Learn from the Experts
All MadWorld sessions and labs are taught by the best of the best - the kind of people you don’t run into every day. This is a great opportunity for you to learn from their years of shared experience.

Bring Home Best Practices
MadWorld attendees come from organizations all over the world - from small businesses to Fortune 1000 companies and from universities to large government agencies. You’ll be able to exchange ideas and build one-on-one relationships with people who have dealt with the same challenges your organization may be facing, and learn more about how they tackled those challenges.

Stay Informed
MadWorld is a showcase for the latest technologies in technical communication. As technologies advance, particularly in the mobile space, your skill set will need to adapt and what better way to plan for the future. You’ll be able to learn first-hand the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead and help make informed decisions.

SOME OF OUR SPEAKERS
• Matthew Ellison
  Matthew Ellison Consulting
• Ellis Pratt
  CherryLeaf
• Tony Self
  HyperWrite
• Scott Bass
  Advanced Language Translation
• Harold Gross
  Caradigm
  (a Microsoft | GE Healthcare company)

WHO SHOULD ATTEND?
• Technical Writers
• Documentation Managers
• Software User Assistance Managers
• Content Managers
• Information Architects
• Customer Support Specialists
• Professors of Technical Writing
• Freelancers and Consultants

www.MadWorldConference.com
People want to be able to find information where they work, whether it is on the Web, mobile devices, their desktops, or print. The problem is that this information is often locked away in Word documents, networks, and individual PCs. It's time for a change.

Free your content with Doc-To-Help: publish your content where it's accessible. How? Just write in Microsoft Word or Doc-To-Help's advanced editor, and Doc-To-Help will publish professional-quality deliverables for use on the Web, tablets, phones, desktop computers, and print. You can also use the documents you already have. Focus on writing and let Doc-To-Help do the rest.

PUBLISH TO Mobile • Desktop • Web • Print

Download Your Free Trial Today @ doctohelp.com
Growing in the green industry. Landes describes where the green jobs are, what green communicators do, and how communicators can “go green.”

When User Experiences Conflict: Lessons Learned From Film Makers
By Cristopher D. Broyles
What should designers do when user experiences differ? Whose experience takes priority? Taking a lesson from film industry practices, Broyles concludes that it is the end-user user experience (or the envisioned audience) that should influence your product development.

Unhappy Customers Are Just the Beginning: Potential Costs of Poor or Missing Technical Communication
By Joseph Devney
Learn what technical communicators should know about the business costs of bad or missing documentation, especially how these problems can affect company revenue and legal expenses.

Going Green as a Technical Communicator
By Cheryl Landes
Demand for communication and documentation professionals is growing in the green industry. Landes describes where the green jobs are, what green communicators do, and how communicators can “go green.”
Celebrate STC’s Diamond Anniversary at the 2013 Summit

2013 TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION SUMMIT
5–8 May 2013

The Society for Technical Communication is where it all comes together, and nowhere is that more evident than at the Technical Communication Summit! Technical communicators from around the world will converge on Atlanta, Georgia, from 5–8 May 2013. Join them as STC celebrates its 60th anniversary at the annual Summit! Choose from over 80 sessions in 7 different tracks at the conference, with top technical communicators coming together to share their knowledge.

And the sessions are just the beginning of your Summit experience! In-person networking, the welcome reception and closing lunch, the Expo Hall, preconference education, the honors banquet, SIG meetings, and so much more are available to help you advance your career.

Visit the newly redesigned http://summit.stc.org for complete details on how you can celebrate STC’s diamond anniversary—and find some diamonds of your own at the 2013 Summit.

Diamonds are forever, but the Early Bird rate of $950 is not. Register by 15 March and save!
Become one of the first Certified Professional Technical Communicators™

Why earn your Certification?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Recognition</th>
<th>Professional Status</th>
<th>Professional Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Show your employers you are a technical communication leader who is committed to establishing worldwide performance standards for the field.</td>
<td>Join an elite group of professionals who have demonstrated their technical communication knowledge and proficiency.</td>
<td>The educational requirements of certification are one more reason to continuously maintain and upgrade your knowledge. Add certification to your career development plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portable Career Credential</th>
<th>A Sense of Achievement</th>
<th>Experience Validation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you change jobs, your certification credential travels with you and will enhance your employability and compensation.</td>
<td>Give yourself the confidence to excel at your job.</td>
<td>Certification confirms your experience and competency in technical communication, your commitment to the profession.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CPTC assessment encompasses broad areas of practice that represent the major activities performed by technical communicators. The certified practitioner demonstrates proficiency in the following areas:

- **User, Task, and Experience Analysis**—Define the users of the information and analyze the tasks that the information must support.
- **Information Design**—Plan information deliverables to support task requirements. Specify and design the organization, presentation, distribution, and architecture for each deliverable.
- **Process Management**—Plan the deliverables schedule and monitor the process of fulfillment.
- **Information Development**—Author content in conformance with the design plan, through an iterative process of creation, review, and revision.
- **Information Production**—Assemble developed content into required deliverables that conform to all design, compliance, and production guidelines. Publish, deliver, and archive.

Employers know that certified practitioners earn more than their uncertified colleagues, because employers find that certified professionals are more likely to be successful hires and valued employees.

Visit [www.stc.org/certification](http://www.stc.org/certification) for more information and to submit your application.
A Note from the Editor

WHAT AN HONOR it is to publish an interview with Dr. John Carroll, author of The Nurnberg Funnel: Designing Minimalist Instruction for Practical Computer Skill, a book that presents a minimalist approach to instructional design and has profoundly influenced technical communicators and their work with users and product documentation. Interviewer STC Vice President Nicky Bleiel asks Dr. Carroll some essential questions about his work at IBM’s Watson Research Center, his thoughts on minimalism’s continued usefulness in a mobile and connected world, and his current research—projects on “collaborative information analysis” and “community technology.” An online podcast of the entire interview is available at http://intercom.stc.org.

In this issue, and related to Dr. Carroll’s interview, is a column by Dr. Tommy Barker on using personas for student engagement that references Carroll’s work.

Articles in this issue also include a close look at how poor or missing documentation affects customers by Joseph Devney. Consequences he addresses include lost revenue, regulatory noncompliance, and potential lawsuits. Cheryl Landes writes about “green” technical communication—the green job market, green projects, and how to “go green.” And Cristopher Broyles uses his knowledge in film production and technical communication to investigate the conflict between designer user experience and end-user user experience.

Have you registered for STC’s 2013 Summit? It’s our 60th anniversary and sure to be a great event. This issue of the magazine includes a preliminary program to sessions and certificate programs that will be offered. And the keynote is the New York Times technology columnist David Pogue. Visit http://summit.stc.org/ to register today!
To listen to a recording of this interview, visit http://stc.intercom.org
Minimalism Revisited: An Interview with John Carroll

By Nicky Bleiel | STC Vice President and Senior Member

It has been 23 years since John Carroll’s landmark book *The Nurnberg Funnel: Designing Minimalist Instruction for Practical Computer Skill* was published. The title of the book refers to the legend of the Nurnberg Funnel, which was said to make people wise very quickly after the right knowledge was poured in. The year 1998 brought *Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*, a collection of essays exploring the evolution of minimalism by Professor Carroll, Hans van der Meij, JoAnn Hackos, Ginny Redish, David Farkas, and other luminaries. In this Q&A, Nicky Bleiel discusses these groundbreaking works with John Carroll, who is currently the Edward M. Frymoyer Professor of Information Sciences and Technology at Penn State’s College of Information Sciences and Technology.

Nicky Bleiel: Let’s start at the beginning, Professor Carroll. Why did you embark on your original research in the ’80s? At that time, you weren’t in academia. You were an “IBMer.”

John Carroll: Yeah. That’s actually probably why I was inclined to do that. This, in the early ’80s at IBM, was a time when the company was trying to expand into new markets. The IBM PC was in development. They had just brought out the Displaywriter, which was a micro-computing-based document-processing system, reaching out to much broader user groups. Users, usability, the whole HCI transformation was loose at IBM. I’ve often thought the decade of the ’80s was the decade of the new user, because there was such a vast expansion. Not that it really has slowed down [laughs] with respect to computing, but it wasn’t like that in the ’70s. It was a professional area, and the issue was supporting computing and information professionals.

These problems of new users—problems of learning, problems of getting started—were “the” problems, because if you don’t get started, all bets are off. There really isn’t anything more to worry about. You haven’t become a user.
I don’t like the term “user” anymore, but that was the term we used then.

**NB**: [laughs] The ’80s, when you were working on all of this, was the time that everything transitioned from everyone who was involved in software being a developer, a high expert, into bringing it out to the people, so to speak.

**JC**: Right. Yeah. And there were waves of it. The first wave was computer hobbyists and clerical people, secretaries. Administrative assistants in today’s parlance. And then office principals, that was the next wave. It was basically the computerization of the entire office, everyone, all the staff. That was a big wave after wave of new users and learners, and that’s what drew us into this work. It was strategically critical for IBM. And as a young psychologist working at IBM, it was fascinating, because [laughs] it was actually a way to apply things I knew and had studied and was curious about to real needs of the business.

**NB**: That does sound like it would be fun. How do you describe Nurnberg Funnel minimalism, in a nutshell?

**JC**: Well, I think the metaphor of minimalism and, of course, the Nurnberg Funnel is this medieval legend—it’s German—about The Funnel of Nurnberg, which made learning very easy. Basically you insert the funnel into somebody’s head and pour knowledge in. It’s an interesting metaphor. In some sense it’s something we all would desperately like. Certainly somebody who is struggling with a computer system or application would like to be able to just pour the knowledge in and not have to struggle.

On the other hand, it’s ironic in that our studies of learning, and other people’s studies of learning, led us to a concept of the active learner, the active user. Meaning that people need to act, they need to be engaged, and that they need to struggle. That’s not a bad thing. That’s the way people learn.

Of course, just because you’re struggling, that’s not a good thing, but the right kind of struggle could lead to the right kind of outcome. The minimalist idea, the way I think of it, is to minimize the extent to which the system and the information get in the way of what the user’s really interested in.

I think this is very consistent with the notion of minimalist design from the Bauhaus tradition. To try to bring function to the fore, chairs for sitting in fundamentally. It’s not something to look at or contemplate. It’s functional.

Similarly, a computer application is to do stuff with. Not to read the information, puzzle over the interface, get confused, and frustrated. That’s not what it’s about. That’s what should be minimized. People should be on the course that they want to be on and relating to computer products the way they want to.

**NB**: I think that’s an interesting way of putting it. More Bauhaus and less Louis XIV in design.

**JC**: Yes. Of course, the impulse to end up with Louis XIV, with decoration, and extras, and so forth, is something you always have to struggle against. You know, the old term “featuritis.” Those of us who produce software, produce information. We’re producing both the vehicle to make everything work right but also the obstacles. And we have to exert a certain amount of self-control, empathy, and of course, user testing [laughs] and other things like that, to make sure we don’t lapse into decoration and obstacles.

**NB**: That’s very true. Jumping back to something you touched on when we first started talking, there’s been a bit of an argument in the tech-comm community about what we should call the people who consume our content. Everybody in software has always said “users,” and some have suggested we say “customers.” But in the book, you generally refer to them as “learners.” Do you think that term is more appropriate and keeps us, as technical communicators, more on task?

**JC**: I do like the term “learner.” “User” is passive, to me—you’ve been handed something, use it—whereas I think what people are doing is much more actively a matter of ownership and appropriation and coming to control a new tool in a new environment. And it is a matter of learning. It’s a matter of problem-solving. Besides being cumbersomely long—you could call them “problem-solvers....

I think that’s accurate, too, but it’s awkward. But also, it focuses on the performance, where “learners” focuses on the human development and appropriating new knowledge and skill, which I think is really more the essence of what’s going on. But I think it’s worth struggling a little bit with the terminology. [laughs] For years, I used “users” unquestioningly, and I finally realized I wasn’t really comfortable with it, so I tend not to use it. In your question, you also suggested the term “customer,” and I understand, in a commercial context, where that could be relevant, because there is a transaction going on in the background. There’s a purchase. But again, as with “user,” I think that’s something I wouldn’t want to overemphasize, because a customer can’t buy skill and a customer can’t buy a good user experience. They have to be a partner in that.

---

**Ten Misconceptions About Minimalism**

1. Minimalism means brevity.
2. Minimalism means incomplete instructional analyses.
4. Minimalism does not support people who learn by reading.
5. Minimalism over-emphasizes errors.
6. Minimalism is just another word for job aids.
7. Minimalism only works for simple domains.
8. Minimalism merely reflects the preconceptions of users.
9. Minimalism offers a complete documentation solution.
10. Minimalism has no theoretical foundation.

*From Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel, 1989*
Actually, we have the same terminology thing in the university, in contemporary times, where some of our administrators urge us to think of our students as customers [laughs], which I think is just terrible. It’s a terrible idea because, again, they can’t buy an education, and calling them a customer conveys to them that they can, which, really, just technically, it’s wrong. It’s also the wrong attitude to take when you’re a student or a person learning new skills and information in a professional context.

NB: It’s true. What you call someone, how you label something, does matter, bottom line.

JC: Yes.

NB: Now, *The Nurnberg Funnel*, it pioneered so many of the best practices that technical communicators adhere to today. You could start with the concept that software documentation should be designed and it shouldn’t simply be a list of menu items and dialog boxes. The concept that documentation should be modular, and support both sequential use and random access. That docs should be user-centered. Even the concept that “less is more.” What do you think is the most important takeaway of *The Nurnberg Funnel*?

JC: Well, it’s a fair question. I may end up wriggling out of it. I wanted to insert here just an acknowledgement. It fills me with delight that people still can find utility in this book after all the years that have passed. I never anticipated this, so it’s just pure pleasure. It’s fun to revisit the ideas and try to reconstruct things we were thinking of then and how they might be relevant now.

I think that the idea that documents must be designed is one part of minimalism in *The Nurnberg Funnel* that’s very relevant today.

I do think that techniques like crowdsourcing and search have caused, what I think, is a radical position that there is no need to design information anymore because it’s so abundant. We can rely on the crowd and search, and between the two we’re going to be able to generate such wondrous amounts of information.

I’m drawn back to a very old statement by Herbert Simon that I think comes from the ’60s where he said that in our age we have an abundance of information—that’s true—but we have a poverty of attention. This, I think, was much in our minds, even in our early work, and I think it’s a bigger problem now.

Online information is a huge resource and we do need to curate it. We do need to cultivate it, use it, and understand how people appropriate it, but we need to understand that people are overwhelmed by the amount of information.

