



## In This Issue

### [The Importance of Documentation: An Object Lesson in Technical Accuracy](#)

President Opal Gamble knows from first hand experience how bad documentation equals a bad experience. The whole situation is even worse when it relates to security devices. See if this article matches your imagination. ♦

### [Upcoming Chapter Events](#)

Although February is a short month, there is a lot happening this month. With so much happening, and a shorter month, time will just fly until our annual wine and cheese in March. You don't want to miss any of these events. ♦

### [December General Meeting Recap: Is Marcom for You?](#)

Our last general meeting seems so long ago, but it was certainly an event worth remembering. Find out what we learned from our panel of experts. ♦

### [Highlighting Hazards: Mastering Warnings and Error Messages](#)

December's STC remote seminar was an early gift to attendees who wanted to find out how to document hazards and error messages. The only danger associated with this article is missing the information that it contains. ♦

### [Pre-emptive Project Planning](#)

January's STC remote seminar demonstrated that planning is not always futile. In fact, using the techniques and templates provided in this seminar can help you to both predict and handle the future. ♦

### [The Results Are In!](#)

Everyone likes to be a winner, so it's not surprising that there were many winners in this year's Technical Publications, Online Communications, and Technical Art competitions. Find out about our exchange of entries with the Minnesota chapter STC, and the results of

## The Editor's Message

Welcome to the latest issue of The Quill. It's hard to believe that it is already February. On the bright side, we are one month closer to spring and the summer. On the dark side, we are still in the midst of winter. For those avid skiers and snowmobilers, I guess you will have to flip the bright and dark comments.

## Education

At the beginning of December, as I was trying to get that month's issue of The Quill together, I was also in the process of studying for an exam. For me, it had been about 20 years since I had had to write an exam (now you know how old I am). But it appears, like riding a bicycle, it comes back to you. I just got my marks last week and I passed, with honours.

This story was not meant to brag, but to show you that you never stop learning...especially in this business. I have just started the second half of the course, so it seems that I couldn't stop learning now if that's what I wanted.

## Our Education Seminars

If you have not already registered for one or both days of this year's seminars, you might just be able to get your registration in for the February 17th or 18th seminars. If you have not checked out what opportunities for learning await you, access the [PDF file on our chapter Web site](#) for more details.

that exchange. ♦

## [Balancing Work and Home](#)

As everyone tries to get as much as they can out of life, the phrase, "There's not enough hours in the day" keeps coming up. Find out how one technical writer found a solution to balancing work and a home life. ♦

## [A View From the Other Side...of a New Year](#)

It's always exciting to get something new, and this month's article is no exception. There is a lot new on the other side of the pond. ♦

## [Don't Lose It...Use It!](#)

Growing up, you may have heard your parent tell you to "use it or lose it." Now, even as an adult, those words are still true. Find out how our technical writer in the States is keeping her skills sharp by doing volunteer work. ♦

## [CIC SIG: Notes From an Isolated Writer](#)

While the saying is that no man is an island, in the world of writing, you can sometimes feel isolated. And, if you think this article is just doom and gloom, then think again. There's words to live by in this article. ♦

## [Membership News](#)

Being in a large group, it can be hard to get to know members. Find out who's new and who are new senior members. ♦

## **STC Election Early This Year**

If you pay your dues by February 28, 2005, you can have a say in the STC's future by casting your vote. Read these articles so you can make an informed decision:

- [Candidate for Director, Region 1: Cindy Currie](#) ♦
- [Candidate for Director, Region 1: Rich Maggiani](#) ♦
- [Candidate for 2nd Vice-President: Deborah Sauer](#) ♦
- [Candidate for 2nd Vice-President: Paula Berger](#) ♦
- [Candidate for 2nd Vice-President: Linda L. Oestreich](#) ♦

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

## **Employment**

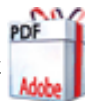
In addition to being able to find a job by looking for postings on our Web site, there are occasionally employers who do not want to put a posting on our site. When this occurs, the employer asks our Employment Manager for a list of people who might be looking for work. If you would be interested in being on that list, contact [Ursula McCloy](#) for details.

## **Questions**

Questions are the perfect tie in between education and employment. You need to ask questions to learn, and the questions don't stop even when you are employed. (See my earlier comment about how learning continues for the rest of your life.)

If you would like to ask a question or share your wisdom, I am always eager to hear from you.

Send your articles, suggestions, and comments to me, Debbie, at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org).





# About The Quill



by [Debbie Kerr](#), The Quill Editor

The Quill is the monthly newsletter of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC, which is a Canadian chapter in Region 1. Our chapter spans from Windsor to Mississauga and Georgian Bay to Lake Ontario. This area is home to the technology triangle, which is home to many high-tech industries.

## 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. In **2003**, our first year in an online format, we won a Merit Award.

## Publication Policies and Frequency

The Quill is published monthly, with the exception of January, so there are nine issues published from September 2004 to June 2005.

The following is a summary of when articles must be submitted so that they can be included in a particular issue. To help the Quill Editor to plan the content of each issue, contributors are encouraged to submit their story ideas one week before submitting their articles.

Issue	Article Deadline
September	August 23
October	September 20
November	October 18
December	November 22
January	No Quill
February	January 18
March	February 14
April	March 21

May	April 18
June	May 23
July or August	No Quill

## Copyright Statement

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication within the submission deadlines stated earlier. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to the newsletter to run the article and to other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

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.

The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC, 2004-2005.

## Reprint Policy

Articles contained in this newsletter may be reprinted if credit is given to The Quill and the author of the article. You must also submit an electronic copy of the article to The Quill Editor at [quill@stc-soc.org](mailto:quill@stc-soc.org) OR mail two paper copies to the mailing address below.

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Past President: [Heidi Marr](#)

Treasurer: [Carol Lawless](#)

Recorder: [Emily Layng](#)

For a complete list of contacts, go to the site of the Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC at [www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org).

## STC Head Office

Mission Statement:

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

You can find out more about the STC using any of the following methods.

Web site: [www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org).

