



# The Quill



## Writing for Electronic Delivery

A workshop you won't want to miss

by Elaine Ruddock, Education Manager

Need to write text for a Help system? The web? Electronic delivery? Then you NEED to attend this workshop! *Writing for Electronic Delivery*, led by Jonathan Price, focuses on the writing style you need to develop if you want your electronic content to be easy to navigate, easy to understand, and easy to use.

Created for anyone who must prepare text for display on a computer screen, this workshop explains why the traditional styles we have used when writing on paper do not work in the electronic medium, offers detailed guidelines for e-text, writing exercises, and extensive discussion, as well as case studies of the prose style with help system and website examples. Based on extensive research, the in-depth handout gives you the background for each guideline, and plenty of opportunities to try your hand at writing in this new style.

By the end of this course you'll learn, among other things, how to:

- Identify ways in which the electronic medium reduces legibility, readability, and usability of text, forcing us to write differently
- Edit an existing paper document so that it can be used, read, and understood in a Help system or on a website
- Reduce the length and density of text, without sacrificing meaning, to respond to users' requests for 'less text'
- Create titles, heads, and subheads that help people grasp your key points
- Write link text so that people understand, in advance, what they will find on the target pages
- Add value through Meta content (information about the information on the page)
- Articulate the website's structure by writing effective menus
- Offer visitors multiple routes to information, accommodating their varying mental models.

Who is Jonathan Price?

With a doctorate from Yale, Jonathan Price has created online information systems and coached teams developing online courses, help, CD-ROM, and web. He regularly writes, lectures, and conducts workshops on preparing content for web publication.

*Continued on page 7*



So far this STC year, we've had great success with the Quill! I'd like to personally thank the Newsletter Committee, our local chapter Council Members, and all other contributors for their hard work and dedication.

As usual, there will be no January issue of the Quill. I'd like to wish you all the happiest of holidays, and I look forward to seeing you all in February 2003!

As usual, please send your submissions, suggestions, and criticisms to:  
[acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

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### Superficial Resemblances

"Because two words look the same, they must come from the same source." This is a very common error. To be fair, many, if not most, similar words are etymologically related, but this is not always the case. In fact, there are so many exceptions to this rule, that it is a very poor guide.

Often the error is that one word has a Latin root, while its similar-looking neighbor comes from a Germanic root. In these cases, the two words are often distantly related in that they share an Indo-European root, but they entered the English language through entirely different routes. An example of this is butterscotch, which has nothing to do with Scotland or with whisky.

# Professional Development & Employment

## What can STC do for you?

by Ted Edwins, Chapter President

In previous articles, I have stressed the importance of using STC chapter and SIG meetings to network for career opportunities, and outlined the benefits of becoming a member of the Society. This month I would like to tell you about some resources directly related to professional development and employment. The STC website is a treasure trove of information for members.

### International Job Bank

As a resource for our members, the Society maintains an International Job Bank database for use by both employers and job seekers. If you are you trying to fill a technical communication position within your company, go to [http://www.stc.org/post\\_job.asp](http://www.stc.org/post_job.asp) to post a job. If you are looking for a job as a technical communicator, go to <http://www.stc.org/jobsdatabase.asp> (available only to members).

### Salary Survey

<http://www.stc.org/salary.asp>

Every year, STC surveys a random sample of its members who work as technical editors and writers in the U.S. and Canada. The survey gathers information regarding salaries and benefits. This information is available only to members.

### Special Interest Groups

[http://www.stc.org/sig\\_info.asp](http://www.stc.org/sig_info.asp)

STC's Special Interest Groups (SIGs) are composed of STC members with common experiences and interests who share their skills and knowledge with each other and with other STC members. Some of these interests are based on the type of work members do. In other cases, the interests pertain to the nature of members' employment situation. You can join a SIG when renewing your membership at a cost of \$5 US per SIG.

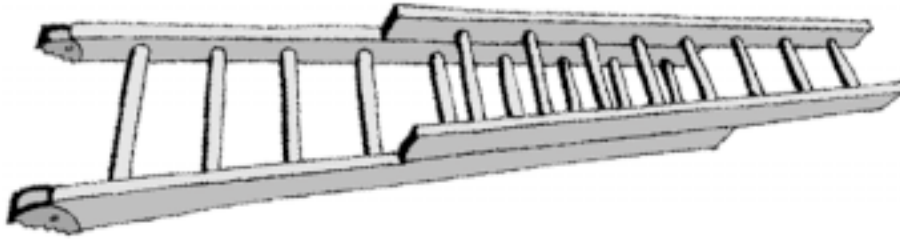
### STC Canadian SIG

<http://www.stc.org/SIGS/canadian.asp>

The Canadian Issues SIG, formed in May 2001, fosters communication among Canadian members of STC to allow them to exchange information and to discuss issues within STC that are of a particular concern to Canadian members, or that arise out of political, socioeconomic, and geographical constraints related to living in Canada.

This SIG evolved from the Canadian Issues Committee that, for 10 years, helped identify and resolve many





issues concerning Canadian members of STC. Membership in the SIG is not restricted to Canadian members but is open to anyone with an interest in the special needs and concerns of Canadian STC members.

### Educational Opportunities

[http://www.stc.org/academic\\_database.asp](http://www.stc.org/academic_database.asp)

Are you looking to start a career in technical communication or to obtain new skills? Use the form on this page to search for schools offering degrees in the technical communication field worldwide.