Saying that the age of design is passed and now we can just rely on the Web and it will take care of things, I think, is just way more optimistic than I am. I think that information does need to be designed. Of course, we have to realize also we can’t design all the information on the Web. That’s loose and that is the new paradigm, so we do need to understand search. We need to integrate that into information strategies, but I don’t think a way to get started is to point people to a Web browser and say, “You’re on your own. There’s plenty of information there.” That’s true and that’s the problem.

NB: That’s very, very true and it’s something the profession has been struggling with and working on for many years. As you noted, that question started a lot earlier than a lot of us thought. Speaking of learning, in *The Nurnberg Funnel* you note that people learn by doing. This was an important concept. They learn by doing, not reading. For software, kinesthetic learning trumps visual and audio learning. This piece of minimalism is often overlooked. How does the research you and your colleagues did support this?

JC: I would say that the way our research supported it is through the studies we were doing, which were largely these rather intensive thinking-aloud studies of new users getting started with various IBM—mostly IBM—systems. We saw people resort to learning by doing almost immediately. Of course, the most vivid examples were people who would declare that they were systematic thinkers. They really liked to puzzle through things and they wouldn’t be going off half-cocked and trying this and trying that. They were very systematic people.

Of course they weren’t because learning by doing, I think, is really just a fundamental truth about learning. People need to act. We are, after all, talking about skill learning. We’re not talking about pondering abstract concepts or definitions or conceptual information, declarative information. It’s mostly skill learning and you learn skills by doing.

In terms of where the idea came from, I was talking about how we experienced it and observed it in our research, but it’s an older idea that in my education and further reading you can trace back to various sources. I’ve gotten a lot of inspiration from reading John Dewey on this, but there are many other sources.

For example, Jean Piaget, the great developmental psychologist, talked about how people had to interact with things, see them, handle them, manipulate them, in order to develop their intellect. He had a series of stages in his model of intelligence.

I think it’s a very widespread idea. In fact, I think this general idea of active learning is so pervasive there really aren’t voices against it anymore.
I regard this as pretty much a settled issue. It was maybe just mildly controversial even in the ’80s, but it’s certainly not now.

**NB:** We know that this is how people learn. We know that we need to optimize for it. On the other hand, there’s a greater and greater level of impatience when people need to learn software.

**JC:** Of course, that impatience is because they want to do things. What we tried to do in our work was work with that impatience. A lot of times a risk can be seen as a resource from a different perspective. If people are impatient that’s energy. It’s a goal. It’s a desire, a direction. If you can guide that, if you can work with it, if you can direct it in a lightweight way and put more initiative, allow more initiative to the learner, you might get a better result. That’s really what we were trying to do. And I think it’s more possible to do today. In the 1980s, the idea of digital memory, integration of printers, even what printing was, these were all new concepts, and I find it hard to believe these same concepts are problematic in the least for anybody now.

So we’re in an industry, we’re in a region of human endeavor, where what’s problematic is moving ahead so now there are concepts about the way that smartphone apps update, some of these are not concepts everybody shares, but those problems were not even ... we couldn’t even conceive of them.

And I think this pattern is likely to continue so that the problems that are vexing us today someday will be in the background, and there will be new ones.

**NB:** That’s the good thing about problems, right? [laughs]

**JC:** Yeah.

**NB:** *Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel* was published in 1990, and you followed up in 1998 with *Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*. How did you come to revisit minimalism eight years later?

**JC:** Well, in the intervening time—and, of course, when a book comes out in 1990 in those days it means you finished it in 1988. So in that intervening decade, I got to meet a lot of people, got to read more stuff, find out what other people were doing, and realized that what I was doing was just part of a larger zeitgeist of changing ways of thinking about information design, documentation, learning, various user interface designs, and so forth. And I was, with the help of the Society for Technical Communication, able to arrange a workshop at Virginia Tech—I can’t remember exactly what year that was, maybe 1996—and invite a bunch of these people I had met in that decade, and they were all going in different directions, emphasizing different aspects.

I remember people were talking about using hypermedia to layer information to achieve minimalist designs where you could hide information unless people requested it. Get it out of their way unless they actually chose to look at it, made that their path for looking at different kinds of applications. As I mentioned, I was working heavily on office information systems, and people were working on other things with similar approaches and so forth.

So that was how *Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel* came to be, and that book included the article on misconceptions about minimalism, because any idea that you try to develop, people are going to creatively interpret it, and that’s an opportunity to refine the way it’s presented.

**NB:** First of all, I’d like to say it’s very cool that STC was involved with all of this. We’re very proud of that, and I was going to ask you about the essay that you and Hans van der Meij wrote for that book. Minimalism is a hot topic right now—for lack of a better term—in tech comm, because it’s considered essential for mobile outputs and documentation in general. But Nurnberg Funnel minimalism, to expand on your paper a little bit, it doesn’t mean concise, necessarily, though I’m sure that you wouldn’t dispute that conciseness and good editing is important. So if minimalism does not exactly mean brevity, how would you explain it?

**JC:** Well, I would say that brevity is more a consequence of minimalism than a principle of minimalism. If you go back to what I was saying earlier about trying to facilitate the learner’s initiative and goals and aspirations and impede them less, you will most likely end up with a briefer design, or it might be layered. I was alluding earlier to David Farkas’s contribution to minimalism in the book *Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel* which had to do with layered designs. This was a way in his work of getting the information design out of the learner’s way, making the information layered so that it was available on demand, but not necessarily an impediment if the learner didn’t choose to look at it at that time.

**NB:** Wow. That’s a great explanation of that. That makes perfect sense.

In *Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*, you note that minimalism is a combination of documentation and user interface improvements. Do you believe that technical communicators should get involved in user interface design and software usability, and if you do, how do you think they could work alongside user experience professionals without actually changing their profession and becoming user experience professionals?

**JC:** The second part of that is probably the more difficult part, but the first part is easy. I’ve always believed this, and I think the design of information and the design of the user interface started to really... Again, if we rewind history here, when we started out books were the primary vehicle for information design, for technical communication, designing libraries, actual books. And that’s just much less true now. Information started to move online, started to become integrated with user interfaces.

I think that the two interests were always very aligned and subject to a lot of the same processes. The way usability’s articulated, the way we think about usability testing applies just the same to developing a book as it does to developing an interface. The interface is more interactive, and so it’s more complex.
But once the information starts to go online, it’s exactly the same. And not only that, it’s embedded in the user interface, so I don’t see how the two professions can really be separate. They’re codependent, and the better and the more closely they’re integrated would lead to a better process in which usability would be optimized generally throughout the design.

The other question you asked is how these two professional concerns—and they’re often people who come from different professional preparations and maybe affiliate with different groups—how they can maintain their identity. That’s a tricky question.

And I think it’s valid, because these are different perspectives. The information and the user interface has been integrated to a considerable extent. The two perspectives are valid perspectives on that boundary object, that single thing that they’re looking at from two different points of view.

But I think that is just problematic. Probably some information designers will over time become user interface designers, and maybe the converse, too. So there might be movement across that boundary. That probably wouldn’t be a bad thing, either. I think that’s an interesting dynamic in the whole system development process.

Of course, you could make similar arguments, or raise similar issues with respect to people who design functionality and people who design user interfaces and online information, right?

NB: True.

JC: There’s been a long tradition of trying to separate architecturally the user interface from the functionality, but in general I wouldn’t say this has been a howling success. I mean in very simple user interfaces it’s doable. The Web, the early Web, was able to do it, but then as Web 2.0 is articulated, it’s probably less true today than it used to be. I don’t know. I think that all these professions end up interacting quite intimately, and people cross boundaries, and maybe that’s just the way it’s going to be.

NB: I like the term you use, “codependent.” So we should all realize our codependency, because at the end of the day there’s going to be better software and that’s what we’re interested in developing. That’s what everybody on the team wants to do.

JC: The tensions, the perspective of an information designer, the perspective of a user-interface designer, the perspective of the software engineer, looking at the same thing from different ways, I think that could be a beneficial tension. Again, all conflict, all difference is not necessarily a problem. Sometimes it’s a resource. [laughs]

NB: That’s very true.

JC: If we could only collaborate with people who are exactly like us and have our values and our skills and our knowledge, it’d be a boring world.

NB: [laughs] Absolutely. We talked earlier about all the different options we have for online user assistance today. Of course, we still create manuals, but there are so many more options. We have embedded help. We have tool tips. We have videos. We have wizards.

We have all kinds of things going on to help the user and guide them along on their path. But minimalism strives to keep the documentation itself from obstructing the user. Do you think these options distract the user, or do you think they’re just valid steps on the path to minimalism?

JC: I think they’re both. I think that we have a much richer design palette today than we did in 1980, and that’s got to be a good thing. On the other hand, to use your analogy earlier about the Louis XIV tendency, it raises that risk, because now the concept of what is a document set now is just totally open-ended. I mean, it could be a ton of information. It could require a dump truck. And that’s probably not where we want to go. We certainly don’t want to make that a prerequisite to doing anything. That would be exactly the wrong thing to do.

On the other hand, having a rich design palette makes the professional practices much more interesting, much more demanding. There’s lots to know. There are lots of techniques to deploy, maybe a lot more need for a kind of multimedia analog of layering, so that not everything is on the critical path, but it might be in the information space as an option.

But I think the goals of minimalism are still valid. I think people use tools to get things done, and one way we have to measure ourselves is the extent to which we facilitate that and make it make a very short and stimulating and effective path available to the person wanting to use the tool.

That said, we know that people often do not attain the level of expertise that would be good—even for their own goals—and so we need to think about ways to stimulate people to learn more and get better. Again, these challenges aren’t new ones. They were there in 1982 also, and they’re still here today. And as systems are more complex, more integrated, and more interesting, I think these challenges also get more complex and more interesting.

NB: Right. We want to support discovery learning, but we’ve given them a lot more to discover. [laughs]

JC: Right. That’s not a bad thing. I mentioned at the beginning that I think maybe it’s just a fact that
learning involves some struggle, but I think that this can be very rewarding. I think people intrinsically want to be stimulated and learn things, and so if we do it right, really, we’re not just doing our job, we’re really enriching [laughs] the human experience, I think. I think people in computing and information technology have a great opportunity to contribute to that.

NB: I agree. It’s a very noble goal, too. We talked about how all these options have increased and disciplines—we talk a lot about content strategy in tech comm now. So technical communicators, understandably, we’re more technologically savvy and we’re more process-oriented. But The Nurnberg Funnel focused quite a bit—and we’ve talked about this a lot today—on the psychology of learning.

Do you think that The Nurnberg Funnel’s emphasis on learning theory is still valid? [laughs] I think you do. Technology and systems always change, but humans essentially don’t change much at all, do they?

JC: Well, no. I guess my simplest answer is learning theory is still valid and, I think, provides a stimulating and a forceful and a useful perspective, and that’s a continuing thing. Technology and systems are ever-changing. Let’s call it “the human architecture” is unchanging, and that’s the sense in which learning theory is a continuing resource for us, to us. But what is changing is prior knowledge and culture. What the humans bring to the kinds of situations we are designing for—that is changing—and that will continue to change.

So earlier I was alluding to our concerns back in the day with people trying to understand what it meant when a document was queued for printing. Well, that was really a fascinating challenge in 1980 but not so challenging today. Kids that are three or four understand that. [laughs] So that’s simply not something we need to worry too much about.

On the other hand, there are many other problems that have come to take those problems’ place. And so that’s the sense in which the humans also are ever changing. Again, winding the clock back, one thing that really impressed me in 1980 was the IBM materials we were reviewing at that time did not treat the learners as ... well, they didn’t really treat them with respect. I mean they didn’t treat them as people that had a goal or that knew anything.

And when we worked with these people, we realized these people did have goals and they were experts, but they weren’t experts with the Displaywriter or the IBM PC. They were experts in office work, and they knew a lot about work practices, and processes, and objectives, and quality standards, and they knew more than we did.

And we came to see that prior knowledge as an important resource that needed to be leveraged in the design of information, the design of training materials, and the design of user interfaces. And that basic strategy, I think, should be the operative one, but all of the specifics are different.

So the people today, just the people who walk off the street that are like your user, they know a lot about the Web, they know a lot about mobile phones. They use computers every day. They know about Facebook. I mean, there is lots of prior knowledge that we have to respect and that we have to use and leverage in our designs today, but it’s all different knowledge.

So this, again, is the challenge of information design, and the fundamental problem that was addressed in, The Nurnberg Funnel, and why this profession is not going away. It can’t go away. But it will always be changing.

NB: Right. So the tech-comm mantra of “know your user” is important in all phases of software design, in designing the information, in designing the interface, in designing the interaction, all of those things.

JC: Yes. I think a lot of times when people read that mantra, which has been around a long time—that must go back to the ’70s, if not the ’60s—but when you read that I think a lot of people say, “Ah, we’re all human beings. What’s the news there?” But we shouldn’t take it at that high a level. It’s true. We’re all human beings, and our minds essentially work the same as people several thousand years ago, but our users are completely different than the users of 10 years ago. That’s a thing we have to focus on when we say, “Know the user.”

And that’s changing ... it’s changing faster and faster, in fact, so that challenge is not just a “so what?” kind of challenge. It’s really a very serious challenge, and it gets more demanding. I think, with time.

NB: You said in Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel that many challenges remain ahead—not just the one we just discussed about knowing users—and that you believe there can never be an end to the project of reconstructing minimalism; that it’s constantly evolving. We have talked about the fact that software is ubiquitous, it’s everywhere, and it’s much more user-friendly than it used to be. Is there anything you could think of that you would tweak in your original description of minimalism?

JC: I think if I was going to write the book again I could write it better. [laughs] I think I’m a better writer now than I was 25 years ago. Aside from that, I think I’m going to stand pat with the basic ideas. Essentially, in what you’re alluding to, I was predicting that things would change—of course that’s an easy prediction, and I’d make it today too.

We’ve talked about some of that change. You rattled off the design palette for information designers today. That is a much richer design palette than what we were talking about, not just in 1980 but in the mid-’90s when we did Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel.

That’s the sense in which the project of reconstructing minimalism is constantly evolving. Tools are all different. The point I was making a minute ago about the cultural context, the prior knowledge that we can assume and must leverage—and respect—in our users or learners, that’s changing.

Of course, the applications. The most obvious thing would be mobility. In the mid-’90s there really wasn’t any mobility to speak of. Not like today. The prospect now—with a billion smartphones already in use—the prospect
today is that everybody is going to have a fairly advanced computer in their pocket all the time.

That’s the world we’re designing for right now. I think that’s going to require minimalism in every sense, but it’s a different kind of requirement than we were ever worrying about when we were thinking about desktop computing.

