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Poster sessions are used to share research in science, engineering, and academics, providing important venues to share one's work, discuss ongoing research, share preliminary results, and obtain feedback in a relaxed atmosphere. In this article, Adkins discusses how to design and format a poster, and why poster sessions are a can't-miss opportunity for students.
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STC Efforts Realized: U.S. Government Acknowledges Technical Writers as Distinct Profession

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its newest Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH) in December and, as STC announced in April, “Technical Writer” has its own chapter for the very first time.

The change acknowledges that the requirements of technical writing are sufficiently distinct from all other writing professions to warrant according technical writers their own chapter in the 2010 edition.

“This is a breakthrough achievement for STC and for the profession of technical communication,” said STC President Cynthia C. Currie. “It is the result of a long-standing relationship with economist Richard O’Sullivan and our vision that technical writers (and all technical communicators) be recognized as the special breed of communicator they are.”

O’Sullivan, principal of Change Management Solutions, is an association economist who has been advising BLS for 25 years and assisted STC in this endeavor. “To go from where we were in late 2006 when STC approached OMB to having a new category of technical writer in 2010 is amazing,” said O’Sullivan. “Usually, putting through changes like this can take up to a decade. But our argument was compelling and the differences STC focused on were clearly apparent and hard for OMB to argue against. We had our proof in the marketplace.”

STC responded to a request from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to update the Standard Occupational Classifications (SOCs), the classification system used by all U.S. and state government agencies when collecting and publishing information on employment, wages, and salaries. The Occupational Outlook Handbook is one of the Department of Labor’s most popular programs and an essential tool for the human resource management profession. The reference details the latest changes in the 820 occupations tracked by the BLS each year.

“Having the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics recognize technical writers as a profession distinct from all other writing professions independently confirms STC’s claim that not all writers can do technical writing,” explained STC Immediate Past President Mark Clifford, who was STC President at the time of the initial announcement.

“We’re very pleased to have this distinction made in an important reference tool that is so well respected by the human resource community.” The OOH presents some good news in its inaugural Technical Writer chapter as well. It states that technical writers held close to 50,000 jobs in 2008, and more importantly, employment is expected to grow 18 percent—“faster than average,” and nearly twice the rate projected for the nation’s workforce in total—from 2008 to 2018. The chapter also calculates a median salary of $61,620 as of May 2008, with further breakdowns for specific industries. (For a comparison, “Writers and Authors” had a median salary of $53,070 at the same time, while “Editors” checked in at $49,990. And job growth for the positions is expected to be more than two percentages below the rate for the entire workforce from 2008 to 2018.)

The OOH description of the position clearly differentiates it from similar jobs. As significant points, it lists the following:

• “Most jobs in this occupation require a college degree—preferably in communications, journalism, or English—but a degree in a technical subject may be useful.

• Job prospects for most technical writing jobs are expected to be good, particularly for those with Web or multimedia experience.

• Excellent communications skills, curiosity, and attention to detail are highly desired traits.”

Overall, the inclusion of the position and the information provided are good news for STC members and the profession. “The OOH is the most important reference tool used by HR professionals,” said O’Sullivan. “To have this distinction being made by the DOL in this document is important for the profession. It supports STC’s position before employers and HR departments and provides an unbiased and respected voice backing what STC has been saying for years.”

To access the new section of OOH for technical writers, visit www.bls.gov/oco/ocos319.htm. To read the Handbook in its entirety, go to www.bls.gov/oco/home.htm.
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  2010. 284 pages.
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- **Mastering APA Style: Student's Workbook and Training Guide, Sixth Edition.**
  2010. 220 pages.
  Lay-Flat Spiral Binding.
  List $25.95 | ISBN 978-1-4338-0557-8

  2010. 221 pages.
  Lay-Flat Spiral Binding.

  Adelheid A. M. Nicol and Penny M. Pexman

- **Presenting Your Findings: A Practical Guide for Creating Tables, Sixth Edition**
  Adelheid A. M. Nicol and Penny M. Pexman
In September 2008, Google released its new web browser, Chrome. While the browser’s release was a significant event in its own right, what really caused a buzz in the technical communication community was the fact that the accompanying documentation was in the form of a comic book.
While the Chrome comic was far from being the first technical comic—and, in fact, there is a long history of the comics medium being used for technical documentation—it was perhaps the most high-profile technical comic in recent years. The fact that it was also written and illustrated by Scott McCloud, one of the medium’s top theorists and author of the seminal Understanding Comics, gave it an added resonance.

As I mentioned in a recent post on the STC Notebook blog (http://notebook.stc.org), my passion for comics has paralleled my career in technical publications; over the years, I began to see how the ideas and structure of one could be used to help the other. In fact, since the release of the Chrome browser comic, I’ve been able to combine the two by writing and producing several technical comics for clients as diverse as software companies, an educational nonprofit, and a large engineering group. I also write what may be considered more traditional comic books (i.e., the entertainment kind); I am currently the regular writer of the comic book series based on the Disney*Pixar movie Cars.

One of the questions I am most often asked is how do I write for comics—people seem fascinated (and maybe mystified) by the process. Before getting to the details, there are a few fundamentals we need to cover.

**What Do We Mean by Comics?**

When I utter the word “comics,” most people immediately think of spandex-clad superheroes, talking animals, or a gang of perennial teenagers who never seem to finish high school. There is a common misconception that comics are a genre with a limited range. They aren’t. In fact, they aren’t a genre at all.

Comics are a medium. Just like film, theater, prose, poetry, or any other process of telling stories, comics can be used to convey all sorts of information about a wide variety of subjects to multiple audiences. Comics can make you laugh, cry, gasp in wonder, shake in terror, and they also can make great instruction manuals, training aids, white papers, or any other type of business or technical communication.

In *Understanding Comics*, McCloud defines comics as “Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer.” I prefer a simpler definition that comics are a graphic medium in which images are used in order to convey a sequential narrative. In other words, the combination of words and pictures in sequence.

**So What Does a Comic Script Look Like?**

Comics are often produced by a team. For instance, on the *Cars* book I write, I come up with the story and write a script, while the art is done by a dedicated artist, with the coloring and lettering done by specialists, and the whole project overseen by an editor.

Even with the technical comics projects I produce, I minimally employ an artist and usually someone to proofread the book; the teams can vary between three and five people and maybe even more on larger projects. From a technical writing perspective, the biggest shift is that you are no longer writing for the end users, because your audience is now the rest of the team.

Given that comics are essentially a visual medium, a comic script looks something like a screenplay at first glance. The major difference is that in comics, the writer is also the director, and so the script ends up being a lot more detailed. The other major difference is that while movies and TV show continuous movement (or, to be strictly accurate, the illusion of it at 24 frames per second), comics show snapshots of set moments in time.

Now that we have a few fundamental definitions in place, let’s take a more detailed look at the process.

**Before You Start**

Writing a technical comic is no different than any other project that you undertake in that there are some basic questions you need to ask before you start.

- **Who is the audience?** You’re already doing this before you start any writing project, in any medium.
- **What is the message we want to deliver?** Again, no matter what the medium, all technical documentation needs a purpose.
- **What deliverables will we be providing?** For comics this can be traditional print (either a stapled comic book or a square-bound graphic novel), on the web, motion comic (sequential art with a degree of animation and maybe audio added), or cell phone. The primary end deliverable may affect the dimensions of your artwork. If the web or iPhone is your main target, then you may want to use landscape pages rather than the traditional portrait layout.
- **How many pages will we need?** This could be a combination of subject matter, cost, budget, schedules, and so forth. I have worked on technical comics from 8 to 120 pages.
- **Will we want to publish pages or extracts as the project develops?** For instance, on one of my projects, we will be posting a couple of pages on the website each week and only go to print after it is completed. This will affect how we schedule the project deliverables.

**Blocking Out the Story**

I’m a strong believer that the most effective communication tells a story—in that it has a beginning, middle, and end—and that you know something at the end that you didn’t when you started. This applies as much to technical communication as it does to entertainment. Comics are, at their core, a sequential medium that makes them perfect for storytelling.

To be effective, a technical comic needs a story. The way I tackle this is to block out the story before I actually write the script itself. For instance, a typical comic book that you find on the newsstand or at your local comic book store usually has a 22-page story. To start,
I take a piece of paper and write the numbers 1 to 22 in a column down the left-hand margin. Against each number I write a single sentence of what I want to happen on that page. For a technical comic that could be something like “Explain the server configuration.”

I then take that list and further block it out by taking each page and writing down the number of panels I think I will need on that page and what happens in each panel. For instance:

Page 16—Explain the server configuration.
1. Enter the server room.
2. Character 2 asks Character 1 about the setup.
3. Largest panel on page—Virtual whiteboard—Explains configuration.
4. Character 2 asks usage question, “So how do I … ?”

Narrative

Technical comics work best when the reader has a protagonist (called the “point-of-view character”) that they can either empathize with or project themselves into—a character that will ask the questions they would ask.

Even if you have several characters in your cast, one should be clearly identifiable as the point-of-view character and act as a guide through the information. This is where I believe that the Google Chrome comic failed. It lacked a central character to drive the narrative, instead presenting the viewpoint of several Google engineers all talking—as a result, it quickly becomes confusing. This is in stark contrast to McCloud’s own Understanding Comics, where he uses a cartoon avatar of himself to guide the reader through a very complex theoretical discussion.

Snapshots in Time

As I mentioned earlier, each panel of a comic is essentially a snapshot in time, so unlike a movie scene, you can’t have a character performing several actions at once. This is crucial if you are using comics for procedural documents; ideally, you should have one step per panel.

For instance, a sequence like “Unscrew the cover plate, remove the plate, and set it aside,” would need at least two panels to illustrate it effectively.

Watch the Number of Words

As comics are predominantly a visual art, there often isn’t a lot of room for text in the panels. In fact, too much text can easily crowd the art, with the overall effect throwing the reading experience out of balance. The net effect is that in comics every word has to count, and the writer needs to use concise, clear language.

Yet the great thing about comics is that words can be used in different ways within a panel to generate different effects. The options for inserting text include characters’ dialogue or even showing their thoughts or internal monologues. You can also use captions to provide information or contrast, and sound effects to add emphasis; there is also the ability to add textual elements into the art itself. The net effect is that while the actual amount of text in a panel may be limited, it can be used in a variety of ways to help deliver information in a very efficient manner.

Words and Art Work Together

Comics work best when the combination of words and art support each other. A good writer lets the art do the work and provides words to add nuance, impart information that isn’t obvious from the visuals, or to foreshadow events. The worst thing you can do as a comics writer is to describe exactly what the art is already showing. The old adage of “show don’t tell” is particularly relevant to writing comics.

Symbols, Icons, and Color

Over the course of their development, modern comics have developed their own language of symbols that are instantly recognizable and are generally understood, even when used outside of the medium itself. Items like the speech balloon, movement lines, and so forth are often employed in many types of communication, from advertising to training manuals.

Symbols and icons are very powerful, and often supply a visual shortcut when used with a community that has a common understanding of what the symbol or icon means. Beware that while some icons are almost universal in understanding, others may change meaning across cultural boundaries. (I’ll be discussing the use of symbols and icons in more detail in an article planned for the December 2010 issue of Intercom.)

Remember the Team

Earlier in the article I talked about the shift from writing for the end user to writing for the team. As the writer, this means that you need to put into your script items that the reader will never see, but are essential for the rest of the team to be able to understand your intent.

These hidden script items could include things such as:

• References for the artist in the form of links to external images and documentation that give them a better understanding of what to draw. This is very important on a more technical project where products and equipment need to be depicted accurately.
• Notes on foreshadowing, including notes along the lines of “make sure to include Item A in the shot here as we will need it on page 3.”
• Instructions to the colorist and/or letterer on particular effects you want to achieve.

The Final Product

As with any team effort, the end result often proves to be better than the parts. One of the main reasons I enjoy writing in the comics medium is that great collaborators often take my ideas and add things to them that I had never thought of. While you the writer may come up with the original script, you have to be prepared for the script to be used more as a guideline. Be prepared to accept changes that improve the project. The important thing is the affectivity and impact of the end product.

At the end of the day, it’s all about improving communication. 0

Alan J. Porter is president and founder of 4Js Group LLC (http://4jsgroup.blogspot.com/), a technical and business communications consulting and services company that specializes in helping organizations “tell their stories” by combining creative talent with business experience. 4Js Group is the go-to company for corporate comics projects.
How can storyboards help you with your projects and what are the qualities of a good storyboard? This article describes storyboards and how you can effectively use them for your projects.

