



The Quill

The Newsletter for the Southwestern Ontario Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication



November 1999 Volume 11 Number 3

www.stc.waterloo.on.ca

Announcing Scholarship 2000

UW and WLU students can win up to \$1000

by Catherine McNair,
Scholarship Manager

Chapter scholarship planning for this year led to some intense debating on one subject in particular: which faculties' students should be eligible for the STC scholarship. On the one hand were those who wanted special recognition for the English faculties that particularly promoted the profession, and who wanted to help restore the imbalance of scholarships open to students in Math and Engineering.



On the other hand were those who felt that, since technical communicators do come from all academic backgrounds, and since writing ability had to be proven before the award would be granted, the STC scholarship should be open to all.

Both views have merit, but in the end, the latter view won out. Applications will be accepted from third- and fourth-year students enrolled in any faculty. Furthermore, in light of the fact that we now have a Wilfrid Laurier University

Student Liaison, we will accept applications from WLU students in addition to University of Waterloo students. The first prize is \$1000.

The second prize is \$500. Both winning students will also receive an STC membership.

Once again, we could use your assistance in helping to get the word out to qualified students.

Applications are available from our Web site, and from university undergraduate secretaries. They must be submitted by February 11, 2000, along with:

- A copy of the student's latest transcript, showing an average of at least 75%
- A 200-word explanation of why the award is deserved
- Two samples that demonstrate the student's ability in technical communication

The awards will be given out at our March 2, 2000 general meeting. We hope to see you there.



Workshop 2000

"Reinventing Technical Communication"

An inspirational look at Information Engineering

February 10-11, 2000

Announcing the Southwestern Ontario chapter workshop for 1999-2000. This year, we are very excited to offer a workshop presented by Mr. John Bowie. Mr. Bowie specializes in recognizing the myths and limitations technical communicators have lived and worked by for the past fifty years, and demonstrating why they are no longer valid. He will introduce a model of how users and products communicate; using this model, he'll identify failures in traditional methods of technical communication. The presentation contains several case studies, live demonstrations, and prototypes that illustrate these ideas.

Watch for more information and for details on how to register in upcoming issues of The Quill. Plan to attend!

Pamela Sittler,
Workshop committee manager

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Get a real job

To post a job or view the latest available positions, visit our new STC Toronto and Southwestern Ontario Job Bank at <http://www.stcutoronto.org/jobs/>

STC society for technical communication

Winners and Givers



Congratulations to the winners of the October meeting prize draw. Thanks to those who donated prizes.

Kristi Champ

T-shirt, pen

Donated by Kati Bujna of Spicer Corporation

Ena De Jong

T-shirt, pen

Donated by Kati Bujna of Spicer Corporation

Ronnie Seagren

Free STC Membership

Donated by STC Southwestern Ontario chapter

Senior Members

The grade of senior member is conferred automatically on each member after five years in the grade of member in the society. Senior members will receive certificates from STC.

Lise A. Cormier

Deborah A. Kerr

Alina R. Rutten

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Pg Dn

Sherry's sensible steps to a sexier index

October meeting offers tips on meeting user's needs

by [Nancy Halverson](#)

Indexing may not be everyone's favourite thing, but Sherry McMenemy is out to change your mind. Actually, she's on a mission to "Enlighten the world" to the powers of good indexing.

Her enthusiasm is infectious. In her presentation to the October general meeting — "Indexing your Docs — Efficiently and Effectively" she deftly showed how a good index improves our documents.

Aside from the ripple of laughter when Sherry exclaimed "Indexing is fun!", the audience paid close attention to Sherry's words of indexing wisdom. Obviously she was attracting new converts to her cause.

The value of a good index may not be apparent on the face of the document, but for most users, the index is the introduction. Not only is the index the first thing that the user sees, it is also a major navigational tool. And most of all, a good index will reduce the number of support calls — big ammunition when you're trying to get the suits outside!

Sherry has a background in adult education, and took on the study of indexing as an extension of her analytical type personality. She found that

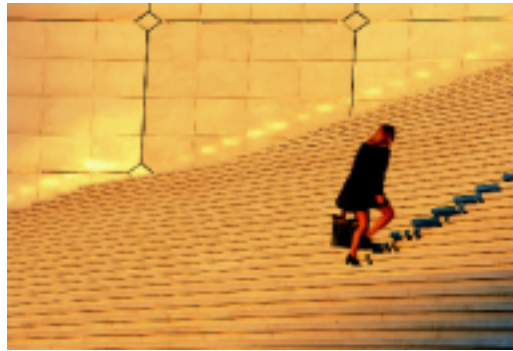
she could make her documents accessible to more people if she applied the theory of learning styles. There are apparently nine different learning styles, but ever the master of brevity, Sherry condensed her presentation to include the major three: analytic, associative, and kinetic. Sherry developed principles that create indexes that are 'comfortable' for these different styles.

