When you're writing in an organizational setting, be aware that you may have yet another level of scrutiny and regulation put onto your work. Organizations have their own standards and their own processes to make sure that things come out the door in a way that is consistent with their desired public-facing image. For example, you might end up using a visual or editorial style guide when you write copy for marketing purposes to make sure that your visuals and your language sync up with the newest campaign that your company/organization is making use of.

With that said, one thing you need to be aware of is that within organizations there can be situations where you may be asked to cut corners or ignore ethical guidelines. You might wonder why in the world someone would create technical writing about an unethical choice or series of actions, but the history of technical writing is littered with corporate scandals that were unearthed via mundane technical writing. From the Ford Pinto to the Challenger explosion to the Volkswagen Emissions Scandal, technical writing and communication goes hand in hand with unethical choices as often as it does ethical ones. Like any tool, you can use it for good or evil.

When you're writing in an organization, there can be enormous pressure to do what's right by the company rather than what's the legal and ethical choice. As a technical writer, and as an individual, it is up to you to make the right choice in these situations. History is full of folks that said, "Okay, I'll do it," in the face of an unethical ask. Be one of the folks that say no. They sleep better at night.

SECTION BREAK—ETHICS IN TECHNICAL WRITING

1. What examples of ethical codes exist in your college experience? What organizations do you belong to or know of that have ethical codes?

2. How do ethical codes shape our behavior as professionals?

3. What types of writing do you think are the most sensitive and in need of the most ethical guidance?

4. Many educational institutions have ethical rules governing plagiarism, write your own version for your classroom in your own language.

PROFESSIONAL VOICE AND TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Another fundamental aspect of being a good professional and technical writer is developing a professional voice. One of the things that I tell all my students, graduate and undergraduate, is that there is a clear and fundamental difference between knowing what you're talking about and sounding like you know what you're talking about. The difference between these two is often the presence or lack of a professional persona or professional voice.

What exactly is a professional voice? Well, we could probably spend an entire semester working on just that. Entire books have been written and will be written on style, but for our purposes I define professional voice thus: writing with appropriate authority, allowing sources to back you up rather

than speak for you. That may seem subtle, and in a way it is, but placing yourself in the position of authority is a cornerstone of both coming across as a professional as well as owning up to your responsibilities in a professional setting.

Often times when we're writing as grade school or even high school students, we're put into a position with research where the research itself becomes the focus of our writing. You write a term paper that needs 10 sources, and those sources are the term paper; you're simply creating a vessel for them to be shared with the world. While that type of investigative writing can be useful, the presentation that it lends itself to is not.

When we present ourselves as professionals, we are the ones who have done the research, who know the relevant background information and sources need. If you know it, write and talk that way! (And if you don't, do that work so that you don't end up being one of those folks that sound like they know what they're talking about when they are in fact clueless). Below you'll find a couple of example sentences that lay out the differences I'm conveying. See if you can guess which is professional voice:

Example 1:

> There are a couple of things that apply when we decide whether to build a coal or natural gas plant. According to the Guide to Greenhouse Emissions by Lora Fitts (2015), "there is a large difference between the emissions generated by coal and by natural gas production" (p. 159). Elsewhere, Boris Johnson (2017) writes in Energy Choices for the Future that "building for coal at this point in history is a backwards point of view for any forward-facing organization" (p. 257).

Example 2:

> The research available does not support the choice to build a coal-powered plant on campus. Recent work studying emissions shows that coal has a much more aggressive pollution profile vs. natural gas (Fitts 2015), and the general consensus among experts is that coal is at best a backwards choice for any new construction (Johnson 2017).

Looking at these two examples, you should be able to see a marked difference in the way that the author tackles the subject matter at hand and its presentation. The first example maps to the classic "this is what I read" approach where you simply repeat the wording of your sources verbatim, often while naming the exact book/journal/article that you're drawing on. Now, that is not to say there is not a place for this type of research (there is), but for the most part when you put all of this information in the text, you're overloading the reader with content they really don't need. The Works Cited page of your text is the place for most of this information in a normal setting, and what you're doing is taking the decision-making process and offloading it to experts rather than owning the choice yourself. Even in situations where your job is simply to inform, you should own the collection and presentation of the data you've found!

Notice that in example 2, the author makes a clear point (we should not build a coal plant) and then backs it up with strong statements that are supported by relevant citations. The author isn't hiding behind sources and isn't asking the reader or the sources to make a decision. Instead, the author has

decided what they want to say and is simply telling you what they've found out from research. This is the essence of professional voice—doing the homework and the research and then presenting your point of view accordingly. Instead of talking about your sources, you talk for them and let them back you up. Note that the author doesn't go beyond the sources quoted in the first example, but simply uses them as the backing for their own representation.