What is Storyboarding?
One definition of storyboarding is that of a highly interactive, visual process that combines creative and analytical thinking, also known as “displayed thinking,” as defined by Grace McGartland of Thunderbolt Thinking. She also notes that a storyboard can be a screen-by-screen sequence of frames detailing what learners will see, hear, and/or do during a specific type of experience. Elements of a typical traditional storyboard with multiple elements include:

- Project information
- Objectives
- Audio/narration
- Video clips
- Graphics
- On-screen text
- Navigation and interactivity
- Relevant notes

Some basic reasons to use storyboarding include:
- Facilitating communication within a working team
- Preventing costly errors
- Allowing everyone to share ideas
- Promoting buy-in and consensus
- Identifying problems before anything is developed
- Helping to generate new ideas

History of Storyboarding
Leonardo da Vinci was the first person thought to have used formal “storyboarding” in planning his artwork. It is believed that his rival Michelangelo also took up the practice. There are earlier accounts of the practice of mapping planned attacks and architecture captured in cave drawings.

Modern use of storyboarding began with Walt Disney and his cartoonists in 1929 during the making of Steamboat Willie, the first animated cartoon feature. The visual planning model pioneered and perfected by Disney is used in many other industries today, such as marketing and instructional design. It has become an inexpensive way to present ideas and gather valuable input before the final product is created.


How We Can Apply a Wide Definition
Wikipedia provides a wide definition of storyboarding that shows storyboards as any kind of graphic organizer. This can include a series of illustrations or images displayed in sequence for the purpose of pre-visualizing a motion picture, animation, motion graphic, or interactive media sequence, including website interactivity.

In terms of adapting storyboards to business, the Wikipedia entry notes that storyboards were adapted from the film industry to business, purportedly by Howard Hughes of Hughes Aircraft. Today they are used by businesses for planning ad campaigns, commercials, proposals, or other projects intended to convince or compel to action. A “quality storyboard” is a tool to help facilitate the introduction of a quality improvement process into an organization.

One advantage of using storyboards is they allow the developer to experiment with changes. The process of visual thinking and planning allows a group of people to brainstorm together, placing their ideas on storyboards and then...
arranging the storyboards on a wall. This fosters more ideas and generates consensus inside the group.

Storyboards in this wider definition can appear in many applications, from books to instructions to proposals to processes. If you want to make an idea understood, a storyboard format or related presentation such as a flow chart or time line can help. Placing sticky notes on a wall to show the elements of a project—a set of instructions, for example—is also a form of visual representation or storyboarding. A team can view this and rearrange and discuss elements in a convenient form with this approach. Moore explains a related application, which we can also imagine in an electronic format through a spreadsheet.

A storyboard is used by teams to write documents. Information needed to create the document is posted on corkboards or walls in a designated room accessible to all team members. In this room, the document grows from outline to draft to a thoroughly reviewed, final document. During its growth, the document can be tracked using a simple flagging system.

Many storyboard templates exist, such as the one shown in Figure 1.

**Why Technical Communicators Should Use Storyboards**

As described by Wiens, those unfamiliar with storyboards often ask, “Why bother?” In response, some benefits are that storyboards:

- Effectively document elements, communicating all components in one document
- Set a scope
- Permit a collaborative approach
- Clearly communicate to all team members
- Set expectations
- Save time
- Mitigate costs
- Are easy to manage
- Act as quality assurance

Some technical communication classes include storyboarding in the course-work. One example is Purdue University’s English 421 (Technical Writing), which lists these steps of storyboarding:

1. Find or create a storyboard template that you can use to draft your outline.
2. Each frame of your storyboard should represent a unique page, a step in a sequence, or some other individual component of your work (such as a PowerPoint or Keynote slide, a keyframe in Flash, or a web page).
3. In each frame, identify your content. Use shorthand to describe the content (including images and audio) that you want to include and approximately where it should be placed.
4. Add notes to each frame in your storyboard on design, source files, material, and anything else that will help you remember what each frame should contain and how it should be presented.
5. When you have completed a rough draft of your storyboard, read through it to see whether it has an order that makes sense and includes the multimedia you want to use. Move frames around as necessary.

Whether your project could use a storyboard to show the details of a web-based tutorial, or you are working with a group to define a process, or you have another project where you need collaboration and visualization, storyboarding is a creative tool that could be helpful toward achieving successful completion.

**References**


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As technical communicators, the ability to step out of the box and write in non-traditional environments is truly a job requirement as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. It seems as though technological advancements breed more technological advancements. In previous generations, the technical communication community could use several years of experience, lessons learned, and “best practices” to solidify ourselves as experts and to measure the quality of our work. But, at the
current speed of change, we now often find ourselves embarking on a new journey—not a road less traveled, but a road where there’s an expert to turn to. And, a road that is not paved with a set of instructions to follow.

This article is not meant to serve as an extensive user guide for any screen capture software, nor will it provide step-by-step information or methodologies for producing video tutorials. Its purpose is to get your video production skills moving in the right direction as your role evolves from manual or help writer to well-rounded technical communicator in today’s market.

**Pre-Planning Dos and Don’ts**

In organizations in which video tutorial production is a new team endeavor, some managers mistakenly believe that the resident technical communicator “can be brought in just to write the script” and be left out of everything else. You’ll quickly see why this isn’t the case—and cannot be the case. Here’s a list of pre-planning dos and don’ts to consider before you begin writing your video script:

- **Don’t** create a video (or multiple videos) around where to find a button or menu item.
- **Don’t** include information in your video describing what action(s) will occur by clicking a button or selecting a menu item.
- **Do** include information around where to find buttons and menu items and what they do using text and screen shots. This kind of information is better displayed, received, and referenced by the user in text. No viewer will want to take the time to execute a video and watch for even 60 seconds if they can reference a guide in 10 seconds.
- **Don’t** plan video tutorials that last longer than two to three minutes. Viewers want information fast. They are using your video tutorial for a specific reason, or for a piece of information.
- **Do** expect to plan features and benefits videos, or demonstrations for sales and marketing purposes, to be longer. Take attention span into consideration.
- **Do** expect that if you watch your video and get bored within the first 60 to 90 seconds, the viewer will, too.
- **Do** understand that it’s acceptable to “video-tize” only parts of concepts or topics, and then refer the viewer to additional texts or screen shots for information.
- **Do** understand that it’s acceptable to create multiple videos for longer tasks or more complex topics. Make sure you can provide information describing the different parts to the viewer prior to beginning the video tutorial.
- **Do** include supporting text outside of the video. Beyond help documentation and text tutorials that the video tutorials support, provide information like:
  - Descriptive title
  - Short summary (in order of sequence in which information will be presented)
  - Video length
  - Predicted audience (who should view the video)
  - Prerequisites (what should the viewer know, read, or view before watching this video)

It’s tempting to include this information on the first couple of slides of the video itself. Beware of falling into that trap! By providing the information as text outside of the video, you are decreasing the amount of time the user will have to spend watching the video and assisting the user in deciding if watching the video will be beneficial to the task at hand. Plus, if you are concerned with search engine optimization, this is a great way to get parsed by search engines.

**Writing Tips to Get You on Your Way**

Once you have selected the concepts or tasks for your video(s), it’s time to get to what will probably be your favorite part: the writing. Although video tutorial script writing is similar to writing help documentation and text tutorials, there are some important considerations. Here are some tips to get your writing started.

Start by writing a three- to five-sentence summary of the video. This will help you stay within the purpose and scope of the video. If the summary changes while you’re writing, take a step back and make sure you’re not over-complicating the tutorial, and that the new summary is still in line with the other guidelines in this article.

Logically break the two- to three-minute video into two to five smaller sections that can be divided with a transition slide. If the video tutorial is demonstrating a task, this can easily be done by breaking it up into steps (i.e., Step 1, Step 2, Step 3). This will begin to organize your script into an outline and allow you to efficiently and effectively focus on high-quality script writing.

Just like a movie, your script needs a beginning, middle, and end. However, remember that this is not a feature film. Quickly tell the viewer what you’re going to tell them, correctly and adequately, and then tell the viewer what you told them. Just like a text tutorial or other help documentation, some introduction and some conclusion are useful. Be careful not to waste your viewers’ time with background information or information that’s not pertinent to their successful completion of the video. As with
Getting the Job Done

Setting Up the Script

As the technical communicator, it’s your role in script writing to tell the video recorder what to record, to tell the speaker what the audio should say, and to tell the video editor how it should all fit together. This is most effectively done using one document rather than trying to maintain information in several places.

Create references for each role to effectively communicate what should be recorded, said, edited, and applied. Because your script will include instructions to multiple people—or people acting in multiple roles—and because planning and integration is extremely important to the quality of the final video, you can effectively manage your script and script-writing responsibilities by creating a simple table and filling in the blanks. The columns to include are:

- Row ID (to be used in conjunction with the video editor and voice recorder/speaker—this should be numbered starting with 1 and continued sequentially for every row in the table)
- Steps/Scenario (for the video recorder)
- Slide Number (to be used later by the video editor)
- Audio (for the voice recorder/speaker)
- Caption Text (for the video editor)

This will create references for the actual video recorder, voice recorder/speaker, and video editor (even if you’re the one playing all three roles), so it’s clear which voice is applicable to which slide created.

Remember, with video screen capture software, the final output looks like a movie. Technically speaking, the software captures several screen shots while you are in recording mode and plays the screen shots one after another. From a video production and video editing perspective, you will be applying audio files, captions, and so forth to individual slides. This is similar to a PowerPoint presentation, and it might be helpful to write your script as if you are planning such a presentation.

Writing the Recording Script

You should always start by writing the steps the video recorder should follow. This is the simplest part for someone with experience writing help documentation and text tutorials: outlining the steps sequentially for the video recorder to follow while recording the video.

The biggest difference between writing the steps for video tutorial production and writing the steps in help documentation or text tutorials is that you must provide a level of detail to the video recorder that includes a complete working scenario. For example, if you create a video tutorial about entering data from a form into a software tool, you must provide the video recorder with the information to enter into all the fields on-screen. This will ensure that your video recorder is able to follow all the steps with the outcome you expected.

If you don’t provide this kind of information, the video recorder could become confused and go off track from the script while trying to interpret what you planned for them to record. This is an important step, even if you’ll be taking on the role of the video recorder. If you accidently click the wrong button or enter information into the wrong field while recording, you may have to re-record sections of the video, or restart your recording from scratch. Including the steps and a complete working scenario is an important part of the planning process and helps ensure a high-quality final video. Insert this information into the “Steps/Scenario” column of your video script. You should include one step per row (e.g., Row 1: Click the Save button).

Writing the Audio Script

The next step is to write the audio piece of the script. You should include the text for the audio in the same row as the step in which the audio is relevant.

Don’t write too much audio content on each slide. Remember, audio actually significantly increases the length of the entire video because the video does not move forward to the next slide until the audio is over. The audio for each slide should be no longer than one to two sentences. If you have more to say, most video screen-capturing software will allow you to duplicate a slide (with or without the action and captions associated with it) and you could potentially apply one to two additional sentences of audio. This rule is also appreciated by the voice recorder/speaker. It’s easier to record one to two sentences and save the audio file than to try to record an entire paragraph. Speakers may fumble over their words or read something incorrectly; if so, they’ll have to re-record the audio file. Fewer words in each audio file will result in less rework for the speaker.

When writing the audio script, write how people talk, not how they write. This is one of the hardest transitions from help documentation and text tutorial writing to video tutorial writing; it’s not what you’re familiar with. Write the text for the audio, and then read it aloud and ask yourself: “If I were to verbally tell someone this, how would I say it?” However, be aware of regional language and who the audience will be. For example, if you’re from the southern part of the
United States, you might use the word “y’all” habitually; if you’re from Australia, you might be tempted to end the video with “cheers.” This is regional language and you should be careful to exclude it for global audiences or audiences from different regions to increase clarity. That said, unlike technical writing, the use of contractions such as “don’t” and “can’t” is not only acceptable but recommended when writing text for audio. It sounds more natural, and it is more common in speech to use contractions.

Remember that you’re not writing a technical manual. You don’t have to create audio for every action the screen will display (i.e., Click the Save button). The viewer can see what’s going on and doesn’t need to be told. In fact, viewers report that it’s annoying when the speaker describes every single action as they are taking it. Use the audio to provide additional information or to drive home an important point.

Plan for silence. Think of silence as leaving white space in your document. You don’t need constant speaking (although you don’t want silences that feel more like dead air than natural pauses). Also, music is not effective, and can even be distracting, in technical video tutorials, with the possible exception of the introduction and conclusion if no voice-over audio will be presented at that time.

Writing Captions

The next column to complete in your script table is for the captions.

Use captions as supplemental text to the audio. Do not use more than one sentence per caption. Some screen capturing tools will automatically insert captions. Automatic captions will be directly related to the actions taken on the screen. Your captions may be related to the actions taken on-screen or provide some other kind of information. You can include more than one caption per slide, but you must plan in order to arrange them so they appear sequentially and with the right timing relevant to the audio and action taking place on-screen.

