



# The Quill



## Looking Back and Looking Ahead

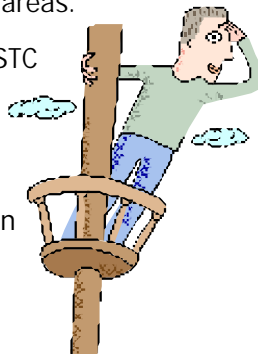
Celebrating Achievement and working towards the future

by Ted Edwins, Chapter President

To prepare for this month's article, I decided to look back in the Quill archive to see what my predecessors had written. I had hoped to steal some ideas but what I found instead is evidence that we are continuing our growth as a chapter. What is clear is that we are a group of people who do some amazing things and are contributing to the creation of a vibrant community of technical communicators.

This year we had some significant accomplishments to celebrate:

- We recognized the valuable contributions to the chapter by individuals. Patrick Hofmann and Pam Sittler were recognized with Distinguished Chapter Service Awards for their chapter activities.
- Our February workshop, *Writing for Electronic Delivery* with Jonathan Price, was well attended and was financially successful. We thank Elaine Ruddock and her committee for a job well-done.
- We continued our support of the Technical Communication program at Fanshawe College by offering a scholarship of \$500. The scholarship offered to University of Waterloo and Wilfrid Laurier students also had many applications this year.
- The Contractors and Independent Consultants SIG was very active with several meetings thanks to the organizational efforts of Elaine Garnet.
- For our general meetings, we tried to shake things up by meeting in new locations. We thank Shannon Hilker and her program committee for the extra work needed to make these meetings a reality.
- A student chapter was started at Fanshawe College in London, Ontario, with the help of Deb Maskens, Otte Rosenkrantz, and the Technical Communication students. We are confident that this student chapter will provide educational and professional opportunities for our members in the London, Sarnia, and Windsor areas.
- We sponsored telephone seminars offered by the STC and made attendance free for chapter members.
- Council held two goal-setting meetings during the summer. During the first meeting, Carolyn Watt of the Toronto chapter helped us determine the vision by which the chapter is guided and the goals we want to achieve. During the second meeting, we determined the activities that would help us meet those goals. *Continued on page 7*



Another STC year is coming to a close! Whether you've served on council, volunteered on a committee, or reaped the benefits of general meetings, it's time to celebrate!

Reward yourself for your hard work and dedication by attending the June BBQ!

Great food, charming atmosphere, and interesting conversation all await you! Check out page 2 for details.

Please send your comments, complaints, and submissions to the editor, at [acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com).

## Contents

Single Sourcing: XML Alphabet Soup .....	3
Polishing Your Pictures .....	4
Old Programs Never Die .....	5
Understanding Complex Software .....	6





# Sizzle!

## STC "Meat & Greet" BBQ

Tuesday, June 3<sup>rd</sup> ~ 5.30-9.30 pm  
Dinner at 6.30 pm

The Club Willowells  
40 Blue Springs Drive, Waterloo

Join your fellow technical communicators and guests  
rain or shine for this indoor/outdoor catered event

Please RSVP by Thursday, May 29<sup>th</sup>  
to [shannon\\_hilker@hotmail.com](mailto:shannon_hilker@hotmail.com)

Directions from 401: Exit Hwy 8 K-W, Exit 86 Waterloo North, Exit King St S (left at lights), Left on Blue Springs  
See [www.willowells.ca](http://www.willowells.ca) for a map

# Single Sourcing: XML Alphabet Soup

## April general meeting recap

by Leo Petipas, Hospitality Manager

Rob Frankland, founder of Rascal Software, presented an interesting development in harnessing the power of XML for a single-sourcing approach to Help system creation.

Starting with a history of single-sourcing, then and now, he chronicled the development of Help systems that varied tremendously in their effectiveness. Current tools that are being used include:

- Word/RoboHelp – essentially relies on the power of Word and its diverse formatting capabilities.
- FrameMaker/WebWorks Publisher – this has a conditional text feature, but is an expensive and hard-to-use combination of tools.
- AuthorIt – relies heavily on Word templates.