### International Conference

<http://www.stc.org/conferences.asp>

STC's annual conference is the world's largest gathering of technical communicators. Among the many highlights of the conference are educational sessions, workshops, vendor exhibits, and displays of the winning entries of the Society's international competitions. Technical communication professionals also benefit from numerous networking opportunities and employment resources. The next international conference will be held May 18-21 in Dallas, Texas.

### Regional Conferences

STC chapters are grouped into regions that roughly correspond to geographical location. Our chapter is in Region 1. Many regions in the STC organize a regional conference. A regional conference is a smaller version of the international conference. Members can attend any regional conference. For more information, consult the Related Events webpage (see below).

### Related Events

<http://www.stc.org/related.asp>

This page provides information about upcoming events and ongoing opportunities for technical communicators. These include conferences, seminars, calls for papers, calls for grant proposals, publishing opportunities, and other items of professional interest.

### Other Chapters

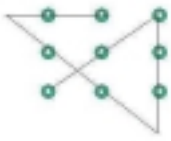
[http://www.stc.org/chapter/chapter\\_search.asp](http://www.stc.org/chapter/chapter_search.asp)

You can also search for educational and employment opportunities in areas served by other chapters. Use this page to search for a chapter.

As you can see, your membership dues provide you with a terrific opportunity to improve yourself professionally and to search for careers both locally and internationally. Good luck! \*

Scot, as in Scotland, comes originally from the Latin *Scoti*, the Roman word for the Gaelic people of Ireland who later (6th century A.D.) migrated to north Britain and gave that name to what is now known as Scotland. From this comes the adjective *Scotch* that is used to refer to things Scottish, including the whisky. The scotch in butterscotch comes from the Middle English *scocchen*, and from there probably from the Old French *coche* and the Latin Vulgate *cocca*, meaning a notch or nick. The candy was notched, or scored, to make it easier to break into pieces.

Such errors also arise because a foreign word bears a superficial resemblance to an English word. So a ten-gallon hat is often thought to be large enough to hold ten gallons of water. This is not true, unless you have an exceptionally large head. The gallon in ten-gallon hat derives from the Spanish *galón*, meaning braid. So a ten-gallon hat is a hat with braiding around the brim



### On the Fritz

It's rather mysterious in origin, being first used in 1902. It gained impetus during WWI when it was used to refer to anything German or that didn't work right. But the wartime derogatory reference is obviously not the origin, given the date of first use.

### On the Lam

The phrase meaning to be on the run from something dates to the turn of the 20th century. It probably comes from the English dialectical verb *lam* meaning to beat or to strike. To *take it on the lam* was to be beaten, which was usually followed by running away. *Lam* may ultimately be of Scandinavian origin, but that isn't definitively known.

### Outside the Box

The phrase *think outside the box* is an allusion to a well-known puzzle where one has to connect nine dots, arranged in a square grid, with four straight lines drawn continuously without pen leaving paper. The only solution to this puzzle is one where some of the lines extend beyond the border of the grid (or box). This puzzle was a popular gimmick among management consultants in the 1970s and 80s as a demonstration of the need to discard unwarranted assumptions (like the assumption that the lines must remain within the grid). The term dates to at least to 1975.

# Is Your Team Dysfunctional?

## The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, A Leadership Fable: Review

by Christy Simard, Scholarship Manager

*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team, A Leadership Fable*. Patrick Lencioni. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002. 229 pages, \$33.50 CDN, ISBN 0-7879-6075-6. Reprinted with permission from The PEER Group Inc.

*The Five Dysfunctions of A Team*, written by a former VP at Waterloo software company Sybase, tells the story of a high-tech executive team pulled together by a low-tech CEO with a flare for building successful teams. Following the story, Lencioni lays out his model for teamwork, complete with concrete steps for overcoming the dysfunctions and practical exercises for the workplace.

*Five Dysfunctions* offers a refreshing take on teamwork that holds significant explanatory power. Bold in stating that consensus can cripple a team, and that peer pressure can hold team members accountable, this book cuts to the core of human behavior in groups. After you read this book, you will see why some teams succeed while others struggle.

Lencioni presents the five dysfunctions of a team using the model of a pyramid. Starting from the bottom of the pyramid, each dysfunction forms a foundation for the next. In his book, Lencioni also identifies the grave outcomes we face when we give in to these surprisingly human dysfunctions.

### Absence of trust

In the context of teams, trust is the confidence among team members that their peers' intentions are good, and that there is no reason to be protective around the group. It's about being confident that people's respective vulnerabilities won't be used against them.

To foster this kind of trust, teams need to spend time together and share experiences. From low-risk activities such as sharing personal histories, to

higher risk activities such as disclosing the weaknesses members bring to the group, Lencioni offers a number of exercises for building trust.

The team-leader's role in overcoming absence of trust is simple to explain. Lead by example. You must show your vulnerabilities before others will take that risk. And when they do take that risk, you must create an environment that doesn't punish them.

### Fear of conflict

Constructive, ideological conflict is often the shortest way to the best solution with the most buy-in. When Lencioni talks about conflict, he refers to the open discussion of concepts and ideas, and open disagreement between team members. He also argues that in addition to making better decisions backed by more people, teams that engage this way make it all happen faster.