Write your captions well enough to accurately and completely summarize the audio. Remember that not every viewer will have access to headphones or speakers. You should not provide additional information in your caption that is not provided to the viewer through the audio or that is describing an action taking place on the screen. It can be too much for the viewer to keep up with if they are trying to see the mouse movements on-screen, listen to the audio, and read the caption at the same time—particularly if the information from all three doesn’t complement each other and provides new or different information.

Next Steps

At this point, the writing exercise is basically over for your video tutorial script. Once the script is complete, the next activities for high-quality video production are to use the video script you created as follows:

1. The video recorder should follow the Steps/Scenario column to record the video.
2. The voice recorder/speaker should record the voice files (usually MP3s) and save one file per row in the script table. The voice recorder/speaker should make the file name consistent with the Row ID to easily communicate to the video editor which slides to apply the audio files.
3. The video editor should run through the entire video along with the script and fill in the Slide Number column. Typically, when recording the video, the screen capture software will create more or fewer slides than you expected while planning. This is to be expected. For example, your action may be to select a menu item, but the screen capture software may create a slide to move the mouse to the main menu, click the main menu item, move the mouse to the submenu item, and finally select the submenu item—all of which would create more slides than the one row you probably planned for. The screen capturing software will apply a number to each slide. The video editor should insert the slide number applicable into the correct row. (Note: There will not be one row per slide. Some slides will not have audio or captions.)
4. The video editor should apply the correct voice file to the correct slide.
5. The video editor should create/modify the correct caption(s) to the correct slide.

Change is inevitable. Due to the evolution of your role as a technical communicator, there will be roads less traveled—roads where we must pave the way together, make mistakes, and learn lessons for future generations. With the technology and software available today, simply recording a video tutorial is an easy job. But, to provide successful videos, it’s important to take the same planning and analysis into consideration as with any other technical documentation. Now, it’s time to test your script writing skills. Good luck paving the road.

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Beyond the Act of Writing: Strategies for Successful Outcomes

By Hillary Hebert and Harry Calhoun

When you write for a living, applying your writing skill is only part of your job. Whether you are a freelancer or full-time staff member, your strategy for meeting deadlines, your planning skills, and the social skills and tact that help you meet your client’s needs are critical, too. This article discusses some tactics for coping with deadlines, planning and organizing, and working with those all-important clients.

Deadline Strategy: Stop!

A tight deadline—even for a veteran writer—can create a lot of stress. So what do you do when you get hit with a big, unexpected project and a seemingly impossible deadline? Panic? Maybe, or maybe not. A smart strategy can hold the workday together and allow for timely copy.

For starters, there’s a technique (borrowed from aviation lore) to abate disaster when you’re faced with urgent action and a very short timeframe: Wind your watch!

Well, perhaps not literally with today’s timepieces. That was the advice given many years ago by a flight instructor as the first thing to do if the engine quits. Now, that is a short deadline to be respected! Fortunately, as a writer, your life doesn’t hang by a project deadline, but you might think your career does. So, work like a pilot: Stop, wind your watch, make a plan. When you take your mind off the immediacy of the problem, you allow yourself to assess the scope of the work and gain perspective.

Your first effort should be to clear up your environment and free yourself of distractions. Just as a pilot needs a clearing in the countryside to bring his plane in safely, a writer needs clear “thinking space” to bring in a project on time. First you finish the jobs that can be completed in short order, sideline the ones with more generous deadlines, and negotiate everything else.

Now, down to business.

The Plan

It’s easier to develop a plan when it’s divided into three logical parts: Objective, preparation, and operation. You’ll want to start with the objective: yours and your client’s. You can’t tell where to start from or how to get there until you know where you’re going.

Objective

As a writer, your objective is to bring the project in on time with a quality piece of work. But that’s not your client’s objective. Your client is looking for an action, not a product. She’s paying you to create a new brochure or a better website. But her objective is for customers to attend her presentations, use her services, or buy her product. It’s your job to know how your client defines success. What does the client want to happen as a result of your work? The answer will influence how you shape your piece. Can you summarize your client’s objective in one or two sentences? Put it on a sticky note. As you work, keep this target in clear view.

Once you identify the action your client wants, you need to know metrics:
how your client measures success. Can you incorporate features into your deliverable that would help her track responses?

Preparation

Now, with your client’s objective clear in your mind, it’s time for the prep work. Consult with your client to determine, or confirm, her preference for a medium or media in which to work. Printed materials or a presentation? A single standalone piece, or several components for a campaign? Will there be a recurring theme over multiple media?

Once these questions are settled, explore the techniques that are best suited for each medium. Let’s say your client has asked you to create an eight-page brochure, a promotional front-and-back flyer, and an email. She has provided (or you have researched) the information you need in order to create this collateral. While the source is the same for all components, the intent and function of the various pieces are not.

Operation

In this case, we’ll assume your client needs all the deliverables at the same time to support a major product announcement. You’ll be creating the three deliverables based on the same product-related information. How the materials interconnect and are used is a big part of how you will operate. For example, let’s say that the brochure is about the product’s features and that the product will be promoted at a conference. The flyer and the email will be used to promote the conference. So, in terms of time consumed, the brochure will take the most time to produce. Another important factor is that it will be a take-away at the conference, so the choice here is obvious; you do the brochure first.

Typically, you would work on the longest piece first and then cut and repurpose the copy to write the other pieces. However, before you write, it’s often useful to first consider the shortest piece. That way, you can figure out the most critical selling point that you want to drive home in your email. Once that’s done, you can write the pieces in any order, but you have nailed down your focus.

Working with the Client

When it comes to working with a client, “the customer is always right” is not a motto to live by. Sure, the client sets the direction for your writing. If the direction is “drive people to the website to register for our conference,” then that is your goal. However, remember that your client is employing you for your talent and skills. Even if the client is “always right” when it comes to direction, it’s your job to collaborate to create a better end product.

Some of this is simply writing your copy in the style you know will succeed. Then diplomatically disagree if the client wants to change something that you believe in passionately. You won’t win them all, but in some cases you will prevail. (Just be ready to be saddled with the blame if your writing doesn’t get the response the client thinks it should!)

Persuade your client to use more white space and less copy to make a piece more readable. Explain how “less can be more.” Be aware of your client’s limitations in your area of expertise and be willing to be a gentle teacher. Your client may be brilliant in his or her area of expertise, but there are times when your knowledge can help the client to find a solution that better suits the project’s purpose.

Recently, a client came to an agency convinced that she wanted a PDF as her final deliverable. But she also wanted the copy in the document to be customizable for different audiences, and she had no designer on staff who could manipulate the PDF. The writer on the project explained that she could do the document as a PowerPoint presentation with the same graphic image as the PDF, then drop in whatever copy she wanted. The result? The client was pleased with the outcome and had a broader understanding of the media for future projects.

The Client Experience

Why does it matter how writers go about their work? Because a writer’s social skills play a big part in determining the client experience. Arguably, the work experience with the writer can be more important to the client than meeting the project’s definition of success. The client experience is what will get you a subsequent assignment.

The client wants to feel confident that you are capable in your skills, disciplined in your work habits, and can ensure a successful outcome. Clients expect timely communication, adherence to a schedule, and respectful collaboration. They will be upset by budget over-runs and missed deadlines. They expect you to make the effort to learn enough about their business in order to understand their perspective and that of their customers. They expect you to visualize the project’s goals as clearly as they do.

The client expects you to plan your work and work your plan. Develop your ability to assess the situation when a big project comes in, put together a strategy, and follow through to a successful conclusion.

Summary

If you’re reading this, you’re probably well versed in writing in general and for your milieu in particular. However, working under pressure presents its own set of challenges. It’s also key to be able to strategize and come up with a plan you can stick to—and not just when you have tight deadlines. No writer works in a vacuum, and learning to interact well with your clients is an important part of your job. Combine all these strategies and tactics, and you have just made yourself a more valuable writer.

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you’ve seen a “Call for Posters” on a bulletin board in a hallway or on an email discussion list, and you wonder, “Is this right for my research project?” Chances are the answer is “Yes!” Whether your research is a statistical analysis, a case study, or a synthesis of articles and books on a topic, the results of your research can be published in poster form.

Poster sessions have long been used to share research in science and engineering, and it is through these fields that technical communicators have become acquainted with research posters. Poster sessions allow for a large number of people to present their research at once and are an important opportunity for students to share their work. For example, in 2008, almost 80 students participated in the “Posters on the Hill” event sponsored by the Council on Undergraduate Research. Smaller events may include sessions with about a dozen posters.

What is a poster session?
Poster sessions are a way of discussing ongoing research, sharing preliminary results, and getting feedback on the presenter’s research. These sessions give participants the chance to share findings in a relaxed atmosphere that encourages dialogue between the presenters and other professionals attending the conference.

Posters are usually mounted on display boards and easels in a room or hallway, bringing a number of presentations together in a single space. Most sessions provide the poster board and easels, but you should bring push pins, clamps, or other materials for attaching your poster to the board. During a poster session, presenters stand by their posters and answer questions about their research projects. Conference attendees circulate throughout the room, viewing posters and asking questions or discussing research that they find interesting.

What information should I put on a poster?
A poster should present the most important findings of your research in a format that can be understood in 10 minutes or less. This means that you need to plan your poster carefully, identifying the key sections and the information that is essential to tell your story. Summarize your study with enough detail to be complete, but with a single clear focus so that viewers are not confused. Don’t worry about creating text that flows from one section to the next. A poster is supposed to be a well-designed series of snapshots, and most viewers will not take the time to read paragraphs of dense prose.

Posters should include a title block that includes the title, the presenter’s name, and the presenter’s affiliation. Title blocks also may include information about the event at which the poster was presented.

Consider developing a handout that summarizes your findings for viewers who want more information about your project. A handout should be a single sheet of paper and should include the same title, name, and affiliation information that is on the poster. It also should include contact information, such as an email address, so that participants can follow up with questions or share research and resources. You also should add information about the event at which the poster was displayed. Like your poster, your handout should show off your writing and design skills.

How should I format my poster?
Because technical communication borrowed the poster format from science and engineering, early posters at conferences of organizations like the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing followed the traditional science model. Scientific and engineering posters usually use boxes for text and graphics, with traditional research article headings such as Purpose, Methods, Data Analysis, Results, and Conclusions.
The poster in Figure 1 is an example that uses this traditional format. This poster, created for Missouri Western’s Undergraduate Multi-disciplinary Research Day, started with a template recommended by the event sponsors. The student used the recommended text box and heading format, but replaced the solid background with one that immediately introduces viewers to the focus of her project.

As technical communicators have become more familiar with posters, they have begun examining the poster as a genre and, thus, have been opening up the poster format. For example, at the 2007 conference of the Council of Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication, the poster session began with a discussion of the visual design and rhetorical strategies used by participants when they created their posters. One of the posters from that event can be seen in Figure 2. The creators of this poster, a faculty member and graduate student, chose a bridge graphic to quickly tell the story of their research and focus on their most important recommendation.

When designing your poster, use headings that are informative and clearly related to each other and to your topic. Consider using headings such as questions or summarizing statements to give readers a sense of what you think is most interesting and important about your research. Remember that the purpose of headings is to give your readers a quick overview of your project and to help them find the information that they are most interested in. Whatever headings you use, include the following information in the text of your poster:

- an introduction, including your research question
- a review of literature and/or methodology
- findings
- discussion and/or conclusion
- references

After you have planned the information that you will include in your poster, begin designing the layout. Even posters that are primarily text-oriented should still make good use of layout and design principles such as attractive arrangement and effective use of white space.

Graphics such as photos, charts, or illustrations can be an important part of a poster, but make sure that they tell part of the story. Don’t clutter up the display with pictures that distract rather than inform. As much as possible, graphics should be self-explanatory. Keep captions short and to a minimum.

Ideally, viewers should be able to read a poster in five to fifteen minutes from three feet away. Fonts for the title head-
ings should usually be between 60 and 78 points. Body text should be at least 35 points. Remember that graphics also must be visible from a distance. It is helpful to preview posters by projecting them from a computer or overhead projector to a screen or wall. When you preview your poster, pay close attention to the amount of text and white space. A common problem in first drafts is too much text and not enough white space, as researchers struggle to narrow their focus for the poster format.

How do I make a poster?

PowerPoint is the easiest tool to use for making posters. If you have access to a poster printer, you can create your poster on a single PowerPoint slide, using the Page Setup controls to customize the paper size for your printer. You also should check the information in the original “Call for Posters” to see if there is a recommended size.

Start with a blank PowerPoint slide, then insert and format text boxes, images, and other graphic elements to present your information effectively and attractively. If you don’t have access to a poster printer, or you don’t want to try to carry a full-size poster to a conference, you can format sections on PowerPoint slides and mount them on poster board.

Where can students participate in a poster session?

National organizations that offer opportunities for students to participate in poster sessions include the Council on Undergraduate Research, the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, and STC, which often includes poster sessions in its annual Summit. Students also should look for opportunities to share posters on their campuses, at regional conferences, and at STC chapter meetings.