As with all good documentation, planning is crucial. Sherry argues that the index must be planned into the project — not just the time (10%) and space (7-8%), but the keywords, glossary terms and some user-testing of the index. Her method of indexing calls for thinking proactively of the index — put guidelines in place (yes, right in the project plan) that cover the index, glossary, and table of contents. She also suggests that there be a contingency plan in the project plan covering the

index: sub-contract or bring in another writer if time is running short.

Sherry's principles for indexing fit in with the technical communicator's mantra: Meet the user's needs. Simple, eh?

After her presentation, she fielded some spirited questions and despite her lack of vision (the lights blinded her to the audience), she managed to effectively address all of the questions posed.



Is your job a pain in the neck?

Staying Healthy in a Computer-Based Workforce



Could your computer be jeopardizing your health? Come find out at our next general meeting as registered physiotherapist **Randall Helm** discusses repetitive motion injuries in the computer-based workplace. He'll teach us about the factors that contribute to computer-related pain syndromes, explain how posture and exercise (or lack thereof) affect our risk, and round it all off with some handy ergonomic tips we can take back to the office. See the calendar on page 6 for details. For additional information, contact [Ted Edwins](mailto:Ted.Edwins@mgl.ca), Program Manager (tjedwins@mgl.ca).

Life as an Internal Communications Specialist

Spotlight on local STC member Frances Gilgunn

Each month The Quill profiles one or more of the lovely and talented members that make up the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC. Find out where they work, what they do, and the types of skills they employ every day. This month local member Frances Gilgunn describes her role as an Internal Communications Specialist.

What I do and where I do it

Internal Communications Specialist,
Corporate Communications
Clarica Life Insurance Company
(formerly The Mutual Group)
Waterloo, ON

The background that got me here

I have a B.A. in Communications from Wilfrid Laurier University and a Post-Graduate Diploma in Human Resources Management from Humber College. I started my first job at Clarica as a Document Writer in our group insurance division, and then moved into a Technical Writer role in other lines of business throughout the company. Right now, I'm working in our Corporate Communications department as an Internal Communications Specialist. For the past seven years, I have been involved in a diverse range of writing and communication activities: designing and writing

Get those entries in

High school writing competition

First place \$200, Second place \$100
Deadline: Friday, November 26, 1999



Contact:
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spicer.com
or (519) 748-
4575 ext. 258

legal insurance contracts, employee benefit booklets, online policy and procedure manuals, newsletters, bulletins, forms, brochures, training materials and instructional job aids — pretty much anything that needed to be written. This meant I had to understand and learn financial terms and complex subject matter, acquire an in-depth knowledge of financial products, and analyze business processes and procedures.



Then, my final challenge was to make sense of all the information I had gathered and translate it into readable documentation for a wide-ranging audience.

My role as a communicator

In my current role as an Internal Communications Specialist, I'm involved with all aspects of employee communications:

- directing and writing content for our corporate intranet sites and assisting with the design and style of the site
- ensuring that our employee communications are in keeping with our new brand image ("clarity through dialogue")
- creating communications aimed at increasing employees' business literacy (e.g. stock market company education)
- researching, developing and communicating policies, processes and guidelines for key corporate initiatives
- counselling other corporate areas on how to best communicate sensitive or complex subject matter to employees
- measuring and evaluating the effectiveness of our employee communications

continued on page 7

Bad beginnings



Dishonourable mentions from this year's Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest (named after the man famous for the opener "It was a dark and stormy night...")

So far this year, Cary Yamanaka's skill in karate had netted him three trophies — two bowling, one golf.

Night was a mere threat on the quivering lip of the sky and the golden tongue of the sun still licked the recesses of the bridle path, when suddenly, an unnatural shriek emanated from the dark throat of the forest, causing stiff fingers of fear to march firmly down the spine of the motionless maiden.

At first Lisa felt terribly confused but now she just wasn't sure.

Correction

On page 3 of last month's issue, in the Riddle column, the word "passage" should have been "paragraph". But you knew that.

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Pg Dn

Don't call us...



Vice Presidents and personnel directors of the one hundred largest corporations were asked to describe some of the more unusual statements made by job candidates.

I have no difficulty in starting or holding my bowel movement.

At times I have the strong urge to do something harmful or shocking.

I feel uneasy indoors.

Sometimes I feel like smashing things.

Women should not be allowed to drink in cocktail bars.