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Fax: (703) 522-2075

Email: [stc@stc.org](mailto:stc@stc.org) ♦

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# The Importance of Documentation: An Object Lesson in Technical Accuracy



by [Opal Gamble](#), President

As technical communicators, we all concern ourselves with ensuring that the material we produce is as accurate as possible. We double-check our facts. We get SMEs (Subject Matter Experts) to review our drafts. Quality assurance may even test our documents.

We send those documents out, pleased that we've done everything we could to make sure the information is correct. Maybe we even indulge in a little back-patting for a job well done.

But what happens to our audience when our facts go awry?

## Small Scale Problem

Well, in some cases, inaccurate documentation creates a few headaches and some frustration, but nothing too terrible. A few weeks ago, while visiting my boyfriend, his Dad hauled me aside and said "I've got a problem... help?"

He had purchased an [iTrip](#) for his new iPod, and he could not get the software to work. "These stupid instructions," he cried, waving a glossy pamphlet, "I followed them exactly, and it doesn't work!"

(Technical writer for a laser systems company... sure, I can fix an iTrip-iPod documentation problem. No leap there.)

As it turned out, the problem wasn't the documentation. Not at all. In fact, I'm just about willing to guarantee that the writer in charge of those documents had everything right: the problem was that the CD was missing one important .xml file (the play list, for those of you in the know).

Let's face it, though. No one ever cries for the blood of the person that created the CD... they yell at the technical communicator and those "damn instructions."

## When Documentation Makes Your Ears Bleed

A larger example of documentation gone wrong comes from an acquaintance of mine, who was on a strict deadline and had to work very late into the night on a project.

Before embarking on this late night project, she reviewed the company's security system documentation and discovered that if the system went off in the middle of

the night, the security company would call the police and the facilities coordinator for the company where she worked. Both parties would then be obligated to investigate the intrusion.

Come 2 a.m., my acquaintance decided it was time for a fresh cup of coffee, so she headed off to the kitchen. As she reached to put her mug on the coffee machine ledge, the alarm went off with a shriek that made her drop her mug on the floor and sprint for the passkey on her desk.

It is quite possible that she set a new land speed record that night.

As per the instructions in the documentation, she fled to the nearest exit, went outdoors, and allowed the door to lock behind her. Then, she let herself back into the building with her passkey, which should have reset the alarm by informing the system that an employee was present.

The documentation promised that this would take "a few minutes."

Ten minutes later, she was back in her cubical, the shrillness of the alarm still peeling paint off of the walls, reading the security system documentation in hopes that she would find the technicality that was keeping the alarm screaming. Her mind was filled with fear as she imagined facing not the police, who were surely on their way, but a grumpy co-worker who was hauled out of bed at 2:10 a.m. for a false alarm at the office.

## **A Few Discoveries**

As it turned out, the problem with the documentation was three-fold:

1. It neglected to indicate that when the system was full arm the shutoff was good for two hours after the *first* passkey entrance, rather than the most recent entrance. In other words, if Schmoie entered the building at 12:05, and Mary entered the building at 1:20, the alarm would re-arm at 2:05 a.m., not at 3:20 a.m.
2. It was out of date, and indicated that the alarm went into full arm at 11 p.m. instead of 1 a.m.
3. It omitted details that the writer considered "too confusing" for his readers: a few minutes is 15; walking through the building while the alarm is still sounding triggers it again, and so on.

Now, while nothing bad happened to "me" (you saw that coming, didn't you?) as a result of this documentation snafu—I managed to get the alarm turned off eventually and I didn't lose my hearing—it did give me a jolt about the project I was working on.

What happens to my end user, when my documentation glosses over something or is unclear?

The police aren't going to show up and arrest my readers because the documentation led them astray; however, that doesn't mean they aren't just as mortified and furious about the error in laser system documentation as I was with the mistakes in the security system instructions.

That alarm has triggered me to create my own three-fold rule: *For every documentation flaw you write, you will fall victim to three more.*

Be careful with your documentation! ♦

### **About Opal Gamble**

*Technical writer, web monkey, and general geek, Opal's wanted to be a tech writer since high school; she became a STC-SOC council member in 1997. A graduate of UW's co-op Rhetoric and Professional Writing program, Opal is a Technical Writer and (unofficial) web designer at [Virtek](#). She also runs her own freelance business.*

*When she's not doing STC business, Opal participates in autocross events (with a hybrid car, no less!) and tries to cultivate a green thumb in her garden.*

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## Upcoming Chapter Events



by [Peter Szabo](#), Program Manager

Happy Belated New Year!

With 2005 already a month old, we start off February with our monthly General Meeting, featuring guest speaker Louis Beauregard, who's travelling all the way from Montreal to tell us about single-sourcing with e-learning materials. And he'll be giving away a free copy of software as a door prize, too. In response to your answers to our survey, we're offering this General Meeting on a **Wednesday** night to give those of you who are often busy on Tuesdays a chance to join in the chapter fun for a change.

We'll continue our very popular chapter-sponsored STC afternoon seminars with a close look at the features in the newest release of Adobe Acrobat, version 7.0. And that will take us closer to the Annual Wine and Cheese Networking Night on March 1 in the posh digs at the University Club.

### **WEDNESDAY, February 2, 2005: Single-Sourcing and E-Learning**

When people say "single-sourcing" they usually mean creating a user guide and online help from a single document. But what about adding e-learning to the mix? Join Louis Beauregard as he describes ways to create compelling, media-rich, e-learning content—without breaking the bank. Louis will discuss the implications of e-learning as they relate to data modeling, instructional design, content creation, and production automation.

**Time:** 7:00 p.m., doors open at 6:30 p.m.

**Location:** University of Waterloo (U of W), Davis Centre, Room 1304 [[map](#)].

**Cost:** FREE for all

### **Wednesday, February 9, 2005: STC Remote Seminar**

**Topic:** Adobe Acrobat 7.0

**Host:** Brian Wood

In this ninety-minute educational seminar, Brian Wood will provide a glimpse of several new features that are particularly useful to technical, business, and other professionals.

**Time:** 1:00-2:30 p.m. EDT (Doors open at 12:30)

**Location:** CheckFree i-Solutions, [[455 Phillip Street, Waterloo](#)].

**Cost:** FREE for members and \$35 for non-members.

## **Tuesday, February 15, 2005: Council Meeting**

**Time:** 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**Location:** CheckFree i-Solutions, [[455 Phillip Street, Waterloo](#)]

All members welcome—help your chapter by becoming a volunteer!