Why should students present a poster?

While poster sessions are valuable for faculty and practitioners, they provide a forum for students to share their research and projects. Posters are especially appropriate for sharing preliminary results of longer projects, or for sharing single-semester research projects. Planning and preparing a poster while drafting a research paper can help you focus your paper as well.

Poster sessions are also a good venue for introducing students to conferences and giving them public-speaking experience in a more casual setting.

Technical communication students work with both textual and visual elements in documents, so respond to the next “Call for Posters” and put your skills to work.

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2010 Preconference Program

In addition to the education sessions during the conference, STC will again offer advanced sessions, or institutes—a “conference within a conference.” Currently the following institutes are planned:

Usability
Presenters: Scott Butler, Rich Gunther, Jim Jarrett, and Brian Sullivan

Content Strategy
Presenters: Rahel Bailie, Rachel Lovinger, Ann Rockley, and Julian Murfitt

Information Design
Presenters: Phylise Banner, Don Moyer, and Karen Schriver

Localization
Presenters: Jean-Luc Mazet, Lisa Pietrangeli, and Kent Taylor

The 2010 Summit will also include preconference workshops and tutorials, as well as certificate sessions; all require separate registration and fees. The preconference schedule will take place on 1 May and 2 May; dates and times are below and will be posted to http://conference.stc.org.

The preconference workshops are $250 for members and $500 for nonmembers, while the certificate courses include conference registration and cost $1,395 for members and $1,795 for nonmembers. Visit http://conference.stc.org for further details and to register. Currently scheduled are:

Preconference Certificate Sessions
All four certificate sessions are two-day sessions, scheduled for 1–2 May from 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM. Session instructors will also recommend regular conference sessions to complement the certificate sessions.

Leah Guren, TechComm 101
Technical communication is an exciting and challenging career with unlimited opportunity for professional development. But to succeed, it’s not enough to learn a desktop publishing or Help authoring tool—you need to master the analysis process. This is a thinking person’s dream career! TechComm 101 is the fastest, most efficient way.

Saul Carliner, Technical Communication Manager
Effectively managing a technical communication group involves a unique set of skills: clearly communicating expectations regarding a job, effectively evaluating performance, developing and communicating a strategic vision for your group, making a business case for proposed projects, and selling the services of your group. This certificate program helps you develop these skills.
Phylise Banner, *Instructional Design for e-Learning*

Effective e-learning is dependent on the design and facilitation of the learning experience. Learning theories and instructional design best practices must be understood and applied in order to develop an approach to creating environments that leverage multiple instructional strategies.

This certificate program will cover a combination of theory and problem-based approaches to instructional design for e-learning. Participants will have the opportunity to learn and apply instructional concepts, principles, and strategies to the design and development of a collaborative instructional project.

Ann Rockley, *Content Management Overview*

This seminar provides an overview of content management systems (CMSs) and the issues associated with identifying and implementing a CMS in an organization.

**Preconference Workshops and Tutorials**

Bernard Aschwanden, *Hands On: Minimalism, DITA, and Content Management Workshop*

Sunday, 2 May, 8:30–11:30 AM

Learn to write less, use topic-based architecture, and control the creation, revision, and publication cycles of documentation projects. Get hands-on with industry-leading tools. Understand how three industry-leading ideas work together during this half-day session.

Rahel Bailie, *Architecting Content: Content Strategies*

Sunday, 2 May, 1:00–4:30 PM

This workshop explores development of a content strategy; balancing the tensions between the demands of multiple departments and stakeholders. It also looks at the nature of content and how we need to change its development, management, and delivery to survive the current economic climate, and implications for forward-thinking content strategists.

Rob Hanna, *Introduction to Information Mapping for Technical Communicators*

Saturday, 1 May, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM

First established in 1967, information mapping has helped large corporations eliminate documentation inefficiencies while improving customer satisfaction. This session teaches you how you can apply the principles of information mapping to improve the usability and effectiveness of your writing. Learn valuable skills in information design, modular writing, and single-source authoring. This session is a full day in length.

Brenda Huettner, *Career Tactics for Technical Communicators*

Sunday, 2 May, 8:30–11:30 AM

This workshop takes you through the basics of today’s technical communication landscape, and helps you to identify your own areas of strengths and weaknesses. We’ll learn and practice a variety of techniques to help you determine what you want and create a plan to help you get it.

Tom Johnson, *Developing and Designing Blogs with WordPress*

Sunday, 2 May, 8:30–11:30 AM

Learn how to use WordPress to create a blog with the look and feel you want. Also learn to incorporate best practices in blog design concerning readability, layout, typography, findability, navigation, and more.

Neil Perlin, *A Quick Look at Adobe Captivate*

Sunday, 2 May, 1:00–4:30 PM

Adobe Captivate lets you quickly, easily, and inexpensively create demonstrations, simulations, and other movies for use in help, sales, marketing, tech support, and more. In this workshop, you’ll create a little movie in three hours in order to learn about Adobe Captivate’s basic features and get a hands-on overview.

Will Sansbury, Yina Li, Rachel Peters, Mark Richman, *Essential UX Skills for Technical Communicators*

Sunday, 2 May, 8:30–11:30 AM

Many of the skills required to be a user experience designer can help you improve your technical documentation. This workshop teaches foundational information architecture skills—including heuristic evaluation, card sorting, and usability testing—to empower you to improve your technical communication and provide increased value to other parts of your organization.

Renee Shull, *Teamwork and Creativity: Seriously, Let’s Play*

Sunday, 2 May, 1:00–4:30 PM

This interactive session will introduce you to new ways of using your imagination, creativity, and logic in devising solutions to complex problems. Integrated Play will help you build relationships with your cross-functional teams; enhance your interpersonal skills to motivate each stakeholder. Using three-dimensional thinking, you will construct metaphors out of LEGO® bricks describing real situations facing you, and leading you to discover options. Possible solutions can be implemented immediately without entrapment in theoretical roundabouts.

Linda Urban, *Topic-Based Authoring: Getting Your Feet Wet*

Saturday, 1 May, 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM

In this hands-on workshop, you learn about topic-based authoring. After we define terms and look at examples, you will practice identifying and defining topic types, chunk linear information into topics, and assess what kinds of changes are required to make individual topics work effectively for users. The workshop will be a full day. Please bring a sample of your own content (10 to 15 pages, printed single-sided).
Technical Communication Summit Session Descriptions

Society pages

STC presents the preliminary listing of sessions for the 2010 Summit, being held 2–5 May at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower in Dallas, TX, with session titles, speakers, and descriptions. This list will be updated as more sessions and speakers are added to the conference. Conference education sessions are included with your registration.

There are nine tracks offered, organized to best suit your needs. The tracks are: Communication and Interpersonal Skills; Design, Architecture, and Publishing; Education and Training; Emerging Technologies; Managing People, Projects, and Business; Professional Development; Usability and Accessibility; Web Technologies; and Writing and Editing. Below are the sessions by track; the March issue of Intercom will publish the preliminary schedule by date and time.

**Track: Communication and Interpersonal Skills**

Barrie Byron, *Enhance Your Writing Career with Improved Speaking Skills*

Learn how to make effective verbal communication a part of your technical communication career success plan. As our work environments change, we need to develop and use verbal skills to add visibility and credibility to our writing roles. Enhance your professional reputation by polishing your public speaking skills.

Ant Davey, *How Communication Works*

To communicate most effectively, you need to understand how communication works. This session will look at basic communication models, what works, what causes it to breakdown, why people are different from you. This is the foundation for understanding communication, on which the Communication and Interpersonal Skills track is built.

Whitney Hess, *Evangelizing Yourself*

In this session I will help timid and unassertive practitioners come out of their shells and become leaders in the community. The advice I have to impart is based on my own experience taking control of my career and developing an authentic and positive reputation.

Suzanna Laurent, *Attitude—The Choice is Yours!*

Attitudes are everywhere in life. You are never without them. Your attitude creates your actions, which produce results. This session shows you how to gain control of your attitudes to gain control of your life. Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference personally and professionally.

Rich Maggiani, *The Art of Questioning*

Questions are the foundation of excellent research and interviews. Learn the power of questions, what they can engender, and how to write them; as well as 10 types of questions and how to sequence them to obtain the information you need.

Moderator Traci Nathans-Kelly, *Situated Global Communications: Experts Talk About What Happens*

This progression will allow participants to speak to a variety of experts in translation, localization, and related areas of global communication. With Traci Nathans-Kelly, Hans Fenstermacher, Jennifer O Neill.

Renee Shull, *Motivating Without Authority (LEGO SERIOUS PLAY)*

It’s not just what you say, it’s how you say it. Unless you are lucky, you have to be careful about “telling it like it is.” Using three-dimensional thinking, you will construct metaphors out of LEGO® bricks describing real situations facing you, and leading you to discover options. Possible solutions can be implemented immediately without entrapment in theoretical roundabouts.

**Track: Design, Architecture, and Publishing**

Robert Anderson, *Hands Free DITA Publishing*

Sure, the DITA Open Toolkit is free, but only programmers can use it, right? On the contrary! Come learn how you can publish your DITA content without touching code. We’ll also cover ways to spice up your output without even needing to know what XSLT or Ant are.

Bernard Aschwanden, *DITA: From Zero to DITA ASAP*

DITA can be part of a fast-paced environment where rapid development is the business norm. DITA speeds-up content creation even as scope and deliverables change. Follow a development process from outline to finished content. Develop tasks, concepts, references, and maps; and use each in different ways to deliver the right output.

Moderator Rahel Bailie, *Content Strategy SIG Progression*

Complement of topics relating to the emerging practice area of content strategy. With Alyson Riley, Rahel Bailie, Colleen Jones, Anne Gentile, Lisa Dyer, Janet Swisher, Brenda Huettenmeier, Andrea Ames, Mollye Barrett, C. C. Holland, Rachel Lovinger, Gina Fevrier.

Tharon Howard, Alicia Hatter, *A Survey of Eleven Documentation Delivery System Alternatives*

The important role information products play in user experience is often overlooked. Today, users want information more immediately than ever before. Print manuals no longer suffice; clients increasingly expect Web 2.0 delivery systems. In response to this new media landscape, this session evaluates eleven new distribution systems for performance support.

Michael Hughes, *Architecting User Assistance for Reuse*

This presentation examines four common scenarios for reuse and how user assistance architects and information developers can keep their reuse options open in each scenario: * Same document in different media * Same topic in different documents * Same content within many topics * Slightly different content within one topic.

Pamela Kostur, *Content Management as a Practice*

Content management isn’t just a system you buy or implement. It is always, however, something you do. Managing content is the goal, regardless of technology.
or technique. This presentation examines content management as a practice, focusing on: Content, Users, Business requirements, Processes.

Steven Lungren, Richard Lowe, Peter Dykstra, Flower Power: Daisy Wiki-based Content and Translation Management
Case studies demonstrate how two groups use Daisy, an open source Content Management and publishing platform, to publish structured Help for two web products with very different business requirements. Both systems were rolled out with short lead times and have reduced costs by supporting re-use, re-purposing, and translation management.

Rand McKinney, Jeremy Franklin, Creating a Wiki-Based Online Help System
The Second Life Viewer 2.0 includes a context-sensitive online help system with content hosted on a wiki. The system provides for content localization and versioning. Some of the help content is also incorporated into official Knowledge Base articles on the wiki.

Neil Perlin, Creating Visual Help and Training Using Adobe Captivate
Adobe Captivate lets us easily create screen movies for use for training, marketing, online help, and more, and is quick to learn and inexpensive. This session describes Adobe Captivate’s uses, features, and outputs. It then illustrates some of those features by creating a simple but real movie in real time.

Leigh White, Mollye Barrett, The Trip to DITA
Learn about the trip one small documentation team took from unstructured FrameMaker to structured FrameMaker using the DITA content model. Two writers, two consultants and what happened along the way.

Track: Education and Training
Karen Baranich, Jeanette Rogers, Jane MacKenzie-Smith, Expert Evaluation of Training
Have you ever wondered how your training materials stack up against the standards of the experts? In this session, you’ll get a chance to learn. Presubmit your materials and schedule a one-on-one with an expert to get feedback.

Colborn Ben, Patrick Quinlan, Nate Jackson, Single Sourcing Sans a CMS
In this session, content developers from Citrix Education will demonstrate the tools and techniques they use to create multi-modal, multi-language training without a CMS.

Janice Critchlow, Judy Hall, Using Wikis to Enhance Training Development and Delivery
This session describes a case study in which we used wikis both as a way to speed up the development of instructor-led training and as a tool for use during the instructor-led classes.

Bettina Davis, How is Technical Training Different?
New research on technology training across diverse industries across a diversity of industries reveals 24 differentiators that distinguish technical training from other types of training. These key differentiators will be discussed along with the implications for development of technical training.