I get excited very easily.

Up and running with quickstart HTML guide

A review of Elizabeth Castro's *HTML 4 for the World Wide Web*

by [Leanne Rollins](#)

As a busy manager of a thriving documentation department, I value quick and succinct answers. So when it came to learning HTML, I could have chosen to use a WYSIWYG editor, and simply by-passed learning the rudiments of HTML, but as I said, I like the fast way, not necessarily the easy way. I prefer to learn using a book, so off I went to the Computer bookstore. I asked the clerk for a book that taught HTML to novices, but you got you started immediately.

And voila, the clerk directed me to *HTML 4 for the World Wide Web*.

A member of the Visual Quickstart Series by Peachpit Press, this guide boasts that it "uses pictures rather than lengthy explanations. You'll be up and running in no time." Ok, I was skeptical, but for less than \$25, why not? Back at my desk, I got acquainted with the book.

The introduction gave me concise, practical information about versions and browsers, then the first chapter launched right into the idea of building blocks (tags). It didn't take long before I realized the intrinsic value of the book: practical, illustrated examples showing the tags used in a real context along with the output. Perfect!

The book uses a two-column format. One column shows numbered instructions and the other provides the HTML code and the result in a browser. No wading through long text-heavy paragraphs to get to the instructions I need. Everything broken out into chunks, each topic building on the previous. Beautiful. Being a purist at heart, I thoroughly enjoyed trying all of the examples provided in an ASCII text editor, tweaking the results to suit my own needs and watching the site come to life.

In a single afternoon, I learned how to use frames (more importantly, when not to!), implement cascading style sheets, create forms, and upload my site to a server for public consumption. But this book provides more than just basis instructions. At-a-glance browser limitations, tips, and supplemental topics make the book a quick and easy reference source. And it isn't just a one-time read. I refer to the book constantly as I develop more complicated and intricate sites.

Granted, the book lacks an in-depth boring history lesson, and it doesn't have an exhaustive reference section, but if you're looking for an accessible guide-you-by-the-nose entry point into HTML, you can't go wrong.

HTML 4 for the World Wide Web, Elizabeth Castro. Berkley, CA Peachpit Press, 1998 ISBN 0-201-69696-7



Welcome to the Southwestern Ontario chapter

by [Carrie Spira](#)

We'd like to welcome [Jim Weare](#) to the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC. He originally became interested in the STC in order to keep up to date on technical writing methods, and to develop networking contacts. He joined our chapter after receiving a warm welcome at our spring Wine and Cheese event. Jim is our liaison with Conestoga College.

Jim is a Communications Professor at Conestoga College in Kitchener. He teaches Business and Technical Communications to first- and second-year students. In addition, he is a partner in

Skopus Webdesign, a small business that caters to Internet communications for other small businesses in the K-W area. He also works as a communications training consultant on a contract basis. Currently he is under contract with Prentice-Hall to adapt an American Technical Writing textbook for use in Canadian Colleges.

Outside of work, Jim has many interests including ancient Romano-British history and woodworking.



Why you need *HTML: The Definitive Guide*

Don't call us...

A review of Chuck Musciano & Bill Kennedy's *HTML: The Definitive Guide*

by Naomi Bilodeau

HTML: The Definitive Guide doesn't waste time trying to tell you how cool HTML is. It doesn't attempt to seduce with pictures, or carefully hold your hand through pedagogically designed examples. What it does do is give you the tools you need to understand the tags behind HTML: simply, clearly, and in exhaustive detail.

Who needs this much information? You do. Because the HTML standard, isn't. As a markup language, HTML was never originally intended for desktop publishing and text layout.

HTML tags outline content types like paragraphs, headings, and lists, leaving style and form up to the web browser. Cascading style sheets and other innovations in the HTML 4.0 standard are a much-needed attempt to give control back to the author. Unfortunately, the leading browsers still implement HTML pretty much as they see fit. That makes editing through a WYSIWIG interface such as FrontPage or Dreamweaver tricky; the editor effectively has to second-guess which tags to use to apply your formatting. Even the best HTML editors have trouble coping. Sooner or later your editor will let you down. A solid understanding of the tags and what they do lets you fix those annoying spacing problems by editing the HTML tags yourself.