RSVP to [Opal Gamble](#).

## **Thursday, February 17, 2005 and Friday, February 18, 2005: Education Seminars**

**Hosted by:** Southwestern Ontario Chapter STC

**Location:** Hilton Garden Inn, Cambridge, ON

### **February 17, 2005**

- Developing a Style Guide, presented by Vivian Viitala and Katherine Estes
- Template Development: Best Practices, presented by Bernard Aschwaden

### **February 18, 2005**

- Mapping the Content Ecosystem, presented by Rob Hanna
- Why You Need Structured FrameMaker, presented by Russ Ward

For details about any of these seminars, access the PDF file on our Web site at [www.stc-soc.org](http://www.stc-soc.org)

Hurray to register; time is running out!

## **Tuesday, March 1, 2005: Annual Wine and Cheese Networking Night**

**Time:** 7:00-9:00 p.m.

**Location:** University Club, University of Waterloo Campus  
200 University Ave. West, Waterloo, ON

[Click here for a map of the University campus.](#) The University Club is designated by the abbreviation 'UC.'

**Cost:** FREE for members and nonmembers.

**Yes, there will be food!** And one free drink for everyone.

For more details, keep checking the Calendar section of our Web site.

If you have any questions about upcoming chapter events, or if you have a suggestion for a meeting topic, feel free to e-mail [Peter Szabo](#) (Program Manager).

For details about our chapter's events for the rest of the year, as well as last minute updates or additions to the schedule, be sure to check our local [STC chapter calendar](#). ♦

### **About Peter Szabo**

*Peter has been a technical writer in one form or another for ten years. For the past five years, Peter has worked for CheckFree i-Solutions, a software firm in Waterloo, and is currently the Manager of Technical Publications.*

*Born and raised in Toronto, Ontario, Peter moved to Guelph in 1997, where he currently lives with his wife, Irene, and six-year-old son, Taylor. He is working on his first feature-length screenplay.*



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# December General Meeting Recap: Is Marcom for You?



by [Marisa Latin](#), Quill Contributor

If you envision your audience asking 'what's in it for me,' then you're definitely a marketing communications (marcom) writer, as you'll see in this meeting recap.

In a presentation and panel discussion titled Technical Writing vs. Marketing Writing, Christy Simard, from The PEER Group, compared technical communication and marketing communication. She also provided detailed 'survival' tips regarding the team (who and what to identify and why), the message (what to research, outline, and get approved), the writing (the living process), and the reviews (what to expect and how to handle it). Above all, put your ego aside and consider all feedback.

Christy then joined our other talented guests, Richard Evers, currently at RIM, and Elaine Ruddock, from Campana, for a great panel discussion. Questions were directed by our Program Manager, Peter Szabo, and the audience.

The following table presents the highlights from this meeting, with the commonalities between the two sectors underlined.

Comparison	Techcom	Marcom
Purpose of Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>help people complete a task or understand a system</li> <li>convey product features</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>persuade people to action</li> <li>convey product benefits (what's in it for me that's more different than anyone else)</li> </ul>
Subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>technical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>technical</li> </ul>
Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>existing customer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>potential customer</li> </ul>
Goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>clear, correct, concise writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>engaging, convincing, compelling writing (you want them to have questions)</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>facts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>needs, emotions, what matters</li> </ul>
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>details, structure, flow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>speed, creativity, emotion</li> </ul>

Timing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• more hours per assignment (longer docs)</li> <li>• fewer hours per page</li> <li>• (eg. 4 hours for a complex help topic)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• fewer hours per assignment (shorter docs)</li> <li>• many more hours per page (takes longer to write one thing)</li> <li>• (eg. 40 hours for a datasheet page)</li> </ul>
Deadlines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• longer</li> <li>• based on engineering activities</li> <li>• change less often</li> <li>• may include multiple assignments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• shorter</li> <li>• based on 'compelling events' like trade shows, telephone campaigns</li> <li>• change more often</li> <li>• may include multiple assignments</li> </ul>
Doc Type	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• user guides</li> <li>• online help</li> <li>• integrated assistance</li> <li>• quick start cards</li> <li>• reference manuals</li> <li>• specifications</li> <li>• presentations</li> <li>• tutorials</li> <li>• demonstrations</li> <li>• text (sentences, paragraphs, lists, etc.)</li> <li>• illustrations and diagrams</li> <li>• charts and graphs</li> <li>• tables and matrices</li> <li>• definitions</li> <li>• multi-media</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• press releases</li> <li>• product blurbs</li> <li>• data sheets</li> <li>• success stories</li> <li>• white papers</li> <li>• proposals</li> <li>• quotations</li> <li>• artwork</li> <li>• presentations</li> <li>• tutorials</li> <li>• demonstrations</li> <li>• text (sentences, paragraphs, lists, etc.)</li> <li>• illustrations &amp; diagrams</li> <li>• charts &amp; graphs</li> <li>• tables &amp; matrices</li> <li>• definitions</li> <li>• multi-media</li> </ul>

\*marketing materials are public domain that you can put into your portfolio

Production Requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• don't need high quality (make your own print masters, etc.)</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• higher-quality production (full color printing, more artwork, pre-press setup)</li></ul>
Contacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• engineers</li><li>• trainers</li><li>• support staff</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• engineers</li><li>• trainers</li><li>• support staff</li><li>• designers</li><li>• photographers</li><li>• printers</li><li>• ad agencies</li><li>• marketing coordinators</li><li>• sales reps</li><li>• execs in sales and marketing</li></ul>
Work Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• established priorities</li><li>• predictable assignments</li><li>• covering the details</li><li>• knowing it's either right or wrong</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• changing priorities</li><li>• shifting schedules</li><li>• looking higher than the details</li><li>• more subjective feedback</li></ul>
Reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• mostly SMEs (subject matter experts), and not many of them</li><li>• mostly critique technical content</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• more people review the doc</li><li>• heavy critiques (technical, words, etc.)</li></ul>

SME

- developers (who work beyond the level you need to write at, forcing you to figure out the missing pieces of information and flesh out cryptic notes)
- sales staff who know the audience
- people in your field (the marketing writer becomes the SME for marketing)

Why should you try marcom? It's fun, if you like to be creative and work on many different things. It will help you develop new skills and enhance your job security and career options. It will help you become a better technical writer as you develop the habit of asking what's in it for your audience.