Keith Hopper, Convergence of Technical Communication and Instructional Design Disciplines
Southern Polytechnic State University has initiated an innovative new graduate program blending the disciplines of technical communication and information design into a masters program in Information and Instructional Design. This presentation will focus on the need and opportunities for individuals with advanced degree credentials in instructional design.

Tom Johnson, Developing a Personal Voice in Audio
You can deliver video tutorials with a friendly, personable voice by implementing several audio techniques common to professional voice talents and sound engineers.

Moderator Jeanette Rogers, Instructional Design and Learning Progression
The Instructional Design and Learning SIG brings the experiences of its members to you by providing this progression on the latest topics around creating and using innovative instructional design. With Jackie Damrau, Jeanette Rogers, Cheryl Landes, Jane Maduke, Jamye Sagan, Gloria A. Reece, Marguerite Krupp.

Cheryl Rouland, Education, Training, and Tech Writing: Bridging the Gap
Course objectives, lesson plans, project plans, software development cycles, and adapting to continuous change, this presentation looks at how educators and trainers can learn from technical writers and vice versa.

Moderator Dan Voss, Academic Community Progression: Across the Spectrum
This progression covers a wide range of topics within academe, including curriculum, use of videos in training, bridging academe and industry, international mentoring, ethics, social media, university websites, the state of technical communication in India, and literary engineers. With Dan Voss, David Dayton, Sally Henschel, Marguerite Krupp, Tom Moran, Makarand Pandit, Cindy Pao, Ann Jennings, Gyanesh Talwar, Clio Fouque, Julie Watts.

Track: Emerging Technologies
Char James-Tanny, Alan Porter, Greg Koch, Sarah O’Keefe, Collaboration Technologies and User Assistance Panel Discussion
This session uses a question/answer discussion format to review how collaborative technologies, such as Google Wave, Wikis, Blogs, and Forums, are affecting user assistance. The panelists will share their experiences with these technologies and how they see user assistance delivery changing over time.

Daniel Nackowski, Business Intelligence meets Language Technology
New technological developments have brought concepts from data mining, linguistic analysis, and business intelligence into the server-based, enterprise-scale linguistic asset management arena. This presentation will discuss why content is an asset and how data mining, computerized linguistic analysis, and business intelligence can be applied via technology to manage those assets.
Neil Perlin, Beyond the Bleeding Edge

As tech comm becomes increasingly technical, it’s vital to know what’s coming. Bleeding Edge speakers will help by introducing new trends, tools, or technologies that might affect STC members. Topics won’t be selected until March in order to be as timely as possible.

Track: Managing People, Projects, and Business

Rebekka Andersen, Elucidating Content Management Technology Diffusion and Adoption Challenges

This presentation elucidates some of the challenges work groups face when attempting to adopt content management technologies. Based on the results of an extensive case study and research in the field of technology transfer, the presenter describes how work groups and technology developers can better plan for technology diffusion projects.

Nicky Bleiel, Stewart Mader, Designing for Collaboration: Managing Projects with a Wiki

This session will demonstrate—live—how to quickly structure, populate, and manage your documentation projects with a wiki. Stop the email/spreadsheet madness and start collaborating effectively.

Lisa Dyer, Janet Swisher, Building an Empire from the Grassroots Up

The information-development process is ubiquitous, democratic, and mission-critical to any business. But it’s harder than it looks and opportunities to do better are everywhere. How can Information Development groups help other teams within an organization realize the business value of content strategy and content management?

Tharon Howard, Creating Social Networks and Online Communities that Last

What can you do when designing an online community to maximize user experience? This presentation, based on two decades of managing successful online communities, will teach participants how to design sustainable online communities that attract and retain a devoted membership by providing them with contexts for effective decision-making.

Larry Kunz, Managing Documentation Projects in a Collaborative World

Two trends, community-based authoring and Agile, are revamping the way we manage documentation projects. Fortunately, these trends share much in common. Content strategy emerges as an important new discipline.

Jane MacKenzie-Smith, Managing e-Learning Projects: Avoiding the Pitfalls

Project Managers often do not realize how complex an e-Learning project is. In this interactive presentation, participants will learn about the e-Learning development process, especially the prototype stage, and the pitfalls at each stage. Participants will have an opportunity to determine stages in which specific project problems could be avoided.

Moderator Michael Markley, Best Practices in Management

This session is intended for anyone who is working in a management role, or aspires to do so. This will be a typical progression session. An outstanding group of technical communication managers will present and discuss topics related to project management, team management, supervision, and career development. With Alyssa Fox, Susan Tacker, Francisco Abedrabbo, Noel Atzmiller, Judy Glick-Smith, Amanda Lewanski, Daniel Voss, Barbara Gammonna, Michael Markley, Bernard Aschwanden, Frances Gambino, Annette Reilly, Christine Sigman.

Moderator Ed Marshall, Consultants & Independent Contractors SIG Progression

This session features topics of interests to self-employed technical communicators and those who are interested in being self-employed. With Louellen Goker, Thea Teich, Cheryl Landes, Richard Shroud, Ed Marshall, Darrin Devereaux, Daree Allen, Linda Gallagher, Monique Semp.

Sarah O’Keefe, Managing in an XML Environment

Working in an XML-based environment requires different skillsets from the traditional desktop publishing environments. In addition to new tools and technologies, contributors must also change how they look at the content creation process. Learn what you need to lead an XML-based group.

Pam Swanwick, Measuring Productivity

Every manager struggles to balance writer workload and project capacity. A simple system can objectively evaluate assigned tasks, task time and complexity, special projects, and even writer experience levels to more accurately assess individual workload and capacity. The result is a simple, but useful, representational graph.

Andrea Wenger, Building Effective Teams Using the Myers-Briggs Personality Types

Communication is critical to building effective teams in the workplace. Yet differences in personality types can lead to serious misunderstandings. For instance, Thinking types value directness, while Feeling types value tact. By understanding these differences, we can forge stronger business relationships by considering the needs and expectations of others.

Track: Professional Development

Daree Allen, Invisible Writer: Make Working at Home Work for You

In this session, I will discuss my experiences telecommuting as a technical writer. I will share tips and strategies for people who are interested in or considering working from home part-time or full-time, how to get promoted, and how to manage children.

Andrea Ames, Strategic, Competitive Professional Development: An Overview

Are you developing professionally, every day, and in every way? If not, you risk more than you think. We often relegate professional development to the land of “nice to have.” In today’s challenging economy and business environment, you can’t afford to not continually add to your own professional value.

Elizabeth Bailey, Improving Organizational Performance

Mid-/senior-level trainers attend this session to review Gilbert’s Behavioral Engineering Model and alternatives to his model and bring an example of a challenge you face to discuss with participants to assist you in identifying elements that support and impact behavior in your organization.

Tristan Bishop, Our Future Role: Knowledge Integration

The past decade has seen us transition
from Information Developers. With the proliferation of user-generated content, our future role increasingly will be as the Knowledge Integrators. In addition to creating user assistance, we will also become the official resource for collecting, verifying, and redistributing input from our users.

Barbara Giammona, Inside the Technical Communicators Studio

Join us as we sit down one-on-one with luminaries of our profession to learn how they became leaders in our field. Complete with the blue cards and the famous 10 questions, these conversations will give you a chance to learn more about the professional lives of STC’s biggest celebrities.

Judith Herr, Scott Josephson, Every Technical Writer is an Undercover Proposal Writer

Looking to bolster your status at work and help secure your position? This presentation reviews how to immerse yourself into the proposal process—how we are all undercover proposal writers, versatile enough to become mission-critical agents empowered to deliver corporate success through our existing skill set.

Steve Jong, Status of Certification for Technical Communicators

The Certification Task Force reports on its progress over the past year and offers a model certification program for discussion and comment.

Jack Molisani, Assessing Your Corporate Value

How much value do you add to your employer? In this session you will learn to perform a Corporate Value Gap Analysis to objectively assess your strengths and weaknesses, compare them to what is needed and wanted by employers, and then build a roadmap for closing the gap.

Alexandra Piacenza, Fundamentals of Strategic Planning

This session demystifies strategic planning and demonstrates how technical communication and project management skills can be leveraged in this fascinating and lucrative field. Learn how leading organizations worldwide (Cognos, Hilton, TaTa Motors, Unibanco, UPS, US Army, Wells Fargo, and dozens more) use the “Balanced Scorecard” to successfully execute their strategies.

Kathryn Poe, Thriving in an Agile Environment

What is Agile? Scrum? XP? Learn how these development methodologies provide opportunities for you to improve your corporate and team value. Learn how to get and stay involved in a project from beginning to end. Gain the interest, respect, and involvement from your team and across the corporate enterprise.

Track: Usability and Accessibility

Randolph Bias, Sheng-Cheng Huang, Remote, Remote, Remote, Remote Usability Testing

This will be a presentation and demo of our remote usability testing procedures. We will highlight tools used, benefits realized, and pitfalls to avoid.

Whitney Hess, 10 Most Common Misconceptions About User Experience Design

“User Experience” has been getting a lot of play, but many businesses are confused about what it actually is and how crucial it is to their success. Find out the 10 biggest mistakes people make when defining what UX comprises.

Caroline Jarrett, Label Placement and Other Time-Consuming Forms Controversies

Ever been caught in one of those arguments about whether labels should go above the fields on forms? Or how to indicate required fields? Or whether to put colons on the end of labels? This talk will give you insight and ammunition—and save you time in design meetings.

Colleen Jones, Kevin O’Connor, Testing Content Strategy: What Works, What Doesn’t

Content strategy is an emerging field of practice that helps get your content under control. Where does testing with users fit in? This presentation answers that question and more by presenting a practical process and illustrating it with mini case studies from Centers for Disease Control and Philips.

Whitney Quesenbery, Using Stories for More Effective Usability

Stories can help you collect, analyze, and share qualitative information from user research and usability, spark design imagination, and keep in touch with your audience. This presentation will look at how stories can be integrated into your own process to make it more effective.

Janice (Ginny) Redish, Writing for Universal Usability

Much of our work has to be usable across many different audiences. Researchers often focus on audiences as specific groups (low-literacy, high-literacy, second-language, elderly). Are their needs really so different? Ginny Redish reviews this research and shows how plain language and clear design can work for all.

Linda Roberts, Web 2.0 and Accessibility

This session will discuss the accessibility of various Web 2.0 technologies such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and bookmarking sites.

Will Sansbury, Yina Li, Rachel Peters, Mark Richman, Essential UX Skills for Technical Communicators

Many of the skills required to be a user experience designer can help you improve your technical documentation. This workshop teaches foundational information architecture skills—including heuristic evaluation, card sorting, and usability testing—to empower you to improve your technical communication and provide increased value to other parts of your organization.

Kathryn Summers, Eyetracking of Online Reading Behaviors

Understanding how people read and navigate page content can improve our ability to provide usable content that is accessible for those who don’t read well—an audience that can include the 50 percent of US adults who read at the 8th grade level or below, or older users, or ESL speakers.

Track: Web Technologies

Anne Gentle, Strategies for the Social Web for Documentation

The social web can be perceived as intimidating, life-saving, risky, or a black hole of productivity loss. Learn how to take a strategic approach to integrating social media to accomplish your overall documentation goals.

Gregory Koch, Twitter Aggregators: Distribute Tweeting Responsibilities Across Your Organization

Social networking sites are becoming a
vital part of everyday personal communications. Businesses can use social networking sites, like Twitter, to advertise and assist customers. Twitter aggregators collect tweets from numerous Twitter users, allowing organizations to create a powerful presence without dedicated staff.

Deb McNally, *Using Twitter in a Support Environment*

Twitter has been around for a few years now. It has become a necessity in the support community. We will discuss the ins and outs of using Twitter in a support environment and include specific dos and don’ts to remember when using Twitter.

Alan Porter, Anne Gentle, Kees van Mansom, Stewart Mader, *Web Technologies and Dynamic User Assistance Panel Discussion*

This session uses a question/answer discussion format to review how web technologies, such as RSS Feeds, Feedburner (and other scrapers), mashups, and YouTube/video content, are making user assistance more dynamic and less static. The panelists will share their experiences with these technologies and how they see user assistance delivery changing.

Scott Prentice, *Using Adobe AIR for Online Help*

Adobe AIR is an exciting new development option for creating cross-platform applications that leverage web-based technologies. One interesting use for AIR is online Help. This presentation will explain the benefits of using AIR and will show examples of commercially available options as well as custom AIR Help samples.

Ryan Williams, Amanda Cross, *Changing the Workflow: Implementing a Documentation Wiki*

Implementing a wiki-based documentation solution does more than just change a documentation’s department work ow. This case study takes a look at how ExactTarget took on the challenge of a new wiki and used it to change the way documentation needs and products are realized.

**Track: Writing and Editing**

Lisa Adair, *Editing Metrics*

Learn how Rockwell Automation tracks writing and editing metrics and what we’ve learned because of those metrics.

