

Introduction to Katie Ferguson

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Introduction

When you look for a technical writer, you're looking not only for a competent writing technician, but for a team member able to research, understand, and document new features using all the tools at her disposal, including technical specifications, interpersonal relationships, and features staged in a test environment.

Katie is a writer, a collaborator and researcher, an independent worker, and a relationship builder who improves quality and builds teams wherever she works.

Good to Know	
Education	BS, Technical, Scientific, and Professional Communications, Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Experience	6.5 years in aggregate as a technical or medical writer 4 years as a Client Service Administrator at a financial advisory firm 2.5 years teaching bike classes to PE teachers 11 months as an AmeriCorps intern
Tools	MadCap Flare Snagit Microsoft VisualStudio with TFS Microsoft Office products
Hobbies	Long-distance cycling, reading, and playing cooperative strategy games.

Writer

Katie produces high-quality technical writing by thinking like a user. She asks, "If I was a user, why do I care about this feature? What do I want to know about how it works? Where do I get confused?" She then answers those questions clearly and directly in her documentation.

Example: Report Settings Project
The product Katie documented at Tamarac included over 20 different types of financial reports, each of which had 10 to 30 unique settings. To make it easier for users to understand what each setting did, Katie added over 500 new pages that documented each setting individually. Help documentation page views increased by 50% in the year after Katie added the pages.

Although Katie loves language and writing, she prioritizes access to information over words. This often means incorporating screenshots to guide users through step-by-step instructions and to help them locate features within the product.

Collaborator and Researcher

Katie loves learning. She thrives on challenges and rises to the occasion when deadlines loom.

Example: Learning Financial Concepts
At her financial advisory job, Katie started with zero knowledge of the finance industry. Within three years, she had passed the Series 65 exam, qualifying her as a financial advisor, and had earned her insurance license to sell life insurance.

When learning about a new feature, Katie uses the right source for the job, whether inter- or intra-team.

Inter-Team Collaboration and Research. Katie learns about new features and expected behavior from all appropriate sources, including:

- **Try it out in test** to learn hands-on about all the ins and outs of the feature.
- **The spec and any written technical documentation**, for initial understanding of the feature, its scope, its use cases, and the impact to users.
- **Demos**, for high-level overviews of the whole feature, as well as opportunities to ask questions with the whole team in one place.
- **Developers**, for questions about how the feature behaves as written.
- **Quality Assurance**, for the kind of detail only a QA person could love – as well as excellent edge cases clients might encounter.
- **Product Managers**, for uses cases, expected behavior, and intended impact to users.

Intra-Team Collaboration. Katie works closely with the writing team to edit and provide feedback on each other's work and accomplish long-term projects while still meeting immediate deadlines.

Example: Smart Help Project

Katie and her colleague collaborated closely to document over 4,300 settings throughout the entire product, then used an in-house tool to dynamically display a link to documentation on the screen as each setting appeared. This put help at clients' fingertips, allowing clients to immediately answer questions as they arose, eliminating the need for users to search for help. Help documentation usage went up 11% as a direct result of adding those links.

Independent Worker

Katie's works best like an arrow: Point her in a direction and let her go. Katie thrives working independently, meeting all deadlines, producing phenomenal documentation, and earning an Employee Excellence Award in 2019 in recognition of her efforts.

Relationship Builder

While Katie works hard and produces excellent technical documentation, she values relationships with coworkers and builds personal connections naturally. An energetic, outgoing, and cheerful personality gives Katie the natural predilection to connect with people across all different teams.

Example: The Jokeboard



In 2017, Katie started writing Dad jokes on a white board at her desk. Soon she started writing a new joke every day, and nearby coworkers began checking the board for a new joke daily.

Two years later, #Jokeboard had become one of the company's most popular Slack channels (see left), a site for employees across the company to find a work-friendly joke every day and to contribute their own add-on jokes and puns.

This cross-team interaction directly facilitates work-related conversations. Jokeboard participants regularly alert Katie about changes to features, upcoming new items, and other work details they know a technical writer values.

