Preface

I didn't plan on becoming a writer. In high school, I muddled through most of my English classes, preferring courses in science and history instead. And, any time I was asked to write a paper or essay, I would complain and procrastinate and more often than not end up putting just enough words to paper to receive a passing grade. In fact, I once carved a bust of William Shakespeare out of Vanilla Bean ice cream—hair, eyebrows, and mustache were provided courtesy of Hershey's Chocolate Syrup—just to avoid having to write an essay on the man's life and his work. (I received a B– for my efforts and my classmates got to enjoy William Shakespeare in a whole new way; they were treated to my "sculpture" shortly after it was graded.) By the time I finished high school, my dislike of English and writing in general was so strong that I made the one decision in my life that, if I could go back and change, I would. I chose to pursue a two-year, rather than a four-year degree in Chemistry because I didn't want to "waste two years of my life taking courses like English and Sociology that I was never going to use." If only I had known then what I know now!

In 1982, I graduated from Cape Fear Technical Institute with an Associate in Applied Science (AAS) degree and went to work for Carolina Power & Light Company (CP&L) as a Chemical Laboratory Technician at the Brunswick Steam Electric Plant. A year later, I was transferred to the Shearon Harris Nuclear Power Plant (which is approximately twenty miles from where I grew up and twelve miles from where I live today), and it was there that I learned how to create Lotus 1-2-3 spreadsheets, dBase II databases, and simple applications using BASIC and C programming languages. Initially, I was tasked with finding a way to store plant chemistry data on an IBM PC; later on, I designed and coded applications that did things like calculate the amount of chemicals to add to a system and generate graphs that, when used with measurements taken with a spectrophotometer, identified the amount of chloride and silica present in a water sample. Eventually, I became the computer expert for the chemistry department and consequently, I ended up spending the majority of my time working at a computer, instead of collecting and analyzing samples. So, in 1989, I made the decision to leave chemistry (and CP&L) altogether to pursue a career as a full-time computer software developer.

I spent the next two years working as a programmer/analyst for a small consulting firm, where I helped design and develop an application for the National Institute of

Environmental Health Sciences. And, when that application was delivered, I was laid off, along with several other individuals who were involved with the project. Luckily, I wasn't out of work long; three months later, I was hired to design and oversee the development of an application that ran on OS/2 1.3 Extended Edition and interfaced with a relatively new relational database management system called *Database Manager* (which was later renamed *DB2/2*, followed by *DB2 for Common Servers*, *DB2 Universal Database*, and *DB2 for Linux, UNIX, and Windows*). At times, work on this application could be challenging because the documentation for Database Manager was somewhat limited. So, halfway into the project, I made a decision that would change my whole attitude about writing, and ultimately, my life—I decided to create a detailed reference that would make it easier for me and others to develop applications that interacted with Database Manager databases.

After experiencing a number of setbacks and delays, I began working in earnest on the manuscript for my reference in 1995. It took me just over a year to finish the writing and another year to complete the work that was needed to get the manuscript ready for publication, and when the book was finally published, I swore that I would never write anything of that magnitude again. (When published, my reference, *The Developer's Handbook to DB2 for Common Servers,* contained 1146 pages!) But, after spending untold hours writing practically every day for a little over a year, the whole process of writing had become an important part of my daily routine. Consequently, several months after my first book was published, I started looking for another book-length project that would fulfill my craving to write. The resulting book, *ODBC 3.5 Developer's Guide*, led to another, which in turn, led to another, and the rest, as they say, is history. Currently, twenty-three books have been published with my name on the cover as either the author or a co-author. And I have authored a significant number of magazine articles as well.

- - -

As a published author, I am frequently asked for advice on how to write an article or book for publication. And, over the years, I have offered suggestions, based on my own personal experience, to several colleagues and friends. So, in 2008, when a vice-president at EMC challenged everyone in his organization—the organization I was a member of at the time—to "publish or perish," I volunteered to teach an educational seminar on how to write technical magazine articles and get them published. I also offered to write a paper on the subject for internal distribution.

As I created the PowerPoint presentation that I planned to use to teach my class, I worked closely with my editors at CMP Media and MC Press to ensure that the training material I was putting together was both accurate and complete. Both editors provided me with valuable feedback (which I incorporated into my material) and both thought the companion white paper was a "must read" for anyone wanting to write a technical article and get it published. But my editor at MC Press, Merrikay Lee, felt strongly that many of the principles that were covered in my training were just as applicable to writing technical books as they were to writing technical articles. She also believed that there was a market for a book that could teach readers how to use these principles to write a technical article *or a technical book* and get it published. So, with her encouragement, I drafted an outline for such a book that was largely based on the information I had covered in my educational seminar. Shortly afterward, she sent me a publishing agreement and convinced me to write this book.

