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Nancy Halverson returns from the cottage and holds her first STC meeting. Find out about her efforts to promote her first meeting, her effective use of food, and the results of that meeting. [More](#)

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Whether you are using structured writing or technical writing, the end result must be easy to access and use information. Find out how information mapping can help. [More](#)

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With the tax season behind us, it's never too early to think about ways to get ready for next year's taxes. [More](#)

The Editor's Message

While we as communicators are always open to learning, sometimes it is just as important to know when to have fun. With the STC year winding down, I thought it might be nice to make the June issue of the newsletter something special.

Interview Stories

We all have interview stories. You can't be the only one with a funny interview experience. Why not share your story (without mentioning the company name)? Your story will allow us to laugh with you and learn from your mistakes. Someone I know got sample bottles of shampoo and mouthwash mixed up and gargled with shampoo before going in for an interview and ended up getting the job.

Pictures

I have received some pictures that show technical communicators in their field. Why not send me pictures that show the interesting aspects of your work -- a team meeting, reviewing an interface? These pictures can be put in the newsletter and might even be good to post on our Web site to help show another side of our profession. Sometimes pictures speak louder than words.

Creative Stories

While truth can be stranger than fiction that doesn't mean that our members wouldn't appreciate a piece of fiction.

Membership News

As people in the communication field, we are always eager to learn and always eager to welcome people with new ideas. Find out more about some of our new members. [More](#)

Warnings

How do you as a writer decide when to use a warning, caution, note, or disclaimer? I used 'Warnings' as a title to get your attention. Find out the best time and place to use each of these items. [More](#)

Upcoming Events

The STC provides you with a lot of opportunities to learn and grow as a communicator. Get details about our annual barbecue in June. [More](#)

Employment

Some changes have been made to the Job Bank on our Web site. Find out how this affects those who are looking for work and those who are looking to hire. [More](#)

STC Head Office

It takes a lot of work behind the scene to keep the STC running. Find out about requests for nominations and requests for proposals. [More](#)

Why not write a short story where the main character is a technical communicator? It could be a mystery where the main character uses the logic of our profession to solve the case.

Light Bulbs

You may be wondering what a light bulb has to do with our profession. Well you know the question, "How many (insert profession here) does it take to change a light bulb?" Why not insert 'technical communicator' into the question and send me your answers? I am looking for some bright answers (pun intended).

Use your imagination and send your creations to me, Debbie, at quill@stc-soc.org



Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication





About The Quill



The Quill is the monthly newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, which is a Canadian chapter in Region 1.

The Quill History

In October 1989, the first edition of the The Goose was launched by editor Rick Martin, who immediately announced a contest for a new name. The winning entry was, of course, The Quill. Within two years, The Quill earned an Achievement Award for small chapter newsletters, followed by back-to-back Merit Awards in **1993** and **1994**. **1992** and **2001** saw Awards of Excellence. In **1996**, we were awarded not only the Distinguished Award, but the Best of Show for all chapter newsletters.

Submission Deadlines

August 25	September Issue
September 19	October Issue
October 17	November Issue
November 14	December Issue
No Quill	January Issue
January 16	February Issue
February 13	March Issue
March 19	April Issue
April 16	May Issue
May 14	June Issue
No Quill	July or August Issues

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When you submit an article, you give the editor and the newsletter staff the right to edit your article for clarity and to ensure that it adheres to the newsletter's style and standards. All articles are edited, copy edited, and proofed prior to publication.

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Be Repetitive. Yes, Be Repetitive: Saving time and boosting usability by repeating your visuals

by Patrick Hofmann



Hi, my name is Patrick and I have a problem: I'm lazy. I have a habit of procrastinating; I have a tendency to take shortcuts. When there's an opportunity to repurpose something that I managed to complete before, I use it.

But honestly, is that so wrong? In a world where we are rightfully encouraged to reduce, reuse, and recycle, can we not apply these three Rs to the elements of the work that we produce?

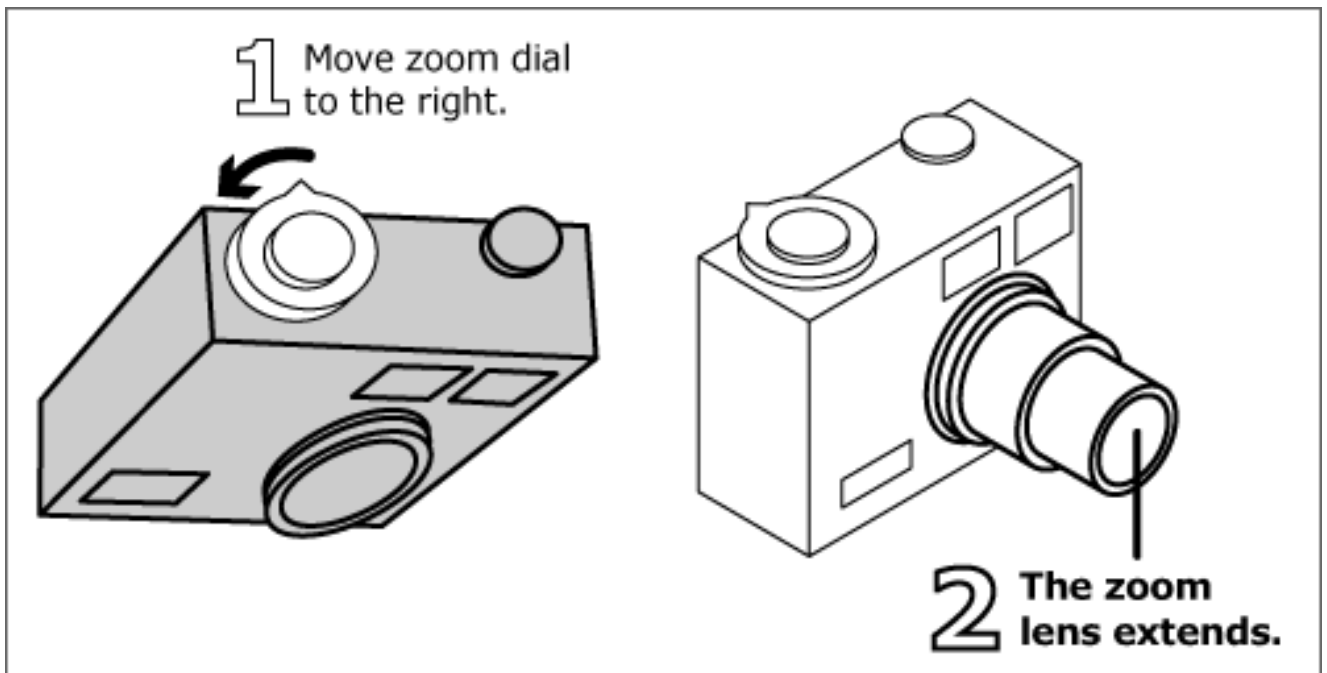
Of course we can, especially 'within' our work (as opposed to committing copyright infringements by plagiarizing the work of others or repurposing our published products for several companies or clients). In the documents that we write, we should repeat our common instructions and phrases, our chapter organization and sentence structures, and our titling conventions and layout, to make our work consistent and more user-friendly. Likewise, in the illustrations and images that we render, we should repeat our image views and angles, our object positions and sizes, and our line and colour attributes, to make our work consistent and more user-friendly.