You can use this book in two ways. You can learn HTML from it, by starting at the beginning and reading your way through to the end. It starts out gently, with a quick summary of the basic structure of an HTML web page and some tips on site design. Unlike many other HTML books, this one emphasizes style and form, explaining the difference between good and bad usage. At first glance, this seems directed exclusively at masochists intent on editing their HTML code 'by hand'. Think your favourite HTML editor is

doing it by the book? Think again. The code generated by most WYSIWIG editors tends to be bloated and difficult for browsers to parse. Clean HTML code ensures predictable cross-platform results, and a shorter wait for your content-hungry audience. This book can teach you how to write (or recognize) HTML code that every browser will love. Once the basics are covered, the book progresses through more and more advanced tags, describing how they interact with each other and where different browsers implement them differently. By the time you get to the end of Chapter 15, you'll be an HTML guru.

But you don't have to work your way through the book a page at a time. Musciano and Kennedy also arm you with a great index, in-chapter summaries, 36 pages of appendices summarizing all the tags and attributes, the full HTML 4.0 DTD (for you SGML types who simply must have it), and complete lists of character entities (do you know how to say é and ™ in HTML?). Even if

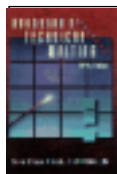
you only use it for untangling the occasional weirdness generated by your favourite WYSIWIG editor, the book's modular structure makes it easy to quickly find what you need and get out again (unless, like me, you get sidetracked easily, in which case reading it cover to cover may save you some serious time at the outset!). *The Definitive Guide* also strays briefly into simple CGI, JavaScript, and Java applets to illustrate HTML's boundaries and what you will need if you want to do more through a web browser interface.

In short, where *HTML: The Definitive Guide* truly excels is in its attention to detail. If you're delivering content in some HTML format, sooner or later you're going to need a solid grounding in HTML or a solid reference book to bail you out. Musciano and Kennedy's *Definitive Guide* somehow manages both. There is nothing quite so satisfying as a reference book that works. This one does, and it's one book I won't lend out to anyone.

HTML: The Definitive Guide, 3rd edition
Chuck Musciano & Bill Kennedy
Published by O'Reilly (\$46.95)



For a \$25 bookstore gift certificate, send book reviews (500-750 words) to the editor, sburke@spicer.com



I am fascinated by fire.

I like tall women.

People are always watching me.

Once a week, I usually feel hot all over.

Almost everyone is guilty of bad sexual conduct.

I never get hungry.

I know who is responsible for most of my troubles.

If the pay was right, I'd travel with the carnival.

I think I'm going to throw-up.



Best Practices of Today's Technical Writers

A minimalist, reader centred approach to technical writing.

Date: November 26, 1999
Time: 9 AM to 5 PM
(Sign-in: 8:30 AM)
Place: Maritime Hotel
(Guy & René-Lévesque)
Admission: \$215 for STC members, \$265 for non-members.

Getting Your Foot in the Door: System Design for Technical Writers

Many technical writers yearn to contribute to the design of the systems that they document. Do you need a good workshop to help understand system design?

Date: December 3, 1999
Time: 9 AM to 5 PM (Sign-in: 8:30 AM)
Place: Maritime Hotel
(Guy & René-Lévesque)
Admission: \$215 for STC members, \$265 for non-members

Full details on the workshops can be found at www.gordonandgordon.com

Upcoming Southwestern Ontario STC events

For updates, visit www.stc.waterloo.on.ca



NOVEMBER

Monday 15
Competition: Judges return entries

Thursday 18
Council Meeting
6:30 pm, Campana

Friday 26
Deadline for High School Competition

DECEMBER

Thursday 2
General Meeting
7 pm. UW Davis Centre Room 1302

Randall Helm will speak on Staying Healthy in a Computer-Based Workforce

Thursday 16
Council Meeting
6:30 pm, Campana

JANUARY

Thursday 6
General Meeting
T.B.A.

Thursday 20
Council Meeting
6:30 pm, Campana

STC Toronto events

Tuesday, November 9, 7:00 pm

The future is now. No more desktops! Companies are going the corporate portal route. Find out what corporate portals are and learn what Microsoft is doing with its Digital Dashboard.

Tuesday, December 14, 7:00 pm

Web-based training is hot and we've got an expert to talk about what it is and how to do it right!



Where: Burgundy Room, North York Memorial Community Hall
North York Civic Centre
5110 Yonge St., North York

Join us on the council and get in on the action

Get involved in the decision-making process at our monthly council meetings. Future discussion topics include a Consultants and Independent Contractors SIG, the chapter mission statement, and the chapter brochure.



Does that piece have pepperoni on it?