- - -

If you look closely at my body of work, you will quickly discover that practically everything I have ever written has one goal in mind—to teach the reader how to do something. For example, how to develop applications that interact with DB2 databases, how to prepare for a particular DB2 certification exam, how to utilize a new feature or function found in the latest release of DB2: the list goes on and on. This book is no different. I wrote it because I wanted to teach others who may have struggled through high school English, as I did, how to turn an idea for a technical article or book into a published work. I trust you will find that it does just that.

Introduction

According to a 2003 survey conducted by Jenkins Group, Inc., a Michigan publishing services firm, 81 percent of Americans would like to write a book. And, although it appears that a similar study about writing articles has never been done, it's probably safe to say that a fairly large number of people have entertained the thought of writing for a magazine as well. There are certainly enough books on the subject of writing to back up this theory, as well as support the 2003 survey's findings—a recent search for books on writing at Amazon.com returned an astonishing 149,911 hardback and paperback titles.

With so many books on the subject of writing available, choosing the right one to help you get started can be a daunting task. To begin with, only a fraction of these books are designed to guide you through the process of turning an idea for an article or book into a published work. And unfortunately, many of the books that focus on this aspect of writing contain material that's outdated and no longer relevant. For example, most books describe how to query an editor by way of regular mail, even though today, the majority of editors prefer to be contacted by e-mail. (And there is a significant difference in how e-mail queries are submitted.) Or, they fail to provide information that every first-time author needs to know, such as how to use tables and artwork, and how to revise early drafts until the wording is clear, concise, and strong. More importantly, almost all of these books neglect to mention just how difficult the task of writing can be. They also fail to offer suggestions on how to develop good writing habits; habits that will help you overcome any obstacle you are likely to encounter.

This book is different. First and foremost, it contains up-to-date information on everything you need to know to turn an idea for a technical article or book into a published work. I can make this claim without hesitation because I contacted several editors and an agent to find out how they do business *before* I documented the process a writer should follow when creating and submitting a query and/or a book proposal. Furthermore, it combines and summarizes important information found in a wide variety of resources, some of which are only available to authors who have already signed a publishing agreement. For example, when you sign an agreement with a large publishing house like McGraw-Hill or Prentice Hall, you normally receive a copy of their "author guidelines," which you are expected to adhere to as you prepare your manuscript for publication. Portions of Chapters 6, 7, and 10 were developed

by combining the information found in the author guidelines used by six well-known publishers who specialize in producing technical and educational books. Similarly, a careful analysis of the publishing agreements I received from publishers I have worked with in the past, as well as a comprehensive examination of agreements I received from friends and colleagues who have worked with other publishers, went into the creation of Chapter 4—a chapter that took me just over five months to complete and that many reviewers have said is the most important chapter in this book.

More importantly, much of the information found in this book is derived from my own personal experience writing technical articles and books for publication. When I set out to create this book, one of my goals was to capture, in writing, tips and suggestions I have offered friends and colleagues who have sought my advice in the past. Another was to reinforce many of the concepts presented with real-world examples taken from my own writing projects that were ultimately published by companies like McGraw-Hill, Prentice Hall, CMP Media, IBM, and TDA Group. But, I didn't stop there. As I developed the manuscript for this book, I relied heavily on the feedback of subject matter experts, to ensure that the information being presented was both accurate and complete. (Refer to the Acknowledgments section for the names and qualifications of the subject matter experts who helped me with this book.) As a result, if you have little or no experience writing, this book will give you a clear and accurate picture of the steps involved in authoring a technical article or book for publication. It should also answer any questions you may have about turning an idea for an article or book into a printed work. If, on the other hand, you're an established author with a list of published works to your credit, this book may teach you a few things you don't already know. (All of the published authors who reviewed early drafts indicated that they had learned something new.)

If you've bought this book (or if you are thinking about buying this book), chances are you have already decided that you want to write a technical article or book and get it published. I am confident the information presented here will help you do just that.

Who This Book Is For

This book is written primarily for professionals and subject matter experts who are interested in writing a technical article or book for publication, but have no idea how to get started (or what is involved in the process). However, any individual who would like know more about writing technical papers, articles, theses, dissertations,

and/or books and getting his or her material published will benefit greatly from the information contained in this book.

How This Book Is Organized

The information contained in this book has been organized into the following chapters:

- **Chapter 1, Before You Begin**
  Chapter 1 is designed to introduce you to the less-glamorous side of writing—to point out that although it can be rewarding, writing is hard work. In this chapter, you will learn about some of the obstacles that frequently get in the way of writing, such as procrastination and writer's block, and you'll be given some techniques that, if used, can help you overcome many of these obstacles. You'll also be shown how to develop good writing habits that will help you keep working when the writing gets tough.