If repetition is such an effective tool to promote consistency and improve the usability of our work, why do so many instructions, especially visual ones, fail to use repetition? The reasons stem from many participants:

- documentation developers take their visual images from too many different sources and applications (clip art, CAD illustrations, engineering schematics, and screenshots) and, in the worst cases, are combining them together into a single illustration or instruction;
- illustrators are attempting to use as many features in their new CAD tools and illustration applications as they can, where lifelike 3D rendering, shading, manipulation, and maneuverability are far more accessible and easy to use; and
- traditional product sellers, marketers, and publication managers, discourage us from creating visuals and instructions that are too brief, minimalistic, and repetitive, as they apparently degrade the technical integrity or superiority of the product and deem our documentation as lacklustre and boring.

For example, the following two-step instruction has two common elements -- a camera -- but it fails to repeat its many attributes:

Before

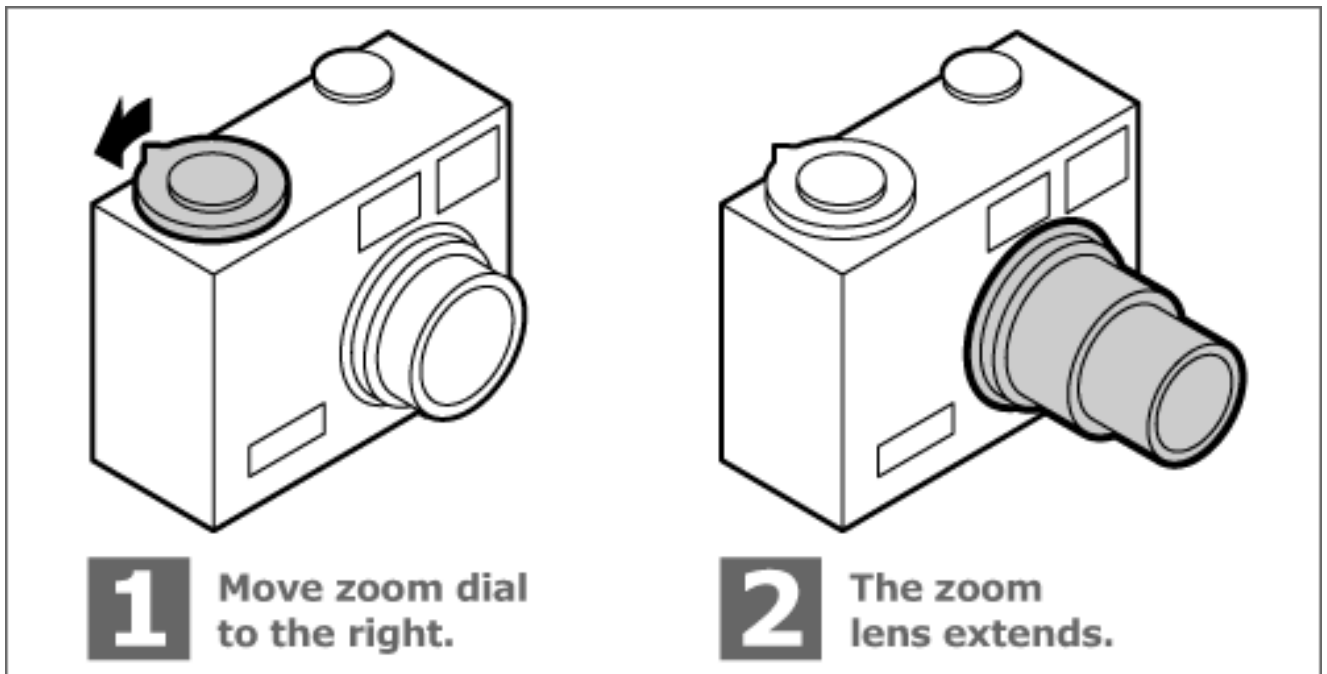


In the above image, the inconsistencies include:

- the view or angle at which we view the camera
- the relative size of the two cameras
- the line attributes and shading
- the conventions used to show the highlighted element or the focus of attention
- the caption text and the step numbers
- the positioning of the cameras within the boxed frame.

By taking each of the above attributes and making them consistent within the two steps, the visual image is dramatically improved and its inherent meaning is greatly amplified.

After



The effects of good visual repetition are most apparent when you perform a 'blink test' on the illustrations. Go to the 'Before' example and close your eyes for three seconds; open your eyes for no more than a second to look at the visual, and then close your eyes again. In that amount of time, what did your eyes see? What meaning did they discern from the visual?

Repeat the above steps with the 'After' example. What meaning did you gather from it?

Although the instruction may not be immediately clear in such a brief time, the repetition in the 'After' example makes the contrast between the unextended and extended zoom lens much clearer. Even in that brief moment of observation, we know the visual's topic is likely about the zoom lens. Furthermore, we also notice that our rapid eye-wandering is greatly reduced in the more repetitive version, because the patterns and similarities are almost immediately apparent. In the 'Before' image, we have to spend considerable time determining and discerning what the two objects are, and whether they're indeed intended to be the same object, since they are illustrated so differently.