Frankland offered a clear definition of single-sourcing: “using a single document source to generate multiple types of document outputs; work flows for creating multiple outputs from a (single) document or database source”. This was compared to other, often convoluted definitions that have been offered by professionals in our field. The definition at the STC site appeared to be the most “wordy” and vague, packed with jargon.

Why single-source? The same content can be “filtered” or tuned for different target audiences as well as “transformed” into multiple output formats. The content can be reused many times.

XML makes an entrance with notions of: write it once, keep data separate from formatting and structure documents consistently – a good fit for single-sourcing. Although technical writers are aware of the power of single-sourcing, the reaction to bringing XML into the formula is something like:

- hard to use
- how do I format my output from XML?
- writers do not code
- I just want to write
- It’s going to take longer
- I don’t have time to learn another language
- Yiiikkes!

*Continued on page 7*



Alexander Bell—who took the middle name Graham at age eleven—was born in 1847.

For generations, the Bell family had been leaders in speech correction. At an early age, A. Graham Bell applied his father’s elocutionary system to help the hearing impaired—including Helen Keller—acquire speech. Then, after developing a partnership with a talented teenager named Thomas Watson, Bell began working on an instrument to reproduce sounds at a distance.

Although many of us associate Bell with the telephone, etymologists also associate the inventor with the three letter *bel* equivalent to ten *decibels*. Audiologists can tell you both *bel* and *decibel* express the relative intensity of sound, which, like the response of the human ear to sound, is measured on a logarithmic scale. That means the 130 decibel intensity measured near artillery fire—the threshold of pain—is many, many times louder—exponentially louder—than the 70 decibel measurement of a loud telephone bell.

Normal conversation measures about 60 decibels; the sound in a recording studio measures 20 decibels; the sound in a soundproof room measures ten decibels (or one bel), and the sound of absolute silence, the threshold of hearing, measures zero bels.

© 2003 Merriam-Webster

# Polishing Your Pictures

## Getting graphic with technical information

by Elaine Ruddock, Education Committee Manager

Plan on attending this one-day workshop offered by one of our chapter "favourites"—Patrick Hofmann!

In our technical documentation, online help, and interface designs, our pictures always seem to play second fiddle to our words. We find them too hard to illustrate; we encounter too many resolution and incompatibility issues, and we can never seem to make them attractive enough and meaningful enough.

In the **Polishing Your Pictures** workshop, we will get very graphic (ew, bad pun) with these challenges. We will spend a day visualising instructions, sharing common problems, and working on some neat hands-on exercises. The key learnings include:

- how to visualize as you write
- how to illustrate instructions with the same concern for usability as we have with writing, how to use visuals to downsize your word-count
- how to make your visuals consistent
- how to repurpose and 'transport' your visuals to other media and formats.

In the end, the workshop's goal is to help you boost the visual language and usability of the information that you produce.

As a Visual Interaction Designer, Patrick Hofmann is "*a man of few words.*" At Quarry Integrated Communications in Waterloo, he builds award-winning visual design strategies to improve online, hardcopy, and interface information.

### When?

Wednesday, May 28, 2003

### Where?

The Pines Banquet Facility (formerly the Knotty Pine Restaurant)  
115 Fountain Street, South  
Cambridge, ON

### Time?

Continental Breakfast – 8:30 am  
Workshop – 9:00 am – 4:00 pm (lunch included)

### Cost:

\$165.00/ members \$225.00/ non-members

### Information?

To register, please contact Elaine Ruddock, Education Manager at 519-239-3382 or [atlascommunications@rogers.com](mailto:atlascommunications@rogers.com). \*



Albert Einstein

The German-born physicist whose theories—and their applications—changed the world is remembered not only by generations of scientists but also by philosophers and dreamers.

Although Einstein took comfort in the idea that "Politics are for the moment. An equation is for eternity," he also observed, "Not everything that can be counted counts; and not everything that counts can be counted." So what is it that counts? The Nobel prizewinner rated "Imagination . . . more important than knowledge. Knowledge," he wrote, "is limited. Imagination circles the world."

The scientist who valued imagination more than knowledge pointed out, "Any fool can know. The point is to understand."

Albert Einstein knew there was plenty that needed to be understood. He believed, "Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty." And if we don't succeed? Citizen Einstein declared, "I know not with what weapons World War III will be fought, but World War IV will be fought with sticks and stones."