How to get there

- From Toronto:**
- take Hwy 401 West
 - exit North on Hwy 7/8 to Kitchener
 - follow Hwy 7 East
 - exit north on Hwy 86 to Waterloo
 - exit on Northfield Drive, merge right turn right on Kumpf Drive (immediate)
 - turn left on Randall Drive
 - the entrance to Campana is on the left immediately after crossing railway tracks (behind Focus building)



Meet Frances Gilgunn

continued from page 3

The scope of technical communication

Since starting my writing career, I have produced, using different PC programs, technical documentation and communications on a variety of insurance products, legislation, business processes and procedures and application systems for a wide ranging audience. This experience has led me to delve into other areas of communication and documentation including knowledge and database management, usability testing, project management, process analysis, HTML programming, and online help authoring. I'm also involved in developing and enforcing style guides, editorial guidelines and consistent writing standards, and advocating the use and application of plain language principles.

The most interesting project?

The most interesting and challenging project I worked on was the development and implementation of a brand new business application system. This complex system combined into one system all the tools our customer call centre staff would need to serve our customers efficiently and effectively. Our Information Technology area built this system from scratch and the technical writers working on the project had the good fortune of being involved right from the very beginning.

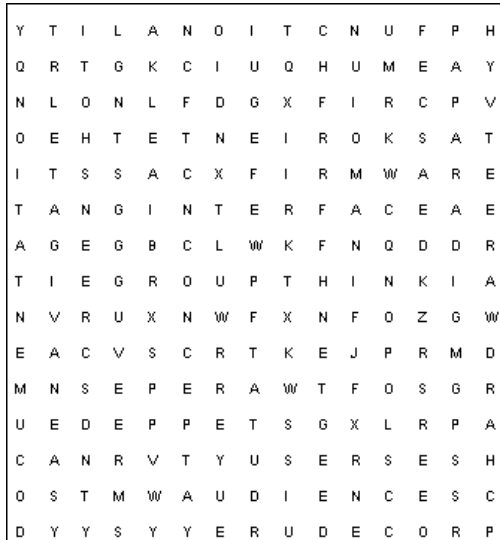
My task was to write the instructional job aids and determine workflow processes for this non-existent system. This meant I had to learn what the "phantom" or non-existent system was capable of doing as well as observe production activities to determine consistent and accurate work procedures and investigate and research changes, problems and inconsistencies in work procedures. I also had to interview trainers, business experts, and process designers to familiarize myself with various work procedures, test the usability and readability of my documentation, and provide training and support for users of the new system (resolving technical and navigational problems while using the system).



Read The Quill online at www.stc.waterloo.on.ca

Workday time-waster: Procedures

by [Carrie Spira](#)

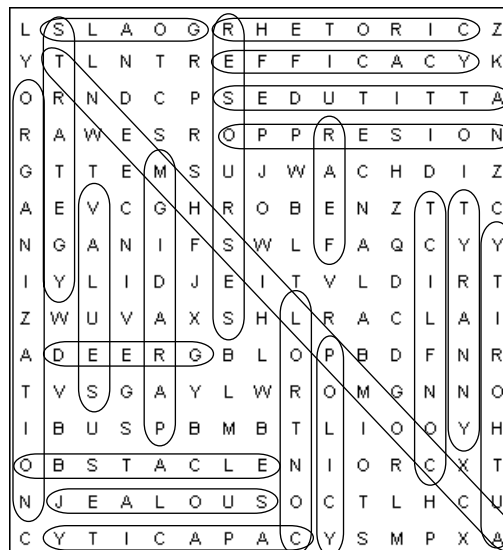


Words to Find

- | | | |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------|
| audience | GUI | screenshot |
| concept | hardware | selfexplanatory |
| documentation | interface | software |
| easy | navigate | stepped |
| firmware | paradigm | taskorient |
| functionality | procedure | users |
| groupthink | quick | |

Solution next month

Solution to last month's puzzle



Word trivia



The longest one-syllable word in the English language is "screched."

The symbol on the "pound" key (#) is called an octothorpe.

The dot over the letter 'i' is called a tittle.

The word "set" has more definitions than any other word in the English language.

'Stewardesses' is the longest English word that is typed with only the left hand

The only 15 letter word that can be spelled without repeating a letter is uncopyrightable.

About the Quill



The Quill is the official newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC). The Quill is published in Kitchener, Ontario monthly, except in January, July, and August, and distributed free to all local STC members. Material in this publication may be reprinted, provided the author and the Southwestern Ontario chapter of the STC are acknowledged. All readers are welcome to submit short articles, letters, and other interesting items relevant to technical communication to the editor. Please submit items at least one week prior to the date of the general meeting.

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Advertising

Business card \$10

1/4 page \$30
(\$20 for 3 or more issues)

1/2 page \$40
(\$30 for 3 or more issues)

Full page \$80
(\$60 for 3 or more issues)

End

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Deadline for the December issue:
Wednesday, November 24, 1:04 p.m.