As our readers scan through our manuals and scroll through our online pages, this ocular activity is constant. Whatever we can do to streamline their eye movement and minimize eye-wandering is essential to good readability and solid usability. Repetition is one of the greatest tools to achieve this goal.

As you can see, laziness does have its advantages. When you put the right spin on it, laziness is really just another word for efficiency.

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My First Technical Writing Experience

by Sarah-Beth Doner, Recorder



It all began during the winter of 2003. It was my 1B academic term at the University of Waterloo, and I was entering the co-op process for the very first time. I knew that I wanted to find a job that involved writing because I love to write. When anyone asks me to describe my love for writing, I simply answer, "I love to write, to communicate." I would rather write an essay than a poem, and I love to edit, so I had it set in my mind that I would eventually publish textbooks. I could think of no other way to incorporate my particular affinity for writing with an equal attraction to education and teaching. When the first co-op jobs were posted, I was a little discouraged. Somehow there didn't seem to be very many opportunities to help produce the textbooks that I pay far too much to purchase every term.

Finding a Job

Actually, I was very discouraged. But, that's when I saw it: Position--Technical Writer. Before I finished reading the job description, I had already shifted career paths. This was it! I had found a vocation that pulled together all of my interests: writing, teaching, technology, research. I applied for the job and got an interview. I bombed that interview. Terribly. On the bright side, the interviewer introduced me to the STC by adding me to their mailing list. (But, I'll save that story for another day.)

The following term, I applied to any job I saw that involved technical writing. I was fortunate enough to be hired by iAnywhere Solutions in Waterloo, a division of Sybase. This term has been my very first technical writing position, and it's been a very eye-opening experience for me. I've learned about some of the ups and downs of the business and lived to tell the tale.

Experiencing Shock

My very first week involved training on the software that iAnywhere produces. I was the only Arts major in a room full of Engineering and Computer Science students. The trainer asked us to introduce ourselves, including our year, program, and any languages we knew. All that came to mind were English and Spanish, but I knew that wasn't what he meant. At that moment, I started asking what I'd gotten myself into. Was I supposed to know how to program the software in order to write about it? I was scared.

Learning the Ropes

The following week I met with the Documentation Team and my supervisor. She told me that a long learning curve was to be expected since I had to learn technical writing and a new type of software at the same time. She said that I shouldn't feel pressured to produce anything until at least half way through my co-op term. Instead, I was to focus on learning. I felt encouraged knowing that it was okay to take the time to get my bearings. Still, it seemed like a daunting task.

Over the next few weeks, I spent my time reading the documentation, experimenting with the software, and trying to learn how to use the XML editor that iAnywhere uses to produce its documentation. It was one of the most trying few weeks I've ever experienced. I felt completely unproductive. One of the reasons that I like to write is that I like to see the results of all of my efforts fill the screen or come hot off the laser printer. Instead, I was sitting in front of my computer trying to understand exactly why my database wouldn't start, or why I couldn't insert a tag in a particular place in a document. And I felt that I had to knock on doors to ask for help far too often. Again, I was asking what I'd gotten myself into.

Testing Documentation

My saving grace was getting involved in usability testing of the documentation. The documentation team designed scenarios involving the software, and we tried to solve them using the product documentation. Being completely inexperienced with the software and unaccustomed to the documentation, I was in an excellent position to test just how effective our documentation was in terms of navigation and instruction. Finally, my inexperience paid off! After a few weeks, the software finally began to make sense, and I was able to experiment with more complex features. My confidence grew exponentially each day.

Starting to Write

Then it finally happened: I started writing documentation. At the end of every week, I printed a copy of my chapter and patted myself on the back for adding two or three more pages and learning a new feature of the software. As the weeks passed, my writing improved and my output increased. Instead of two or three pages per week, I was writing 10 or 12 pages per week. And, I was scrapping entire sections of my chapter and replacing them with better, more comprehensive material. I was more confident about emailing developers to ask questions about the software, and I didn't feel guilty about knocking on someone's door to ask for help. Now my chapter has taken shape and grown beyond what I thought possible. And I'm really looking forward to sending it out to the developers for editing.

Seeing Improvement

Looking back, I know that I've improved by leaps and bounds. There were certainly some days when I yearned for the simpler days of writing essays about Shakespeare instead of software tutorials. And I know that this job isn't always going to be exciting -- every job has its drudgery. But, I learn something new absolutely every day, be it about my writing, the software, or the psychology of a documentation user. I'm planning to return to iAnywhere for my next co-op term and I'm looking forward to continuing what I've started and delving into new areas of this crazy thing we call technical writing. ♦

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Confessions of a Technical Communications Manager



by Holly Curtis, Management SIG Co-ordinator

I had exactly 8 months as a co-op student to experience being a technical writer, under the wing of a wise mentor. Then, I was thrown to the lions -- managing a department of revolving writers in a fledgling company full of politics. That eye-opening experience lasted five long years. There, the work week never really ended and neither did the state of constant crisis.

Not surprisingly, technical communications managers do have access to 'how to' manuals -- several, in fact. But, unless your company's political environment and organizational structure is identical to the writer's, only a portion of the well-meaning advice really applies to you. So, I've done my best to gather 'general guidelines' from all the experts. I apply and adapt these 'general guidelines' as I go.

Balance

Now, with 15 years of management experience under my belt, I can confidently say it's all about balance. For myself, a writer at heart, it's about finding the time to write as well as manage. For those who report to me, it's about giving guidance and support, while providing room for them to grow and learn. At Campana, my present employer, our writing team is fairly senior so the writers are pretty much left on their own, knowing they can come to me when necessary. I actually enjoy donning my helmet and running interference for them, when I get the chance.