NB: Very true! You are a professor in the information sciences and technology college at Penn State, and I’d be remiss if I didn’t ask what you’re working on now, even if it isn’t tech-comm specific.

JC: My work ... of course. I don’t think I work specifically on information design. These different professions and perspectives all converge—I think I encounter these issues every day in my work. Just to mention two things I’m doing. One thing I work on is educational technology. In terms of learners, if you’re interested in learning and supporting learners with technology, becoming a professor is a good way to make sure you’ll stay active.

Students both are able to benefit from and really expect technologically sophisticated tools, and I’ve been working with that in my teaching pretty much all the time I’ve been a professor, which is the last 20 years.

One thing I’m working on I call “collaborative information analysis.” This is the scenario of law enforcement or intelligence professionals trying to make a theory of the crime, which may not have been committed yet, by analyzing a very large information space. I’ve been doing this for about seven years, mostly with U.S. Navy support.

The interest in it is, of course, we realize we live in a world full of threats and those threats are hard to identify. There are large information spaces we need to analyze to try to identify hypotheses that would be theories of the crime or crimes. The way that you support that is by allowing people to abstract the information, but also by being able to get back to the original source and ground their hypotheses in the real data.

This involves visualizations and online sketching tools, social network analysis tools, lots of different kinds of tools that need to be integrated. Minimalism is a big issue here because it’s easy to get overwhelmed. The model problem that I’m working on consists of 222 propositions. If you think about it, it’s really easy to get lost in an information space that complex.

That’s one thing I’m doing. It involves development of an integrated tool for information analysis and also studying team process where people try to work together to collaboratively analyze a complex information space.

The other project I’m working on is community technology. I’ve been interested for a number of years, really, in how information technology can strengthen community as an experience that people have.

Specifically, I’m interested in placed community, so I’ve worked with nonprofits, local government, schools, and so forth in a geographical area. Because I’m lazy, I guess, or because it’s more fun to work where you live, I’m working now in the State College community with my own neighbors, in effect. There’s just a huge number of interesting projects.

I think this work has a larger relevance because the idea of community, I think, is fundamentally important to being human. You can see from the explosion of online community and community-like experiences that people are striving for community. They want to participate in community. I think that technology can and does support that. That’s the other focus of my work.

NB: Wow. That’s really interesting and also a way that minimalism is coming full circle for you. It’s coming back around. Cool.

JC: In these areas and other areas I’ve worked in, these ideas are still operative. They’re very important. If information technology’s going to be effective—across the whole host of things that people use it for—these orientations, I think, are critical to our success in the future.

NB: Thank you for that, and thank you for having this conversation with me today, Dr. Carroll. It was a privilege and an honor, and I learned a lot.

JC: Well, it’s been fun for me, too. It’s always fun to go down memory lane. I believe that the past is important to succeed in the future and it’s fun for me to revisit that.

NICKY BLEIEL (nickyb@componentone.com) is the lead information developer for Doc-To-Help (www.doctohelp.com). She has 18 years of experience in technical communication and in writing and designing information for software products in the documentation, media, industrial automation, simulation, and pharmaceutical industries. She’s @nickybleiel on Twitter, and you can see a complete list of her presentations and articles at www.nickybleiel.com. Nicky is the Vice President of STC.

JOHN M. CARROLL is Edward Frymoyer Professor of information sciences and technology at Pennsylvania State University. His research is in methods and theory in human-computer interaction, particularly as applied to networking tools for collaborative learning and problem solving, and design of interactive information systems. His books include Making Use (2000), Usability Engineering (2002, with M. B. Rosson), Rationale-Based Software Engineering (2008, with J. Burge, R. McCall, and I. Mistrik), Learning in Communities (2009), The Neighborhood in the Internet (2012), and Creativity and Rationale: Enhancing Human Experience by Design (2012). He serves on several editorial boards for journals, handbooks, and series. He is editor of the Synthesis Lectures on Human-Centered Informatics and has received the Rigo Award and the CHI Lifetime Achievement Award from ACM, and the Silver Core Award from IFIP, and the Goldsmith Award from IEEE. He is a fellow of AAAS, ACM, IEEE, the Human Factors and Ergonomics Society, and the Association for Psychological Science.

REFERENCES


Unhappy Customers Are Just the Beginning:

By JOSEPH DEVNEY | Associate Fellow
TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS SOMETIMES talk about the value of good technical documentation. What about the converse—the business costs of bad documentation? Or of documentation that simply isn’t provided? Sometimes such costs can be very high.

Missing documentation is self-explanatory: a manual or online help for some audience doesn’t exist. What makes for “poor” documentation is more complicated. The document or document set can be incomplete. That is, the documentation itself exists, but it is missing some important information.

Or the documentation can be poorly organized, difficult to navigate. For example, an index would be helpful, but there is none. Or the hierarchical nature of the information isn’t obvious. Material that should be relegated to an appendix might instead dominate the middle of the book. The index or search feature in an online help system gives unhelpful results.

Some documentation seems to be aimed at the wrong audience. Usually this means that the material is more technical than it should be. Just because a software engineer or other subject matter expert can understand it doesn’t mean a customer or other reader can.

Sometimes the tone of the documentation is persuade rather than instructive. I have seen user manuals that tell me how easy a software application will make my life, without actually telling me how to do the things promised.

Where Does Poor Documentation Come From?
Many operational issues can contribute to inadequate documentation. Among them are:

- Limited time to produce documents
- Non-writers writing technical documentation
- Too much influence from marketing
- Unqualified technical writers
- Poorly designed templates; too strict attention to templates

One thread runs through these causes: they can be the product of management decisions. Managers decide on schedules and budgets and hire the writers. Managers can decide to allow time and budget for user testing or not.

As we will see, skimping on documentation can be a costly decision.

How Common Are These Problems?
In 2012, STC Associate Fellow Sharon Burton conducted a survey of consumers about product documentation. More than half of her respondents said that they look at the documentation before buying a product. What if they find the instructions for a product they have bought to be confusing or incomplete? A small number—7 percent—said they would never buy from that company again. But a 7 percent drop in sales could be significant. And another 37 percent would “possibly” not buy from the company again.

Taking a somewhat different tack, market research company IDC surveyed companies regarding “document-driven processes.” More than three-fourths of their respondents had suffered “serious business risk and/or compliance issues as a direct result of ineffective document processes.” The consequences included compliance problems and lawsuits, two subjects addressed later in this article.

Potential Consequences
Inadequate documentation can harm a business’s bottom line in many ways. Here are some of them.

Unhappy customers. People may complain to their friends (or on the Web!) about the company or the product. They may not buy your products again, and they may discourage others from buying them.

Lost sales. Either from unhappy customers not repeating, or potential customers choosing a competitor with better user documentation.

Wasted employee time. Time spent by employees looking for information is time they are not spending on more profitable tasks. Badly written or poorly organized documentation makes the search longer.

Higher customer service expenses. Providing a manual or good online help can be cheaper than paying help desk personnel to solve customer problems or sending engineers to customer sites.

Fines or other penalties. These can be imposed by regulatory bodies, either from government or industry.
Government agencies can also restrict how your company conducts its business.

**Product liability lawsuits.** The documentation is part of the product and may be the ultimate source of the injury to the plaintiff.

Let’s look at some of these consequences in more detail.

**Lost Revenue**
Poor documentation can lead to lost revenue, as is implied by the results of Burton’s survey. Unhappy customers hurt your reputation and can lower your sales directly or indirectly.

**Case Study: Lost Revenue**
This story is from outside the realm of strictly technical documentation, but is instructive nonetheless. The United Kingdom had a revenue problem. Many small businesses were not paying their taxes or not paying them promptly. The government sent out dunning letters, with limited success. The letters were ineffective communication.

The government’s Behavioural Insights Team, established in 2010, addressed the problem the same way a well-managed technical documentation group might: they did user testing. In this case, they drafted several different tax letters for a pilot project. Each one went to thousands of taxpayers and the team tracked the results. They then used the most effective message for the rest of the letters.

In this case, cutting costs by *not* doing the user testing turned out to be an expensive approach. The government projected that applying the lessons learned from the pilot test nationwide would bring in approximately £30 million per year—far more than the one-time expense of less than £1 million for the test.

**The lesson:** Real-world testing of the effectiveness of documentation is worth paying for.

**Internal Efficiency**
Maybe you don’t write for customers. Even if you write for internal audiences, poor documentation can bring costs. Is it too hard to find existing information? Once found, does it turn out to be outdated or poorly designed? Do employees ever have to recreate information? All of these activities waste employee time.

A recurring problem I’ve run into is having to reuse a graphic without being able to locate the original. There are workarounds, but not good solutions. The missing graphic can be recreated from scratch; that takes time. Or an electronic version can be created from a screen shot or a scan of the existing version; that usually produces a lower-quality image. In some cases, an embedded graphic in Word can be saved in Visio.

The International Data Corporation has estimated that poorly organized documentation can cost a company with 1,000 knowledge workers approximately $3 million per year in lost time. Add an additional $15 million in opportunity cost—that is, lost revenue because the employees were not working on more useful tasks while they were searching for information internally.

**Case Study: Recreating Information**
I once helped a microchip company convert production of documentation from Microsoft Word to Adobe FrameMaker. It was impossible to locate originals of some of the graphics. A few images were created with PowerPoint (not really a graphics application), or with a specialized application owned by only one person in the company (not in my department). The problematic graphics were either recreated from scratch or replaced by screen captures from existing PDFs.

**The lesson:** Organizing and indexing all component files saves time and effort in document production.

**Regulatory Compliance**
Many companies must comply with regulations. These can be mandated by governments or by industry groups. For instance, in the United States, airlines are regulated by the Federal Aviation Administration and pharmaceutical companies by the Food and Drug Administration. These are government agencies. The American National Standards Institute is not a government entity, but a standards-setting body. Some of their standards address documentation.

Running afoul of the strictures imposed by either government or industry groups can have serious consequences. An electric utility that has agreed to follow industry guidelines for system security—including for documentation—can be fined up to a million dollars a day if they don’t pass an audit.

Sometimes the stakes are even higher.

**Case Study: Noncompliance**
In January 2005, a jet veered of an airport runway in Canada. This caused Transport Canada, the Canadian equivalent of the FAA, to start an investigation of JetsGo, the airline that owned the jet. The investigation found, among other things, that some required documentation was missing. The airline was not fined, but the penalty was at least as bad. They were ordered to fly their planes at lower altitudes, which greatly increased their fuel costs. The company couldn’t keep this up for long: in March, 50 days after the initial incident, JetsGo stopped flying planes. They declared bankruptcy not long after that, and were eventually bought by another airline.

**The lesson:** If your company’s documentation falls under regulations from an outside entity, make sure you follow the rules regarding documentation *to the letter.*

Failing to do so can be very expensive. In extreme cases, it can mean the end of the company.

**Lawsuits**
One issue that could bring your documentation to a court of law is copyright violations. This should not be an issue if
You may have had to untangle convoluted writing such as this in your own job. In this case, the contract ended up in court. A hospital and its insurance company were disputing how to split the costs of a multi-million-dollar lawsuit. The judge in the case did not make the effort to parse this text. He declared it “gibberish” and removed it from the discussion. He threw it out.

This power the judge has in a court case may affect your technical documentation as well. Perhaps your company is one of those that uses a disclaimer such as this.

“Although every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the information contained herein, [company] gives no warranty that the information is accurate and shall in no circumstances be liable to any person if it is not.”

Knowing that the judge has the power to throw out unreasonable legal language, and that JetsGo went out of business at least partly because of inadequate documentation, a smart manager would not want to bet the company on such a disclaimer holding up in court. Better to make sure the documentation itself is “bulletproof.”

Why “bulletproof”? In the worst case scenario, your documents might be gone over with a fine-tooth comb by a linguist, someone who knows in great detail how language works. Roger Shuy, in his book *Fighting over Words*, writes about several cases he has worked on. Here is a recap of one.

**Case Study: Product Liability Lawsuit**

A couple with a young son worked for a traveling carnival and lived in an RV (recreational vehicle). One morning the husband woke up with headache and nausea and had a hard time waking his wife. They couldn’t wake the son at all and took him to the hospital. All three were diagnosed with carbon monoxide poisoning. The son’s was the worst; he was at risk for permanent brain damage. The source of the CO? The RV’s gasoline-powered electrical generator, made by a company called Generac. The parents sought out a lawyer. The lawyer called in two experts, an engineer to evaluate the generator and its installation, and a linguist to analyze the owner’s manual.

The linguist, Roger Shuy, analyzed the manual on its own and also compared it to two similar manuals—one from Fleetwood, the manufacturer of the RV, and one from Onan, the company whose generators can be factory-installed by Fleetwood. He found many weaknesses in both the Generac and Fleetwood manuals that experienced technical writers would have identified. The warnings about carbon monoxide poisoning were not clear or prominent; there were no warnings at all about sleeping in the RV or using an exhaust fan with the generator running; the captions about hazards were not used consistently.

Some of the differences between the manuals were striking. In warning about obstructions, the Generac manual said that the generator may overheat and stop...
working if the air vents are blocked—and even that information was at the end of a paragraph. On the same topic, the Onan manual drew the reader’s attention with the first words of the equivalent paragraph: “WARNING: Exhaust gases can cause severe personal injury or death.” This puts the most important information right at the front.

Shuy’s report said explicitly that two of the manuals failed to “follow effective communication principles about how to avoid multiple lines of all capitalized text.” I’m sure everyone reading this magazine understands what that means. More broadly, he said that they also failed to “follow acceptable principles of effective document design.”

The family filed suit against the manufacturer, but the case never went to trial. The linguist’s report was enough to make the manufacturer settle a week before the trial started.

The Generac and Fleetwood manuals suffered in the evaluation by being compared to the one from Onan, which was both more thorough and more carefully designed—they obviously used the services of a knowledgeable technical communicator.

The lesson: If you want to increase your chances of avoiding or winning a lawsuit like this, make sure your technical documentation is at least as good as your competitors’. The plaintiff may compare them in building the case against you. Or you may use the weaker competitor’s documents to defend yourself.

Addressing the Problems
Warning management about potential costs of skimping on documentation can have good effects—not least of which is better documentation. You really can lower the company’s risk of loss from the consequences discussed. You can also raise the profile of the technical documentation department, possibly gaining additional resources. (Or lowering your own chances of being laid off when budgets are cut.) But how do you get the message to the right people? That depends on your own situation.

I once began a campaign for a major change to document production with an email to my manager, explaining the time savings possible. In a different company, I took a more direct and confrontational approach, setting up a meeting with the manager in charge of documentation (who had no background in technical writing), where I brought in a stack of books about technical communication and talked about the research and professional knowledge that goes into document design. You are in the best position to determine what approach will work best in your organization.