© 2003 Merriam-Webster

# Old Programs Never Die

## The importance of technical documentation

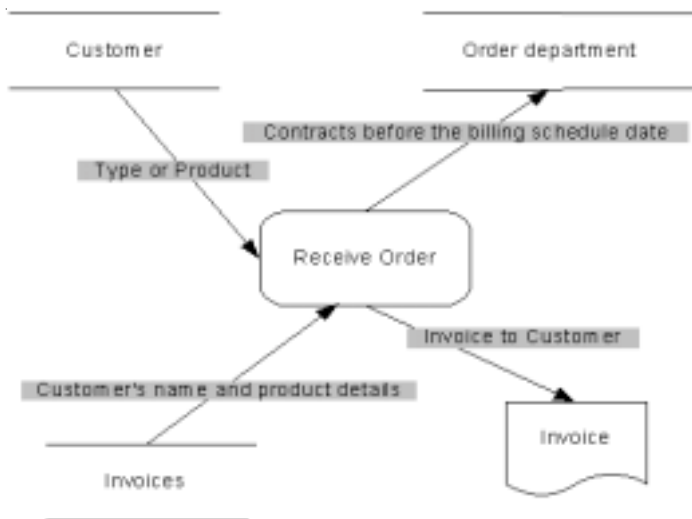
by Aileen Kennedy, Member

While writing our report on the Gordon & Gordon workshop 'Understanding Complex Software' we recently attended, an opportunity arose to explain how Technical Writers use the information from old programs to document Systems Software. This 'translation' of code into plain language helps paint the big picture for those who support these systems.

As most of you are aware, the majority of developers do not like to document anything. Most developers feel that once they have written the code, their job is done. But what happens when these developers decide to move on to other systems or leave the company? This information goes with them - and may be lost forever!

Where does this leave the people who support these systems? If they have worked with the system for many years, there is no problem - but, what about new support staff? They need to get up-to-speed quickly and accurately. Enter the Technical Writer - whose job it is to read code and document it in plain language so that support staff can learn about the system in minimal time.

How do we convert this code to documentation that a non-technical person can understand? Our motto is 'picture, picture, picture'. In fact, 'pictures' are one of the first items of information we look for in the code. We find this by looking at the data read 'in' and 'out' of the system (for example, files, tables, databases, etc.).



Step 1 Design a high-level data flow diagram.

Step 2 Explain the purpose of each individual file, table, or database at a high level, with hyperlinks to more details and related information.

Step 3 Explain field definitions and events.

Step 4 Consistency edit.

As you can see, the initial 'picture' we develop has a domino effect and can be used to produce many documents that tie all the pieces of the system together. \*

Hullabaloo

*hullabaloo* is believed to have its origin in *hallo* plus *balloo*, a Scottish interjection used to hush children. *Hullabaloo* first appeared in print in the 1760s, more than a century after the synonymous *uproar* had made its way from Dutch into English, and *hubbub* (meaning "uproar; noise; confusion") was believed to have traveled from a Celtic tongue into English. *Hubbub*, *hullabaloo*, and *uproar* joined *din*, one of the oldest words in our language and one whose Old English ancestor is thought to be linguistically akin to a Sanskrit term meaning "it roars."

It took another hundred plus years, but in the late 1800s, similar words once again crowded the field. *Ruckus*, probably a blend of *ruction* and *rumpus*, and denoting "row" or "disturbance," was first attested in 1890, followed by *brouhaha*—which may have its origin in a Hebrew phrase from the Book of Psalms.

© 2003 Merriam-Webster

# Understanding Complex Software

## Review of the Gordon & Gordon workshop

by Carrie Spira, Member

I recently attended the Gordon & Gordon 1-day workshop *Understanding Complex Software*, held in downtown Toronto. The workshop strives to provide attendees with a more thorough understanding of complex, multi-component, multi-platform software.

The workshop introduced concepts including software and programmer interfaces, system files running behind graphic user interfaces, programs, threads, and multi-threads, object-oriented programming, mainframe system interfacing, connecting computers, and illustrating complex software systems using flow diagrams. The workshop also included historical computer software information – a chronological look at how computers have evolved from huge, mysterious, complex machinery stored in warehouse-sized buildings to small, familiar, complex boxes on or under our desks.