How can you break in to marcom? Locate new resources. Find a mentor. Get some training. Practice.

What about the money? When you transfer to marcom, you'll probably start in a more junior position, so, depending on where you are now, the salary may be a bit lower to start. But your salary can jump higher, faster. Then again, marketing writers were the first to be laid off during economic downturns, so keep your other skills polished. (By the way, did you know that marcom projects are quoted at a fixed price, whereas techcom projects are priced per page?) ♦

### **About Marisa Latin**

*Marisa has been a technical writer for over ten years and is currently at Insciber. She lives with her lively family and long list of pets. In her spare time, you can find her seeking nature's wonders and capturing 'life' on camera.*



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# Highlighting Hazards: Mastering Warnings and Error Messages



by Carrie Spira, Quill Contributor

Presented by Leah Guren

Wednesday, December 8, 2004 at CheckFree –i Solutions

## What is a Hazard?

- Any potential problem a user can avoid by specifically doing, or avoiding, an action.
- Or-
- Any unusual or unexpected behaviour that can interfere with normal usage.

## Well-Documented Hazards...

- Alert readers to potential problems to prevent serious damage, injury, or loss of life.
- Provide critical information at the right time.
- Protect the company by addressing product liability requirements.

...when the reader notices, perceives, understands, and chooses to comply with the warning.

## Poorly-Documented Hazards...

- Exist to satisfy an industry standard.
- State the obvious or the asinine.
- Exaggerate hazard issues.
- Include weak, ineffective content or icons.

## Key Elements of Hazards

Signal Word	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use standard signals only: Danger, Warning, Caution, Note, or Tip.</li> <li>• Readers may not understand the difference between warnings and cautions, so pick one and use it consistently.</li> </ul>
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use active, direct voice, and the strongest verb available.</li> <li>• Emphasize a positive action, where practical.</li> <li>• Be concise yet clear.</li> </ul>
Ramifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document the connection between the action and the problem (the "so what?" details) to improve reader compliance.</li> </ul>
Recovery (optional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include recovery steps, where practical.</li> </ul>

## Hazard Placement and Formatting

Position before a potential danger, but close enough to be relevant. Repeat critical hazards where needed instead of cross-referencing to hazard content.

When formatting hazards:

- Set signal word apart with white space.
- Use a hanging indent paragraph and a sans-serif font for maximum readability.
- Box or shade background to visually chunk the hazard component.
- Consider using colour to differentiate hazard content from body content.
- Indent to indicate hierarchy and relationships to body content.

## Hazard Example

- ① Signal Word
- ② Action
- ③ Ramifications

<p><b>Warning</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>①</li><li>②</li><li>③</li></ol>	<p>Always attach your wrist strap before handling any computer hardware components to prevent equipment damage.</p> <p>Wearing your wrist strap ensures that electric current does not pass from your body to the equipment.</p>
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## Certification and Compliance Considerations

Specialized markets and industries require that hazards comply with specific certification standards and guidelines. Legal issues can be complex and require sign-offs by appropriate stakeholders. Identify your internal resources and research the latest version of the standard to make sure your documentation meets certification requirements.

## Error Messages

Error messages are a particular kind of warning that appear in documentation or as part of an application. They address unusual or exceptional conditions that the product can't resolve.

### Good error messages...

- Teach users about the problem.
- Enable the user to recover from a problem.
- Appear in both the product documentation and the product.

### Poor error messages are...

- Expensive to both users and the company.
- Frustrating and dissatisfying for users.
- Bypassed and disregarded by users.
- Often written by developers, programmers, or engineers whose job focus is

on product functionality, and not the user.

## Key Elements of Error Messages

Identification	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Specific number or code the user can communicate to the company for internal technical support reporting.</li></ul>
Problem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Detail the most likely cause(s) first.</li></ul>
Cause	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include recovery steps, where practical.</li></ul>
Corrective Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include a recovery procedure.</li><li>• Balance audience needs against complexity.</li><li>• Consider screen accessibility and readability.</li><li>• Consider linking to an online help system or Web site knowledge base.</li></ul>

## Error Message Example

- ① Identification
- ② Problem
- ③ Cause
- ④ Corrective Action

The page cannot be found ②

The page you are looking for might have been removed, had its name changed, or is temporarily unavailable. ③

---

Please try the following: ④

- If you typed the page address in the Address bar, make sure that it is spelled correctly.
- Open the [www.freephotoshop.com](http://www.freephotoshop.com) home page, and then look for links to the information you want.
- Click the [Back](#) button to try another link.

HTTP 404 - File not found ①  
Internet Information Services

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### ***About Carrie Spira***

*Carrie has a BA in Rhetoric and Professional Writing from the University of Waterloo. She lives in Kitchener with her family and works as a Technical Writer in Waterloo. Carrie enjoys putting in her gardens, experimenting with digital photography, and makes time for cardio and weight training activities at the YMCA most days after work.*

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# Web-Telephone Seminar Recap: Pre-emptive Project Planning



by [Heather Celik](#), Quill Contributor

"My spleen is going to eat itself." Such a vivid image may not come to your mind when a critical assignment unexpectedly lands on your desk but that's how John Hedtke described it during a recent Web-telephone seminar on pre-emptive project planning.

If you're a manager who needs to track the workloads of other writers or even just someone who wants to manage their own assignments, you can use Hedtke's suggestions to:

- help avoid surprise projects,
- align upcoming tasks to particular areas of interest,
- raise the visibility of unofficial projects, and
- provide proof if you need to ask for more resources.

So before you receive an assignment that comes as a surprise and with a tight deadline, you can start asking about projects that have yet to be scheduled or approved. Then, using any information you can gather, you can create a simple spreadsheet to track and plan for these upcoming projects.