Priorities

My priorities are split evenly. I'm fortunate enough to have landed myself in a company that gives me carte blanche on all activities and initiatives. This environment has resulted in many new exciting ventures and has helped to create a non-competitive, learning atmosphere. I have loyalties to my bosses, who are trying to run a business and balance the books. I appreciate that they've given me so much freedom in my own career and within my department, so I'm careful not to abuse this freedom. But I also have loyalties and a responsibility to my writers. I feel partly responsible for the development of their careers. I understand their perspective and I completely empathize with their dilemmas.

Because of these split loyalties, I'm often caught in the middle of 'situations'. I argue for professional integrity and creative license, but then I'm faced with many business decisions, which are usually based on spending allowances, budgets and company

standards. Sometimes I have to sacrifice some professional integrity so that I can win another battle later. When I feel my writers are right about something and management is wrong, I take risks. If it turns out all right, we celebrate a quiet victory within the department. If it doesn't turn out, I deal with the repercussions myself.

Problem Solving

Probably the most time-consuming and difficult aspect of my job is solving problems and making decisions. Unlike business managers and project managers, a technical communicator's problems are unique and, I believe, can only be solved by someone with experience in the field.

I make myself available to my writers, which means I'm frequently dealing with the problems or issues of five writers. When you like the people that work for you, it can be overwhelming at times to be juggling so many equally important problems, and still try to keep everyone happy and satisfied.

The People

There's also the routine management tasks that can often induce a fair amount of stress. Responsibilities like hiring, firing, performance reviews, budgeting, personnel issues and explaining time slippages and missed deadlines to the president of the company all require much preparation and a little bit of finesse. The personnel stuff pulls at my heartstrings-these are people's lives I'm messing with. I have the potential to really help (or hurt) someone's career and the power is scary. On the other hand, I have to remind myself that most people do not live and breathe their careers and a little constructive criticism won't scar them for life. Maybe they'll hate me for a few days, but they will eventually learn from the experience, as I have.

I like to lead by example, but that sometimes it isn't easy. I make mistakes, procrastinate and become bored and frustrated, just like everyone else. But I feel the pressure to 'get over it' rather quickly. If I'm feeling frustrated, chances are the others are too. I need to anticipate slumps or bumps and focus on motivating the team to get through the tough periods. This becomes challenging when you also are in need of some encouragement.

The Rewards

You must wonder why I continue to do this job. Well, it really does have its rewards. The best part of my job is the people in the department. I'm surrounded by a fantastic team of writers who share the same enthusiasm and professional dedication. Their passion fuels my passion and this encourages me to push the department into new territory and take more risks.

I've managed dozens of writers and watched them grow into confident, competent communicators. Some have stayed in technical communication, while others have strayed to other fields. Many are thoughtful enough to come back later and thank me for all that ruthless editing or for pushing them to speak up for themselves, or maybe for just listening to them as they worked through their daily issues.

It takes me back to the days of my first job when my mentor humbled me with his editing and patiently tutored me through the ups and downs of technical communication. Come to think of it, I owe Mark a phone call. ♦

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Adventures in Translation (Part 2): Preparing Your Documents

by Margie Yundt



You've kicked off a project to write a documentation suite for your company's latest software innovation, and they need this documentation, and the software translated into French, German, and Japanese. After weighing all the options, you've chosen a translation company to handle the translations, including the localization of the software, and obtained quotes for the project (see [April's article: Finding a Vendor](#)). What now?

Breathe. You can handle this. Read on...

Creating Documents for Translation

To begin with, keep the following in mind when you are creating documents for translation:

- **Be clear and concise.** Don't leave the translator wondering what you mean -- leave no room for misinterpretation. Every word they need to translate directly affects the bottom line, so be frugal (but not at the expense of clarity -- that counts too!). Write out acronyms the first time you use them to avoid confusion. You want to make sure you and the translator(s) are referring to the same thing.
- **Avoid slang and western-biased images.** Slang is difficult to translate and understand in a foreign context. Be aware of your international audience -- are they going to get your reference to the Energizer Bunny®? Probably not, unless you are referring to "The Bunny" as dinner!
- **Keep text out of your graphics.** Whenever possible, avoid including text within a graphic. It will cost you more money, and/or more time, for translators to go into these graphics and translate the text they contain. Consider using alphanumeric labels in graphics and include descriptions for these labels in a separate table below each graphic.
- **Allow for text expansion.** Make sure the template you are using gracefully handles longer character strings -- for example, in French *user* is *utilisateur*; that's quite a difference in character length! Admittedly, with today's 'automatic' templates, string length is usually more of a concern in the software interface than in desktop publishing. Still, you should consider this

factor when creating table formats or side headings. Ensure you leave enough white space to avoid truncated or hyphenated character strings, and remind developers to consider spacing when setting up the real estate for the software interface.

- **Ensure your template is international-friendly.** More than just accounting for varying sizes in character strings, you need to ensure your templates are going to play nicely with other languages, which may include accented characters, special symbols, and/or certain stylistic conventions.

This means stick with the standard serif and sans serif fonts, such as Times and Arial, as these fonts are widely available, legible in a wide spectrum of languages, and, in most cases, have a built-in extended character set for special characters and symbols. If your company uses a specialized or non-standard font, consider finding a conventional alternative. If you don't use a standard font, be prepared to do some early testing of sample translations and/or incur additional costs if the translator (and reviewers) must buy one or more fonts specifically for your project.

Also, consider the flexibility for switching page sizes from the North American convention of 8.5x11 to the European convention of A4 (8.27x11.69). If possible, set up your template to switch between these two formats without affecting pagination. FrameMaker[®] does this well.

And, if possible, set up automation in the template to grab the content (for example, running headers) from the body pages. In other words, avoid "hard-coding" English text in macros, because anything you hard code will need to be manually updated by either you or a translator within whatever software you are using. Will the translator know enough about the software to do this? Maybe, maybe not.

Sending the Documents to the Translator(s)

Okay, so you've completed your documents, and you have all the string files required from Engineering to translate the interface. Now what?

Next, you need to send these files (with clear instructions) to the translation company. In addition to the source files, your package should include the following:

- **A style guide or format description document.** Provide a document that clearly identifies any automation in the template(s) that you provide, the document structure, what to translate or not translate, and the expected

format for the deliverable. The more information you provide up front, the less chance there will be of any misunderstandings about what you get/don't get back.