Weaving historical information among the technical details of the workshop had two benefits – the technical information was broken up into smaller chunks, and learning the technical information was more fun. I appreciate the software of today (and tomorrow) by understanding from where computer software originated and how and why it has changed over the last four decades.

The section of the workshop on connecting and networking computers provided me with straightforward, suitable definitions for acronyms and concepts I've often confused. For example, communication and network protocols are an agreed-upon set of rules for exchanging information. Protocols include signals that indicate

when one computer is about to “speak” or is “done speaking” and another computer can “respond”. There are many kinds of protocols, and some run on top of other protocols. Common protocols include:

- TCP/IP: Permits the transfer of any kind of data. Two computers talk and listen to each other.
- SMTP: Sends email with no connection. SMTP runs on top of TCP/IP. The computer sends the email and does not ask for an email receipt acknowledgement. Because a response is not required and because there are various response protocols around, you can receive a variety of bounce backs responses when an email doesn't reach the intended recipient ( I was amused learn that a bounced email whose contact information includes MAILER DAEMON means that the response originated from a UNIX computer running a mailer program that rejects the email. A daemon is the term for a running program, or process, on a UNIX computer. Many companies use UNIX computers behind the scenes for critical path processes and work such as email).
- FTP: Transfers files and requires a connection. FTP runs on top of TCP/IP. Two computers must work together and must establish a connection to send and receive files.
- HTTP: One computer sends another computer a URL. The second computer generates HTML data and sends the HTML data back to the first computer. Once the HTML data has been sent, the second computer forgets all about the first computer until the next URL request is sent.

### Extinct Words

Plenty of words disappear because the things they name are no longer in use. For example *dag*, *columbiad*, *blunderbuss*, and *demicannon* all refer to armaments no longer in production; and neither the *pibgorn*, the *theorbo*, nor the *harmoniphon* has been used to make music in centuries.

But the extinction of other terms is not always so easy to understand. For example, wouldn't we find it useful to have a label for “dizziness accompanied by dimness of sight”? Long ago folks knew that phenomenon as *scotomy*; nowadays we know that condition as “dizziness accompanied by dimness of sight.”

The loss of the adjective *scripturient* is just as puzzling. It certainly seems right to us that our language have a term to describe “having a strong urge to write,” but *scripturient* now is considered outdated and obsolete.

© 2003 Merriam-Webster



The team of Gordon & Gordon sells all of the workbooks through their website and at their workshops. The workbooks contain all of the presentation slides, a glossary of terms – in this case, programming terms, and a section on recommended resources (including books and web sites) for technical and marketing writing.

The following members have achieved Senior member status...



I'd like to thank the STC for this training opportunity. Thank you for generously giving back to the chapter members! \*

---

## Single Sourcing: XML Alphabet Soup

*Continued from page 3*

The *up* side is that once established, it saves time, content is written once for multiple audiences and it is easy to maintain.

The Rascal Software solution enables you to create your content, store it in XML, translate it into HTML, PDF or PostScript, and from these files build your Help system. It allows for different character sets, numbered, bulleted and definition lists, tables and graphic insertion. Features of the product that would be especially attractive to us as writers include: automatic generation of index, glossary and TOC, and API accommodation. It also supports all major Help compilers.

Presently, Rascal is making beta versions available to interested parties. Release of the first version is expected sometime in the fall of 2003. Check out their site, [www.rascalsoftware.com](http://www.rascalsoftware.com), for a really nice XML primer, white papers on their approach to single-sourcing/XML and the slide presentation Rob gave at the meeting. \*

---

## Looking Back and Looking Ahead

*Continued from page 1*

These were the highlights of the year but by no means is it meant to be an all-encompassing list. Every person on council contributed in many ways to the success of the chapter. There are also many volunteers, some official committee members, others who are co-workers of volunteers, who chip-in to offer their talent when needed. We recognize and appreciate those people as well.

The future of the chapter looks very bright indeed. We have made some excellent additions to the council as some new people step forward to accept some increased responsibilities. In addition, many familiar faces return to council with ideas for improvement.