## How It Works

1. Set up a spreadsheet with columns for the project lead, writer, project name, and a year's worth of weekly columns.
2. Add a row at the bottom that displays the total estimated hours per week.
3. Create two sections: one at the top for official projects and the other at the bottom for unapproved ("rumoured") projects.
4. Fill in all of the information for the official projects as well as any information you already know about the unapproved projects. This arrangement enables you to easily scan for the start and finish dates of all the projects.
5. Distribute the spreadsheet weekly to everyone on your team or in your department. Distributing the spreadsheet, in an organized way, helps raise the credibility and visibility of your team.
6. Maintain the spreadsheet by talking to everyone from managers to the "folks in the trenches." Ask probing questions and always verify official

announcements.

7. Encourage everyone to be a spy. The key to pre-emptive planning is for everyone on the team to seek out as much detail about upcoming projects as they can. Such projects might include the next version of a product, a project pending budget approval, projects that will need customization, and projects where the potential lead has yet to be determined.

The difficulties of project planning usually don't involve the existing projects but the projects that you don't know anything about. You cannot foresee all of the projects that sneak up on you. And yes, sometimes "the dragon wins." But you just may be able to reduce the heat of the fire. ♦

### ***About Heather Celik***

*Last year, after teaching English in Istanbul for two years, Heather returned to the field of technical writing. She is now part of a group developing internal information for a network operations centre.*

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# The Competition Results Are In!



by [Lori Shantz](#), Competition Manager

The competition committee is pleased to announce the results of the 2004-2005 Technical Publications, Online Communications, and Technical Art competitions. This year our chapter, together with the Toronto chapter, exchanged entries with the Twin Cities chapter in Minnesota. The exchange gave our judges the chance to see what our American counterparts are producing, and strengthened our chapter's ties with the wider technical communication community.

## Our Thanks

The competition committee would like to extend our thanks to all the Minnesota judges who took the time to evaluate our entries, and to the Twin Cities chapter competition coordinators, Lee Tesdell and Linda Mikkelsen, who suggested this exchange and worked very hard to make it a success.

We'd also like to thank all the Southwestern Ontario and Toronto chapter judges who evaluated the entries from Minnesota. And finally, thanks to all the people who submitted entries to this year's competitions. We hope you've found this a valuable experience, and congratulations to all our winners!

## Best of Show

**Sue McCluskey, Up Inc**

What Language are we Speaking?: Understanding the Day-to-Day Jargon of Designers & Printers

## Distinguished Award Winners

**Sue McCluskey, Up Inc**

What Language are we Speaking?: Understanding the Day-to-Day Jargon of Designers & Printers

**Frank Artes, Applanix Corporation**

POS AV-Position & Orientation System-Airborne Vehicles

**Donna L. Baker**

Adobe Premiere Pro Complete Course

**Susan-Belle Ferguson, Alias**

Getting Started with Maya Tutorials

**Rob Hanna, International Financial Data Services**

IFDS Update Vol1No2/Vol2No1/Vol2No2

**Betty Dondertman, CAMH**

Alcohol & Drug Problems: A Practical Guide for Counsellors

## **Excellence Award Winners**

**Stephen Gaebel, Aias**

Alias SketchBook Pro Help

**Stephen Van Esch**

Using TabMST web-based training

**Rajiv Datta, IBM Canada**

WebSphere Commerce Migration Overview

**Vivian Viitala, Leitch Technology**

NEO SuiteView Multi-Source Display Processor and SuiteView Layout Manager  
Software Application

**Andrea Smirle**

NDI 6D Architect User Guide

## **Merit Award Winners**

**Christine Simard**

PCTS Server Failure Reference Guide

**Betty Dondertman, CAMH**

Asking the Right Questions 2: Talking with Clients About Sexual Orientation and  
Gender Identity in Mental Health, Counselling and Addiction Settings

**Ken Cox, Ken Cox Media Productions**

ComponentArt Web.UI 2.0 Documentation

**Ursula McCloy**

Time Management System Online Help

**Graham Webster, Leitch Technology**

LCP-3901-1U and RCP-CCS-1U Local and Remote Control Panels Installation and Operation Manual

**Bonnie Szeredi**

RapidStak Operator Guide

**Bernard Aschwanden, Publishing Smarter**

Adobe FrameMaker 7.1 Introductory Design

**Sue McCluskey, CAMH**

2003/2004 Annual Report to the Community: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, and CAMH Foundation: Annual Report 2003/2004

**Gilda Spitz, Longview Solutions**

Administering LRAL

**Peter Szabo**

Implementation and Reference Guide for i-Series Reports

## More Details

For more information about the STC competitions, visit the chapter Web site:

[www.stc-soc.org/competitions](http://www.stc-soc.org/competitions) ♦

### **About Lori Shantz**

*Lori stumbled into technical writing while looking for work as a museum curator. She figured that if she could explain Einstein's theory of relativity to fifth graders, she could probably explain technology to adults. (The jury is still out about which is tougher, however.)*

*This is Lori's fourth year on the STC council, and her second year as competition manager. She also volunteers for a local theater company (occasionally even appearing on stage!) and is a fledgling gardener, an avid reader, and a passionate cook.*

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# Balancing Work and Home



by [Fei Min Lorente](#), Volunteer Manager

I can't really call myself an expert, but I do have experience. I've been a technical writer for the last 15 years and I've been a mother for 7 of those years.

## Some Background

At the beginning of my career, I used to accept any and every project, no matter what overtime was involved. I was anxious to prove my value, and get the promotions, raises and bonuses that came with hard work. Then I had my first child. The first thing I told my boss after returning to work from maternity leave was that I was not interested in working on projects that demanded a lot of overtime. You might think this was a serious career-limiting move, but I wasn't as interested in my career anymore.

I still wanted to work; I enjoy the challenge and mental stimulation of technical writing. Heck, I was simply happy to talk to adults and have 8 hours in which I wouldn't be interrupted by a baby. At least you can tell a grown-up to go away and come back later if it isn't urgent.

## Career Woman and Working Mother

The difference between being a "career woman" and a "working mother" was that my priorities had changed. I still wanted to do a good job, but I wasn't willing to make it my life. So, the next challenge was to strike a balance between work and home. I freely admit that there are times when I wish I could spend more time at work, and there are times when I wish I could spend more time at home but, on the whole, I'm satisfied with my current situation.

Here's what I did.