- **A copy of the software being localized and any special installation instructions.** You should also provide test files and any configuration files that are required to run the software. Translators who can run the software, can also test the translation and put strings for translation in context with the program being documented.
- **PDF versions of the documents being translated.** Translators like to compare the source documents they are translating with the finished English versions so they can make sure the formats match and the translated content appears as expected.
- **A cover letter describing the contents of the translation package (or e-mail).** Include contact information for questions -- e-mail is a great (and cheap) way to communicate, especially across time zones!

If your project involves translations into multiple languages, ensure you provide a complete package for each translator. Or, if you e-mail the information, let the translation company distribute the information to individual contractors. In this case, consider installation for the project as a self-extracting zip file for everyone to download (using a password you provide) via a secure FTP or Web site.

Want to know more? Have questions? Come out to our STC chapter meeting, "Translation 101", on Tuesday, May 4th and quiz our panel of know-it-alls, um, I mean, experts. See you there! ♦

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History of Happenings in May

by Carol Lawless, Treasurer



For many of us, May is a time when we look forward to summer and allow ourselves to think about vacation time. The same is true of the STC. May is a time when council members get their portfolios in order and think about a small break over the summer until the next STC year begins. Internationally, STC members take the opportunity to learn and network by attending the Annual STC Conference. Locally, our chapter has accomplished many things in May.

- **1993** - keeping with the theme of networking and education, our local chapter began hosting an Education day. This ran for several years and included workshops on topics such as "Technical Communication Consulting as Entrepreneurship", "Project Management in a Corporate Environment", "Plain Language: How Do Documents Construct Audiences?", "Networking and Training: The Professional's Tool".
- **1993** - Jack McFadden, our founding president, was recognized at the annual conference with an Associate Fellowship in the STC.
- **1996** - Celia Clark became the second of our members to be awarded an Associate Fellowship.
- **1997** - For the first (and only) time, the annual conference was held "north of the border" in Toronto. We had eight speakers on the roster, and many of the volunteers for the event came from our chapter
- **1999** - Our chapter won the Region's PaceSetter award, for outstanding programs and growth in 1999.
- **2000** - We followed up the PaceSetter award with the Chapter Achievement award, "in recognition of (our) outstanding continuing work to promote the growth of its members, the technical communication profession, and the benefits of STC".
- **2002** - We won another Chapter PaceSetter award, in conjunction with Toronto, "In recognition of outstanding efforts made to continually improve the joint Technical Publications and Online competitions." As well, Leanne Logan became the third chapter member to receive an Associate Fellowship, "For continuous and outstanding contributions to STC locally and internationally, and for outstanding service in both teaching and promoting the profession of technical communications."

- **2003** - Back to Back! We won another Chapter PaceSetter award "For developing a valued community and synergy between STC's Southwestern Ontario chapter, STC's London Ontario student chapter, Fanshawe College, and the University of Waterloo."

While May has traditionally a time for winding down, our chapter continues to work toward its goals until our final meeting in June. ♦

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View From the Other Side...The First STC Meeting

by Nancy Halverson



I was feeling like a one-man band for a while there. The only input I had about putting on this meeting came from the university professor who was booking the room for us on her campus, and she and I exchanged only a few e-mails.

The Publicity

Publicity in a vacuum is what it felt like -- put something out onto the STC-UK list and a few other lists that wanted to pick up on it. No local group, no core of support to draw from, no local meeting place. Even the MA in Technical Communications taught by one of the Sheffield universities is distance-based, with students from all over the UK and Europe. There was just no way to judge the reaction.

I got responses from people for a day or two after the notices appeared -- e-mails asking for details, if they needed to register, what was the fee going to be, etc. They were somewhat surprised that it was a free meeting, independent of any group (no memberships required) and there would still be excellent presenters with interesting topics discussed.

The Presenters

I'd arranged for three presenters -- all of whom I'd 'met' over the STC-UK list. Andy Swartz is a usability consultant who moved here from the States eight (or so) years ago -- we both ended up in Sheffield by following our academic partners, so we naturally shared a connection. (Amazing how some people can quickly feel like 'old' friends.) He also knows about how networking and peer professional development can help from his experience in California, so he was glad to volunteer. He also 'introduced' me to Mike Unwalla, who runs his own tech writing company and is very out-there in terms of marketing his skills. He offered to help and speak about getting freelance work. I first emailed Florence Dujardins on referral from someone, to ask about the job market in Sheffield, way way back when I first arrived. She is the woman who teaches part of the MA in Technical Communications and booked the room for us at Sheffield Hallam University. Her topic was educational needs of tech writers and where to focus energies developing new short courses.

Where and When

Florence and I chose to set the meeting for a Saturday simply because most people

would have to travel to get to Sheffield, although Sheffield was in fact a good central location. But, trying to put together a meeting to draw people out, we decided we needed at least a half-day program.

My count of positive responses was only about 10-12, but I had no way of knowing if others would turn up. Three of my own co-workers had been interested as well. I was hoping for a turn out of about 15 and prepared for 20.

So, having done some shopping for nibblies and packed a coffee pot and kettle, I waited for people to turn up.

The Technique

I'd taken a page out of the STC SWO's playbook and arranged to meet people at a café; for lunch before the program. I always liked the friendly atmosphere generated in those sessions.

It's the first time I regretted seeing the sunshine. The air has just become warm here in the last week, and flowers are running riot -- daffodils are waning, tulips bursting forth, and most blossoming trees are just exploding. And, with it being a weekend meeting -- well, I was a little disappointed to think that people would chose to spend time in the gardens and parks rather than come out to meet with (yawn) other tech communicators.

I couldn't really call myself nervous -- curious and a little afraid that no one would come-out-to-my-party, but not nervous. First, Florence and I met at the venue and were quite happily chatting while we posted directional signs. Then, Andy turned up at the café; and again, the conversation continued nicely. One by one, people saw our 'Tech Com meeting' sign, which we'd placed on our table and joined us. There were eight of us in total by the time we made our way across the street to start the program.