For many people, this kind of engagement at work can be very uncomfortable. Fortunately, Lencioni outlines ways for easing this discomfort.

- Acknowledge the need for conflict
- Identify the value conflict brings to the team
- Coach each other to face conflict
- Remind each other why conflict is necessary.

To help groups overcome fear of conflict, team leaders should resist the impulse to protect members. This lets people develop skills for working through conflict. Of course, you still need to lead by example too.

## Lack of commitment

In the words of Lencioni, "Great teams make clear and timely decisions and move forward with complete buy-in from every member of the team, even those who voted against the decision."

But how can we achieve this? First, give up your need for consensus. If it can't be achieved, it must not paralyze the team. Instead, tap into human nature; reasonable adults can move forward with a plan when they feel they've been heard (that is, they've engaged in healthy conflict). Second, move forward with certainty because *a* decision is better than *no* decision, and waffling leads to lack of confidence.

The team leader's role in fostering commitment is tough. Basically, you need to be comfortable with the prospect of making the wrong decision while moving ahead with confidence.

## Avoidance of accountability

Accountability refers to the willingness of team members to call their peers on performance or behaviors that hurt the team. Whether it's failing to meet objectives or using an admitted vulnerability against someone, peer pressure must shed light on damaging behaviors and work to eliminate them.

Fortunately, you can take simple steps to promote accountability:

- Publish the team's goals and standards
- Conduct simple and regular performance reviews

- Reward team accomplishments, not individual achievements.

As a team leader, let the team serve as the primary accountability mechanism and make it clear that accountability is a shared team responsibility.

## Inattention to results

Failures in accountability invite individuals turn their attention elsewhere. And when teammates care about other issues more, the collective goals of the team get lost. Whether it's personal success, a pet project, or any other objective beyond the team's scope, these distractions lead to inattention to results. Lencioni points out that the fallout from this inattention can be terrible: stagnation, distraction, failure to defeat competitors, or worse.

*Continued on page 7*

Reed, I mean 'read' this...

By definition, a *contronym*, a word coined by Richard Lederer, has more than one meaning. That's because *contronym* names a word whose senses are either contradictory or (at the very least) confusing. Appropriately enough, the *contronym* comes in at least two flavors: they can sound the same, they can be spelled the same, or they can be both. Take *seed*. When a garden is "seeded," seeds are planted in it. When a stone fruit is "seeded," seeds are taken out of it. Then there's *oral*. *Oral* describes something spoken, or uttered by the mouth. *Aural* describes something of or related to the ear or the sense of hearing.

Ready for a few more? When stars are *out*, they can be seen; when lights are *out*, things are dark. Playing a *mean* trumpet may be no *mean* feat, but while the *mean* paired with *trumpet* means "excellent" or "effective," the *mean* bumping up against *feat* means "contemptible; worthy of little regard."

Other contronyms include *oversight*, meaning either "watchful and responsible care" or "an inadvertent omission or error"; *sanction*, which can mean either "approbation" or "disapprobation," and *shank* which, when used temporally, names the early, main, or latter part of a period of time.

## University of Waterloo Continuing Education

### Winter 2003 Courses

- Designing Winning Technical Documents
- Technical Communication Plus +
- Introduction to Interaction Design
- Conducting a Hands-On Usability Study

Call 519-888-4002 for a copy of our calendar or browse our website and register online at <http://ce.uwaterloo.ca>

# Upcoming General Meetings

## Mark your calendar

by Shannon Hilker, Program Manager

Don't miss another meeting because you have other plans. Read the descriptions of January's and February's general meetings and mark their dates on your calendar!

### January's Meeting: Writing SDK Documentation for Programmers

Even if you didn't know that SDK stands for software development kit, it doesn't mean that you can't learn how to create the documentation that goes with it! Join us **January 7th**, 2003 at 7:00 p.m., in room 1304 of the Davis Center at the University of Waterloo, for a discussion lead by Scott Wahl, team lead of technical documentation at Research In Motion®.

Scott will explain what's involved in writing documentation for software development kits (SDKs). In addition to providing examples using both C/C++ and Java code, he will also answer these questions:

- What is an API?
- How do you write SDK documentation even if you're not a programmer (and why would you want to)?
- What sort of information do you need to include?
- How do you work with developers to create this information?
- What are some tools that you can use?

SDK documentation can be an exciting way to advance your career. If you are a technical writer with an interest in working on more technical documentation – even with little or no programming experience – this is the session for you!

Scott Wahl has over seven years experience working on documentation for technical audiences. He holds a B.A. from the University of Waterloo and an M.Sc. in Technical Communication from Utah State University.

### February's Meeting: Determining Your Customer's Immediate Documentation Needs

Do you know your users? One of the first steps in any writing project is performing a user analysis. You may think you know your audience, but how do you find out for sure? This case study examines how one company's writing team planned, organized, and conducted sessions to meet their users and find out more about their requirements.

Join us **February 4th**, 2003 at 7:00 p.m., in room 1304 of the Davis Center at the University of Waterloo, for a discussion lead by Marjorie Gibson, an independent information consultant.

Marjorie has more than 10 years experience as a technical writer. Since returning to Canada from Maine a year ago, Marjorie has been working as an independent information consultant. Her current project involves preparing workshops for online databases to be used by students in the Information and Media Studies program at the University of Western Ontario.