## Cleaning Service

A lot of what follows isn't in your control, but this is. You can stress out about keeping your house clean while you try to spend some time with your family, or you can just cough up the money and spend hours with your child instead of vacuuming. If you feel like you're shirking your housekeeping duties, don't worry; you still have to do the shopping, laundry, cooking, dishwashing and parenting.

## 30-hour Work Week

Okay, I couldn't do this if I were a single parent. We can depend on my husband's income to keep us in the lifestyle to which we are accustomed, so I can afford 75% of a salary. I also have to say, though, that we couldn't manage our lifestyle and he couldn't do his job if I had to work a 40-hour week. A shorter work day is one reason I can leave work in time to meet my children as they get off the school bus, then pay attention to my 7-year-old as she struggles through her homework. My husband can't usually leave the office that early.

You're probably wondering how I landed this deal. Well, I got lucky. I started working on contract for a small start-up company that couldn't afford a full-time writer, but needed one. They decided they'd like to keep me but would have trouble justifying a full-time technical writer. The 30-hour work week was a great compromise. I cost them less; they still have my services available on a regular basis; and I get full benefits (you're eligible for benefits if you work more than 20 hours a week).

## **Telecommuting**

In spite of a cushy 30-hour job, there are still times when I can't make it into the office: one of the kids is sick, or the roads are bad, or someone has an appointment in the middle of the day. I live in Guelph and work in Waterloo, so sometimes it isn't worth the drive to be in the office for two or three hours. The option of working from home means I may still get in a 6-hour day even though I've had to spend two hours in a doctor's office.

I can VPN into the network and, except for large files, it's like I'm there. I have a laptop, so all my files and software are available. We have a home office, including a scanner and fax machine, so we can transmit paper. However, almost everything is done by e-mail or by dropping it on a shared temp directory.

The most useful gadget we have at home for telecommuting is a telephone headset. If I'm on a conference call or reviewing a document with a SME, I have two hands free to write things or type on the computer, and I don't get a crick in my neck.

Let's just be very clear about one thing. You cannot work from home and look after children at the same time. Maybe if they're mature enough to look after themselves, you can, but not when they're little and still need you to get them food and drinks and keep them entertained. Do not let anyone talk you into working from home and looking after perfectly healthy toddlers at the same time. When I'm home with a sick child, I can work if she sleeps a lot, but it's still tricky to get all 6 hours done during the day, which is where the next item comes in.

## **Flex Time**

A 30-hour work week, telecommuting option and flex time? What more could a girl want? Well, there's one more thing...but I'll get to that next. Our office's core hours are 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. and that's when they'd like everyone to be available, if not present.

My normal office hours are 7:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and I carry a cell phone. Frequently, my husband's work demands that he be at work before 9:00, so I end up seeing the kids off in the morning. That means, I'm only in the office from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.. To make up the last hour, I might get up before the children and work from 6:00 to 7:00 a.m., or I might work after settling down my daughter with her homework, from 4:00 to 5:00 p.m., or I might wait until they've gone to bed and work from 9:00 to 10:00 p.m. Flex time gives me that luxury.

## **Understanding Manager**

The final ingredient for balancing a home life with a work life is having an understanding manager. If the manager has one or more children, he is more likely to understand the demands that kids make on your life.

It's hard to imagine why a grown-up might need to sleep all morning unless you've been up with a sick child all night. A manager who has been there and done that knows that you can't always be in the office from 9:00 to 5:00, but you'll work every opportunity that you have; you'll also do more because you're grateful to have the chance to work when you have the time.

An understanding manager trusts you to get the job done, keep him informed, and be available when needed. Best of all, an understanding manager knows that a 30-hour work week is really 30 hours, not 40 hours at 75% of the pay.

## **How do you get all this?**

Okay, I don't have a magic bullet for this. I was extremely lucky and it sort of fell in my lap. However, when they were wondering what to do with me when my contract ended, I did express interest in a not-full-time permanent position.

Sometimes, it's as simple as giving your employer the option. Also, I opted for a laptop instead of a desktop computer, making the telecommuting practical, and we've set up a home office for that reason, too.

With my reduced income, it seems frivolous to have a cleaning service but, for the amount of stress that it removes, it's worth every penny.

As for the telecommuting policy and the flex time, all I can say is that more companies are becoming enlightened and realize that if they want productive employees, they can provide these working environments at no extra cost. Just stay in touch (via e-mail) even when you're not in the office, and be willing to be flexible too, so that if there's a meeting you really have to attend, arrange for child care.

The whole situation makes me feel productive at work and yet lets me be a good parent. I only wish that more people had this option. ♦

### **About Fei Min Lorente**

*Fei Min is back in the Waterloo area after graduating from UW and spending 10 years in Calgary. She is currently working at Dspfactory Ltd., running her own business called Articulated Concepts on the side, and happy to get involved in STC business after the dust settled from the Big Move. When she's not doing technical writing or family stuff, Fei Min fills in the spare minutes with scrap booking.*

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# A View From the Other Side...of a New Year



by [Nancy Halverson](#), Feature Writer

A new year, a new attitude, a new agenda. A new running program—trying to catch up with all the deadlines and work to be planned and executed! I am actually running on the roads again, it's true. My husband has even decided to join me (he calls it his mid-life crisis...I just call it a good way to distress).

## Running Things at Work

The running program at work is a little different. I've decided that the only way one person is going to handle all of this work is to put together a single-source database-driven workflow. I'm keen on it, and it will take extra work to set it up, but it will save so much of my time and effort. Plus, it will get me a copy of FrameMaker, and I won't have to fuff about with Word anymore.

## The "Wonders" of Word

(A little aside: Anyone who tells you that you can produce documents in Word is just plain wrong. While I admit that Word 2003 has some nice features, and is quite good for the most part, it just can't handle long docs or graphics and stay stable. Spontaneously embedding all the linked graphics, ballooning the file exponentially, isn't my idea of stable. And the numbering still isn't fixed—an exercise in tantrum-control is easier to take!)

## The Plan

Keeping information in a modular model should help to free up my time for more research and innovation—theoretically. However, getting this process underway is a long-term type of commitment.

It's hard enough getting my docs out now, but we're in that phase of development where I'm attending meetings for specifications, asked to consult on UI text and training for the latest release, as well as planning for multi-language doc development, helping to put together the flash demos for training and marketing, etc. etc. (How do I know when it's time to ask for a junior?)