Nicky Bleiel, *Getting Your Documentation Project Off the Ground Running*

In this session, you’ll learn how to quickly size-up a software application to develop your project architecture, then use a pre-defined topic structure to create content. These skills and guidelines will substantially reduce your “time to writing,” as well as writing time. Result: your project completed faster, with less rework.

Moderator Dawnell Claessen, *Topics in Policies and Procedures*

The P & P SIG has organized a lineup of speakers who will present a variety of topics directly related to P&P Practice, Process Improvement, and Tools and Technology. Conference attendees will learn about career development, work ow and process improvement, specialized P&P Methodologies and productivity tools. With Dawnell Claessen, Audrey Bezner, Sharon Lynn, Nita Bowers, Annette Reilly, David Shenton, Ann Lette.

Angela Eaton, Liz Pohland, Cynthia McPherson, *Results of Interviewing Editors: Best Practices, Challenges, Insights*

This presentation provides the results of twenty interviews of editors, who vary in experience, industry, and location. The data includes editorial best practices, including advice for editors, authors, and managers.

Moderator Meredith Kinder, *Technical Editing SIG Progression: Editing Challenges and Opportunities*

This progression provides the opportunity to impart knowledge vital to the editing profession, specifically in areas such as simplicity, editorial processes, missed words, time management, consistency, editing PDF files, Section 508 compliance, quality, and standards. These are topics that are of interest to and are presented by our SIG members. With Pat Moell, Meredith Kinder, Angela Eaton, Michelle Corbin, Lynn Jordan, Lillian McNally, Donna Dover, Andrea Wenger, Linda Wiesner, Jeffrey Japp, Kathleen Mohar, Sue Jackson, Kristine Haugseth, Liz Pohland, Cynthia McPherson.

Robert Levy, *Flying Solo: When You’re the Whole Editorial Department*

Many employees now find themselves the sole writer/editor on staff. Your role and responsibilities are increasing along with your workload. This presentation gives real-life tips for keeping your sanity, your head above water, and your career on track while everything is changing.

Deborah Lewis Baxley Doyle, *The Magic Three: Better Writing with Topic Types*

Let’s focus on how to improve the way we create meaningful content for our customers. The fanciest toaster will not improve the quality of the bread, and the coolest tool will not make bad writing into good... Learn how to rejuvenate your writing process in this mini-workshop!

Linda Mikkelsen, Connie Kierman, Sally Spahn, *Information Product Evaluation Workshop*

Receive a 30-minute analysis of your information product by an expert. Your product will be evaluated for organization, style, layout, and use of graphics. Bring your product and supply your own laptop if your product is in an online format. Attendees must sign up in advance for this session.

Linda Oestreich, Michelle Corbin, *How to Edit Online Like a Pro!*

Two expert editors share successes and failures in the online editing world. Get tips on common tools as well as ideas for editing work done by remote teams without increasing their distance!

Nicole St. Germaine, *Using Focus Groups for Discovering Localization Preferences*

This presentation addresses the value of using focus groups for localizing information. Information regarding a particular culture’s preferences for format, graphics, or style may be difficult to find without obtaining this input from the audience itself. This presentation will explain how to maximize the effectiveness of your focus group.

Val Swisher, Mike Dillinger, *Pre-translation Editing: Improve Quality While Reducing Costs*

Pre-translation editing improves content quality and dramatically reduces translation costs. Learn how and why it is very different from the substantive and developmental editing normally applied to printed and web-based content. Learn the
subtle differences between editing for machine translation and editing for manual translation.

Thea Teich, Richard Shrout, Indexing Technical Documents: Approaches

A good index to a technical document reduces costs and saves the time and energy of your customers, users, and clients. Learn guidelines on how to approach an unfamiliar process, the indexing of technical documents. Traditional indexing methods as well as alternative strategies will be explained.

Vanessa Wilburn, Barrie Byron, Information Overload: Users Lost Before They Start?

Before users get started with enterprise applications, the planning and installation documents overwhelm them with multiple content types. A combination of editing, architecture, and leadership can tame a scattered, inconsistent document set. Learn how to find a simple solution to a difficult retrievability problem.

Online Graduate Certificate in Technical Communication

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Information Design & Communication Graduate Program
Hotel Reservations for Technical Communication Summit

STC’s official hotel for the 2010 Technical Communication Summit is the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower. The Hyatt Regency is the location of all the activities associated with the Summit and the only hotel with which STC has a block of rooms. STC’s negotiated room rate is $169 USD (plus tax) for single or double accommodations. That rate is $10 USD less than the last time STC was in Dallas, in 2003! You may make your reservations by clicking on the link on the “Hotel/Travel” tab on the conference website (http://conference.stc.org/), or by contacting the hotel directly at +1 (214) 651-1234.

The Hyatt is one of the city’s most consistent Four-Diamond award-winning Dallas luxury hotels. The Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower offers the ultimate convenience of being adjacent to the historic district and minutes from the train (connected via underground concourse) and the shopping meccas of the city.

STC wants you to have the best possible experience when you attend the Technical Communication Summit. Years in advance, STC works hard to negotiate the best rate available for Summit attendees. You will find that staying at the Hyatt will facilitate networking with other attendees and be the least expensive option as well. In addition, when you stay at the Hyatt, you help STC avoid paying penalties for attrition—hotels penalize organizations when they block rooms but do not use all of them, which can lead to higher rates in the future. Thank you for your help in keeping the Summit affordable for everyone.

STC has also attempted to make the Summit a bit more affordable for members, negotiating discounts on airfare, car rentals, and shuttle bus service for those attending the conference. Visit the conference website at http://conference.stc.org and click on “Transportation Options” under the “Hotel/Travel” tab for details on these discounts.

Early Bird Rate for Summit Expires 15 March

Act now and save! The Early Bird rate for the 2010 Technical Communication Summit expires on 15 March. Register before then for just $845 USD; that’s a savings of $350 USD over the Walk-in rate.

With your registration, you get all the sessions, the networking events, access to the exhibit hall, and everything else that you’ve come to expect from the STC Summit. Want more? Check out the preconference learning opportunities, available for an additional fee. See http://conference.stc.org for all the details and to register now.

Learn cutting edge localization skills and earn ATA credits!

Localize yourself for the industry’s global future. The Localization Certification Program offers train-the-trainer courses, self-paced online learning options, and intensive hands-on workshops. The following courses are available:

- **Localization Certification Program**
  - United States: San Francisco
    - March 22–24, 2010
  - Canada: Gatineau, Quebec
    - June 21–23, 2010
  - Europe: Cologne, Germany
    - September 6–8, 2010

- **Localization Project Management Certification**
  - United States: San Francisco
    - March 25–26, 2010
  - Canada: Gatineau, Quebec
    - June 24–25, 2010
  - Europe: Cologne, Germany
    - September 9–10, 2010

Start online today at rce.csuchico.edu/localize or call CSU, Chico Continuing Education +1-530-898-6105

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Get information faster when you follow STC online. Visit STC’s Notebook blog (http://notebook.stc.org) and click on “Subscribe” to automatically receive email notifications of new posts. If you’re in the Twitterverse, you can follow STC’s tweets at www.twitter.com/stc_org. You can also subscribe to our main RSS feed for press releases and more by clicking “Subscribe” at www.stc.org.
STC “Class of 2010” Fellows and Associate Fellows Announced

STC is pleased to announce that 24 distinguished members have been named Fellows and Associate Fellows of the Society. They will be recognized at the Honors Banquet at the 2010 STC Summit in Dallas this year.

STC awards the rank of Associate Fellow to Senior Members who have attained distinction in the field of technical communication.

The rank of STC Fellow is conferred upon Associate Fellows who have attained such eminence in the field of technical communication that the Board deems them worthy of being singled out as one of the select few who have distinguished the Society and the profession.

All are welcome to attend the Honors Banquet; please purchase your ticket when you register for the conference. A limited number of tickets will be available for sale onsite.

Congratulations to all the honorees!

New Fellows:
Alan Houser
Ann-Marie Grissino
Barbara A. Giammona
David J. Dick
Deanne Levander
Gloria Reece, EdD
Jack Molisani
Karen Lane
Kathryn Poe
Kristine Haugseth
Michelle Corbin
Neil Perlin
Pamela S. Ecker
Phylise H. Banner
Russell L. Friend
Russell L. Kahn
Sylvia A. Miller
Thomas A. Reed
William C. Wiese

New Associate Fellows:
Mona M. A. Albano
Barrie Byron
Angela Dianetti
Taryn Light
Nad Rosenberg

Over 200 STC Members Receive Recovery Packages

The Board of Directors is delighted to report that 204 members will receive Recovery Packages. The Recovery Packages were made possible by $41,000 from the Marian Norby Fund to help STC members affected by the recession. Members could apply for a Full Recovery Package for Society dues ($215 value) or a Subsidy Recovery Package ($65 value for the difference between 2009 and 2010 Society dues).

The original plan was to award up to 100 Full Recovery Packages and 300 Subsidy Packages. However, there were more than 100 applicants for the Full Recovery Package and fewer than 300 applicants for the Subsidy Recovery Package, so those figures were adjusted to fit the applicants’ needs.

The Recovery Package Task Force was made up of past STC presidents: Ken Cook, Suzanna Laurent, Linda Oestreich, and Mary Wise. Together they stated, “We were honored to be asked to participate in this timely and important program. During our evaluations, it was fulfilling to read about how STC membership was so valued in networking and in the candidate’s professional development. Many expressed how STC helped them bring value to their employers and clients. Some wrote meaningful poetry in support of the profession. Our hats are off to the STC staff for coming up with this idea—a win for members who are struggling in this economy and an ultimate benefit to the Society.”

The Board wishes to express its appreciation for the Task Force’s time, talent, energy, and enthusiasm in support of this program.

Mercer University School of Engineering

www.mercer.edu/mstco
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Students may begin the program in August, January, or May.
U.S. Members: Deduct Your STC Dues

If you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. Please note, however, that dues must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words:

- Dues paid in 2009 may be deducted only from 2009 tax returns.
- If you paid your 2009 dues in 2009, they may be deducted from your 2009 taxes.
- If you paid your 2010 dues on or before 31 December 2009, these dues may be deducted only from your 2009 return.
- Individuals who chose the extended membership payment plan in 2009 may only deduct any portion of their 2010 dues that were actually paid in 2009. Amounts paid in 2010 may be deducted from your 2010 taxes.

Members who have questions should contact their local IRS office or their accountant.

You can claim dues as a deduction in one of several ways: a charitable expense, a business expense, or a miscellaneous deduction.

Charitable Expense

Gold members may not deduct their membership as a charitable contribution since the Gold membership is valued at $1,458. This exceeds the dues charged for that membership (it may still be deductible as a business expense or miscellaneous deduction as noted below).

All other STC members who pay taxes in the United States can deduct at least a portion of their STC dues if they claim this portion as a charitable donation. IRS publications 526 (rev. 2003) and 17 define this option:

You may be able to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to a qualified organization. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, STC is a qualified organization. To determine the amount of charitable contribution you may claim, subtract the cost of tangible benefits you receive from STC from the amount of dues you paid in 2009. STC’s tangible benefits for the Basic, SIG Value Package, Student, Retired membership categories can be estimated at $30 per year: $14 for the Society’s quarterly journal, Technical Communication, and $16 for the magazine, Intercom.

The charitable contribution is calculated by subtracting the cost of tangible benefits ($30 for all membership categories except Gold) from the cost of dues.

Example: $215 for Basic membership minus $30 in tangible benefits equals a deductible amount of $185.

For 2009 Dues

Any portion of the 2009 dues paid between 1 January 2009 and 31 December 2009 may be claimed as a deduction on your 2009 return.

The charitable contribution is calculated by subtracting the cost of tangible benefits ($30 for all membership categories) from the cost of dues.

Example: $175 for Classic membership minus $30 in tangible benefits equals a deductible amount of $145.

For 2010 Dues

Any portion of your 2010 dues paid on or before 31 December 2009 may be claimed as a deduction on your 2009 return. The amount of your dues for 2010 depends on the membership category you selected.

The charitable contribution is calculated by subtracting the cost of tangible benefits ($30 for all membership categories except Gold) from the cost of dues.

Example: $215 for Basic membership minus $30 in tangible benefits equals a deductible amount of $185.

If you joined STC at some point other than the first of the year (or only paid a portion of your 2010 dues in 2009), you may prorate the tangible benefits amount to include only the months you received/will be receiving these benefits.

Example: If you paid one-half of your membership dues for 2010 during 2009, you should subtract $15 in tangible benefits from the amount you are claiming as a charitable contribution.

Business Expense

Employers and self-employed consultants may claim the full amount of dues as a business expense for all STC membership categories, including Gold membership.

Miscellaneous Deduction

Those who do not fall into the categories defined above may claim the full amount of dues as a miscellaneous deduction. (For miscellaneous deductions to affect taxes, the total amount of miscellaneous deductions must exceed 2 percent of your adjusted gross income.)