## Sarcasm and Irony

The targets of *sarcasm*—a satirical wit dependent on bitter, caustic, and often ironic language for its effect—may be all too aware of sarcasm's power to wound. But what's the distinction between *sarcasm* and *irony*, and where does *satire* fit into the picture? Let's take a look.

Sarcasm, irony, and satire all are intended to arouse amusement. *Satire* is the term of choice for a literary work that holds up human vices and follies to ridicule or scorn; it also names the trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose or discredit vice or folly. Art Buchwald put it this way: "You can't make up anything anymore. The world itself is satire. All you're doing is recording it."

Previously, Marjorie was Lead Documentation Specialist at MUNIS, a Maine-based software development company. She has also worked in the marketing department of a Canadian software vendor and has participated in designing customer-satisfaction surveys.

Like technical writers everywhere, Marjorie derives the most satisfaction when something she has written actually helps a user. \*

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## Workshop, continued from page 1

Jonathan has taught at Bentley College, New York University, Rutgers University, the University of California Berkeley, the University of California Santa Cruz, the University of New Mexico, and New Mexico Tech. He is the co-author of *Hot Text: Web Writing that Works* and *How to Communicate Technical Information*. Jonathan has also published two-dozen other books about writing, art, video, and technology, and as an STC member, has presented at numerous STC workshops—to rave reviews!

With such vast experience to share with us, this is one workshop you won't want to miss! See your Workshop brochure (included in this issue of the Quill) for complete details and registration information, or contact Elaine Ruddock at [atlascommunications@rogers.com](mailto:atlascommunications@rogers.com) for more information. \*

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## Book Summary, continued from page 5

Inattention to results *can* be overcome though. State the team's expected results. Then, tie rewards to those results. This helps team members focus their attention on the goals and outcomes of the team rather than their own priorities.

To lead a team that's focused on results, you must truly value those results. As Lencioni puts it, "You must be selfless and objective, and reserve rewards and recognition for those who make real contributions to the achievement of group goals."

### In summary...

Whether you are struggling with a dysfunctional team or enjoying the success of a high-functioning team, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* offers valuable insight. As Lencioni builds his model, he explains the connections between one dysfunction and the next. And to make sure the information gets through, he compares the behaviors of functional and dysfunctional teams.

Beyond valuable insight, *Five Dysfunctions* offers practical exercises for the work place. These exercises vary in their time commitments and personal risk factors, so you're sure to find the right set of activities for your group. Lencioni even includes a diagnostic tool for evaluating your team's predisposition towards the five dysfunctions.

Appropriate for team members and leaders alike, *Five Dysfunctions* scores in several ways: the page count is manageable, the story is engaging, and the theory is presented in bite-sized pieces. Finally, for those of you troubled by the negative framing (the five dysfunctions of teams, rather than the five attributes of successful teams), take heart. Lencioni flips it around at the end to be certain that each reader understands the five positive keys to high-functioning teams. \*

Buchwald's concept of recording reminds us that *irony*—a manner of expression in which the intended meaning is the opposite of what is seemingly expressed—commonly refers to the written word; in its most literary or dramatic sense, *irony* implies a deep appreciation of the discrepancies implicit in life. William Zinsser observed, "It is a fitting irony that under Richard Nixon, 'launder' became a dirty word."

*Sarcasm* has more bite than both *irony* and *satire*: that's appropriate, since the term that got us started today has an ancestor in the Greek verb meaning, "to tear flesh like dogs." Thomas Carlyle famously renounced its employment with the words, "Sarcasm I now see to be, in general, the language of the Devil."

# Word Processor Alternatives

Where to go when you've had enough of Microsoft Word

by Opal Gamble, Contract Writer

Ready to dash?

A non-native speaker of English asked why it is we have hyphens; before we dash off our response, we'll note that not every written language includes that punctuation mark. Pinyin, for example, the system for romanizing Chinese ideograms, dispenses with hyphens entirely.

But back to English. The hyphen (from the Greek words meaning "under one") first appeared in our language during the 10th century. Originally, as now, hyphens were used to indicate an end-of-line division of a word, something of a boon in those early days of silent reading.

These days, hyphens serve other purposes too: they are used between letters or syllables that are repeated to give the effect of stuttering, sobbing, or halted expression; they indicate words spelled out letter by letter; and they are used to indicate compound words.

Before the typesetting purists fire off complaints about our play on *dashing off* a response about hyphens, we'll admit to our lowly pun. We'll also explain the fine line distinguishing hyphens and dashes. *Em* and *en dashes* are printing terms; an *em dash* (that's "em" as in "Mary") is twice the width of an *en dash* (that's "en" as in "Nick"), which is itself wider than a hyphen. *En dashes* generally replace hyphens in typeset material, but in keyboarded material, the standby hyphen is still standard.

I have a dream of a word processing program that has the functionality of Word without the \$519.00 price tag. Although I have been using Microsoft Word for years, I am thoroughly sick of looking at the cost of upgrades (\$129!).

It's time for something new and cheap.

There are a surprising number of options for Windows word processors in the Open Source and freeware circles. While they are not universally flawless in interpreting Microsoft's proprietary .doc format, they do a pretty good job.

So, in the name of education, I've downloaded four free, alternative word processors for Windows. I opened up a basic, 80-page document I created in Word to see how well the programs could do when considering legacy documentation from Word.