- **Chapter 2, First Steps – Technical Articles**
  Chapter 2 shows you the process that most writers use to submit an idea for an article to a publisher. In this chapter, you'll learn how to identify trade journals and magazines that might have an interest in publishing your work, and you will see how to pitch your article idea using a device known as a *query letter.* You'll also learn how and when to follow-up after querying, as well as what to do if, for some reason, your query is rejected.

- **Chapter 3, First Steps – Technical Books**
  Chapter 3 shows you the process that most writers use to submit an idea for a technical book to a publisher. In this chapter, you will learn how to locate a publisher that routinely publishes the type of book you plan to write, and you'll see how to develop a *proposal* that conveys a sense of your planned book's focus, format, and style to anyone who reviews it. You'll also learn how to compose a query letter that will encourage an editor or agent to ask for your proposal, and you'll learn when and how to follow-up, what to do if your query and/or proposal is rejected, and how to find a reputable agent (should you decide to hire one to represent you).

- **Chapter 4, The Publishing Agreement, The Author Questionnaire, and Working with an Editor**
Chapter 4 is designed to introduce you to two very important documents most writers receive after getting an offer to publish their work. In this chapter, you will learn about the document that is used to describe the work that is to be published, and that provides the framework upon which author–publisher relationships are built—the *publishing agreement*. You'll also see the terms and conditions that are frequently found in a publishing agreement, and you will receive recommendations on how to make many of these terms and conditions favorable to you. Additionally, you will learn the purpose behind another important document—the *author questionnaire*—and you'll see the types of questions you are likely to encounter, should you be asked to complete and return one. Finally, you'll be given some basic guidelines on how to build a healthy working relationship with an editor. (He or she is the individual who will oversee the production and publication of your article or book.)

- **Chapter 5, Developing the First Draft**
Chapter 5 is designed to provide you with some general guidelines that successful writers often employ when developing an early draft of a technical article or book. In this chapter, you'll learn how to create a working outline, and you will discover why it's important to have an outline you can adhere to as you write. You'll also learn how to use headings and subheadings appropriately, how to incorporate the basic elements of good writing throughout your article or book, how to find your voice and set the proper tone, and how to use transitions effectively. Finally, you will learn how to craft an opening that draws the reader in, as well as how to develop a closing that resonates in your reader's mind long after he or she has put your writing aside.

- **Chapter 6, Using Tables, Artwork, and Sidebars**
Chapter 6 introduces you to three important elements that are frequently used to enhance the information presented in a technical article or book—tables, artwork, and sidebars. In this chapter, you will learn how to use tables, artwork, and sidebars to present complex or important concepts in a manner that makes them easier to understand. You will also be given guidelines on when to incorporate each of these elements into your writing, and you'll learn how to

create various types of artwork, such as line drawings, screenshots, photographs, and text figures, that can easily be reproduced without sacrificing quality.

■ **Chapter 7, Staying Out of Trouble**
Chapter 7 is designed to introduce you to four very important concepts that every writer must know if he or she wants to stay out of trouble: how to write bias-free text, how to avoid making libelous statements, how to avoid plagiarizing others, and how to avoid copyright infringement. In this chapter, you will learn how to keep from alienating or offending others by using bias-free text, and you'll discover how to avoid making libelous statements in your writing. You will also learn what plagiarism is, as well as what you can do to avoid it, and you'll become knowledgeable about things like copyright, copyright law, the public domain, the "fair use" doctrine, and the proper way to "reuse" someone else's copyrighted material in your work.

■ **Chapter 8, Revising for Perfection**
Chapter 8 shows you how to revise your writing until your finished article or book is the best that it can be. In this chapter, you'll learn why revision is important, and you will receive suggestions on how to turn your first draft into a second draft, your second draft into a third, and so on, until you have a polished manuscript that's ready for publication.

■ **Chapter 9, Soliciting Feedback**
Chapter 9 shows you to how to invite early readers to provide constructive criticism on your work. In this chapter, you will learn why feedback is important, and you'll receive some basic guidelines that will help you find reviewers who are qualified to critique your work. You'll also learn when it's appropriate to solicit feedback, as well as what to do with the feedback you receive, and you will learn the proper way to deal with your personal feelings when you receive feedback you don't agree with.

■ **Chapter 10, Last Steps**
Chapter 10 is designed to introduce you to the elements that most publishers expect you to supply when you submit a completed manuscript, to provide

you with guidelines on how to review your material as it moves through the publication process, and to give you some ideas on how to promote your published work. In this chapter, you will learn about the elements that make up the front matter and the back matter, and you'll be shown how to prepare both the byline and credit line for an article *and* the front matter and back matter for a book. You'll also learn how to submit a completed manuscript to a publisher, as well as how to review copy edits and page proofs. Finally, you will learn how to handle mistakes found after printing, and you'll be offered some suggestions on how to promote your writing once it's been published.