In closing, I want to thank all those people who sat on council and who volunteered to help in any way with chapter activities this year. Volunteering is a topic I have written about many times and I want to take another moment to recognize those who contributed. This chapter exists because we all contribute in some way, each according to time or ability. With everyone working together, we can continue our tradition of improvement. \*

## 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.

## Who are the Quill?

**Editor:** Andrea Braniff  
**Copy editor:** Andrea Steinhauser  
**Word Puzzles:** Andrea Braniff  
**Print manager:** Andrea Braniff  
**Print editor:** Shannon Hilker  
**Distribution:** Barbara Girling  
**Comic strip artist:** Vacant

## Contributors

Ted Edwins, Leo Petipas, Elaine Ruddock, Carrie Spira, Heidi Marr, Aileen Kennedy

## Advertising

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)

# STC Southwestern Ontario Council Contacts for 2002-2003



## Executive

### President

Ted Edwins  
[tjedwins@mgl.ca](mailto:tjedwins@mgl.ca)  
519.822.2417

### Vice-President

Vacant

### Past President

Lynda Baxter  
[bbaxter@golden.net](mailto:bbaxter@golden.net)  
519.836.0834

### Treasurer

Carol Lawless  
[carol.lawless@clarica.com](mailto:carol.lawless@clarica.com)  
519.888.3900

### Recorder

Christa Bosse  
[christa.bosse@clarica.com](mailto:christa.bosse@clarica.com)  
519.888.3900

## Activity Managers

### Auxiliary Mailing List Co-ordinator

Barb Girling  
[barbg@writeme.com](mailto:barbg@writeme.com)  
519.893.1134

### Competition Manager

Vacant

### Education Committee Manager

Elaine Ruddock  
[atlascommunications@rogers.com](mailto:atlascommunications@rogers.com)

### Email List Manager

Paul Kostiuk  
[pkostiuk@spicer.com](mailto:pkostiuk@spicer.com)  
519.748.4575 ext 258

### Employment Manager

Heidi Marr  
[heidi.marr@peergroup.com](mailto:heidi.marr@peergroup.com)

### Hospitality Manager

Leo Petipas:  
[carolburrows0805@rogers.com](mailto:carolburrows0805@rogers.com)  
519.744.8449

### Membership Manager

Martin Eberl  
[meberl@sympatico.ca](mailto:meberl@sympatico.ca)

### Program Manager

Shannon Hilker  
[smh@campana.com](mailto:smh@campana.com)  
519.747.5222 ext 263

### Public Relations Manager

Debbie Kerr  
[canhot@alumni.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:canhot@alumni.uwaterloo.ca)  
519.821.9808

### Quill Editor

Andrea Braniff  
[acb@campana.com](mailto:acb@campana.com)  
519.747.5222 ext 277

### Scholarship Manager

Christy Simard  
[christy.simard@peergroup.com](mailto:christy.simard@peergroup.com)

### Volunteer Co-ordinator

Lori Shantz  
[lori.shantz@sympatico.ca](mailto:lori.shantz@sympatico.ca)  
519.741.7824

### Webmaster

Stephen Burke  
[sburke@spicer.com](mailto:sburke@spicer.com)  
519.748.4575 ext 266

## Special Interest Groups

### Management SIG Co-ordinator

Vacant

### Online SIG Co-ordinator

Vacant

### Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG Co-ordinator

Elaine Garnet  
[2egarnet@rogers.com](mailto:2egarnet@rogers.com)

## Academic Liasons

### Faculty Liaison, Fanshawe College

Otte Rosenkrantz  
[orosenkrantz@fanshawec.ca](mailto:orosenkrantz@fanshawec.ca)  
<http://gs.fanshawec.on.ca>

### Student Liaison, Fanshawe College

Catherine Haycock  
[catherine\\_haycock@hotmail.com](mailto:catherine_haycock@hotmail.com)

### Faculty Liaison, University of Waterloo

Deb Maskens  
[dmaskens@ucentricity.com](mailto:dmaskens@ucentricity.com)

### Student Liaison, University of Waterloo

Vacant

### Faculty Liaison, Wilfrid Laurier University

Dr. J. David Black  
[dblack@wlu.ca](mailto:dblack@wlu.ca)