I've instituted the following rating scheme (out of ten) so it's easy to compare between programs:

**Conversion:** 2/2 for a flawless import; 0/2 for a disaster

**Satisfaction:** 2/2 for lack of nag screens, use of logical shortcuts; 0/2 if I want to throw things while using the program

**GUI:** 2/2 for a professional and welcoming interface; 0/2 it looks like someone made it in 10 minutes

**Usability:** 2/2 if the functionality is easy to learn or use; 0/2 if my work flow is interrupted trying to find functionality

**Support:** 2/2 for decent documentation; 0/2 if there is no help available

Let's see how the programs handle.

OpenOffice.org 1.0.1

Website: <http://www.openoffice.org/>

Download size: 51,777 KB

Rating: 9/10

My first impression when I opened up OpenOffice.org Writer was "oh hey, it looks like FrameMaker." On further investigation, the program resembles a FrameMaker-Word hybrid.

OpenOffice.org Writer opened my 80 page document and kept my style sheet intact. It did, however eat my page numbers. When trying to figure out how to get my page numbers back into the footer (my first attempt resulted in a page number in the middle of my first heading) OpenOffice.org flashed a light bulb in the bottom right corner of the screen. It was a less-invasive version of Clippy, the infamous MS paperclip. The catch was that I was just clicking through a dialog and I have no idea what triggered the help, or what relevance the topic it chose had to my current non-task.



On further investigation, it turns out that my page numbers did import, the interface "hid" them on me, probably because my choice of excessive font size.

The help seems adequate: procedures are covered well, and peppered with icons and screenshots. I tried finding out what the "Standard" button in the Style dialog did in the help, but couldn't find it. I had to resort to clicking it to find out.

You can save to doc, html, and a variety of other formats including the OpenOffice.org specific format.

I'm impressed.

Conversion	Satisfaction	GUI	Usability	Support
2	2	2	2	1

Software 602 Inc. - 602Text

Website: <http://www.software602.com/>

Download size: 15,729 KB

Rating: 8/10

Opening 602Text was like opening a lightly prettier version of Word. There's even a little field in the tool bar that displays your word count - too bad it increases the word count by 1000 over what Word and OpenOffice Writer report for the same document.

The program disables some functionality until you register 602Text. This shouldn't annoy you very often unless you have a burning desire to add things like barcodes to your documents.

602Text appears to be friendlier than Word is to people writing manuals or books. It adds the ability to format on a chapter basis.

The program comes with WinHelp for assistance. I didn't have to use the help to figure anything out, but the colour choices they made were a bit painful.

My gut reaction is that 602Text would be roughly as annoying as using Word, just in different areas.

You can save as doc, html, and text.

Conversion	Satisfaction	GUI	Usability	Support
2	1	2	2	1

*Continued on page 10*

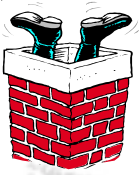
### Explaining Metaphors

Wait no longer: here's the story behind a familiar metaphor: "wait for the other shoe to drop."

To "wait for the other shoe to drop" is to anticipate the occurrence of another event causally linked (or associated with) one that has already taken place; the act of dropping the other shoe has the symbolic sense "to end the suspense."

It's easy to imagine how this phrase came into being: if a person is going to drop one shoe, he or she will generally drop the other one. In fact, this metaphor is believed to have its origin in a joke.

It seems that a guest who checked into a hotel late at night was warned that the fellow next door was a light sleeper. The newcomer tiptoed to his room, sat down, and accidentally dropped his shoe on the floor. Sure enough, his next-door neighbor was awakened by the noise. The rueful guest managed to take off his other shoe without further ado, and he climbed into bed, only to be awoken an hour later by a pounding on the shared wall and a shout of, "When are you going to drop the other shoe?"



Who is he to you?

Customs of the Christmas Season in Spanish speaking countries have many similarities, and many variations. All of Latin America and Spain are predominantly Catholic. For many of these countries Baby Jesus, el Niño Jesus, brings gifts for children.

In Costa Rica, Colombia, and parts of Mexico, the gift bearer is el Niño Jesus, "the infant Jesus." In Brazil and Peru, he's called Papa Noel.

In Puerto Rico, children receive gifts from the Three Kings on January 6th, also called the celebration of Epiphany, the 3 Kings' Day. Each child puts grass under their bed for the camels. In the morning the grass is replaced with gifts. Also, Puerto Rico, being part of the United States, does its major gift giving on December 25, with the Christmas Tree and Santa Claus - in this sense, Puerto Rico is totally Americanized.

Epiphany remains a part of the holiday season in Puerto Rico and is a day off from school. Giving gifts then is more for traditional values than the actual gift-giving celebration. Unless one wants to make a specific statement about the importance of maintaining traditional purity (anti-commercialism) and disassociation from American influence.

However, the celebration of Epiphany is not just in Puerto Rico. Some nations say it is the 3 Kings who bring the toys, while others credit Baby Jesus, since it was He who received and wants to share.

## Word Processor Alternatives, continued from page 9

### AbiWord

Website: <http://www.abisource.com/>

Download size: 3,841 KB

Rating: 6/10

AbiWord was pretty familiar when I opened it - a slightly toned down version of Word, so it's more like WordPad at a first glance.

AbiWord removed my footers. I added the page numbers in easily, but the program crashed when I tried to apply a style to the text in the footer. When I reopened the document and tried to fix the footers again (I hadn't saved my edits before the crash), I was unable to add page numbers or modify the footer in any way.