The important thing is to have some data to back yourself up. Speak in terms of money or time lost. The resources listed at the end of this article are a good starting point. If you can gather data from your own company, that would be even more effective. Talk to the help desk, talk to the corporate legal department (they know more about copyright issues than engineers), talk to people who have to find things on the company intranet.

Use whatever you think will work for you. This is just another communication challenge.

JOE DEVNEY (joe@devney.com) is both a writer and a linguist. He has worked in the field of technical communication since 1995, primarily documenting software and data centers. He has been active in STC nearly as long, serving as chapter president and as a competition judge, among other things. More recently, he earned his master’s degree in linguistics and is especially interested in the intersection of language and law. One particular area of linguistic research has been the comprehensibility of jury instructions, which he sees as a technical communication issue.

FURTHER READING


SHUY, ROGER W. 2008. Fighting Over Words. Language and Civil Law Cases. New York: Oxford Univ. Press. Case studies of civil cases on which a prominent forensic linguist consulted, including some about product documentation and warning labels and one about copyright violation.


Going Green as a Technical Communicator

By CHERYL LANDES | Fellow

There’s no better way to make a difference than when you can do something you love to change the world. And for us, that passion is effective, clear communication.
ANYONE WHO HAS watched a Muppet movie starring Kermit the Frog has heard his “it’s not easy being green” lament. Maybe being green is challenging for a frog, but from an industrial perspective, green is gold. Economists now use the term The Green Collar Era to refer to the 21st century because of the increasing numbers of new jobs created in resource conservation, alternative energy development, pollution reduction and cleanup, and recycling.

Customers are also demanding change. They’re voting with their wallets by buying products from companies demonstrating social and environmental responsibility. At the same time, younger generations prefer working with companies who are making a difference in the world and conserving resources. This shift is creating dramatic, positive effects on how companies are doing business.

All of this is good news for job seekers. It’s even better news for technical communicators, because our skills are desperately needed.

Where are the green jobs?
Statistics vary on the number of green jobs in the United States and where the jobs actually are. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 3.1 million jobs in 2010, the latest year with available data. Other groups that track job data report lower numbers. Opinions on the regions of the country with the most jobs also vary, although New England and the West Coast are consistent in the top rankings.

One reason for the variations is that “in the absence of standard definitions and data, strikingly little is known about its nature, size, and growth at the critical regional level,” Mark Muro, Jonathan Rothwell, and Devashree Saha wrote in “Sizing the Clean Economy: A National and Regional Green Jobs Assessment,” an article for the Brookings Institute in July 2011. Another reason, and probably the most important, is the confusion in the actual definition of green jobs.

CareerOneStop, a site sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration, defines green jobs as “any occupation that is affected by activities such as conserving energy, developing alternative energy, reducing pollution, or recycling.” But during the past year, experts are seeing a new trend: Green permeates all industries.

Kevin Doyle, principal of the Green Economy consultancy and contractor at the New England Clean Energy Council, says that the green industry now includes any companies participating in sustainable activities, such as recycling, using recycled materials, and retrofitting older facilities to save energy. Companies that sell products to other companies practicing sustainability also fall under the green industry category.

Bill Bean, president of Green Planning and Coaching in Lee, MA, agrees with Kevin. He predicts that the term green “will be going away soon.”

So what does this mean for technical communicators? Opportunities are increasing everywhere!

How great is the demand for technical communicators?

Every time I attend any meeting about green careers or other topics in the green industry, I ask this question. The answer is always the same: Our skills are needed in all aspects of writing, from creating technical reports on research to publishing case studies on corporate sustainability programs.

On 6 April 2011, the University of Washington’s Professional and Continuing Education sponsored a panel discussion called “Retooling for a Green Future.” During this discussion, the moderator and all five panelists stressed that communication skills are more important than a master’s degree or certificate in green disciplines.

“We need people that can write, and people that can communicate, that can take these ideas that will make them known to everybody,” said moderator Charlie Cuniff, director of the Seattle Office of Sustainability & Environment.

Cathy Conolly, senior wetland manager at ESA Adolfson, added, “I think there are a lot of opportunities for communications specialists who work in incorporating green information—in terms of presenting green information and bringing in the public.”

Johanna Jobin, the sustainability products manager for Millipore in Billerica, MA, echoed Conolly’s comments during another panel discussion on green careers at a The Indus Entrepreneurs Boston (TiE Boston) meeting in Waltham the next day. Jobin said the greatest demand is for skilled marketing writers who have a strong grasp of technology—in other words, technical marketing writers.

So why technical marketing writers? “A good marketing department listens to its consumers,” Susan Dobscha, associate professor of marketing at Bentley University in Waltham, MA, said at the 2011 Green Careers Conference in Marlboro, MA. “The true role of marketing is to listen to your consumer and respond.” Marketers balance the needs of the consumer with the greater good. Top-quality marketing communications play a substantial role in this balance.

Excellent communication also helps stop greenwashing before it starts. Dobscha says that greenwashing typically originates from an “uneducated manager, not the marketing department.” Then companies try to retool what they do, which can result in unintentional greenwashing.

“Think about your role in your company as helping the company to steer away from greenwashing activities.”

As communicators, that role presents many opportunities.

What types of projects do green communicators do?

I started working as a green communicator long before the term green was fashionable. When my career started
as a technical communicator in 1991, the common terms for my work were environmental writing or environmental communication. Most of the work stemmed from growing environmental regulations, and that’s how I broke into technical communication.

When I graduated from the University of Oregon’s School of Journalism with a degree in public relations, my career options were limited. Public relations is almost impossible to break into for new college graduates in the Northwest, so I began working as a secretary for the State of Oregon. Two-and-one-half years later, I moved to Seattle and landed a secretarial job for the accounting department at Crowley Marine Services, a worldwide marine transportation company. As part of my job, I edited monthly reports for the controller and his four assistant controllers. Six months after I started there, I was promoted into the administrative assistant pool for the company’s president and five vice presidents.

Shortly after my promotion, I began editing and writing reports and memos for the vice president of the Environmental, Safety, and Quality Assurance Department. The regulatory paperwork for his department had almost doubled by then, thanks to the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989. The maritime industry is heavily regulated in general, but the tanker’s grounding prompted the State of Alaska, followed by the other states along the West Coast and eventually the federal government, to add and tighten regulations regarding transporting oil on tankers and barges and responding to hazardous material spills.

Because Crowley Marine Services hauled oil as one of its main market niches, we were required to comply with all of the regulations. We also helped clean up hazardous material spills. Compliance meant developing contingency response plans, emergency response plans, and training for our vessel and facility crews. The requirements for documentation varied for federal and state governments. In some cases, county and city governments wanted separate plans.

We hired consultants, our subject matter experts, to help us stay current on all of the requirements. They also wrote the plans and training materials, but there wasn’t anyone to edit the documents before submission to the agencies for approval. We also needed someone who could write newsletters about our environmental and safety programs for customers and employees. So the company created a position for me as a senior publications coordinator, who handled all of these duties. Eventually some of the responsibilities for writing emergency response plans and training materials moved in house, but I still worked with internal and external subject matter experts to gather the required information.

After a major corporate restructure at Crowley Marine Services, followed by four years of full-time contracting, I landed in the airflow controls industry as a lone writer for Phoenix Controls Corporation, a subsidiary of Honeywell. For seven years, I wrote and edited the company’s technical, marketing, and training materials. When I left the company and returned to full-time contracting five years ago, I began receiving more requests for marketing materials and technical documentation in energy savings. Today, 50% of my client base is involved in the energy savings sector, and my projects include:

- case studies
- white papers
- requests for proposals (RFPs)
- user guides
- developer documentation
- training materials for technicians and salespeople

Of these, approximately 75% of my work is writing and editing marketing materials.

In all of these positions, I did not have the industrial expertise when I was hired. So why was I chosen?

**How do communicators turn green?**

The key to breaking into a green career is to demonstrate that your skills are transferrable. “Most employers are happier hiring someone without the knowledge but have the skills and let them immerse themselves into the industry,” Doyle said. He used candidates with a liberal arts background as an example. “They know how to write, communicate, build networks with people, and are curious.”

Doyle also said that an environmental studies degree or certificate is not as helpful for breaking into a green career as it was “five to seven years ago. Almost in every case, people want combination skills, even at the undergraduate level.”

So, how do we demonstrate our skills are transferrable?

Before I broke into technical writing at Crowley Marine Services, I offered to proofread documents for the controllership. Soon they asked me to edit documents any time I found typos or wording that could be clearer. I knew nothing about the maritime industry when I started, but I was eager to learn and I wasn’t afraid to ask questions. My proofreading and editing projects were also a great way to learn more about the company while proving my abilities.

After I was promoted into the executive administrative assistant pool, I continued offering these services, and my editorial responsibilities grew. When the executives realized they needed an in-house writer, they immediately thought of me and promoted me into a brand new position.

At Phoenix Controls, I was the company’s first technical writer. Because this was a new position, the job description was not clear, so I decided to fill my portfolio with a wide range of samples in case anyone asked about my experience with different types of documents during my interview. My strategy worked, because the company wanted someone who had experience in a variety of areas. I demonstrated with my writing samples that I had the skills they needed, although I had no experience in the airflow controls industry.

If you do not have a variety of writing samples, start building your portfolio. Focus on marketing projects whenever you can. Offer to edit coworkers’ documents, if possible, or join a special project team where you can write...
about a green project or initiative. There are also many volunteer opportunities to gain experience, which increases your networking base. Examples of my previous green volunteer projects include editing website copy for Friends of Heybrook Ridge in Index, WA, and writing a proposal to reorganize the library at the Sitka Center for Art and Ecology in Otis, OR.

Also attend green industry meetings and conferences. This is the best way to meet people in the field who need your services, whether you’re interested in regular, full-time employment or contracting. Stan Schatt and Michele Lobl’s book, Paint Your Career Green: Get a Green Job Without Starting Over, contains a long list of volunteer organizations and professional associations that sponsor meetings and conferences. Also check the “Other Resources” at the end of this article for more networking ideas.

Green careers have a bright future. Although many new technologies are available, more are evolving. Demand for marketing communications and documentation will also continue to grow. So for any technical communicator who’s passionate about sustainability and social responsibility, going green is ideal. Jan Whittington, associate professor at the University of Washington Department of Urban Design and Planning, sums it up the best when she said, “It’s about being able to communicate well with people on issues you care about.” There’s no better way to make a difference than when you can do something you love to change the world. And for us, that passion is effective, clear communication.

Other Resources

Green Job Directories
Clean Techies, http://cleantechies.jobomatic.com/a/jobs/find-jobs
EcoEmploy, www.ecoemploy.com
Green Resume Depot—a free service (released January 2013) where job candidates can submit their resumes. The resumes are stored privately, and Green Resume Depot contacts candidates when there are job matches. http://talent.peopleplanetprofitblog.com
Greenfish (staffing firm in Brussels), www.greenfish.eu

Information on Green Careers
The Green Jobs Blog, maintained by Green Jobs Network Founder Leonard Adler in San Francisco, is one of the most comprehensive, up-to-date resources for finding

---

“I GOT A PROJECT THAT TURNED INTO A $25,000-A-YEAR GIG THANKS TO THE STC SUMMIT!”

“I spoke up in a session at a past Summit and was approached afterward by a man who was scouting for editors. He lived only about 50 miles from me, but I probably would never have met him otherwise. This encounter evolved into a $25,000-a-year gig of interesting editing with a small firm that pays well and on time, and even holds dinners for its contractors twice a year. I always knew that I had to show up to make connections and attending the Summit proved it!”

Bette Frick

MY NAME IS BETTE FRICK AND I’M AN STC MEMBER

http://summit.stc.org
jobs in the green industry. You’ll find extensive lists of green job boards, career fairs and events, training and education, recruiters, industry associations, research reports, and books at www.greencollarblog.org.

O*Net, a partner of the American Job Center Network, publishes information about green sectors and occupations at www.onetcenter.org/green.html.


Reports on Trends and News in the Green Industry

Clean Edge, Inc., a consulting firm with offices in Portland and San Francisco, publishes a variety of reports and hosts webinars about trends in the clean technology sector at www.cleanedge.com.

Environmental Entrepreneurs, a nonprofit organization promoting “sound environmental policy that builds economic prosperity,” publishes a series of clean energy reports and newsletters at www.e2.org/jsp/controller/jsession id=947614E293D51984CAF430CBA44BF7643doxName=clean jobsarchives.

Greentechmedia is a website with the latest news in the industry, www.greentechmedia.com.

The Green Market Oracle brands itself as “the convergence of sustainable capitalism and the global environment.” The site publishes news on green companies and environmental trends worldwide at www.thegreenmarket oracle.com.

LinkedIn Groups

There are many, but these I’ve found the most helpful:

- CleanTech Open
- Green Group Boston (Green Group Boston also meets monthly at the Burlington Public Library in Burlington, MA)
- Green Jobs & Career Network
- Green, Energy & Sustainability Careers
- Greentech Media
- The Green Exchange
- Think Green
- GreenBiz.com—Sustainability Professionals

Cheryl Landes, STC Fellow and Certified Professional Communicator through the Association for Women in Communications Matrix Foundation, founded Tabby Cat Communications in Seattle in 1995. She has 22 years of experience as a technical communicator in several industries: computer software, HVAC/energy savings, marine transportation, manufacturing, retail, and the trade press. She specializes as a findability strategist, helping businesses to organize content so that it flows logically and to make content easier to retrieve online and in print.

Cheryl, who currently lives in Vancouver, WA, has given many presentations and workshops about indexing, technical communication, and marketing services as a solo entrepreneur throughout the United States and Canada. She has written two handbooks on digital indexing in MadCap Flare and Adobe FrameMaker, and more than 100 articles and three books on Northwest travel and history. For more information, visit her website at www.tabbycatco.com.

References


WHEN USER

By CRISTOPHER D. BROYLES
Introduction and Question

In technical communication, one of the overarching aims is to improve user experience—whether it’s through the use of plain language in a publication to make it easier to read or a website that has undergone usability testing to ensure improved navigation. A similar theme of understanding and designing for an envisioned user/audience is also seen in rhetorical theory. Many of Aristotle’s ideas, for example, were tied to an envisioned audience and the envisioned effect that an utterance would have on that audience: logos, pathos, ethos, and kairos. In both fields, understanding audience and designing with audience in mind is foundational.