The Attendees

The group included Tina Hoffman, an STC vice president who traveled up from Reading; Nick Rosenthal, a translator and linguist who traveled from Manchester; David Williams a senior tech writer from Cambridge; Brian Parkinson, a graphics designer who lives in Sheffield. That was all. My co-workers didn't show, and half of the people who'd responded positively didn't come out. (Drat the English sunshine!!!)

I wasn't thrilled with the numbers, but I was very pleased that people had traveled and that they were from such diverse backgrounds.



Mike Unwalla, Andy Swartz, Tina Hoffman, David Williams, Nancy Halverson (front), Florence Dujardin, Nick Rosenthal and Brian Parkinson.

The Results

We had a great session -- lots of energy, discussion on who we might try to get involved and why there wasn't more interaction between the professions. The program ran over by about an hour, but we all enjoyed ourselves too much to quit.

And the feedback has been fantastic. Apparently, the STC UK meetings in London only attract about 20 people at the best of times, so for me to put eight people in a room outside of London was great. I feel a bit better about the numbers now, and everyone was grateful that I got the meeting off the ground at all.

I'm hoping that the energy that we felt in the room on Saturday carries us through for a while. We discussed how to 'cross-pollinate' between the various disciplines for a larger, more rounded conference. All of us want to overcome the politics of the organizations (STC, ISTC, ITI etc) and open up the programs to a broad range of communicators. I hope that with our core group of people, we can get things moving a bit. We're maybe at the beginning of a long but interesting road.

(I have to mention here that enthusiasm was high before my provisions arrived, but spiraled up higher after the coffee and tea making equipment was hauled in, along with a generous bunch of fruit, and other goodies. Food -- gets 'em every time!)

New Beginnings

It's over now, and time for the follow-ups. I've already received messages from

some of the participants, so the networking begins in earnest. I've been asked by the STC President to join the council next year, and I'm seriously thinking about it. They're going to do 'virtual' meetings for council instead of face-to-face meetings, since everyone's time is too precious to travel to London. I could handle it -- possibly. Since there aren't any monthly general meetings to organize, and very little other activity, I might just be able to contribute something.

Here we go again! But, this is definitely rewarding work, even when you have to do it alone for a while.

I'm looking forward to seeing Waterloo again in July. Thanks to everyone for letting me feel like I'm still a part of your group. I hope you've enjoyed some of my rantings! ♦

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April Meeting Recap: Information Mapping

by Diane Russell, Student Liaison, WLU



Finding speakers who are both informative and interesting can be a challenge -- but our executive always comes through on this one. April's meeting featured Jim Purdy, a trainer of Information Mapping for Communicare.

Differences Between Structured Writing and Technical Writing

Jim spoke on the chief differences between 'technical writing' and 'structured writing'. His first slide had everyone laughing; it featured a bulleted list of how to define technical writing. Along with the expected "providing specialist information for a non-specialist audience", Jim had also included the quip "documentation that no one would read by choice".

By contrast, the hallmarks of structured writing include:

- separation of content from format,
- turning prose content into 'modules',
- more 'bookmarks' for increased user choices, and
- usability for various media without having to re-work format.

Cognitive Psychology

Information-mapping is based on cognitive psychology, and is proven user-friendly. The best way to describe it is to think of text information in a paragraph, which has been re-worked into a table or graph for easier viewing. Jim gave the example of a paragraph in a manual which would describe a company's policy on 'casual dress days' for its employees. Picture a single paragraph containing a description of the policy, its effective date, and any exceptions. Structured writing would take this information and translate it to:

POLICY: On Fridays, employees will be permitted to wear jeans to work.

EFFECTIVE: June 4, 2004

EXCEPTIONS: Employees who must meet with clients

No acid-washed or torn jeans allowed; also, no shorts

Thus, structured writing allows the reader to extract only the desired information without having to read through a lengthy document of interrelated text.

Advantages of Structured Writing

Jim highlighted other advantages of structured writing, including:

- increased comprehension by users
- better communication
- decreased production costs, as text/graphics can be re-used

One drawback was noted: companies must adapt the same formatting principles for all employees.

As a new graduate, I was eager to put this information to good use and found it helpful for a brochure I am working on for my Toastmasters group. Imagine doing this with all those university essays...

Discount Offer

As part of my presentation Thursday night, Jim Purdy would like to offer STC members a discount on their 3-day Information Mapping seminar "Developing Usable Content and Documentation" held at their Toronto facility in the west end (Gardner Expressway & South Kingsway).

STC members can attend one of their regularly scheduled Public Seminars and receive a 25% discount off the \$2,350 + tax price (\$1,762.50 + tax). Their [Web site](#) has the schedule for all their Public Seminars (the next seminar is scheduled for June 14-16) for a maximum of 12 individuals. However, if there is a demand, they can schedule as many seminars as there are willing STC members.

This discount does NOT apply to STC members who attend one of their Onsite Seminars (at your work place), nor does the discount apply to the Public Seminars held in Ottawa and Montreal.

If our chapter organizes an information mapping workshop, the price per person would be even less. Why not let our [Education Manager](#) know if you would be interested. If there is enough interest, Information Mapping might be our annual February workshop? ♦

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Consulting and Independent Contracting: Tax Tips for Next Year



by Elaine Garnet, CIC-SIG Coordinator

Dear Entrepreneur:

I have posted my taxes and paid the portion of GST that I owe the Government of Canada. Although this article is too late to help you with the past year's taxes, it is just the right time to learn how to do your taxes for this year.

Heaven knows, I'm not a tax expert, but if you are new to business, these tips might help (or at least start you thinking about) planning for next year. As a sole proprietor, I prepare my own taxes using an off-the-shelf accountant (Quick Tax). If you are incorporated, you will have to hire the real thing. If you are really in the big time, with multiple businesses and money invested here and there, you may also want to hire an accountant.

The GST

You know it and love it. You probably pay some every day. If you are in business and earn more than \$30,000 a year, you must register for a business number and collect GST from your clients. I say 'must' because I generally obey the rules. There are plenty of consultants out there, though, who are making a bundle and keeping quiet about it. How they get away with it, I don't know. Anyway, if you have a business number and are collecting GST, the government will faithfully send you a form every year on which you must enter total revenue, total GST collected and the GST paid by your business for goods and services. The difference between 'collected' and 'paid' will be either a balance to be paid or a refund to be collected. Pray for a refund.