Money, Not Time

While dues, contributions, and out-of-pocket expenses may be deducted, personal services may not.

Please Note

The information provided above is for your convenience only and should not replace the advice of your tax professional. STC may not provide formal tax advice for individuals regarding their personal tax situation.

Flipdoc Feedback

The January issue of Intercom debuted the new “flipdoc” PDF, and there are more changes on the horizon! Starting in April, there will be four online versions of the magazine for members to choose from:

- a flipdoc PDF
- a standard PDF
- a text-only PDF
- a web-based format

One member wrote our editorial staff and said, “I just love Intercom being online! I think I just read more in one issue in ten minutes than I have ever in a paper copy…. It was so easy to flick through, zoom in, and move around the page. Really great work.”

What are your thoughts? What do you like and what can we improve? Email us at intercom@stc.org and let us know what you think!
Challenge Tomorrow

Do you prepare in advance—or wait to see what happens?

Lead the way. Changes are coming fast in the technical communication profession. Your smartest move is to get a jump on the changes and prepare in advance. STC membership shows you the way to access the latest knowledge, master the best techniques, and transform today’s skills into tomorrow’s advantages.

Keep moving forward. There’s no marking time as a member in the Society for Technical Communication, the profession’s premier membership organization. Between STC benefits such as educational opportunities, webinars, online professional publications, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), and more, you’ll be prepared to face the professional challenges ahead. Direct your career to the success you deserve.

Start working on tomorrow right now. Visit www.stc.org and renew your membership. It’s the professional way to move forward.

For less than a candy bar a day. Totally satisfying and never filling. Information you can chew on.
2010 Election Guide

The STC election is scheduled to begin 9 March and end at noon EDT (GMT-4) on 8 April. In March, voting instructions and ballots will be mailed to members who selected this option on their 2010 applications and renewal forms. All other members will be emailed instructions for accessing the online ballot.

Please note, STC bylaws specify that the First Vice President automatically becomes President the following year. Michael Hughes automatically succeeds to the office of President from his previous office of First Vice President. Additionally, Hillary Hart automatically becomes First Vice President from her previous position as Second Vice President. Therefore, neither candidate appears on the ballot this year.

Members previously voted for the position of Second Vice President, with the person elected to that position automatically serving as First Vice President the following year and President the year after that. With the elimination of the Second Vice President and Hillary Hart’s succession to First Vice President, there is no position to elect this year. In 2011, members will have the opportunity to elect a First Vice President.

A full copy of the revised bylaws is posted on the STC website at www.stc.org/PDF_Files/bylaws.pdf.

Candidates for 2010

The candidate information page for STC’s 2010 election is now live on the STC website at http://notebook.stc.org/2010-election. From this page, you can access candidate biographies, read their answers to questions asked by the nominating committee and by other members, and ask questions directly of candidates.

Last year, Intercom published selected answers from the candidates in its Election Guide. This year, however, with Intercom going online, it made more sense to link to each candidate’s STC election page so readers could get easy access to all the information needed to make an informed decision. See the link in the “Biography & Candidate Response to Questions” section for full information on each candidate.

Secretary
Rachel Houghton
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Willamette Valley, Lone Star
Current Professional Title: Senior Technical Writer
Company: Self-employed
Company Location: Hillsboro, Oregon, USA
Personal Website: www.rhoughton.com/rhoughton/

Director
Nicoletta A. Bleiel
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Pittsburgh, Usability & User Experience
Current Professional Title: Senior Information Developer
Company: ComponentOne
Company Location: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA
Personal Website: http://nickybleiel.com/

Director
C. Alvin (Al) Hood
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Atlanta
Current Professional Title: Senior Technical Writer
Company: Transtechnik Corp USA
Company Location: Ball Ground, Georgia, USA

**Director**

**Makarand (Mak) Pandit**  
**Member Status:** Senior Member  
**Current Community:** India  
**Current Professional Title:** Managing Director  
**Company:** Technowrites Pvt. Ltd.  
**Company Location:** Pune, Maharashtra, India  

**Director**

**Tricia Spayer**  
**Member Status:** Senior Member  
**Current Community:** Northeast Ohio, Single Sourcing, Information Design & Architecture  
**Current Professional Title:** Technical Writer/Illustrator  
**Company:** Pressco Technology Inc.  
**Company Location:** Solon, Ohio, USA  
Personal Website: http://triciaspayer.com/  

**Director**

**W. C. Wiese**  
**Member Status:** Fellow  
**Current Community:** Orlando, Management  
**Current Professional Title:** Communications Manager  
**Company:** MEADS International (Lockheed Martin joint venture company)  
**Company Location:** Orlando, Florida, USA  

**Nominating Committee**

**Lory Hawkes**  
**Member Status:** Fellow  
**Current Community:** Lone Star  
**Current Professional Title:** Senior Professor  
**Company:** DeVry University  
**Company Location:** Irving, Texas, USA  

**Nominating Committee**

**Nathaniel Lim**  
**Member Status:** Senior Member  
**Current Community:** Silicon Valley  
**Current Professional Title:** Senior Technical Writer  
**Company:** Elekta, Inc.  
**Company Location:** Sunnyvale, California, USA  
LinkedIn Website: www.linkedin.com/in/nathaniel-lim

**Nominating Committee**

**Preeti Mathur**  
**Member Status:** Senior Member  
**Current Community:** Twin Cities  
**Current Professional Title:** Independent Consultant  
**Company:** Currently working through Dashe and Thomson  
**Company Location:** Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA  

**Nominating Committee**

**Linda Mikkelsen**  
**Member Status:** Senior Member  
**Current Community:** Twin Cities, Instructional Design & Learning  
**Current Professional Title:** Senior Technical Writer  
**Company:** Cray, Inc.  
**Company Location:** St. Paul, Minnesota, USA  
This column focuses on the basic principles of information design, the branch of technical communication that uses an understanding of how we humans process and understand information to develop more effective techniques to present that information. Please send your comments, questions, articles, and suggestions for future articles to the column editor, Geoffrey J. S. Hart (ghart@videotron.ca).

From Theory to Practical Implications: The Example of Data Graphics

By Geoffrey J. S. Hart, Fellow

My discussion of typography (Intercom, July/August 2008, December 2008, and February 2009) examined the subject from a theoretical perspective, with me ultimately concluding that there may not be a single optimal solution: so long as you pay attention to simple typographic rules, you won’t stray too far from producing a legible document.

That being the case, it seems a bit contradictory that information designers worry so much about the cognitive costs of small factors on the readers who must decipher our words and images. After all, you’d think that “good enough” solutions really are “good enough,” and that intelligent audiences can overlook these minor costs and still have plenty of energy left to understand our message.

Unfortunately, considerations that seem purely theoretical often have important consequences. In this article, I’ll use three simple graphs to demonstrate how even little things can trip up our audience.

Stacking the Deck

Let’s start by illustrating a theoretical problem. Figure 1 presents a “cumulative total” bar chart that summarizes the relative values of three budget items (A, B, and C) in a given year. In such graphs, the length of each component of the bar (such as A) represents that component’s contribution to the total (A+B+C); the top of the bar thus adds to 100% of the total.

Such graphs display both the value of each component and (with a little simple arithmetic) the values of various combinations of components. For example, examining the lengths of each of the first bar’s components reveals that A, B, and C account for about 42%, 16%, and 42%, respectively, of the total. On this basis, A and B combined account for 58% of the total, and the proportions for A and C and for B and C can be calculated similarly. Repeating this process for the second year shows that A decreased and C increased by identical amounts, not affecting the total. But this is not an obvious conclusion: we must calculate the lengths of the three components of each bar, and doing this for the upper components of the bar (B and C) requires us to estimate the values at the top and bottom of each component.

I try to avoid such graphs for a good reason: Although they present a large amount of data in a small space, they communicate poorly the value of any individual component. Calculating each value other than that of the lower component (A) takes several steps: extending two lines horizontally to the vertical axis so we can read the values at the top and bottom of that component, then subtracting the smaller value from the larger to calculate the difference. Each step provides an opportunity for error. If our primary goal is to communicate the value of each component and how it changes over time, plotting the values side by side as individual bars is more efficient; it eliminates one of the two estimates and the arithmetic, and permits direct comparison of the heights of each bar.

Another problem lies in the nonstandard nature of this graph. Some authors create a very similar graph that uses the top of each component of the bar (not its length) to represent the value of that component. (You can see this more clearly if you imagine a bar for B standing behind the bar for A, and a bar for C standing behind both the other bars.)

For example, in 2009, A would still have a value of 42%, but B would equal 58%, and C would equal 100%. That’s not a common misreading, but it happens more often than you’d think. Twice in the past year alone, I’ve seen scientists misread their own graphs in this way and reach faulty conclusions. (This has happened so often in the 25 years I’ve been editing data graphics that I regret not having collected statistics.) If I hadn’t noticed these errors, they would have been published, since the journal’s peer reviewers missed the errors, and I identified them only during final editing of the papers.

Figure 1. A cumulative-total stacked bar chart for a fictional three-item budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Real-World Example

There’s no need to take these claims on faith or scour the scientific literature for examples; a recent example, accessible to anyone with a library card, nicely demonstrates that the preceding theoretical discussion has real-world effects.

In “The $10 Trillion Hangover” (Harper’s Magazine, January 2009, page 32), two economists described the massive increase in the U.S. national budget deficit over the past decade. (Please note: I’m not casting political stones here. I’m simply choosing a revealing, and widely available, example.)

Figure 2 dramatically simplifies the graph by illustrating only the data relevant for this example. At first glance, it’s clear that total spending increased sharply, from $2.2 trillion in 2000 to $3.1 trillion in 2009. More careful inspection will reveal that defense spending (the gap between total and non-defense spending) increased the most: the distance between the two graph lines widened during this period. The increase doesn’t seem particularly severe (“only” $0.3 trillion) until you realize that it represents a proportional increase of 75% (see Figure 3)—more than twice the increase in non-defense spending and almost twice the increase in total spending. Both figures contain the same information, but Figure 3 shows the relative magnitude of each budget component more effectively.

Different Tools for Different Purposes

There are certainly cases when presenting multiple types of data in a single graph is efficient. For example, scientists and engineers often use complex graphs called “nomograms” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nomogram) to combine data for several interrelated parameters into a single powerful calculation and analysis tool. But most nonspecialist audiences lack the time or will to interpret such complex graphics. Fatigue, lack of training, lack of time to think, distractions, or other factors often make them stop with their first impression rather than carefully examining the graph to learn whether that impression is correct. When that happens, we fail to communicate and the consequences can be serious.

In information design, the challenge is always to think carefully about what we want to say and how we can communicate a single concept so readers can do as little work as possible to extract the intended meaning.

The theoretical considerations that underlie this problem are simple enough to appear trivial, and skeptics might argue that anyone truly interested in the data will do the work required to understand it. My experience is that even experts such as scientists won’t always make that effort. Many readers would miss the dramatic differences in the rates of spending increase in Figure 2; the difference can’t be missed in Figure 3.

In information design, the challenge is always to think carefully about what we want to say and how we can communicate that message most efficiently. Like a nomogram, Figure 2 is an effective tool for presenting a large amount of data to dedicated readers willing to calculate all the various combinations of values hidden in this graph. But to communicate only the rates of increase without forcing readers to do the math, Figure 3 is far more effective.

If you’re interested in learning more about data graphics, please contact me to request future articles on this topic.

Geoff Hart (ghart@videotron.ca) works primarily as a scientific editor and spends a dismaying amount of time correcting errors in which authors misinterpreted their own data due to misleading graphs that misrepresented their own data.
XML: The Death of Creativity in Technical Writing?

By Sarah O'Keefe, Associate Fellow

I spend a lot of time giving presentations on XML, structured authoring, and related technologies. The most common negative reaction, varied only in the level of hostility, is “Why are you stifling my creativity?”

Does XML really mean the Death of Creativity for technical communicators? And does creativity even belong in technical content?

To answer these questions, let’s look at a few types of creativity and how they are affected by the introduction of XML into a workflow.

Creative Layout

Introducing XML into an organization usually results in automation of layout. Instead of writing information in a page preview mode, with line breaks and page breaks visible, you create information in a relative formatting vacuum and must rely on the output generation process to assign the appropriate formatting to your content.

If you are the type of writer who likes to use pretty purple hearts as bullets instead of the “boring” black circles, then, yes, XML will kill your creativity. XML also (generally) reduces or eliminates your ability to manage page breaks and line breaks. The quality of the final output will depend on the stylesheets that are created, probably by someone else, to generate output.

This separation of content and formatting is not unique to XML. This article, for example, was written in OmmWriter (a Mac-only text editor), transferred into OpenOffice to apply a few styles, and then sent to STC as a Word file. The Word file is then imported into InDesign to produce the print/PDF version. I have little or no control over the final look and feel of my content.