One question not addressed so clearly in the literature is what to do when user experiences differ—specifically, when user experiences are in conflict with another. What do designers do? Whose user experience takes priority? I submit the following for consideration: the answer depends on the nature of the conflicting user experience—is it the designer’s user experience vs. the end-user’s user experience or is it one end-user’s user experience vs. another end-user’s user experience? In either case, I believe that there are solutions that technical communicators and rhetoricians can borrow from film makers.
Designer’s User Experience vs. End-User’s User Experience

In thinking about how much work goes into a film, whether it’s composing a musical score, writing dialogue, developing special effects or computer-generated imagery, the hours spent in a make-up chair, or the overall burgeoning budgets of film production, it would seem there is a clear priority for the end-user’s experience over the user experiences of those involved in the film’s production. By this, for example, consider the following two actors: Robert Englund, who played Freddy Krueger in the enormously successful Nightmare on Elm Street franchise (not inclusive of the recent film-series reboot) and Michael Dorn, who played Commander Worf in the iconic Star Trek franchise. I doubt that they liked sitting still for hours on end each day of shooting while their make-up and prosthetics were applied. Or, how many late nights did James Cameron spend writing, editing, and tweaking particular scenes in Avatar? And Lord of the Rings, for example, required the actors to travel all the way to New Zealand in order to find an appropriate backdrop for the film series—separating them from friends and family for the sake of their art. In fact, it’s rumored that the filming location is one of the reasons that Sean Connery turned down the role of Gandalf. My point is that although individuals in film are usually well compensated for their work, their user experience in making the film often involves extreme trials because the success of the end product, as measured by the envisioned audience reception, takes precedence over individual user experiences of those involved with the production.

End-User’s User Experience vs. Another End-User’s User Experience

Sometimes film designers cannot fully agree on what will make for the best end-user experience, and, as a consequence, they do “alternative cuts” or “alternative endings” for a film, or allow for the inclusion of “deleted scenes” on the film’s Blu-Ray release. Independence Day, for example, which was the first DVD I ever purchased, has at least two available cuts: the theatrical release and the special edition. The original Halloween II had at least two cuts, the original release and the extended release for television. Halloween 6, too, had at least two available cuts. The Motion Picture Association of America’s age restrictions/rating guidelines and cultural values are part of this consideration process. For example, nudity can be an issue that results in multiple versions of a film. The European version of the film Powder has more nudity than the U.S. version because film nudity is more accepted in Europe. Thus, when there are multiple audiences that cannot be reconciled into one definitive cut, the film-based answer seems to be to release multiple cuts/versions of the film. And, moreover, the time taken to produce those different releases and cuts for a single film iterate my first point—the envisioned end-user user experience takes precedence over the user experience of the designers.

Conclusion

Thus, if you take those two film-inspired points to heart—(a) the privilege of the end-user user experience over the designer’s user experience and (b) releasing different versions of a single film to accommodate different audiences—the question becomes, “How can technical communicators and rhetoricians translate those lessons learned from film production into usable practice and theory when developing a publication?” In response to that query, I share the following:

1. When producing a publication, be prepared to put the time in: The sacrifices you make of your own time for detail, accuracy, clarity, depth, and authenticity through drafting, revising, and editing (i.e., the more knocks you take to your own user experience in the process), the more likely it is that your end product will foster an improved user experience on the part of the audience. In other words, you must place the envisioned audience first above your own personal trials and challenges in the publication process.

2. If you identify multiple audiences for a single publication, look for ways to reach all those audiences through that single publication. This might be through annotations, speaker notes, or, in the case of audiences with disabilities, including features like alternative text and captioning. And, in situations where multiple audiences cannot be accommodated through a single publication, consider dividing the publication into multiple versions: abridged vs. unabridged; entry-level, intermediate, and advanced (which works well for training-type publications). Again place the envisioned audience first in terms of the content and design of the publication.

Although I openly acknowledge that my treatment in this article about audience has not been academic, I do not believe that it detracts from the relevance and importance of the lessons that can be borrowed from film makers. My conclusions shared here are merely my perceptions of what I have observed in film and film production processes that I, as a technical communicator, can borrow and integrate into my own theory and practice. Importantly, the two themes I shared here parallel a central theme in both technical communication and rhetoric: let the envisioned audience influence your writing in a meaningful and conscious way.

Cristopher Broyles is a doctoral candidate in technical communication and rhetoric at Texas Tech University. His research focuses on improving text-equivalent descriptions (i.e., descriptions written for blind and low-vision audiences) through the application of user-center design, rhetorical analysis, and genre theory. Prior publications include multiple governmental publications on Section 508 compliance and a journal publication on simplifying language use in the sciences to accommodate larger audiences. Broyles has been a part-time writing instructor at the postsecondary level for over 10 years, a technical editor for 7 years, and he is currently the project manager of a Section 508 compliance team for a government agency in Washington, DC.

26 Intercom February 2013
Meet the Candidates

THE STC ELECTION is scheduled to begin 11 March and end at 5:00 PM EDT (GMT-4) on 22 March. All members will be emailed instructions for accessing the online ballot.

Please note, STC bylaws specify that the Vice President automatically becomes President the following year. Nicky Bleiel automatically succeeds to the office of President from her previous office of Vice President. Therefore, she does not appear on the ballot this year.

NOTE: All STC members must have paid their dues by 28 February 2013 to vote in the election.

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

Candidates for 2013

The candidate information page for STC's 2013 election is now live on the STC website at www.stc.org/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. There are also audio podcast interviews with participating candidates.

See the link in the “Biography & Candidate Statement” section for full information on each specific candidate.

There is one position to be elected for Vice President; one position to be elected for Treasurer; two positions to be elected for Director; and two positions to be elected for Nominating Committee.

Vice President
Katherine (Kit) Brown-Hoekstra
Member Status: Associate Fellow
Current Professional Title: Principal Company: Comgenesis, LLC
Company Location: Littleton, Colorado, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/katherine-brown-hoekstra?category_id=67

Vice President
Paul Mueller
Member Status: Associate Fellow
Current Community: Houston Chapter, Management SIG
Current Professional Title: President/Owner Company: UserAID
Company Location: Houston, Texas, USA

Treasurer
Brian Lindgren
Member Status: Fellow
Current Community: South Carolina Midlands Chapter
Current Professional Title: Director of Business Development Company: Engility Corporation
Company Location: North Charleston, South Carolina, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/brian-lindgren-2?category_id=71

Treasurer
Jane Wilson
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Atlanta Chapter, Content Strategy SIG, Information Design & Architecture SIG
Current Professional Title: Information Architect Company: RML, a GE Transportation Company
Company Location: Atlanta, Georgia, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/jane-wilson?category_id=71

Director
Deanne Levander
Member Status: Fellow
Current Community: Twin Cities Community, Online SIG, Technical Editing SIG
Current Professional Title: Technical Writer Company: TCF Financial Bank
Company Location: Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/deanne-levander?category_id=69

Director
Michael Opsteegh
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Orange County Chapter
Current Professional Title: Senior Technical Writer Company: Eyefinity
Company Location: Irvine, California, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/michael-opsteegh-2?category_id=69

Director
Ben Woelk
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Rochester Chapter, Academic SIG, Marketing Communication SIG, Policies & Procedures SIG
Current Professional Title: Policy and Awareness Analyst Company: Rochester Institute of Technology
Company Location: Rochester, New York, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/ben-woelk?category_id=69

Nominating Committee
Phylise Banner
Member Status: Fellow
Current Community: Instructional Design SIG, Scientific Communication SIG
Current Professional Title: Director of Teaching and Curriculum Quality Company: American Public University System
Company Location: Charles Town, West Virginia, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/phylise-banner?category_id=70

Nominating Committee
Andrea Wenger
Member Status: Senior Member
Current Community: Carolina Chapter, Technical Editing SIG
Current Professional Title: Senior Technical Writer Company: Schneider Electric
Company Location: Knightdale, North Carolina, USA
Biography & Candidate Statement: www.stc.org/election/item/andrea-wenger?category_id=70
### 2013 Technical Communication Summit

**Conference-at-a-Glance** *(5–8 May 2013, Atlanta, Georgia)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Saturday, 4 May</th>
<th>Sunday, 5 May</th>
<th>Monday, 6 May</th>
<th>Tuesday, 7 May</th>
<th>Wednesday, 8 May</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:00 AM</strong></td>
<td><strong>8:00–5:00</strong> Preconference Certificate Sessions (optional pricing)</td>
<td><strong>8:00–5:00</strong> Preconference Workshops and Certificate Sessions (optional pricing)</td>
<td><strong>8:30–11:00</strong> Education Sessions</td>
<td><strong>8:30–11:00</strong> Education Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>9:00 AM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>9:30–5:00</strong> Expo Open</td>
<td><strong>9:30–5:00</strong> Expo Open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>10:00 AM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>11:00–2:00</strong> Lunch Break</td>
<td><strong>11:00–2:00</strong> Lunch Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>11:00 AM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Visit the Expo Hall</strong></td>
<td><strong>Visit the Expo Hall</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Noon</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2:00–4:30</strong> Education Sessions</td>
<td><strong>2:00–4:30</strong> Education Sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5:00–6:00</strong> Annual Business Meeting</td>
<td><strong>5:00–6:00</strong> Annual Business Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6:30–8:00</strong> Communities Reception</td>
<td><strong>6:30–8:00</strong> Communities Reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7:00–7:30</strong> Honors Reception (free)</td>
<td><strong>7:00–7:30</strong> Honors Reception (free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7:30–10:30</strong> Honors Banquet (additional ticket required)</td>
<td><strong>7:30–10:30</strong> Honors Banquet (additional ticket required)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>5:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>5:00–6:00</strong> Annual Business Meeting</td>
<td><strong>5:00–6:00</strong> Annual Business Meeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6:30–8:00</strong> Communities Reception</td>
<td><strong>6:30–8:00</strong> Communities Reception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>7:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7:00–7:30</strong> Honors Reception (free)</td>
<td><strong>7:00–7:30</strong> Honors Reception (free)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>8:00 PM</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>7:30–10:30</strong> Honors Banquet (additional ticket required)</td>
<td><strong>7:30–10:30</strong> Honors Banquet (additional ticket required)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2013 Preconference Program

The 2013 SUMMIT will include preconference workshops and certificate sessions; all require separate registration and fees. The preconference schedule will take place on 4 May and 5 May; dates and times will be posted to [http://summit.stc.org](http://summit.stc.org).

The preconference workshops are $250 for members and $500 for nonmembers, while the certificate courses include conference registration and cost $1,495 for members and $1,995 for nonmembers. Registration for the certificate courses (not including conference registration) is $725 and $1,295, respectively. Visit [http://summit.stc.org](http://summit.stc.org) for further details and to register. Currently scheduled are:

**Preconference Certificate Sessions**

All four certificate sessions are two-day sessions, scheduled for 4–5 May. Session instructors will also recommend regular conference sessions to complement the certificate sessions.

**SAUL CARLINER | The Basics of Technical Communication Business**

The successful practice of technical communication requires making key business decisions. This course explains and identifies the key business decisions facing technical communicators and explains how to make them. Through lectures, readings, and activities, this certificate course explores how business decisions affect your ability to communicate content; describes the
business planning cycle; explains how to develop a strategic plan, business case, and a project plan; considers the impact of business processes on technical communication groups; and explains how to market technical communication products and services.

PHYLISE BANNER | Data Visualization: Seeing Through the Numbers
This session will explore data visualization and literacy, focusing on various techniques to conceptualize narratives and create visualizations. Along with gaining a more comprehensive understanding of data visualization, participants will be introduced to new ways of managing, analyzing, and visualizing data sets, as well as textually expressing underlying relational content.

ALYSON RILEY and ANDREA AMES | Strategic Information Architecture Bootcamp: Tools, Techniques, and Vision
Boost your business value with this interactive workout! Experience foundational concepts, best practices, and practical tools to advance your information architecture (IA) skills in measurable ways that matter to your business.

MICHELLE CORBIN and LINDA OESTREICH | Technical Editing Fundamentals
This certificate course in technical editing is designed for beginning through advanced technical editing practitioners and the writers who work with them. It provides a look at editing beyond regular editing practices for beginning technical editors, a great refresher for advanced technical editors, and a peek into the world of editing for writers who either do editing or work closely with editors. The course presents material on many different topics and concludes with discussions and materials on a career in technical editing. It is interactive and includes exercises for reinforcement of lessons learned.

CAROL BARNUM | Usability 101
If you know you want to add user experience to the products you document but you don’t know how to get started, this certificate will give the principles and practice to take the plunge into the world of user experience (UX). In two days you’ll learn why and how to use the two most common tools in the UX practitioner’s toolkit: heuristic evaluation (also called expert review) and usability testing. Starting with the basics for each tool, you will then apply what you have learned to an expert review and a usability test. You’ll learn when to use each tool and how to introduce small, powerful studies back on the job.

Preconference Workshops
The below workshops are scheduled for Sunday, 5 May, and will take place from 1:00–5:00 PM.

RHYNE ARMSTRONG | The Art of the Demo: Honing Your Presentation Skills
Want to be taken seriously by your coworkers? Want to be seen as someone who knows their stuff? In this session, we will discuss how technical communicators can improve their presentation and demonstration skills to really shine.

SCOTT DELOACH | CSS and HTML5 to the Point
In this beginner- to expert-level workshop, Deloach will share tips and tricks for using intro and advanced HTML5 and CSS3 features, including showing and hiding content, displaying images in lightboxes, formatting and authenticating forms, providing location-aware assistance, creating rounded corners, and more.

LEAH GUREN | Don’t Write: THINK!
Good writing is more than knowing where to put the commas. In fact, the best way to improve documentation quality is to stop and think before writing. This workshop breaks the focus on text and provides three techniques for discovering creative solutions through correct analysis.

MATT SULLIVAN | Moving Your Documentation to Video
Technical documentation is moving toward video at an ever-increasing rate. From YouTube to free recorded webinars to services like Lynda.com, recorded video training is a powerful medium. Join Matt Sullivan, ACE, ACI for a BYOD workshop designed to help you implement video training using various tools.

RAHIEL BAILIE | Running a Productive Content Requirements Workshop
The content requirements workshop is the cornerstone of a content strategy. Whether you’re starting from scratch, culling an overstuffed content trove, or remaking a brand, your starting point will be to determine which content is needed to fulfill a set of requirements. Learn to maximize this effort.

Keep your eye on http://summit.stc.org for more scheduled sessions, full details on dates and times, and more.
Technical Communication Summit
Session Descriptions

STC PRESENTS the preliminary listing of sessions for the 2013 Summit, being held 5–8 May in Atlanta, GA. The listing includes session titles, speakers, and descriptions. This list will be updated online (see http://summit.stc.org) as more sessions and speakers are added to the conference. Conference education sessions are included with your registration.