As well as going the single-sourcing route for my English docs, I'm hoping to incorporate some multi-language features as well—storing the additional languages in the same database with the same labels, which will reduce the formatting costs of our translations. If this all comes together, we should have a streamline and yet agile docs department (again, this is part of my other running

program).

## **The STC Year**

The new year is shaping up to be busy on the STC front as well. After a fall of inactivity (STC-wise), I'm now up for a trip to Amsterdam to the Trans-European competition and awards event—judging and awards are to take place on the same day, along with a bunch of STC-chapter focused seminars.

That same week, I'll be going to a course sponsored by the local business development authority for "Advancing women into management". It's free, so I'm hoping that it's worth the price of admission at least. That same week (it always happens at once, doesn't it?), I'll be heading to Manchester for a Usability Professionals' Association meeting on the unlikely topic of usability techniques etc.

Our local group of STCers (there are only a few of us here in the North of England) are gathering in March for a day-long professional development session. I was supposed to organize something for here in Sheffield, but a collaborator and I figured that we should try to stage something in Manchester, as it's a bigger city. Hopefully it'll be a well attended event. It's always a bit of a gamble it seems, but by doing a Saturday session with some good speakers, we're trying to get the local talent out.

## **Membership Has Its Advantages**

I got a real surprise last week. I'm enjoying this job at ZOOtech; it's challenging and gives me a chance to think about docs and design in ways that I hadn't been able to before. When I interviewed for this job, I asked about how the company supports professional development. I was told that they encourage book learning over seminars or courses. That wasn't impressive, but a minor aspect of the job. So, when I whimsically asked my boss if ZOO might consider picking up my STC annual fees, I was taken aback when he asked for a justification.

Well, I copied some stuff from the STC Web site, added in my own personal opinion of what I get from the STC, and to my amazement, they agreed! It was a real shock, but a happy one. Of course it helps that US\$145 only costs about £100, making it a minor expense, but still. I'm very satisfied that they're supporting me for this. It just shows that you have to ask—it's not that scary after all!

## **A White Christmas**

On the home front, we had a very relaxing Christmas. It was actually a white

Christmas for us! Hard to believe, but the top of our hill (it might be the highest hill in Sheffield—I'm calling it Mount Fulwood now) got snow on Christmas eve, and it snowed most of the day. We put on our boots, hats, mitts and jackets and went walking in the afternoon—a very Canadian thing to do it seems.

English families tend to eat Christmas dinner around 1 pm, but we can't adjust, so we had ours in the evening—leaving the afternoon free for a lovely winter walk. The nicest thing about winter in Sheffield is that it only lasts a few hours (maybe a few days if we're lucky). The snow was gone by the 27th and it was just cold and rainy after that.

Today we woke up to a few inches of lovely snow, making the drive into town perilous for some. It's fun to watch people, who have no idea how to drive in snow, attempt to descend a slick hill (no sand, salt or ploughs) with their brakes locked and steering wheels flailing. Passing them is more fun. You never forget how to drive in snow.

## **A Definition of Technical Communication**

Interestingly, an article appeared in a recent Guardian issue on careers in writing. Here's the paragraph describing Tech Authoring (ranked #2 behind journalism):

### *Technical communications*

*Remember when you bought your first computer? It should have come with an instruction manual, put together by a technical author. This is the invisible 'expert' whose job it is to convey complex information in simple terms. Opportunities exist within manufacturing, finance, software companies and government agencies. You need to be curious about the way things work and able to structure information logically. Practical courses and on-the-job training are the way in. City and Guilds, for example, runs a technical communications course and Sheffield Hallam University offers an MA in the subject. For more info visit the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators website at [www.ISTC.org.uk](http://www.ISTC.org.uk).*

One of the contributors to the STC-UK list made these comments about the use of the word 'expert' in the description: While serving in the Army, the term "expert" was jokingly defined as:

*"Expert - an ex is a 'has been' and a 'spurt' is a drip under pressure".*

I'm not sure that I'm liking this definition if it applies to me and my colleagues, but who am I to question another writer? ♦



## **About Nancy Halverson**

*Nancy grew up in Toronto, but has lived in Ottawa, Melbourne, Waterloo, and now Sheffield. She has travelled through the South Pacific, Australia and Indonesia, which is where she met her husband, Ryan Wilson (another Canadian), along the way. A career switch introduced her to the STC in 1997. Her writing experience has included several contract positions and a position at Inscriber for several years. She has two daughters and has been living in England for two years.*

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## Don't Lose It...Use It!

by [Diane Russell](#), Quill Contributor



Seriously, it happens. You learn a new language but have no opportunity to practice it. Months later, you're struggling to recall those words you once knew so well. Try going back to a sport that you haven't played for years—your abilities will be noticeably diminished.

Wait, does this mean that the same thing could happen to your skills as a technical communicator? It's a definite possibility. Speaking from personal experience, if asked to write an essay today, I could certainly draw upon previous knowledge to produce a reasonable effort. Would it be as good as those written while enrolled at WLU? Somehow, I doubt it. When essay-writing is part and parcel of every course taken, it somehow becomes a natural thing to do. Abandon it for a year and you may notice that your skills need some sharpening.

Careers become interrupted for a variety of reasons. Suppose you find yourself unemployed, or in a field that does not reflect your desired profession. What can you do to ensure that your hard-earned skills remain current? I've discovered one enjoyable means—volunteering. If this possibility sounds intriguing to you, perhaps sharing my experiences will provide the inspiration.

### **Available Options**

After graduating with a BA in English, I had hoped to pursue a career in medical writing. However, immediately after graduation, we relocated to the USA. Canadian-educated technical writers can qualify for an employment visa, but only if they have three years experience in their chosen field. As a new graduate, that option was out. I do work here on a part-time basis, but not as a technical writer. However, being part-time allows me the flexibility to contribute my newly-acquired skills on a regular basis.

Volunteer organizations are not usually looking for writers. Don't let that discourage you. It's amazing how one position can be parlayed into something more relevant. Allow me to explain.