Then I noticed that AbiWord also reset my margins to a default of one inch and didn't retain paragraph spacing (1.5 line spacing, and 6pt above each paragraph). The program also claimed that my paragraph style was "None," which, of course, I could not edit.

The word count was 100 words higher than OpenOffice.org or Word.

The online help does not appear to be up to date: it says that AbiWord cannot save to the doc format, only rtf and an amazing number of other formats. However, I saved my document as a doc without any problems.

Table support is primitive. Even after reading the help a few times, I couldn't figure out how to add a table to my document. Also, the AbiWord documentation warns that opening Word documents that have complicated tabling may pose problems.

Conversion	Satisfaction	GUI	Usability	Support
1	1	2	1	1

AbiWord seems to have potential, but right now it looks like more hassle than it's worth.

### RagTime Solo

Website: <http://www.besoftware.com/>

Download size: 51,425 KB (note that the company is in Germany, so download speeds are slower than usual)

Rating: 7/10

RagTime annoyed me instantly by running a slideshow-styled tutorial on start up that was nearly impossible to get out of (I couldn't Alt-Tab away from it, it would take over the screen again). The tutorial was, however, very professional and it gave a good overview of the product's capabilities. When I finally got the program itself open, it reminded me vaguely of FrameMaker.

You can import doc files - RagTime gives you conversion options when you open a doc - but you cannot Save As anything other than a RagTime format. Exporting is limited to RagTime formats and pdf.

RagTime maintained my paragraph spacing, but lost my 1.5 line spacing. The program also misinterpreted my footers. There was no word count functionality.

I was impressed with the potential for RagTime to be a great layout tool for brochures and projects with a mix of pictures, statistics, and text. The WinHelp that came with the program does a decent job of getting you through a foreign interface.

However, I don't think I'd be inclined to use it as a pure word processor.

Conversion	Satisfaction	GUI	Usability	Support
1	1	2	1	2

### Summing Up

My favourite option of the four programs was OpenOffice.org. Although it is probably overkill for most of my typical home projects, I am impressed with the functionality and flexibility of the program. Bottom line: this program has Word's functionality and then some. A lot of the tasks I tried (like applying a watermark to my pages) were easier to accomplish in OpenOffice.org Writer than they are in familiar Word!

602Text appears to be a solid alternative as well and a good choice if you're most familiar with Word's interface. It's certainly not hard on the eyes.

I think that AbiWord might be a good choice in a year or so: creating tables is a must-have ability as far as I'm concerned.

While RagTime has some nifty features for layout, I don't think the program is going to catch on any time in the near future.

Product	Conversion	Satisfaction	GUI	Usability	Support	Total
OpenOffice.org	2	2	2	2	1	9
602Text	2	1	2	2	1	8
AbiWord	1	1	2	1	1	6
RagTime	1	1	2	1	2	7

If you are curious about looking into other word processing or office suite alternatives, try <http://www.msboycott.com/thealt/>. \*

In Italy Babbo Natale, which means Father Christmas, is Santa. Children put a pair of their shoes by the door on the day before Epiphany and the following morning they find them filled with small gifts and candy. Italy, like Spain, Portugal and most of the Latin American nations (or countries speaking Romance languages), is mostly Catholic. December 25 is a day of more religious observance, remembering the birth of Christ. The Epiphany, called Little Christmas, is the day for gift giving. However, Babbo Natale does come on Christmas Eve in some parts of Italy.

In Spain children leave their shoes under the Christmas tree the night of January 5th and presents from the Three Kings (Los Reyes Magos: Melchor, Gaspar and Baltasar) appear the next morning. Santa Claus is called Papa Noel and some children receive presents both days on December 24th (from Papa Noel) and on January 6th (from the Three Kings).

In Morocco he is known as Black Peter

In Japan, Santa Clause is called Santa Clause or just "Santa". Children often call him "Santa no ojisan," which means "Uncle Santa."



### Stay tuned...

The STC Southwestern Ontario Chapter is working to bring you more educational opportunities. Possible one-day workshops for 2003 include Graphics for Technical Communicators (Patrick Hofmann) and a workshop hosted by Gordon & Gordon (topic undetermined).



Wise Words

**People think that I can teach them style. What stuff it all is! Have something to say, and say it as clearly as you can. That is the only secret of style.**

[Matthew Arnold (1898), quoted in David and Hilary Crystal's *Words on Words* (2000).]

**I have lived to see great changes in this respect. I have known the mute *h* to become audible, and the audible *h* to become mute. I was taught to pronounce the words *humble*, *hospital*, *herbs*, and *honest* without an *h*, and can't get out of my old fashion without a struggle.**

[Samuel Lysons, *Our Vulgar Tongue* (1868)]

**Man does not live by words alone, despite the fact that he sometimes has to eat them.**

[Adlai Stevenson, *The Wit and Wisdom of Adlai Stevenson* (1965); quoted in the *Oxford Dictionary of Thematic Quotations* (2000)]

## Website Basics

### SIG presentation summary

by Robyn Peterson, Member

On Wednesday, November 13, the Independent Contracting Special Interest Group held an informative and dynamic learning session at the University of Waterloo.

The title of the session was *A Free Beginner's Whirlwind Guide to Website Creation*. Ted Edwins was our expert presenter for the evening.