There are seven tracks offered, organized to best suit your needs. Below are the sessions organized by track, and alphabetized by session title within each track. A future issue of Intercom will have the preliminary program schedule by date and time.

Project Showcase Session
The Project Showcase sessions will include presenters at tables to share their projects with groups of attendees as they walk from table to table. These small groups and discussions will allow technical communicators to share their experiences and discuss various ways to approach projects and solve the related issues. We bring the Project Showcase back for another year and are excited to invite you to be a part of it again. Currently scheduled are:

- Eileen Palsson, Creating and Cultivating Community Via CHM
- Erin Brennum and Celia Groff, From Confusion to Cohesion: Process-Oriented Documentation
- Katherine (Kit) Brown-Hoekstra, Gamifying Your Content
- Judy Hall and Laura Hartman, How ToS: Creating a Quick Path to Success!
- Neil Perlin, MotoDog: A Case Study in Native App Development
- Xiling Wang and Feng Wang, Role of Attitudes in Assessing TC Instruction Feasibility
- Michael Boses and Patrick Quinlan, Using Automation to Improve Your Content for Free

Lightning Talks
The popular “Lightning Talks” return to the Summit as well. These talks are five-minute presentations on topics of interest to technical communicators. Each speaker gets 20 slides, displayed for 15 seconds per slide. Timing is strictly enforced. Expect presentations that are insightful, thought-provoking, humorous, and possibly controversial. Expect to see oratory skills tested, and expect to have fun. Currently scheduled are:

- Jamie Gillenwater, 101 Reasons We Love Tech Comm
- Bill Swallow, Any Ol’ Lighting Talk
- Katherine (Kit) Brown-Hoekstra, Changing the World
- David Caruso, Inspiration Redux: Move In The Right Direction
- Alyssa Fox, Management Munchies: Nibbles of Leadership Advice
- Richard Hamilton, Marketing Copy is Dead
- Marcia Wood, Motivational Editing
- Rhye Armstrong, Oh, the Crap I’ve Seen
- Robert Hershewon, Quality Recordings: Quick and Clean
- Ray Gallon, The Hairball of Content
- Brenda Huettner, The Mars Science Laboratory Tweetup From Close Up
- Michael Opsteegh, To Serif or Not to Serif
- Nathaniel Lim, What’s in a Nametag

Projections
Projections are round-table discussions on a general topic, with multiple presenters per session. Attendees can join any presenter during the projection, and will be able to switch tables to hear multiple progressions.

Education and Training Progression
Includes topics such as Using Mentoring Programs to Collaborate With Industry and more still to be added.

Professional Development Progression
Includes topics such as Building and Maintaining Your Personal Brand; The Retirement of Technical Communicators; Growing Opportunities in Content Management and Social Media; Technical Communication: A Map to Better Understanding; Shock-Proofing Your Use of Social Media; and Strategic IA Careers: Skills and Knowledge for Success.

Writing and Editing Progression
Includes topics such as Cultivating In-House Sources of Documentation; PlainTalk: Get the Marbles Out of Your Message; Defining Policy, Procedure, and Other Governing Documents; Managing Technical Knowledge; Overcoming Roadblocks; Technical Editors and Converting Documentation to DITA Content; Career Development for Policies & Procedures Writers; and Every Topic Is Page One.

Communication and Translation Progression
Includes topics such as SME>Me>E: Screencast Creation and Collaboration; When Words are Not Enough: Is Your Content Ready for Localization?; You Want That in Chinese—Yesterday??; Traditional Executive Summary versus the Videogame Proposal One-Sheet; Localization Is Key to Going Global; New International Standard for Content Management; There’s Nothing Simple About Simplified Technical English; and Plain Language: Accessibility for Content.
Education Sessions
Track: Content Development and Delivery

ELISA SAWYER, *A Technical Writer’s Trip to Hollywood*
While getting a certificate in screen writing through UCLA, the presenter discovered that an understanding of how to craft scenes and characters improved her technical writing. She will summarize key information provided in screen-writing curriculum, and how it relates to information architecture and addressing the needs of our technical audiences.

RITA BRODY and BRETT MCCORKLE, *Baby Steps: Automated Publishing Using Arbortext and SharePoint*
Learn how Erie Insurance is developing an automated publishing system based on SharePoint 2010 to provide targeted search results for Agents and Employees, thereby saving time and improving efficiency.

PAUL WLODARCZYK, *Collaborating in DITA*
In 2012, easyDITA conducted a survey of the current state of collaboration in information development organizations. Despite widespread DITA adoption, most review happens in PDF. This presentation discusses DITA-based collaboration best practices and demonstrates emerging technologies that improve the speed and effectiveness of review and collaboration.

JEAN-LUC DOUMONT, *Conveying Messages with Graphs*
Graphical displays are still poorly mastered by technical communicators and other professionals. They seldom think of using graphs to communicate about data; when they do, they often use the wrong graphs or in the wrong way. Based on Doumont’s book ‘Trees, Maps, and Theorems’ about “effective communication for rational minds,” this session discusses how to select the right graph, how to optimize the graph’s construction, and how to phrase a useful caption.

MATSO LIMTIACO, *DITA Proof-of-Concept Publishing System*
This presentation describes how the presenter’s team developed a proof-of-concept DITA publishing system using existing tools and without a CMS or a dedicated DITA resource. The presenter’s company is using the system to produce several 180-page user manuals, some in 10 languages.

SARAH MADDOX, *Doc Sprints: The Ultimate in Collaborative Document Development*
This session describes how to plan and run a successful doc sprint. The result? High-quality documentation, happy customers, and an enhanced reputation for your tech comm team.

LEAH GUREN, *Editing as an Extreme Sport*
Forget bungee-jumping and rock climbing; are you bold enough to take on the challenge of Extreme Editing? It takes nerves of steel, quick reflexes, and razor-sharp intellect. Learn how to fearlessly cut through the fluff, boldly slash vague prose, and bravely restructure to improve usability. No safety equipment required!

RAY GALLON, *Embedding User Assistance Using DITA*
This presentation demonstrates a real (and ongoing) DITA implementation at a small, startup company, on a single application at very low cost. The project is a “just in time” layered user assistance system. Ample time is provided for interactive discussion and comment on technique and design principles.

SCOTT PRENTICE, *EPUB and Tech Comm—Are We Ready?*
This presentation will bring you up to speed on the current state of EPUB tools and technologies, and show you how to make the most of this new content delivery option. EPUBs, ebooks, and technology are changing the way people consume information. Can the tech comm industry make efficient use of this technology? What type of content is it best suited for? Does it really make your documentation available on every device and platform? Is it really ready, and if so how do you get started? Come see.

JURGEN MUTHIG, *Functional Design: Developing a Standard That Fits Your Needs*
The functional design method is based on a useful linguistic approach that guides you in defining all the rules which are necessary for consistent documentation. And if you work with DITA, it helps you develop an authoring guide which guarantees that DITA can keep its promises.

CAROL LOSAPIO, *Key Principles and Practices for Communicating Science*
The call for scientists to do a better job of communicating both the meaning and the nature of their work is getting louder. Public understanding of science affects people’s ability to appreciate and make full use of the products of science.
RHYN ARMSTRONG, *Multiple Roads to Knowledge Management*
Taking the wrong road can be dangerous. If you go too far without making sure you are in the right direction, you might end up somewhere that can be harmful to your organization, your team, or even to yourself.

MICHAEL OPSTEEGH, *Planning and Creating Engaging Infographics*
Infographics are a powerful way of communicating large amounts of disparate data to inform or persuade your audience in a manner that is often more engaging than text alone. This presentation covers the different methods of displaying data, planning and wireframing, tools that can be used, and ethical considerations.

BILL SWALLOW, *Six Easy Ways to Control Your Localization Costs*
There is a continually growing need to deliver content in multiple languages for a diverse geographic and cultural audience. The cost of producing all of this information can seem staggering, but there are some fundamental ways in which you can lower these costs.

JEAN-LUC MAZET, *Take Control of Your Content*
The source of all evil is The Source. Do you want to learn more about controlled authoring tools and practices to facilitate, control, and automate content creation tasks? This tool-agnostic session will present advantages and raise questions about using these tools for content development, translation, and maintenance.

HALCYON LAWRENCE, *Using Foreign-Accented Speech: To Localize or Not?*
There are currently more non-native speakers of English in the world than native speakers, yet existing speech-mediated applications marginally reflect this fact—in part because not enough is known about how people will respond to accented speech-mediated technologies. This presentation addresses the conditions best suited for use of foreign-accented speech.

KEES VAN MANSOM, *Using Semantic Technology to Create Process-Driven Documentation*
Online documentation often requires users to search for information and interpret it within their context. This session demonstrates how, by using semantic technologies, instructions can be embedded in a process and made actionable, providing users the right information at the right time and making their actions reproducible.

Track: Content Strategy and Design

RAHIEL BAILE, *Big Content: Content Strategy as a Design Framework*
Content becomes the lynchpin around which the rest of the design, technology, and user experience revolve. Good content is the logical nexus of the user experience; it makes sense to start a project with the content. Content strategy promises to upend the framework used for development projects.

R. N. HOMER CHRISTENSEN, *Collaborative Single-Source Development of Documentation and Training*
This session provides a fast-paced exploration of how the presenter’s company developed and implemented a multi-author, single-source (non-DITA) workflow into a project mid-stream to provide a flexible, well-received set of documentation and training materials for the world’s largest prison system. He will discuss general principles, getting buy-in from management and team members, challenges, and the pay-offs.

CHARLES COOPER and ANN ROCKLEY, *Content Strategy for Mobile Devices*
Mobile has forever changed the way people access and interact with your content. This session introduces the concepts of mobile content strategy and design and the tools you need to address the requirements of the customer, the content to be delivered, and the ever-changing array of devices for delivery.

ANDREA AMES and ALYSON RILEY, *Defining and Evaluating Success: Metrics for Information Architects*
Demonstrate your impact on your customers and business! Make better design decisions! Discuss and learn to define metrics, evaluate, and articulate the value of your strategic architecture and content initiatives.

SCOTT DELOACH, *Embedded User Assistance 101*
In this session, the presenter will share examples of real-world embedded UA and discuss how you can get started creating embedded UA for your new or existing projects.

SARA WACHTER-BOETTCHER, *Flexible Content Demands Future-Ready Your users are mobile and they expect your content to be. But locked into inflexible pages and documents, today’s content isn’t ready for the world of responsive sites, apps, APIs, and read-later services. Instead of scrambling to make more content, you need content that does more: Content that’s structured so it can travel and shift while keeping its meaning intact. But structured content isn’t just about your CMS. It affects your whole organization.*
ALAN PORTER, From Technical Writer to Content Strategist
Content strategy is a hot topic right now. The rise in corporate awareness of the value of content represents a great opportunity for technical writers to leverage their skills and experience. This session will help you position yourself to take advantage of that opportunity.

EDNA ELLE, Managing and Optimizing Unstructured-to-Structured Conversions
This session describes steps to manage and optimize conversions from unstructured content to XML. It includes planning strategies and pre-conversion tasks, tips, and tools that save time and yield more accurate conversions.

VAL SWISHER, The 10 Golden Rules of Global Content Strategy
A global content strategy is a structure for managing all of your content that is consumed by people in languages other than the source. Take the best of unified content strategy and Web strategy, put them into a blender, puree, and garnish with many languages. Voila!

LEE LEFEVER, The Art of Explanation
Description to be determined.

MOLLYE BARRETT, The Content Life Cycle: A Strategic Compass
Use the content life cycle to help identify business requirements for how content must be treated, handled, and processed. This session will demonstrate how to analyze the content life cycle for workflow improvements, automation, and ways to measure cost, and provide the basis for identifying hardware, software, and human requirements.

SARAH O’KEEFE, Transforming Technical Content into a Business Asset
Technical content is often the last in line for investment and innovation, but poor content has profound effects inside and outside the organization. Before relegating technical content to the necessary evil role with minimal investment, consider whether it might actually be less expensive to create high-quality technical information.

Track: Education and Training

JAMIE GILLENWATER, Create Learning that Lasts with Interactive Documents
Take a lesson from the trainer’s handbook: Engage your users with interactive chunks of information. Learn how to apply adult learning styles through various tools.

TOM JOHNSON, Creating Video Tutorials in an Agile Environment
In agile environments, video tutorials often have a short shelf-life—remaining current only until the next release. When you create videos, therefore, you have to create them inexpensively and quickly. At the same time, you must maintain professional standards for the visual display and sound quality.

PHYLISE BANNER, Massive Open Online Learning
This session will explore design strategies and delivery processes related to Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Focus will be on using the MOOC as a framework for professional development and workplace learning.

NICKY BLEIEL, SAUL CARLINER, and TOM JOHNSON, User Assistance, Tech Comm, and Learning
This panel will explore the role of user assistance in learning for the workplace and why this is important. We will invite the audience to join us in a conversation about how learning happens through UA and techniques we can use to make our UA more effective learning resource.

Track: People, Projects, and Business Management

ALYSSA FOX, Bending Without Breaking: Info Dev Flexibility in Agile
This session helps technical communicators face challenges in agile planning and execution. It’s increasingly common for writers to work on multiple agile teams. The session includes tips for better communication and teamwork on your agile team, with the goal of a “whole team approach” in mind.

ALYSON RILEY, Building Effective IA Teams in Resource-Challenged Times
How do you build a world-class team of information architects? Adopt a collaborative, community-based approach with corporate-level sponsorship. Learn techniques to break down organizational barriers, lead with a common vision and set of goals, navigate tricky political waters, drive change with metrics, and grow IA skills.

JENNA MOORE, Documentation Thrives in an Agile Methodology
The agile software development methodology offers new opportunities for documentation teams to integrate schedules, eliminating many traditional blocks that have stood in the way of timely and accurate information development. When documentation is included in the agile schedule, everybody wins. Learn how to make your agile documentation project thrive.

LISA PIETRANGELI, How to Build a Business Case and Influence
In this workshop, the presenter will address the information and tools necessary to influence change and present a case for improvements at your company. Through use of an actual case study and practical tools, you will explore how to start building a case as a group.
KNIVES—AND SHARES THEM IN THIS SESSION.

WILL ALWAYS REMEMBER SEVEN CAREER WRITING AND STAFFING COMPANY, BUT LATER, HE NOW HAS HIS OWN TECHNICAL JOB SELLING GINSU KNIVES. FIFTEEN YEARS THE PRESENTER WAS Laid OFF IN THE 1990s LEARNED FROM SELLING GINSU KNIVES.

KIRSTY TAYLOR, AND THEN THERE WAS ONE ... DOCUMENTATION TEAM

This session discusses keeping your sanity in a merger. In the past year, the presenter’s team of technical communicators was merged with another team merger—culture, standards, time differences, and multiple Englishes. Kirsty will look at the facets of a doc team merger—culture, standards, time differences, and multiple Englishes.

