

MISTY ADAMS AIMS FOR THE STARS

Written by Christopher Williams

Misty Adams, a technical editor at NASA, received a bachelor's and master's degree in technical communication during her six-year enrollment at Missouri S&T. As a nontraditional student with a lot of curiosity, Misty did not start out to be a technical communicator, however. It took her some navigation and exploration to reach her educational milestones.

Misty first explored mechanical engineering but was challenged by the volume of math. "I was inspired by MythBusters, to be quite honest. I've always said I was an engineer without the math." The technical communication program became Misty's beacon once she was aware of it. Misty already had history with technical communication. A motorized scooter enthusiast, she had pored over Honda's technical manuals and was impressed by them. "They were a combination of language and instruction that really spoke to me," she said.

Misty's enthusiasm for language and editing eventually extended into the classroom at Missouri S&T. She completed her BS in Technical Communication and stayed around for the MS, working as a graduate teaching assistant (a de facto instructor) as she pursued an advanced degree. After graduating with the MS in 2013, she worked in the Rolla area as a technical communication specialist for Brewer Science and a remote technical writer for Wells Fargo.

In 2016, Misty began her three-year employment as a contract technical writer/editor at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base (WPAFB) in Dayton, OH, where she worked on various reports, publications, and templates related to flight simulator research. It was at WPAFB that Misty was introduced to the world of government contracting and acronym soup. "I started a list at WPAFB, and by the time I left, I had entries for over 1,200 acronyms."



Since May 2019, Misty has been working as a contract Technical Editor II at the NASA Goddard White Sands Complex (WSC) in White Sands, NM. Her work at NASA is vastly different from her work at WPAFB. At NASA, the mission focus is space exploration for the betterment of humanity through science and technology, whereas at WPAFB the mission focus was military defense and security. All employees at the NASA Goddard site are contractors, except for three government civilians.

The primary function of the NASA Goddard site is the uplink and downlink of data services to NASA satellites and the International Space Station (ISS). Misty's work as a technical editor involves revising internal technical publications to support this function. She has revised maintenance manuals for satellites when new equipment was procured, updated facility access manuals, and incorporated software updates into procedures. She often refers to Merriam-Webster's dictionary and her technical editing books to support her edits.

Misty's advice for students who want to work for a government agency is to focus on obtaining a security clearance first. She obtained a security clearance of "Secret" and sees it as critical to opening future doors. "Sometimes your clearance is more important than your skill set," she said. She also stresses that military contracting has more varied rules and regulations than civilian contracting. Not all contracting companies are the same; some may be great to work for while others may not be. The key to success in any professional field is to set goals and have patience and persistence.