The PST

Most independent writers or contractors aren't providing a transaction that's tangible. All my work is carried out digitally. No paper or discs change hands. When I pay PST to purchase an item for the business, I record the amount within the cost of the goods. The PST is an expense for me. I record the GST separately because I track how much I paid and hope desperately for a refund.

Businesses Expenses

If you have a home office, you can claim the business part of your telephone bill, Internet service, insurance, and any maintenance bills. Be sure to include all office

supplies, equipment, and expenses such as postage, fax, and courier fees. And don't forget all those bank fees and interest expenses!

If you buy a computer or office furniture, for example, you must depreciate the cost over time. It makes sense to buy capital equipment (for example, a computer) at the end of the year, so the depreciation will be less. The same applies to a business vehicle.

And here's a really great tip. Remember when your kid assembled the office furniture, or helped you paint the room, or entered data for you? Pay them a salary, and you can deduct the salary from your income. I checked this out with Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) last year and it's perfectly above board.

Business-Use-of-Home Expenses

Total all hydro, utility, mortgage interest payments, etc, and apply these to home office expenses. I have eight rooms in my home and use one room that is totally dedicated as office space. Therefore, I take one-eighth of all these expenses and claim them as business use of home expenses. If you prefer, use square footage to calculate the portion claimable.

Vehicle Expenses

Keep careful track of your business mileage throughout the year and take this as a percentage of your car's total mileage. Parking, gas, oil, maintenance, and insurance are all claimable at that percentage. You can also claim lease payments. Again, if you buy a vehicle, you can depreciate part of the cost over time.

Personal Stuff

All the personal stuff is as straightforward as it always was. Just follow the guide. If you have any questions, don't call me. I have reached my quota of tax frustration.

Sincerely,

Elaine Garnet

CIC-SIG Coordinator ♦

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Membership News

by Steve Neville



This month's membership news encompasses both both new members and senior members who receive this rank when they have been members of the STC for five years.

New Members

Welcome to our new members!

Fei Min Lorente lives in Guelph and is a Senior Technical Communicator at Dspfactory. She also has her own technical writing business called Articulated Concepts. Although Fei Min has been a member of the STC for over 10 years, she only recently moved joined our chapter. Prior to this, she was an active member of the Alberta chapter where she also served on the executive. Most of her spare time is taken up with her family, but she also makes time for karate, swimming, and some stress-relieving baking.

Anne Marie Parks joins us from Lambton Shores, which is often referred to as Grand Bend. She has been an English as a Second Language (ESL) literacy tutor for 14 years, and is also a part-time technical writing student at Humber College. In addition, she also volunteers her writing services at a local London park, where she is creating a procedure manual. Like many STC members, Anne Marie joined the STC to increase her contacts and to access the STC's resources. Anne Marie's hobbies include shade gardening and hiking.

Dina Abramson lives in Hamilton and just completed the technical writing program at Humber College. She joined the STC to help get her career off the ground and to get valuable information. Dina currently works as a Systems Consultant who provides application maintenance and support for mainframe legacy systems. Dina is interested in starting her own home-based business as a technical writer. Since she has Lupus, she wants to manage her time to benefit her health and quality of life. She also wants to meet other communicators and independent consultants who are doing similar ventures so that she might gain some insight and advice.

In addition to these three new members, we also welcome **Tim Grantham** and **Gail Major** to our chapter.

Senior Members

In addition to new members we also have four new senior members. Congratulations to:

- Catherine L. Arthur
- Lynn M. Coulthard
- Martin C. Eisenloeffel
- Stephen Van Esch ♦

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Warnings, Cautions, Notes, and Disclaimers

by David Tinsley



This article discusses guidelines for the use and placement of Warnings, Cautions, Notes, and Disclaimers in technical documentation. This article expresses a personal opinion and I do not want to suggest it is the only (or best) way of approaching the subject. It is, however, a standard approach that I have found easy to implement and unambiguous to the reader. I hope this article will be useful to new technical writers and the perhaps not so new among us!

Three Distinct Functions

Warnings, Cautions, Notes and Disclaimers perform three distinct functions:

1. Warnings and Cautions alert the reader to situations that may cause personal injury or equipment damage.
2. Notes provide additional information to the reader that is outside the 'flow' of the associated text.
3. Disclaimers protect the company by stating limits about what the product can or cannot do.

It is good practice to place all the Warnings and Cautions in the front of the document as well as in the appropriate place in the main body of the text. Notes are placed at the appropriate place in the text, while Disclaimers are normally placed only in the front matter.

Warnings

Warnings alert the reader to situations where a hazard to personnel may arise. They are placed before the event to which they relate and are repeated at each applicable occasion. Stating "See Warning on page xx" is not acceptable. They are formatted in bold and in a larger font than the associated text. A warning symbol is placed in the adjacent margin.

A Warning comprises three distinct sections:

1. The action required to avoid the hazard. "Do not touch the exposed electrical terminals".
2. Details of the hazard. "The electrical terminals are at mains voltage".

3. The consequences of ignoring the Warning. "Touching the electrical terminals may result in death or serious injury".

An example of a complete Warning is as follows:

Make sure the pressure relief valve is open before disconnecting the input union. The bottle is pressurised to 150 bar. Disconnecting the input union without opening the pressure relief valve will cause an explosion and may cause death or serious injury.

Cautions

Cautions are similar to Warnings but they are used when equipment damage may result if a process is not followed. They are formatted and placed in the same way as Warnings, but with a Caution symbol in the margin. Like Warnings, Cautions comprise three distinct sections:

1. The action required to avoid the damage. "Do not touch the component pins".
2. Reason for the Caution. "The component is an electro-static sensitive device".
3. The consequences of ignoring the Caution. "Touching the component pins will cause irreparable damage to the component."

An example of a complete Caution is as follows:

Do not touch the glass envelope when handling the bulb. The skin contains oils that will adhere to the glass envelope. Touching the glass envelope will cause premature failure of the bulb.