Even in unstructured, non-XML environments, most technical writers are expected to conform to a formatting template. That removes most formatting decisions from the writer’s purview. What’s left are the finicky production issues that the software cannot handle in a template—copyfitting, tweaking hyphenation, and perhaps moving tables and graphics around to improve the look of a page.

It’s my opinion that, with rare exceptions, technical communicators should not focus on page production. I wrote a related blog post (“A strident defense of mediocre formatting,” www.scriptorium.com/blog/2009/09/a-strident-defense-of-mediocre-formatting.html) on the same day that I asked a coworker to fix a kerning problem in some text. In my defense, the text was actually on a book cover page. And that summarizes my position fairly well: page production for cover pages, perhaps; page production for the body of a 600-page book, no. I see the cost savings from automated output, which can be significant, as a reasonable trade-off for giving up creativity in page layout in technical content. There is also the related issue that much of our content is delivered both in print and online, so production work might have to be done more than once. And let’s not even get into the localization issues. (For the opposing view, consult Roger Hart’s blog post, “Technical communications—the business of eliminating poetry?” at www.simple-talk.com/community/blogs/roger/archive/2009/09/25/74972.aspx.)

Creative Organization

For content organization, XML may or may not interfere with creative
approaches. For example, if an article is required to have a list of authors, an abstract, and then the body text, you can easily enforce this organization through XML. Without XML, enforcement would come from the magazine editor. But embedding existing stylistic requirements into XML is hardly a new infringement on creative license. The problem arises when XML is used to enforce organizational requirements that are new or that were not previously enforced. Usually, XML structure will describe the required components of a book or deliverable. A book might have front matter, chapters, optional appendices, and a required index. A help system might require a copyright topic as the first topic. An API reference could specify how each class or method must be documented (e.g., name, description, syntax, parameters, example).

Within the required organization, however, there is generally a good bit of room to maneuver. For example, how should topics be linked together? What is the best way to provide navigation through the content? Michael Hughes wrote an excellent article on a grouping technique he called “task clusters” (“The Anatomy of a Help File: An Iterative Approach,” www.uxmatters.com/ml/archives/2007/05/the-anatomy-of-a-help-file-an-iterative-approach.php). XML is like a scaffold: it supports you as you build your content; once you are inside the overall structure, you have a lot of freedom to organize. The consistency imposed by XML makes content more predictable, which may be helpful to the reader.

Interestingly, XML does not provide a way to constrain authors into a very common requirement for magazine and newsletter articles—a minimum or maximum word count. It’s as though the scaffolding determines the footprint of the building but the author controls the number of floors, the height of each floor, and the interior walls on each floor.

**Creative Writing**

At the paragraph or sentence level, XML has very little sway over the content. You might have to construct links in a specific way, or be limited in the formatting you can apply at the character level (e.g., you might not be able to bold words inside a title), but beyond that, you have few constraints.

Editorial style guidelines impose much stricter rules than XML structure can. For example, your style guidelines probably include rules about where to use boldface, the infamous “click” versus “select,” and other hot buttons of technical writing. If you are unhappy with constraints on word choice, that is unlikely to be an XML problem.

Using an XML technology called “schema,” it is possible to impose certain data types on an element. For instance, you can specify that a `<date>` element must contain numbers in the format `yyy-mm-dd` that result in a legal date. Data typing is rarely used for XML content; it’s much more common with XML data, such as configuration files.

**Inside the Box of XML**

Although the use of XML reduces or even eliminates creativity in page production, the resulting output can still be quite good. XML’s reputation for producing ugly pages is not an inherent limitation of the technology, but rather a result of inadequate effort in configuring the print/PDF stylesheet. (PDF stylesheets are quite difficult to build.) For a business, the appeal is clear: automated formatting is a one-time effort and saves critical time at the end of the document creation process. Copyfitting to save paper is less critical when the final deliverable is a PDF file and not a printed book.

For document organization, the creativity constraints are less clear. Many organizations simply use XML to enforce guidelines that are already in place, such as organization of reference content. Within these structures, authors still have a lot of room for creativity. XML has little effect on content structure inside paragraphs.

Thus, I can finally answer my initial questions. XML kills off the possibility of creativity in one specific area (formatting), has some effect on high-level organization, and very little impact on low-level organization. Technical communicators add the most value and have the most opportunity for creativity in crafting sentences, paragraphs, topics, and groups of topics that explain complex concepts to their readers. XML does not interfere with this mission.

Why, then, is there so much resistance to XML? There is a perception that XML forces writers into creating cookie-cutter topics rather than useful technical information. I suppose the blame lies with those of us who spend more time discussing the glories of automation rather than how structure can support writers in creating better content. It’s my experience that after a transition period (which can be as much as a year), most writers actually prefer working in XML because it eliminates the need to memorize formatting conventions and instead lets them focus on content creation.
The Society for Technical Communication (STC) will hold its 57th Technical Communication Summit at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower in Dallas, TX. For more information, contact: Lloyd Tucker +1 (571) 366-1904 lloyd.tucker@stc.org http://conference.stc.org

The American Society for Indexing (ASI) will be holding its annual conference in Minneapolis, MN. For more information, contact: ASI conference@asindexing.org www.asindexing.org/site/conferences/conf2010/index.shtml

The Council of Science Editors (CSE) will hold its annual meeting, “The Changing Climate of Scientific Publishing—The Heat Is On,” in Atlanta, GA. For more information, contact: CSE +1 (703) 437-4377 CSE@CouncilScienceEditors.org www.councilscienceeditors.org/events/annualmeeting10/index.cfm

The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) will hold the 2010 International Conference & Exposition in Chicago, IL. For more information, contact: ASTD +1 (703) 683-8100 www.astdconference.org

The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) will hold its Performance Improvement Conference in San Francisco, CA. For more information, contact: ISPI +1 (301) 587-8570 conference@ispi.org www.ispi.org/AC2010

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3. Dallas, TX
4. Minneapolis, MN
5. Atlanta, GA
6. Chicago, IL
7. Maastricht, the Netherlands
8. Munich, Germany
9. Vienna, Austria
10. Orlando, FL
11. San Francisco, CA
12. Enschede, the Netherlands
13. Dallas, TX
14. San Francisco, CA
15. Denver, CO
16. Milwaukee, WI

February 2010
19–22 May 2010
The 4th International *Maastricht-Lodz Duo Colloquium* on “Translation and Meaning” will take place in Maastricht, the Netherlands. For details, contact:
Dr. Marcel Thelen
+31 43 346 6471
m.m.g.j.thelen@hszuyl.nl
www.translation-and-meaning.nl

24–28 May 2010
The *Usability Professionals Association (UPA)* will hold its 2010 international conference, “Embracing Cultural Diversity—User Experience Design for the World,” in Munich, Germany, at the Bayerischer Hof Hotel. For more information, contact:
Nicole Tafoya
+1 (630) 980-4997
Chair2010@usabilityprofessionals.org

24–28 May 2010
The *International Terminology Summer School (TSS 2010)* will take place at the University of Vienna in Vienna, Austria, jointly organized by TermNet, the International Network for Terminology, and the Center for Translation Studies. For more information:
TermNet
+43 1 23060 3965
events@termnet.org

2010

1–4 June 2010
Join the *Association of Proposal Management Professionals (APMP)* for the 21st Annual APMP International Conference and Exhibits at the Walt Disney World Dolphin in Orlando, FL. The focus of the event is “Going Green: A Global Initiative—All Things Considered.” For details:
APMP
www.apmp.org/ca-29.aspx

2–4 June 2010
The *Society for Scholarly Publishing (SSP)* will hold its 32nd Annual Meeting in San Francisco, CA, at the Hilton San Francisco. For more information, contact:
+1 (303) 422-3914
info@sspnet.org
www.sspnet.org/Events/spage.aspx

7–9 June 2010
The *Professional Communication Society (PCS)* of the Institute of Electrical and Electronic Engineers (IEEE) will hold its 2010 Professional Communication Conference at the University of Twente in Enschede, the Netherlands. For more information, contact:
PCS

17–19 August 2010
The *International Society of Logistics (SOLE)* presents its 45th Annual International Logistics Conference and Exhibition, themed “Global Logistics Sustainability,” to be held at the Omni Mandalay Hotel at Las Colinas in Dallas, TX. For more information, contact:
SOLE
+1 (301) 459-8446
solehq@erols.com
wwwSOLE.org

27 September–1 October 2010
The *Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (HFES)* will hold its 54th annual meeting at the Hyatt Regency San Francisco in San Francisco, CA. For more information, contact:
HFES
+1 (310) 394-1811
info@HFES.org
www.HFES.org/web/HFESMeetings/2010AnnualMeeting.html

27–30 October 2010
The *American Translators Association (ATA)* will hold its 51st annual conference at the Hyatt Regency Denver in Denver, CO. For more information, contact:
ATA
+1 (703) 683-6100
ata@atanet.org
http://atanet.org/conferencesandseminars/AnnualConference.php

27–30 October 2010
The *American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)* will hold its annual conference in Milwaukee, WI. For more information, contact:
Dane Russo
+1 (301) 294-5303
amwa@AMWA.org
www.amwa.org/default.asp?id=433
While attending college, I was often questioned about my choice of an English degree. The most frequent questions were: Are you going to be a teacher? No? What about a lawyer? What can you do with an English degree? I was not sure at that point, but hoped that I would someday find a position that I enjoyed and that satisfied me, where my degree would be useful. After graduating from Youngstown State University in May 2007, I searched for a job to fit my English degree and writing skills. I did not find it—it found me. In September 2007, I was recruited as a contract technical editing assistant at Westinghouse Electric Company. This position helped me discover that I love to edit. In March 2008, I obtained my current full-time position as a technical writer and editor at Westinghouse.

Westinghouse develops new nuclear power plants aimed toward a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Headquartered in Cranberry, PA, with offices around the world, Westinghouse has been commissioned to develop four nuclear power plants in China and 14 in the United States, along with the possibility of others in several countries. They also maintain and replace existing plant systems. These projects produce a massive amount of documentation. The Technical Communications group was formed in 2007 to review this new and updated documentation; it consists of 20 technical writers and editors working to ensure that all Westinghouse documentation is editorially reviewed.

I work with four other editors in Repair, Replacement & Automation Services (RRAS), a business segment of the Nuclear Services business unit. Most of the work that RRAS performs is on existing power plants, but they are also involved with the development of new units. Their scope includes replacing older parts and systems and requires that new documentation be written for the additions, which is where the other editors and I are needed. Engineers write their documents, submit them to the Technical Communications group, and we edit them according to clearly defined standards that RRAS developed. I edit several types of documents, including design specifications, reports, test procedures, and project plans, among others.

I edit using both the Track Changes and Comment features in Microsoft Word. Then I fill out a checklist, which will be sent to the author when the review is complete. Through this process, the author gets a clear understanding of the editorial issues and the guidance that I followed while performing the editorial review. I focus on clarity, consistency, grammar, spelling, punctuation, format, and other Westinghouse or RRAS guidance as applicable.

The documentation I edit varies since there are many different kinds of documents. Some go to our customers while others are for internal use. One of my favorite parts of the job is collaborating with co-workers, often from around the world. For many of the authors, English is their second language; therefore, I not only work to improve their writing but also their understanding of the English language so that each document is an improvement over the previous one. I help them ensure their documents are clear, consistent with other Westinghouse documentation, and do not contain spelling and grammatical errors.

Westinghouse is undertaking several major projects, and one of the best things about my job is that I feel I am participating in something much bigger than myself since there is a major need for cleaner, more efficient energy. I genuinely enjoy my job as a technical writer and editor. It is a job that is challenging and rewarding.

I hope to someday become more involved in technical writing as well as continuing to edit. To that end, I am pursuing a Master of Professional Writing degree from Chatham University, where I hope to develop and hone my skills to help me advance in my career. I am also involved with STC and attended the Technical Communication Summit in May 2009. STC has helped me network and has educated me about my profession, making me grateful that I am able to participate.
Early Bird registration is now $845 from 16 Jan through 15 March!
Walk-in registration: $1195

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS

Make the 2010 Summit in Dallas your destination for the best expertise in Technical Communication education. Choose from an extensive selection of more than 85 sessions from tracks including Writing and Editing, Architecture and Design, Professional Development, Managing People, and more. Explore the advanced world of STC institutes through sessions that take an in-depth look at topics. Experience it all 2 to 5 May.

Expert speakers from the global technical communication profession will lead education forums, address general sessions, and provide informal exchanges of ideas. Pre-conference workshops, certificate opportunities, SIG meetings, and the EXPO Hall are the ticket to your career growth.

Visit http://conference.stc.org for complete details and registration access. 2010 is the year to stretch your professional capabilities. And Summit 2010, 2 to 5 May, at the Hyatt Regency Dallas at Reunion Tower is the place to start.

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