JACK MOLISANI, CAREER LESSONS I LEARNED FROM SELLING GINSU KNIVES

The presenter was laid off in the 1990s and a friend offered him a summer job selling Ginsu knives. Fifteen years later, he now has his own technical writing and staffing company, but will always remember seven career lessons he learned from selling Ginsu knives—and shares them in this session.

HANNAH MORGAN AND BEN WOELK, EMPOWERING THE INTROVERT WITHIN: BECOMING AN OUTSTANDING LEADER

Introverts possess a quiet confidence that commands respect. When you leverage the innate strengths of introverts—self awareness, concern, and communication—you gain recognition as a leader. Discover how you can become an outstanding leader.

JENNIFER ANTHONY, CARRIE CHAMBERS, BARBARA GIAMMONA, SABINA HORIGAN, RICK MERWIN, AND BIANCA SZCZESNIAK, INTERVIEWING SMEs: COVERING THE BASES AND HITTING HOMERS

Is it only an urban legend that brownies will guarantee that a Subject Matter Expert will make time to meet with you? And when s/he does agree to meet, how do you make good use of that time? Come learn SME-handling tips from this multi-industry, multi-generational panel of experts.

CRAIG BAEH, HILLARY HART, JOEL KLINE, AND LIZ POHLAND, REANIMATING THE TC BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

Since June 2012, a team of STC members and staff has been redeveloping the beta knowledge portal known as the TC BOK (Technical Communication Body of Knowledge) for launch at the STC Summit in Atlanta. The overall goal of the project was to reinvigorate the design, content, and delivery of the TC BOK, filling in gaps in content and integrating the development site with the STC website. This presentation introduces the new beta version and each lead facilitator describes his/her specific focus:

- Information development and content management
- Community and social engagement
- Editing and integration of publications/intellectual property
- Resource development

Come and see how you can use and contribute to this important resource for the profession.

LAURA PALMER, STAKING YOUR CLAIM IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA FRONTIER

This session explores the roles for technical communicators who would like to be involved with social media. The presenter will engage participants with the critical intersections of tech comm and social media competencies for risk management, tone/style development, communication strategies, training, SME knowledge, and strategic integration of multiple social media channels.

Track: User Experience and Usability

MIKE PACIELLO, ACCESSIBILITY

Description to be determined.

KAI WEBER, ADDICTED TO MEANING: MENTAL MODELS FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATORS

This presentation explores how “meaning” works in technical communication, why it fails, and how you can create meaningful documentation. Drawing on the cognitive psychology of mental models and user experience design, Kai shows with examples why minimalism works but FAQs don’t, and how to write for users without irritating them.

WHITNEY QUENSENBERRY, CONTENT FOR EVERYONE: MAKING INFORMATION AND MULTIMEDIA ACCESSIBLE

Information is critical, whether reading an article or using an application. And content authors are critical to accessibility. From informative headings to links that make sense to meaningful alternatives for images or multimedia, making content understandable and perceivable is the front line of accessibility. If the audience can’t read and understand the information, then it might as well not be there. Come learn how to make sure that your documents, websites, help, or application content is accessible for everyone.

DONN DEBOARD, CUSTOMER JOURNEY MAPS: VISUALIZING AN ENGAGING CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Customer journey maps visually illustrate your customer’s experience using your product. We’ll define customer journey maps, their components, and how to create them. We’ll discuss the benefits of customer journey maps and how we can measure success. Finally, we’ll create a customer journey map for a real-world situation.

KAREN BACHMANN, EFFECTIVELY COMMUNICATING UI AND INTERACTION DESIGN

Effective design documentation helps ensure the final UI matches the original user goals and informs required changes that are inevitable during a project. Learn what content to include in design documentation as well as different delivery approaches to help communicate effectively with the project teams.
with them through your writing. Creating mini-personas; and conversing measurable, user-focused purposes; see the power of writing specific, and a fun practice exercise, you'll evaluate your work. With examples way to successfully plan, create, and personas, and conversations as a Learn and practice making purposes, gamification's impact on documentation, and gain strategies and best practices enterprises will have at least one gamified market research predicts that 70% of near you. are you prepared? In 2015, gamification is coming soon to a product. attend this session to understand experience skill becomes required transition from usability expert to user experience architect. Emphasis is placed on making UX an essential and valued role in the requirements definition process. This presentation is particularly appropriate for developers of software or Web applications and documentation professionals who support them.

CHAR JAMES-TANNY, Writing for Everyone: SEO, ESL, Translation, and Accessibility “Keep your feet on the floor. Keep your hands on your lap. Keep your eyes on me.” During this session, you will learn about the benefits of consistency, word selection, and careful sentence structure. While anaphora (a rhetorical device using repetition for emphasis) is a valid technique, it can lead to confusion. “Keep” does double duty, meaning “place” in the first two but “watch” in the third. The words we write are available to everyone (blogs, Twitter, Facebook, and more) so we no longer know our audience. Writing needs to be for everyone and easier for them to get the information they need, reduce confusion, translation costs, improve searches, and optimize content strategy.

DOnte ORmSBY, How to Build a Referral Machine What do successful websites do that others do not? We’re revealing the common traits all successful websites share and how you can duplicate their techniques. Learn the common pitfalls that prevent websites from succeeding and the simple steps you can take today to start converting visits into referrals.

ROBERT hERSHENOW, Make High-Quality Voice Recordings with Simple Equipment Increase the quality of your voice recordings, easily and at low cost. Learn about microphones, room acoustics, effective techniques, and why audio quality matters—all in simple, nontechnical language.

MAthEW PIERCE, Screen Video: Best Practices, Regardless of the Tool Screen videos are used for tutorials or sharing any type of information. Come practice skills that everyone should use before creating a screen recording. Discussion will include concepts of how to create great videos through the editing process and how to choose the file format right for you.
Historic Atlanta: Places to See During the 2013 STC Summit

BY JAMES RYAN GREGORY | Student Member

ATLANTA IS A CITY rich in history; from the Civil War to Martin Luther King Jr., tourists and history buffs alike will find places of interest to visit. When you're attending sessions at the 2013 STC Summit in Atlanta, find time to explore the city and the surrounding region. The northwestern corner of Georgia has much to offer the visitor interested in the American past, whether the ancient or the more modern variety.

For instance, about thirty miles north of the Atlanta perimeter freeway (I-285), you can step back to the days before European settlement in the Americas and visit the Etowah Indian Mounds Historic Site. The six earthen mounds of Etowah—one of which is over 60 feet tall and covers three acres at its base—are part of the best-preserved Mississippian culture site in the Southeast. The Southern Appalachian Mississippian people constructed and dwelled in the mounds, temples, and town of Etowah from 1000 to 1550 A.D. In addition to the residential and burial mounds, several features remain for you to explore: a defensive ditch, an elevated ceremonial plaza, and the borrow pits that provided the soil for constructing the mounds. A trail along the Etowah River offers insight into the ways that Native Americans utilized the natural environment for food and medicine, and a museum houses artifacts discovered in the relatively few archaeological excavations carried out on the site.

Moving forward to more recent eras (and closer to the city of Atlanta itself), the Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park provides opportunities to explore and experience a significant battleground of the American Civil War. From 18 June to 2 July 1864, over 5,000 soldiers were killed on this site in a series of confrontations between Confederate troops under Joseph E. Johnston and Union forces led by General William Tecumseh Sherman. An important point in the struggle for Atlanta, the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain ended in a Confederate victory. Today the park established on the battlefield offers over 17 miles of interpretive walking trails, a visitor center, three major battle sites, a restored nineteenth-century farmhouse, and three monuments to the soldiers who died in the fighting. The park is roughly 10 miles northwest of the Atlanta perimeter freeway and about 30 miles south of the Etowah Indian Mounds.

Atlanta’s place in American history doesn’t stop here; from the Civil War to civil rights and beyond, there remains much to explore. It was in this city on 15 January 1929 that Martin Luther King Jr., the most significant figure of the Civil Rights Era, was born. Dr. King’s birth home and the neighborhood surrounding it are now part of a National Historic Site that includes Dr. King’s family church and his tomb, among other buildings. Dr. King was baptized in Ebenezer Baptist Church and later served as co-pastor there with his father. Both the church and the adjacent memorial park in which Dr. King’s grave is located are open for self-guided tours. The tomb itself rests on a pedestal in the middle of a large reflecting pool. Guided tours of the birth home at 501 Auburn Avenue are available on a first-come, first-served basis. These tours are held throughout the day but accommodate only up to 15 people and fill up quickly, so arrive early to reserve a space. (Free tickets are available from the information desk inside the King Center at 449 Auburn Avenue.)

The birth home of Martin Luther King Jr.
in the Beaux-Arts style completed in 1911. The hotel was the site of celebrations for the premiere of the film adaptation of Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind* in 1939. (Mitchell was an Atlanta native and wrote her famous novel here.) There are also shops on the ground level of the nearby Ponce de Leon Apartments, the first luxury high-rise built in Atlanta, which are open during regular business hours.

Whatever your historical interests, Atlanta has something to offer. Why not take the time to get to know the city during the Summit this May?

**Etowah Indian Mounds**

*Hours:* Wednesday–Saturday, 9:00 AM–5:00 PM

*Admission:* $3.50–$5.50 (Group rates available with advance notice.)

*Address:* 813 Indian Mounds Rd. SW, Cartersville, GA 30120

*Website:* [www.gastateparks.org/etowahmounds](http://www.gastateparks.org/etowahmounds)

**Kennesaw Mountain National Battlefield Park**

*Hours:* Daily, 7:30 AM–8:00 PM

*Admission:* Free (Weekend shuttle rides to the mountain top cost $1–$2.)

*Address:* 900 Kennesaw Mountain Drive, Kennesaw, GA 30152

*Website:* [www.nps.gov/kemo/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/kemo/index.htm)

**Martin Luther King, Jr. National Historic Site**

*Hours:* Daily, 9:00 AM–6:00 PM

*Admission:* Free

*Address:* The King Center, 449 Auburn Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30312

*Website:* [www.nps.gov/malu/index.htm](http://www.nps.gov/malu/index.htm)

**Fox Theatre and Fox Theatre Historic District**

*Address:* The Fox theatre, 660 Peachtree St. NE, Atlanta, GA 30308

*Fox Theatre Website:* [www.foxtheatre.org](http://www.foxtheatre.org)

*Historic District Website:* [www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/fhd.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/atlanta/fhd.htm)

---

**Are You a User Experience Professional?**

**BY CORY LEBSON, DIRECTOR OF STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS | User Experience Professionals Association**

ON BEHALF OF the User Experience Professionals Association (UXPA), we are very excited to begin a strategic partnership with STC.

Established in 1991 as UPa, and recently renamed, UXPA supports people who create and evaluate the user experience of products and services. The UXPA ([www.usabilityprofessionals.org](http://www.usabilityprofessionals.org)) holds international conferences, publishes new findings through both the *Journal of Usability Studies (JUS)* and through *User Experience Magazine*, and has 50 chapters around the world. The UXPA’s goals are to:

- Be an authoritative source on the practice of usability, user-centered design (UCD), and user experience (UX).
- Facilitate professional development and education within the field of user experience
- Promote the business value of user experience, research, design and evaluation to business and other entities.
- Foster a community of user experience professionals through knowledge sharing and networking.

In 2013, UXPA will hold two conferences. In July, we will have a conference in Washington, DC, and in November, in Shanghai, China. For more information, please visit [www.uxpa2013.org](http://www.uxpa2013.org).

Do you want to learn more about UXPA? Find us on Twitter @uxpa_int, on [Facebook](http://www.facebook.com/#!/groups/404691612915081/), and on [LinkedIn](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/User-Experience-Professionals-Association-717).
U.S. Members: Deduct Your STC Dues

YOU MAY BE ABLE to deduct membership fees or dues you pay to STC. However, you can deduct only the amount that is more than the value of the benefits you receive.

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 2012 may be deducted only from 2012 tax returns.
- If you paid your 2012 dues in 2012, they may be deducted from your 2012 taxes.
- If you paid your 2013 dues on or before 31 December 2012, these dues may be deducted only from your 2012 return.

Members who have questions should contact their local IRS office, read IRS publication 526 and 17, or contact their accountant.

You can claim dues as a deduction in one of several ways: as 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 an amount that exceeds the dues charged for that membership. It may still be deductible as a business expense as noted below.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, STC is a qualified organization and is required by law to notify members of the value of tangible benefits received as part of their dues payment. In 2012, the tangible value is $30 ($14 for Technical Communication and $16 for Intercom). This amount or prorated portion (if a member for less than 12 months) should be deducted from total dues payment to arrive at charitable contribution amount.

Example: $195 for basic membership minus $30 in tangible benefits equals a deductible amount of $165.

Business Expense
Employers and self-employed consultants may consider amounts paid as a business expense for all STC membership categories, including Gold membership.

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 does not provide formal tax advice for individuals regarding their personal tax situation.

Share Yourself with Intercom Readers

We’re looking for members to contribute a first-person column for a future issue of Intercom. The magazine has a trio of member-focused columns: My Job (your day-to-day work), Off Hours (discussing your hobby or side gig), and Looking Back. My Job takes a look at the day-to-day work of an STC member and what makes the job interesting, fun, or unique. Off Hours is a look at the side jobs and hobbies our members have. And Looking Back focuses on senior members providing perspective earned throughout their career. Would you like to share your story with Intercom readers? Email Kevin Cuddihy, kevin.cuddihy@stc.org, for more information, samples, and to volunteer!
By Thomas Barker

Technical communicators in education are always looking for ways to engage students in course materials. Time-honored methods, such as using discussions, exercises, blogs, forums, and quizzes, not to mention the old hack, the “reading response,” can help in this. But we know that syndrome of student attention and engagement, and even if you manage to light a fire one day with one approach, that same approach the next day might lead to students reaching for their phones or starting on their lunch in class. How to engage students challenges teachers constantly.

In technical communication classrooms, the challenge is even stronger because of the sense of professional practice that underlies all our teaching. The workplace challenge, the relationship to the “real world” experience of writing and publishing, is strong in our work. Course outcomes demand that students master complex workplace practices. Workplace practices demand not just understanding but application. Teaching professional writing challenges us to find ways to integrate these demands in ways that interest students.

The user persona, from the toolkit of the professional communicator and usability expert, offers one possible alternative to made up exercises, quizzes, or reading response reports. In this article I look at definitions of personas and how they tie in with educational goals. Then I report on how one might use personas as learning identities in the professional writing classroom to engage students in the professional and workplace aspects of writing.