Notes

Notes comprise additional information that aid the reader in the use or understanding of the equipment or subject. Specifically, they are not used when a Warning or Caution is applicable. They are not safety related and may be placed either before or after the associated text as required. Notes are formatted differently than normal text so they stand out, but are not given the prominence that Warnings and Cautions are given.

An example of a Note is as follows:

If the asset is track-only or electro-optical, this selector panel will show an ON/OFF selection.

Disclaimers

Disclaimers are placed in front matter and, if possible, the wording is approved with the company legal department. Disclaimers provide a means of specifying limitations or other requirements on equipment.

An example of a Disclaimer is as follows:

The Widget system is designed to be used with tools specifically designed by the XYZ company for the Widget system. The accuracy of the Widget system cannot be guaranteed if other tools are used.

Conclusion

Technical writers are responsible for producing documentation that, among other things, provides safety information in a way that is clear, concise and precise. All too often, I have read technical documentation that is misleading. Notes are called Warnings or Disclaimers. Warnings are placed after the event to which they relate, or not at all. By using the method of selection and placement described in this article, documentation can provide the reader with the information required in a structured consistent format.

David Tinsley is Manager, Technical Communications at NDI, Waterloo and may be contacted at dtinsley@ndigital.com. ♦

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Upcoming Chapter Events

by Opal Gamble, Program Manager



If you have any questions about upcoming chapter events, or if you have a suggestion for a meeting topic, feel free to email [Opal Gamble](#) (Program Manager) or [Paul Lofthouse](#) (Program Assistant).

For details about our chapter's events for the rest of the year, as well as last minute updates or additions to the schedule, take a look at the [STC calendar](#).



You and a guest are invited to the
annual STC BBQ

*Tuesday, June 1st
Club Willowells
5:30pm to 9:00pm
rain or shine*

*RSVP by May 21st at
www.stc-soc.org/bbq/*

The flyer features a collection of BBQ tools on the left, including tongs, a spatula, a brush, and a fork. On the right, there is a close-up image of a grill basket filled with various meats and vegetables like asparagus, mushrooms, and corn. The text is arranged in a clean, professional layout with a mix of bold and italicized fonts.

[RSVP](#) today! ♦

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Getting the Job Done for the Job Bank

by Ursula McCoy, Employment Manager



The Southwestern Ontario Chapter's online Job Bank has recently undergone a technical transformation, and emerged with a slick new interface. Employers now have the ability to set up an account, post their own jobs directly from our Web site, and then update or remove their jobs whenever needed. Standard corporate information that is linked to an employer's account is added automatically to any posting they make. This should make it easier for frequent posters (and there are a few!) to post multiple jobs.

Some things are still the same. We track when a position was posted so you know how fresh a posting is. Jobs expire and are automatically removed from the site after a month has passed, unless otherwise requested. And both employers and job seekers are still encouraged to contact the Employment Manager with any questions and suggestions, or even just to have a second pair of eyes review a posting or a resume.

For years, various Web Masters and Employment Managers have dreamed about an automated interface similar to the STC Toronto Job Bank, but kudos go to Opal Gamble, who dedicated her spare time to finally make it happen! ♦

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STC Head Office: Requests for Nominations and Requests for Proposals



The following articles appeared in the April issue of Tieline, The Society Leaders' newsletter. If you are a senior member, in addition to getting involved at a chapter level, there are activities at an international level that enable you to make a difference. For all members, read this article to get an appreciation for the effort required to make the things happen that we take for granted.

Note: To access the nominations form, you will have to use your membership number and password to access that part of the STC Web site.

Nominating Committee Seeks Candidates for Society-Level Positions in 2005

Would you like to help STC remain a vital organization? You—and other members whom you know and respect—can perform this important function. How? By being a candidate for a Society-level position in 2005.

Ask yourself these questions: Are you good at listening to and implementing ideas? Do you think you can help direct and administer Society-level activities? Would you like to represent our membership on ceremonial occasions? Could you help coordinate an array of programs beneficial to our profession? If your answers are “yes,” tell the STC nominating committee that you would be interested in running for office. Or, if you know another member who should be considered a candidate for a position on our board, please forward that person’s name to the nominating committee.

A healthy board needs a combination of seasoned Society leaders and new senior members (those with at least five years of STC membership) with fresh perspectives. So whether you’re a veteran member or a new senior member, consider stepping forward.

The nominating committee will consider all recommendations as it draws up the 2005 slate of candidates. Part of the committee’s process involves contacting potential candidates to confirm that they are interested in running for STC office.

The members of this year’s nominating committee are Mary R. Wise (manager), Washington, DC chapter; Rita B. Johnson, Middle Tennessee chapter; Christopher Juillet, Southeastern Michigan chapter; and two others to be determined in this spring’s election. Please feel free to discuss your ideas with any of these people.

Open Positions and Qualifications

In the STC year ahead, the nominating committee will be developing a slate of candidates for the following positions:

- Second vice president
- Treasurer
- Director-sponsor for Region 1
- Director-sponsor for Region 5
- Director-sponsor for Region 7
- Two nominating committee members

All candidates must be senior members. Candidates for second vice president must have extensive leadership experience, preferably in positions at the Society level. Candidates for treasurer should have strong communication skills and leadership experience at the chapter or regional level. Candidates for director-sponsor should have a history of successful STC leadership, preferably at the chapter or regional level.

Nominating committee candidates should have excellent judgment about people and wide acquaintance with members at all levels of the Society.

The nominating committee welcomes your suggestions about potential candidates for the positions listed here. If you think that you or someone you know should be considered, please fill out the [accompanying form](#) and return it to the STC office by July 30, 2004.

Alternatively, members attending STC's 51st Annual Conference in Baltimore, Maryland, May 9-12, may turn in their forms at the program booth in the lobby of the Baltimore Convention Center.

STC's 52nd Annual Conference: Call for Proposals

STC's 52nd Annual Conference will take place May 8-11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington. The call for proposals (and its accompanying application form) will be posted on the [STC Web site](#) in April 2004. ♦

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