic into interchanges about pedagogy in technical communication. A somewhat similar essay is David Craig and Thomas Steinfatt's "Interpersonal Communication for the Technical Communicator." The authors suggest that the relatively new field of interpersonal communication, which they date from 1960, has also been neglected in discussions of pedagogy and curricula for technical communication. The authors cite a 1985 article by George Barnett and Carol Hughes that draws on communication theory as a source for informing technical communication theory. Craig and Steinfatt believe that "technical communicators can develop further this theoretical grounding by learning from the interpersonal communications literature," and they proceed to offer readers a primer of publications in interpersonal communication theory.

Sides has solicited essays from writers who have experience in industry, and these chapters cover a wide range of areas in technical communication. At times his arrangement is idiosyncratic. Articles that address related topics are often not juxtaposed. For instance, "Reading and Technical Writing," with its discussion of readability, and "Style and Technical Writing," which shares this concern for readability, are separated as are "Technical Communication and Rhetoric" and "Ethics and Technical Communication," both of which discuss morality and ethics in persuasive writing. Despite this problem with arrangement, the volume allows easy access to a wide range of valuable and interesting information. Sides has brought together a collection of bibliographical information that will prove to be a rich resource for teachers and corporate trainers of technical communication.


Reviewed by Lynn Veach Sadler, Johnson State College

Cynthia Selfe's Creating a Computer-Supported Facility: A Blueprint for Action is important in any number of ways, two of which are particularly outstanding. It is a no-nonsense, nuts-and-bolts description of how to establish and/or improve an increasingly important phenomenon on the college campus, and it is the first in the series Advances in Computers and Composition Studies, edited by Selfe and Gail E. Hawisher of Purdue University. Both this book and the series it inaugurates are needed.

If Creating a Computer-Supported Facility has a flaw, it is precisely in being too "practical" and "blueprintish." For those of us who pioneered in the field, the experimentation may have been, if not all, then much of the adventure. We found colleagues and, especially, students to be as taken as we were with the fever of testing and trying a medium that seemed to link right-
and left-brain prowess not only in new ways but to link them for the first time in our experience. (Selfe writes that “hemispheric studies of brain function might help English composition teachers discover whether some writing assignments might be better handled on the computers than others; whether certain fonts and colors on computer screens are more readable or more effective than others; and how gender, hemispheric asymmetry, and computer-assisted writing all fit together.”) Students were suddenly patting their heads and rubbing their stomachs simultaneously—creating and editing as writers. Even more amazing, they were actually talking about—really discussing—writing for the first time. (I guess we now pass that phenomenon off under the rubric of the new “collaborative learning” and lose somehow in the process.) To be fair, Selfe’s constant enthusiasm glimmers when she makes her persistent and much-needed nexus between the faculty’s philosophy of teaching writing, which is primal, and the facility that is to be established. She also glows when she puts the computer-assisted facility where it belongs: in the home discipline and therefore out of the hands of non-English technocrats. Absent, however, is that rousing sermonette of concern for what can and should take place in this facility—again, this wasn’t her point; I’m only lamenting. I have heard her voice this call (and to all good purposes), this belief that she and I share. Typically, she moves beyond the “state of the art” to make a case for emergent reading-and-writing-intensive classrooms with electronic environments (computer networks and computer-based conferences) at all levels (elementary through university) that alter the roles of teacher and student primarily by minimizing cues of gender, age, and social status to place the emphasis on what is said rather than who said it. I miss that note in Creating a Computer Supported Facility. I think of it as the “self” of Selfe.

Selfe urges composition instructors to forget about computers and concentrate on writing, to focus on what they know about rhetoric, linguistics, and reading. She knows that establishing this view is most of the battle. From that premise springs all the rest: three overarching sections that focus on planning, operating, and improving the computer-assisted composition laboratory. The three chapters of Section One are “Defining Computer-Supported Writing Facilities,” which notes, for all the seeming prescriptive-ness, the variability among such facilities; “Building on Existing English Composition Programs,” perhaps the book’s best case for using teachers’ assumptions about writing as the origin for the formation of the laboratory; and “Identifying Goals and Making Planning Decisions”—producing an “organic, writing-centered design process.”

Section Two, “Operating a Computer-Supported Writing Facility,” focuses on staffing and on training teachers and students to use the facility. The final section, “Improving a Computer-Supported Writing Facility,” offers not only a rationale for record keeping but also working models, as throughout the book, from the Center for Computer-Assisted Language
Instruction at Michigan Technological University. One chapter honestly introduces the problems—the difficulty of finding the "right" personnel, access issues, resource allocation—and emphasizes ways of solving these problems that are convincing to administrators: increased collaboration by faculty and students, increased curricular "engagement," and new possibilities for research in a pioneering field. Another chapter, "Making Connections," urges teachers to discuss the laboratory and its possibilities not only among themselves but also "within a larger professional context," and the chapter succinctly lists the organizations and journals in the field. The appendix illustrates what goes on in Selfe's own facility, includes "Suggestions for Computer-Intensive Courses," and offers brief descriptions of the word-processing programs, writing aids, document-design aids, and special communication aids found there.

Creating a Computer Supported Facility is notable for its clarity of style and writing. Each chapter proclaims what it is about, provides rich illustrative figures, and recaps its work. As fine as this encapsulation of the field may be, it is, however, Arthur P. Young's stand in the Foreword that best expresses the book's values. He writes, "The hidden benefits that accrue when teachers work together as a 'community of scholars' to articulate their assumptions about writing and learning and to make important decisions about the facilities which will support their teaching may be this book's most important message."


Reviewed by Tim Peeples and Sharon Crowley, Northern Arizona University

This textbook for beginning writers is honest, graceful, and laced with character. Unlike your garden-variety composition textbook that reads like a reference tool, Writing Is Critical Action can be read and enjoyed like fiction or, better, like autobiography. It tells the story of the perilous adventures undergone by writers—novice writers, experienced writers, famous writers—as they try to get better at writing. Warnock is alternatively fellow adventurer, teacher, floundering writer, or awed admirer of some wonderful piece of writing produced by one of her students or by Oates or Dillard or Updike. Her voice accompanies us through the lessons and (re)discoveries of composition. She is honest and open about her own imperfect beginnings and restless writing process. She obviously wants to demystify writing, to disabuse students of the notion that pieces of writing are created by means of immaculate conception. Indeed, demystification is the key word of the first