During his session, which was amply backed up by PowerPoint slides, Ted took us through the step-by-step processes involved in working with NotePad and Internet Explorer to produce HTML statements that would translate into perfectly presentable website pages. Who knew that you could do so much with so little?

Using his easy-to-follow formula construction approach coupled with the presentation handouts, everyone in the group was left with the necessary information to get into basic website design without making major personal investments in software. But Ted did provide use with useful tips and references for future development as and when needed.

The atmosphere was friendly and informal, so we were able to throw questions at Ted without hesitation. Ted supplied informed and practical answers, and opened up good discussion to make sure we understood the points made.

By the end of the evening, we had heightened comfort levels with website design and genuinely felt that we'd learned something of real value to each of us. \*

## Alphabet Soup

### Test your smarts

by Meredith Ballaban, Puzzlemaker

Unscramble the following words taken from the STC website:

1. tltruoisla
2. idcanuee
3. mraomictnou
4. wgnkoitenr
5. imdtuceotnoan
6. psanbcoutlii



Answers: 1. illustrator, 2. audience, 3. communicator, 4. networking, 5. documentation, 6. publications

# Tele - Seminars

## A convenient learning experience

by Ted Edwins, Chapter President

On November 19th, Campana Systems hosted an STC Telephone Seminar entitled "Looking, Finding, Searching...How Users Do It". With only a few days notice, 14 people attended the seminar. An additional dozen people attended the seminar at Clarica.

What Is a Telephone Seminar? A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call in which the speaker makes a presentation over the phone. Sit back and listen to the presentations and join in the lively Q&A discussion that follows. The benefits of the telephone seminar include the absence of travel time, and the ability to train without leaving the office.

Because of the popularity of this first telephone seminar, the chapter would like to offer the opportunity for members to participate in future seminars. Before the chapter offers other seminars in the series, we would like to gauge interest in the topics. We are also looking for a company with a suitable telephone system and phone to host seminar. Please review the list of seminars and email Ted Edwins at [president@stc.waterloo.on.ca](mailto:president@stc.waterloo.on.ca) with the number of people who would want to attend each seminar or if your company can host a seminar.

The cost to attend a seminar is \$30 for members and \$35 for non-members. Refreshments are provided. The location of the seminars will be determined in the future. All seminars take place from 1:00-2:30 PM Eastern Standard Time. If your company wants to purchase a site license for internal use, the cost is \$160 US.



**Upcoming Seminars**

- December 13, 2002**  
*Finding Work in Troubled Times*, Douglas Florzak
- December 17, 2002**  
*A Brief, Comprehensive Indexing Primer*, Seth Maislin
- January 8, 2003**  
*Managing a Software User Interface Design Team*, Diane Feldman & Carla Merrill
- January 15, 2003**  
*Using Personas in the Development Process*, Whitney Quesenbery
- February 5, 2003**  
*Creating Persuasive Executive Summaries*, Stacia D. Kelly
- February 13, 2003**  
*Fast and Easy Time Management*, John Hedke
- March 12, 2003**  
*Making the Complex Clear and Pretty*, Phylise Banner
- March 19, 2003**  
*Evaluating an Index (even if you only have five minutes)*, Seth Maislin

You can find more information about the telephone seminars at <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>. \*

He was full of cliché, but then a cliché is not a cliché if you have never heard it before; and our ordinary reader clearly had not and so was ready to greet each one with the same ecstasy it must have produced when it was first coined. Cliché is but pauperized ecstasy.

[Chinua Achebe, *Anthills of the Savannah*; quoted in the *Penguin Thesaurus of Quotations* (1998)]

Every sentence he manages to utter scatters its component parts like pond water from a verb chasing its own tail.

[Clive James on George Bush Senior in *The Dreaming Swimmer* (1992); quoted in the *Oxford Dictionary of Thematic Quotations* (2000)]

Language is only the instrument of science, and words are but the signs of ideas: I wish, however, that the instrument might be less apt to decay, and that signs might be permanent, like the things which they denote.

[Samuel Johnson, introduction to *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755)]



Good luck for a year?

That's what you get in the South if you eat a dish of black-eyed peas and hog jowls on New Year's Day. The peas, or other food that swells as it cooks, ensure prosperity; add collard greens to the meal and you are guaranteed to gain greenbacks.

The Pennsylvania Dutch rely on a feast of sauerkraut to keep well through the year, while in New York State, people of German descent get off to the good start by downing herring at midnight on New Year's Eve.

For Latin Americans, the lucky food is grapes, 12 at midnight ensure a fruitful year.

Japanese-Americans agree with Southerners that there is nothing luckier than black-eyed peas, unless maybe it's lobster, which they count on for health and happiness. But drop that crustacean or damage its feeler and you'd better get another, it's important that the meal be as symmetrical as possible on New Year's Day.

# The Persona

## November general meeting recap

by Leo Petipas, Hospitality Manager

At last month's meeting, we were given the inside story on a pretty nifty method designed to help get inside the brains of the people who use our communications, an archetype of userhood - the persona.

Alex Tam and Tammy teWinkle from the Interaction Design Group at Quarry Integrated Communications gave us a very interesting presentation on the method for persona development that their team has devised.

What are Personas? A fictitious character is "fabricated" and given a variety of attributes, goals, characteristics, behaviors and work ethics.

