writing, and he offers connections to and departures from the writer-based/reader-based framework of Linda Flower before proposing a contrastive "grammar of speech and prose" in an elaborate chart. Ochsner's connections between agraphia (neurological impairment of writing ability) and style suggest the interesting possibility that style may help writers retrieve or create text.

Two matters concern me about this book. First, I was not always able to follow Ochsner's line of argument, especially in his early chapters on delivery, memory, and style. He seems to be on the verge of, but not quite finished with, developing a provocative set of notions distinguishable from those of other theorists. Second, I thought his remarks about writing across the curriculum and social constructionism would have been placed more appropriately in a separate manifesto. Here they only obfuscate and consume space.

By turning to the social and natural sciences, Brand and Ochsner remind us of many connections yet to be made in studies of the composing process. Their books nicely introduce fruitful areas of research for other scholars.

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Reviewed by Rebecca E. Burnett, Carnegie Mellon University

This first technical writing volume published by MLA is worth reading, particularly for those new to technical communication. As its editors note in their preface, the book is meant to be "broadly based, addressing a variety of theoretical and practical issues confronting instructors who teach advanced as well as introductory courses, plan curricula, and direct programs." By inviting essays from teachers, researchers, theorists, and workplace practitioners whose work is well known, Fearing and Sparrow have compiled a solid collection that touches on many issues important in teaching technical communication.

Part of the collection's value rests in the number of issues it raises, including collaboration, composing processes, audience analysis, usability testing. Another value lies in the arguments posed—prescriptive versus heuristics, for example. Few of these issues, though, are pursued in great detail. While this will be a frustration for some, it will be an advantage for those who need an overview, a starting place, an identification of the relevant issues in short, appealing, accessible essays. Readers can always learn more by consulting the collection's nineteen-page reference list.

The editors equate "technical writing" with "technical communication,"
defining both as "the kinds of practical discourse found in industrial and technological settings . . . as well as . . . related communication skills such as oral presentations, graphics, and layout and design." The collection, however, clearly focuses on technical writing, with only one essay dealing explicitly with layout and design, another dealing minimally with graphics, and none dealing explicitly with oral presentations.

Part One, "On the History and Theory of Technical Writing," contains two essays offering valuable insight into the traditions and directions of the discipline. James Souther's "Retrospective Appraisal" focuses on five approaches to teaching technical writing that developed during the twentieth century: language, rhetoric, product, process, and hybrids. Carolyn Miller's "What's Practical about Technical Writing" explores both "low" and "high" senses of "practical," noting that technical writing has been associated with the world of work, the "low" form of practice, since its beginnings. Miller points to the inherent "contradiction of taking practice as both imperfect and authoritative," and argues that we have an alternative: a sense of "high practice" that comes from understanding that "practical rhetoric as conduct provides what a techne cannot: a locus for questioning, for criticism, for distinguishing good practice from bad."

Part Two, "On the Composing Process in Corporate Settings," includes three essays emphasizing the cooperative, collaborative nature of writing in the workplace. Roger Grice explores the information-development process in detail. Mary Beth Debs discusses her field study confirming that problematic interactions dominate the workplace, and she suggests that we need to teach students "to identify and control variables that affect interactions in the workplace, and to develop strategies for accommodating the intervention of other people within their own writing processes." Jack Selzer argues convincingly that technical writing is rhetorical and social. He sees major pedagogical implications to his long-term observations of an engineer-manager, and he suggests that instructors base advice on practices of workplace writers.

The five essays in Part Three, "Contemporary Perspectives," don't so much "challenge a number of traditional precepts" (as suggested in the collection's preface) as call attention to shifts in emphasis as the discipline of technical communication grows, and incorporates perspectives from allied disciplines such as cognitive psychology, design, and linguistics. Jo Allen persuasively argues that static methods of audience analysis are inadequate, drawing on relevant research since 1982 and offering useful alternatives based on that research. Janice Redish and David Schell define critical features of usability testing, one challenge to conventional classroom approaches. Mary Lay's "Nonrhetorical Elements of Layout and Design" provides a good introductory overview of design principles and terms. Isabelle Thompson and Michael Jordan examine "two long-cherished aspects of cohesion: maintaining parallelism and avoiding vague pronoun
reference,” and encourage readers to reject unexamined prescriptive rules. The final section, “On Teaching Technical Writing,” focuses on pedagogical approaches, resources, and philosophies. In “The Prescriptive versus the Heuristic Approach,” John Mitchell and Marian Smith engage in an almost point-counterpoint debate, both sides of which seem carefully constructed. In “A Comparative Analysis of Teacher Resources for an Advanced Technical Writing Course,” Thomas Warren identifies a number of valuable books, mostly from the 1980s, for teaching students about manuals, proposals, visuals, and writing and editing. Warren does not suggest any articles from discipline-specific journals that could form the core of readings in an advanced course, nor does he establish distinctions that are critical for students in advanced courses to recognize and understand. For example, his discussion of visuals does not distinguish between quantitative displays and illustrations, which have decidedly different forms and functions. He certainly might have mentioned important work by Hartley, Tufte, or Willows and Houghton.

Elizabeth Tebeaux’s article, “The High-Tech Workplace: Implications for Technical Communication Instruction,” is a fitting conclusion to the collection. In her forward-looking article, she summarizes the impact of the information age on our definitions of work and communication skills, on our understanding and management of organizational communication, and on our need to recognize the importance of international communication and communication research. She makes eight recommendations ranging from creating an interdisciplinary communication environment to “helping students understand the proper relation between computer literacy and human analysis and perception.”

MLA is to be commended for expanding its publication list to acknowledge technical communication as an important discipline. Because the essays collected in Technical Writing: Theory and Practice provide only an introductory overview, readers can only hope that MLA will follow with other anthologies offering more in-depth and detailed essays.


By Marcia Peoples Halio, University of Delaware

In The Electronic Text, the former Director of the NCTE Commission on Media compiles and condenses major research on computers and language arts and writes a readable analysis of the effects of technology on reading,