Metaphorically speaking, Example 1 represents you, the author, hiding behind your sources. Instead of showing your work and what you think, you throw up the sources and hope for the best. Example 2 takes a different course, using the sources as a backing to make a statement that you feel is correct. In Example 2, you're the one making a firm statement, and if someone wants to question that choice, they can go to the sources you've cited. You've done the homework and now you're telling folks what you think.

For professional settings, Example 2 is often the way to go. One of the more common complaints about student writing is that it often doesn't communicate clearly and directly. Taking ownership of the text and the points, allowing sources to back you up rather than hiding behind them, tackles that problem head-on. Now, that isn't to say that you will never need to write the way Example 1 is framed, but that isn't going to be as common.

Even in a literature review setting, you're being asked to take ownership of the text in a way that simply repeating sources doesn't. A literature review, if you think about it, is the product of you reading all of the relevant literature on a subject and then presenting that research to an audience. You are the one making the call on what belongs and doesn't, and you are the one that is naming the various camps, setting up their arguments, and explaining how they interrelate. That's a lot of work for you, the author, even though you're primarily telling someone what other people have said! It is your literature review after all, and you need to own that for better or worse.

So, when it comes to professional voice and technical writing and communication, keep in mind that you're the expert, the one doing the research and the presentation. Own that role, and make your points with your sources doing the backing. Don't use them as a shield, but use them instead as backup when you make your points. One day, you may not need to use them at all, once you've become the expert in a given area. Think about someone like the late Neil Armstrong—who would realistically question his description of walking on the moon? In a situation where he has explained what that is like, he is the source. He's the expert because an ever-shrinking number of people are primary sources that have actually been on the moon and returned to tell us about it! And eventually, you may be in a similar position in your own niche area of study and professional practice. Until then, use other sources to make your points with appropriate authority.

SECTION BREAK—PROFESSIONAL VOICE

1. Does professional a professional look like in your field of study? What are the physical hallmarks of the field? How does this impact the way the field works and is seen? Is this perception fair?

2. What is the difference between sounding like a student and sounding like a professor in a given

class?

3. What is the difference between sounding like a student and sounding like a professional?

SIGNPOSTING AND TAXONOMY

For our final subject in Chapter 1, I want to mention a crucial duo central to effective technical writing: signposting and taxonomy. These two subjects are closely related, in that signposting relies on a taxonomy of sorts to operate, and is an expression of taxonomy, but they are worth treating individually as well as jointly. In a nutshell, these two tools are used to shape your text so that it has a definite structure that can be seen, ideally, at a glance. We'll get more into the idea of taxonomy a bit later in the text, and in many ways the Cardsorting resource in the back of the text is entirely about these two subjects, viewed through the lens of potential users. We'll look at signposting first before moving to taxonomy and then back between the two.

BASIC TEXTUAL SIGNPOSTING

Signposting is at its core telling your reader what is happening in your text. This signposting happens at two different levels, and both are important to readers in their own ways. The first way that signposting happens is via the text itself. When you use terms like "firstly," "second," "next," and "finally," you are using signposting embedded within the text in a basic way. In addition to this basic approach, you can also do higher level signposting, but let's unpack the basic approach first before adding complexity.

Basic signposting with order-based terms tells your readers a few things, and you need to be aware that you're telling your reader those things! Nothing is worse than when someone is signaling something while not realizing they're signaling anything at all, or when they think they're signaling something else entirely. If you've learned a foreign language, you've run into this issue with the subject of false cognates, terms that sound like words in your home language that mean something drastically different in the language you're now speaking.

When you say something like "next' to your reader, you are indicating that you're working through a series of steps or ideas, and that you are now transitioning from one such idea/step to another. Being aware of this transition and taking advantage of it makes you a more effective technical writer and communicator. These terms are crucial in technical writing because many times the information we are conveying is quite complex. We don't want to be adding to that complexity with even more complexity in our text. When we do so, we're in effect creating two levels of understanding the reader needs to master: they need to master our text and our odd dialect/presentation and they need to master the actual information we're presenting to them. For example, attempting to learn how to put together a set of furniture with instructions written in Middle English presents two challenges at the same time.

Now, I'm mentioning the two levels of understanding that readers have to deal with as separate entities to make a point, but in reality they are not so simple to break apart. Your "facts" can't be