The design team's investigation and interviews yield specific details about real people in the pool of users, or prospective users, which are collected and massaged to make a concrete-like person—a persona.

The Quarry approach uses three personas. The primary persona is a user for whom the product is designed; someone who would not be satisfied with something that has been designed for someone with different goals. The secondary persona is a user who could live with a product that is made for someone else and is not that fussy about it. Then there is the anti-persona. The person who will bring about the destruction of the world as we know it! No, not really. This is the person for whom the product or application is definitely not designed.

Why use personas? Since a decent pool of qualitative information, that is useful and instructive to the product design process, is rarely available, it is constructive to formulate a model that can be used to guide the product designer. A thorough, well thought out model can be used to inform many steps in document / help systems, content creation, media of choice, priority of product features and

functions and generally guide your work.

Some pitfalls that can be experienced by a seat-of-the-pants approach

to product creation, that personas are intended to overcome, include:

- subjectivity – predisposition of the investigator who may have biased assumptions
- discord – audience members may not necessarily hold a shared view of the work under study
- insecurity – the investigator will sometimes be unsure of what needs to be known
- inaccuracy – some of the information collected may be out-of-date or misinformation.

In spite of the formidable effort that persona creation involves, there are numerous benefits to be enjoyed by your product/communication development group—and lots of unhappy, poorly executed "stuff" to be avoided. As technical communicators, we know how potent a tool the developed persona can be in bolstering the quality of usability. \*

*A fictitious character is "fabricated" and given a variety of attributes, goals, characteristics, behaviors and work ethics.*

# Ask an Expert

## Working with Adobe FrameMaker

Why does FrameMaker only support one level of undo?

Good question. And here's the sad truth: It's always been that way. But why on earth would Adobe never add multiple levels of undo? Rumour has it there's original FrameMaker code that Adobe's loathe to touch—remember that Frame Technologies was the original creator FrameMaker. Anyone familiar with supporting software across multiple operating systems and acquisitions can easily imagine why Adobe might have a chamber of secrets they'll never open.

Enough hearsay! If you work with it, you can get extra undos out of FrameMaker.

First of all, FrameMaker can Revert to Saved. If you save your file frequently, reverting to your last saved file is effectively the same as undoing a few minutes of work. It doesn't offer the control you'd have with an adjustable level of undo, but it's easy enough to get working. If you can't develop the good habit of saving your work frequently, FrameMaker can do it for you. Enable Automatic Save and set it to run every few minutes.

Okay, so you've enabled automatic saves. If you enable Automatic Backup on Save, you buy yourself another level. Each time you save your file, FrameMaker makes a backup, **before** actually saving your changes. To back out once, revert to your last saved work. Not far enough? Open your backup.

To save yourself more grief about FrameMaker's total of three undo options, keep this in mind:

- Most illustration software supports multiple levels of undo. Therefore, it doesn't make sense to use the FrameMaker drawing tools for more than basic shapes in simple layouts.
- A few extra saves are worth the effort when you venture into the Land of No Undo in FrameMaker. So take a moment to save your work before you change column layouts, delete pages, or perform any other function that warns you there's no undoing your actions.

Getting back to developing good habits...if you've come to rely on more than 10 levels of undo, I suggest you evaluate how you work. Each level of undo costs computer resources, and depending on your work, can be timely to roll through. Sometimes it's just better to close your file without saving. The second time around is usually better and faster anyway.

FrameMaker has great support for variables, but there's one missing. How can I make my header show the page count for my entire book?

Adobe has a lengthy description of the procedure for bending FrameMaker to this end included in the FrameMaker help file. A web search on "FrameMaker PageCount" should get you there quickly. If you don't fancy jumping through those hoops, check out Carmen Publishing online. They sell a Book Page Count plugin for FrameMaker. It creates a Book Page Count variable, and in keeping with FrameMaker behavior, the count updates when you generate/update your book. \*

Do you have a question or situation to share with our expert and the chapter?  
Email [quillxpert@yahoo.ca](mailto:quillxpert@yahoo.ca).

Around the World

Ancient Egypt

In ancient Egypt, New Year was celebrated at the time the River Nile flooded, which was near the end of September. The flooding of the Nile was very important because without it, the people would not have been able to grow crops in the dry desert.

At New Year, statues of the god, Amon and his wife and son were taken up the Nile by boat. Singing, dancing, and feasting was done for a month, and then the statues were taken back to the temple.

Babylonia

Babylonia lay in what is now the country of Iraq. Their New Year was in the Spring. During the festival, the king was stripped of his clothes and sent away, and for a few days everyone could do just what they liked. Then the king returned in a grand procession, dressed in fine robes. Then, everyone had to return to work and behave properly. Thus, each New Year, the people made a new start to their lives.

The Romans

For a long time the Romans celebrated New Year on the first of March. Then, in 46 BC, the Emperor Julius Caesar began a new calendar. It was the calendar that we still use today, and thus the New Year date was changed to the first day of January.

The Roman New Year festival was called the *Calends*, and people decorated their homes and gave each other gifts. Slaves and their masters ate and drank together, and people could do what they wanted to for a few days.

## What is 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 Waterloo, 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, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Please submit items by one week prior to the date of the general meeting.

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To submit advertising, please consult with the editor, [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com). Advertising combining text and graphics *must* be supplied in graphic format.

**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)

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