What Is a Persona?

A persona, as defined by Usability.gov, is “a fictional person who represents a major user group for your site.” According to Usability.gov, “Personas help you identify major user groups of your website. You select the characteristics that are most representative of those groups and turn them into a persona.” User personas have been around since John Carroll popularized...
the idea of scenario-based documentation in the 1990s. The concept behind personas challenged documenters to construct narratives of usage for manuals and help as an alternative to menu- or feature-oriented documentation. Personas got a boost in popularity from Alan Cooper’s treatment of them in *The Inmates are Running the Asylum*, where he validated the use of personas for interface design, a validation that technical writers quickly took up to use in Web design and information product design.

Personas are well known to members of the Society for Technical Communication as models for persons to identify themselves as users of the Body of Knowledge Portal (http://stcbok.editime.com/). Members of the Usability and User Experience community study personas as ways of shaping testing materials for information products. But the connection between personas and learning in the technical communication classroom may not be so familiar to instructors.

Most persona use in education falls into what one might expect: using personas for the design of programs. For this use, those doing a needs analysis for a new educational program, say, in engineering, would employ personas to model students and do analyses for program design. For classroom use, however, their potential remains untapped. Sure, an instructor might construct an “in-class persona” to help remediate teaching. Such a strategy introduces a critical element of a persona, that it represents a real person but isn’t the real person. It’s “you but not you” for the sake of displacing your experience and introducing the element of control and focus into teaching. Teacher personas offer important means for instructors to construct their identity as teachers and, because of the displacement of identity, away from the personal toward the professional. Such identities are not fixed but fluid, variable, and, to some extent, controllable. In this dimension, the persona has a clear connection not just to the identities of customers or users and of teachers, but of learners themselves.

**Personas as Learning Identities**

Learning identities, those personas developed over time and reflecting a “stance toward life experience,” lie at the heart of the kind of engagement with concepts mentioned earlier. Alice and David Kolb, educational psychologists from Case Western Reserve University, cite the work of fellow psychologist Carl Rogers in describing how learning identities work. People with a learning identity, they argue, see themselves as learners and engage with life experiences with an inherent belief that they can learn. Learning identities lie at the heart of the kind of experiential learning explored by technical communicator John Carroll in his influential book, *The Minimal Manual*. Another pioneer in the area of learning identities, Paulo Friere in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, argued that oppressed individuals needed to construct an identity that enabled them to reflect on experience critically and take action to transform it.

For professional communication instructors, the challenge to get students to take a critical stance toward their research, reading, and project experience is a high goal. I found it particularly challenging in a community service-learning course in which students spent time doing risk assessment, management, and communication projects for organizational clients. Our dry readings on assessment processes, hazard identification, workplace safety legislation, and health and safety seemed to demand an alternative to quizzes and reading responses. Taking inspiration from my background in technical communication, I constructed an activity using the concept of learning identities to help students find ways to interact productively with their course material.

In the next section, I will outline the basic approach I took in my class and offer suggestions for how it might be adapted by other instructors looking for a new approach to student engagement.

**Learning Identities Exercise**

To create learning identities exercises for my students, I followed a four-step process. That process required me to find representative professionals in the workplace as starter identities, and then help my students work from these exemplary profiles to create a set of characteristics that could function for them as a learning identity, in the guise of which they could engage with our readings.

**Phase One: Find the Model Identities**

Risk communication is a rich field of endeavor, with practitioners in areas like chemical and environmental engineering, education and training, management and quality control, government policy, and communication consulting. I used public Internet sites that featured professional profiles (which abound in all areas of industry, government, and education) to identify persons with interests in risk communication from four major employment roles: research scientist, facilities manager, government minister, and risk communicator. Looking over these exemplary role models, I found the characteristics that seemed to construct their identity: educational background, project work, interests, employment history, and, to some extent, values and personal characteristics. I shared these profiles with my students and asked them to reflect on how they themselves might identify with or someday even have careers similar to those in the model identities. I think it helped that they were real people, often with photographs.

**Phase Two: Create an Identity Survey**

I wanted my students to see themselves as professionals and so I created a survey that included questions geared toward helping them make career decisions that they thought were conducive to their interests, and also to identify characteristics they shared. For example, I asked them to choose
their educational background, their discipline, and their preferred research methods. They were also encouraged to select mentors (from the profiles we had discussed earlier) and to select special issues (e.g., policy formulation, use of social media, worker health and safety) that they found interesting. Similarly, students chose work environments (e.g., laboratory, industry), associates (e.g., other specialists, teams), and personal styles and values. Many of them felt comfortable, for example, with an authoritarian instead of an egalitarian style, or with being process-oriented instead of product-oriented. Above all, the students chose traits that reflected their own personal interests, but that would work also on a professional level.

Once the students took the survey, I composed narratives of their learning identities that they could then use as an interpretive lens when reading or exploring resource material.

**Rick Sanchez, Risk Management and Communications Officer**

Rick uses his BA in business and MA in management and policy to help the Alberta Provincial Health and Safety Policy Division create and formulate effective community health policy. He has worked with Yvonne Winslow, freelance writer and science media specialist, to develop collaborative, community-based risk management policies for the province. Rick also teaches a health and safety course at a local college and presents regularly at the Alberta Conference on Workplace Health and Safety (ACWHS).

**Personal Statement**

“I enjoy working with my colleagues and in small communication teams to develop community health efforts. I just like watching small-scale efforts have large-scale results. I approach my work in a casual way, but like all my efforts to result in effective communication products. My favorite quote is from Aristotle, ‘Democracy arose from men thinking that if they are equal in any respect they are equal in all respects.’”

**Keywords:** health, safety, community, risk, management, government, policy, consulting, university, business.

**Phase Three: Use Learning Identities in Activities**

Students could now follow exercises with a degree of focus brought about by their “you-but-not-you” learning identity. For example, “From the perspective of your learning identity, find an article [from a health and safety magazine] that a) you might find valuable in your work, b) you might want to suggest to your associates or mentor, or c) reflects the kinds of values you think are important. Read the article. Write a brief paragraph telling why you chose this article.” Another exercise listed some risk communication websites and suggested the following: “From the point of view of your learning identity, pick a topic or concern that you face in your work. Then research that topic on the three websites above. Imagine you have been asked by your employer to suggest good Web resources for your colleagues. Write a brief critique of the websites, explaining what treasures or what gaps you find in them. Keep your issue or concern in mind as you write.”

**Phase Four: Evaluate the Use of the Learning Identities**

The results of a focused investigation of resources, such as indicated above, using learning identities as a filter proved to be mixed (as one might expect when trying something out for the first time). While some students saw their constructed identities as an interesting challenge that motivated them to look for something new in their reading experience, others questioned the activity, wondering why they just couldn’t use their own identities. Their reactions to using these lenses for a few exercises suggested ways one might adapt the process. For example, it seemed important that the students felt comfortable that the identity they created really did reflect “who they were” as well as “who they might be.” Similarly, I found it useful to remind them of their identity and use it in class discussions that ensued from their readings. In sum, the students’ willingness to enter into the persona, or learning identity, was what made the experiment somewhat successful.

**Conclusion**

The challenge of engaging students in readings and research faces all teachers. Those fortunate enough to have the tools of the technical communicator at hand can find some ideas, in this case personas, that they can adapt to a variety of learning situations. And, as I found, just trying something like this is a learning experience in itself.

**THOMAS BARKER** (ttbarker@ualberta.ca) is professor in the Communications and Technology Graduate Program at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada.

---

**FURTHER READING**


Rediscover the Value of STC Membership

When our members asked for more value, we took it to heart. We’ve added new benefits and services, changed our community-funding model based on member feedback, increased recruitment incentives, and reduced the cost of dues for on-time renewal, all while redoubling our dedication to member support and satisfaction.

New benefits at a glance for 2013:

- Over 70 free members-only archived Web seminars
- Free access to the annual STC Salary Database
- Free sponsored live webinars on hot topics and tools
- Discounts on software, products, and services through the new STC affinity program

In addition, members still receive all the benefits they’ve come to expect, from free access to our publications to discounts on education, conference, and the new Certified Professional Technical Communicator™ program.

“Returning after 10 years ... STC is new and different (and I’d say improved). ...I have already taken advantage of a number of the free webinar courses and so far they have all been great!!! I've joined several SIGs and am eager to get involved in each of them. So far I have been quite pleased with what STC has to offer and definitely plan on renewing my membership for the foreseeable future!”

— Melanie Lee, 2012 STC Member

Classic membership dues are now $225. Go to stc.org/renew today!
Mark Your Calendar

Organization events across the globe

1 7–8 March
The 2013 Mid-Atlantic Technical Communication Conference and Workshops: Sharpening Your Personal Brand, hosted by the STC Philadelphia Metro Chapter, takes place 7–8 March at the Giant Conference Center in Willow Grove, PA. For more information, please contact: STC-PMC
www.stc PMC.org/
conference

2 21–23 March
STC Rochester is proud to partner with Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) to bring you Spectrum 2013, from 21-23 March at RIT. For more information, contact: STC Rochester
http://spectrum .stc-rochester.org
spectrum@stc-rochester.org

3 26–27 March
The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) hosts the Connect 13 Conference at the NYU Kimmel Center in New York, NY. For more information, contact: PRSA
+1 (800) 350-0111
www.prsa.org/Conferences/ Connect/

4 3–7 April
The American Society for Information Science and Technology (ASIS&T) will hold the IA Summit in Baltimore, MD. For more information, contact: ASIS&T
asis@asis.org
http://2013.iasummit.org/

5 14–17 April
The International Society for Performance Improvement (ISPI) will hold its Performance Improvement Conference at the Silver Legacy Resort in Reno, Nevada. For more information, contact: ISPI
+1 (301) 587-8570
conference@ispi.org
www.ispi.org/AC2013

6 17–19 April
The American Society for Indexing (ASI) will be holding its annual conference at the Hotel Contessa in San Antonio, TX. For more information, contact: ASI
conference@asindexing.org
www.asindexing.org/

7 3–6 May
The Council of Science Editors (CSE) will hold its annual meeting, “Communicate Science Effectively: The World Depends On It,” at the Fairmont Queen Elizabeth in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. For more information, contact: CSE
+1 (703) 437-4377
CSE@CouncilScience Editors.org
www.councilscience editors.org

8 5–8 May
The Society for Technical Communication celebrates its 60th anniversary with its annual Technical Communication Summit. The 2013 Summit takes place in the Hyatt Regency in Atlanta, GA. For more information, contact: STC
stc@stc.org
http://summit.stc.org

9 28–31 May
Join the Association of Proposal Management Professionals for their Bid & Proposal Con at the Westin Peachtree Plaza in Atlanta, GA. For details: APMP
www.apmp.org

10 10–12 October
The Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association (RMMMLA) is holding its annual conference in Vancouver, WA, at the Hilton Vancouver Washington from 10-12 October. For more information, contact: RMMMLA
www.mmla.org/

11 26–29 October
+1 (800) 350-0111
www.prsa.org/Conferences/ InternationalConference/

* STC-related event

F.Y.I. lists information about nonprofit ventures only. Please send information to intercom@stc.org.
From “I Hated Writing” to “It’s a Pretty Awesome Profession”

BY JENNIFER GARRY | Member

AS A STUDENT in high school and college, I was told several times that I should be a writer. My parents thought that I should combine my writing skills with my love of photography and become a photojournalist. All my English composition teachers and professors said things like, “Have you ever thought about being a writer?” There was only one problem: I hated writing. Every paper I had ever written was last minute. I couldn’t stand writing rough drafts and then proofreading and then making changes and then doing it all over again. It was almost painful to write papers. Like forcing a 10-year-old to sit and watch Dateline with his grandma. I could not wait to get my English composition classes over with.

I ended up going to college for a couple of photography degrees, one of which required an industrial electronics course that was only offered in the robotics department. I aced the course and transferred to the robotics and automated systems program after completing my photography degrees. After school I began an internship at a company that designs, builds, and services automated packaging equipment and integrates robotic systems. In 2007 I was hired as a full-time service technician.

When the economy fell, the company tried to keep as many employees as possible by spreading people out on various tasks. I was elected to help our part-time contract technical writer, Kim, with documenting changeover procedures for machine reference manuals. Kim said she knew right away that I was a good writer. I became one of her SMEs and did some writing when she needed help. As sales increased, Kim needed more and more help, and I was (surprisingly) more and more willing to step up. I was actually enjoying writing. It turns out that I enjoy the challenge of explaining complicated machinery to users who likely do not have an automation background.

Kim was (and still is) an amazing mentor. I didn’t know it at the time, but I was being groomed for a transition into full-time technical writing. I worked on the production floor and traveled for service between writing procedures and sequences for Kim. Sales continued to increase, and soon I was working full time as a technical writer. I worked with Kim to update existing manuals, create new manuals, and do side jobs for other departments. Eventually I assumed some managerial responsibilities, such as handling all the customer requests and interactions that were related to documentation.

About two years ago, our company began putting some serious time and effort into creating a formal training program for our customers. I fully believe in everything we are doing in our formal training development, and it’s incredibly exciting to be involved in building something like this from the ground up. Being involved from the beginning has also created a strong sense of pride; I take all of the compliments (and criticisms) to heart, and protect our materials like they’re my prized possessions. So far, we’ve had nothing but excellent feedback on the formal training sessions we’ve delivered.

Today I am the technical publications and training supervisor, and my responsibilities have continued to grow. My days can include (but are most definitely not limited to!) working with software engineers to gather programming information, with mechanical engineers to get operational information and drawings, with service technicians to understand processes and changes to equipment, and with the sales department on quoting training sessions and strategizing on training sales tactics (I secretly want to put this list in bullet form). I also develop quick references and training tools, write content for new reference manuals, and proof updates and changes to existing manuals. Needless to say, I have enough to keep me busy. Sometimes I miss the long days of just pure writing, but I still have the opportunity to write content while managing the challenges of a relatively new but impactful department that has grown to three people.

If 10 years ago someone had asked what I wanted to pursue for a career, I would have never, not in a million years, replied with “technical publications.” As it turns out, it’s a pretty awesome profession. ☻

Adobe® Technical Communication Suite 4
Now available at a monthly subscription of US$69!
Test-drive today at www.runaware.com/clients/adobe/techsuite.

Scan to read what experts have to say about the industry-leading technical communication toolkit.

* Adobe, the Adobe logo, Acrobat, Captivate, FrameMaker, Illustrator, and RoboHelp are either registered trademarks or trademarks of Adobe Systems Incorporated in the United States and/or other countries. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners.
© 2013 Adobe Systems Incorporated. All rights reserved.