### **Montshire Museum of Science**

Norwich, Vermont is home to the fascinating Montshire Museum of Science. On Monday afternoons you'll find me here, explaining exhibits to guests. I've done this regularly since October, and thus have become acquainted with most of the full-time staff. It turns out that the museum has a Web site; also, several of the

exhibits feature computer stations with explanatory text. I made the staff aware of my degree, and mentioned that I'd welcome the opportunity to contribute my writing skills. As a result, I've been introduced to the person in charge of the Web site, and I've been invited to help write whenever I have the time.

## **Nature Centre for Predatory Birds**

Near the small village where I live is a nature centre for predatory birds. You know how it is in small towns...it's not difficult to find out who's involved with what. I've met the co-founder of the nature centre and asked if some technical communication skills would be of help. As a result, I'll be meeting with their team of researchers in a few weeks to help write factual materials.

## **Other Options**

Did you work in another field before becoming a technical communicator? Perhaps that profession has a trade journal that would welcome your contribution.

And finally, don't overlook your local STC chapter as a source of inspiration. Vermont's chapter recently teamed up with the Montreal chapter to offer a competition. Vermont was looking for judges to evaluate a document entry. Although I had no experience, my offer to help was received enthusiastically. This allowed me the opportunity to view and comment on a technical document and also to network with some (employed) technical communicators from Burlington, VT. Great experience...I hope to be asked again next year.

## **Conclusion**

It's said that if you pursue a career doing something you truly love, you'll never be "working". I'm passionate enough about the opportunity to write that I'd gladly do it without pay (well, at least for now). Thus, volunteering works well for me. I'm contributing to my newly-adopted community while putting my hard-earned degree to good use. And who knows? When I get a Green Card, one of those volunteer positions just might lead to a job! ♦

### ***About Diane Russell***

*Diane lives in Quechee, Vermont. She welcomes any comments or feedback.*

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# Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG: Notes From an Isolated Writer



by [Elaine Garnet](#), CIC SIG Co-ordinator

It must be nice to work in a firm where there is computer expertise on call. Working as an independent business woman, I often find myself in the cold. One day my brand new printer refused to print a document and all my tried and true recipes for coaxing a response failed to produce results. I threw in the towel and called the printer support line.

## Windows XP and System Resources

I learned that my system resources were probably low and I shouldn't rely on Windows XP to inform me of that fact. Here's what I had to do and what I now do on a regular basis (with apologies to software manual writers):

1. Select **Start** and then click on **Run...**
2. In the entry box, type `%temp%` and click **OK**. Do you see all those files? What a nightmare.
3. Press **Ctrl+A** to select all the files and then press the **Delete** button. With any luck, those files will disappear, freeing up your system resources.

If Windows objects to a deletion, you may have to delete the files in blocks (You know - select, hold, shift, and drag).

## Other Browsers on the Block

Here's another item of interest. Maybe I'm a bit behind on the news, but it seems Internet Explorer and Netscape aren't the only boys on the block. There is an open source browser called Firefox, which looks interesting. I plan to take it for a spin. The e-mail counterpart is called Thunderbird.

<http://www.mozilla.org/products/firefox/>

<http://www.mozilla.org/products/thunderbird/>

Has anyone had experience with these programs? I'd like to hear from you.

Until then, if you should see smoke rising from Kitchener, it's my computer.

## Words to Live By

The following is from an e-mail that I received, so I don't know the author, but

the content makes you stop and think.

The most destructive habit.....Worry

The greatest joy.....Giving

The greatest loss.....Loss of self-respect

The most satisfying work.....Helping others

The ugliest personality trait.....Selfishness

The most endangered species.....Dedicated leaders

Our greatest natural resource.....Our youth

The greatest "shot in the arm".....Encouragement

The greatest problem to overcome.....Fear

The most effective sleeping pill.....Peace of mind

The most crippling failure disease.....Excuses

The most powerful force in life.....Love

The most dangerous pariah.....A gossip

The world's most incredible computer.....The brain

The worst thing to be without.....Hope

The deadliest weapon.....The tongue

The two most power-filled words....."I Can"

The greatest asset.....Faith

The most worthless emotion.....Self-pity

The most beautiful attire.....SMILE!

The most prized possession..... Integrity

The most powerful channel of communication.....Prayer

The most contagious spirit.....Enthusiasm ♦



## **About Elaine Garnet**

*Elaine is a writer with twelve years of experience in the scientific and engineering fields. Her years of experience, coupled with three degrees and one diploma, have resulted in projects with over 30 companies during the four years that she has owned and operated her business—Words To Order.*

*Currently, Elaine writes the Scientific Research and Experimental Development (SR&ED) reports that technology-based companies submit to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) to obtain tax credits. She also prepares documentation for Industrial Research Assistance Program grants, as well as proposals and business plans.*

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# Membership Introductions

by [Sarah-Beth Doner](#), Membership Manager



## **New Members**

Dove Champagne

Shari White

## **Transfer Members**

Roger Graves (see biography)

Barry Keenan

John Morland (see biography)

## **Senior Members**

Deb L. Bald (Inscriber)

Debby L. Catton  
(Sun Life)

Debbie A. Kraemer  
(Sun Life)

Christy M. Simard (PEER Group)

In a group this size that is spread over many cities and towns, it is not always easy to get to know other members. This is one reason that it is so great when people supply me with a biography that I can include in our newsletter.

Thanks John and Roger for taking the time to tell us about yourselves.

## **John Morland**

John graduated last June from the Technical Writing Certificate Program at Fanshawe College, London Campus, and has been working under contract with Christie Digital Systems in Kitchener for the last three months. In February, he will begin working out of his home in Ingersoll, on a six month contract for Innovatia, which is a telecommunications company based in St. John, New Brunswick.

## **Thoughts About Technical Writing**

What John likes best about technical writing is the variety—writing, interviewing

people, and discovering how things work. He hopes to establish himself as a consultant in the future.

John is a late-comer to the field of technical writing, but "no matter how late," he says, "I am thankful I found something that I really love doing."

## **Roger Graves**

Roger is actually a returning member of the Southwestern Ontario chapter, having belonged to the chapter between 1992-1993 when he was a faculty member at the University of Waterloo. At that time he worked on the education committee and organized the chapter conference in 1993.

### **Education Field**

Currently he is an associate professor of English at DePaul University in Chicago and Director of the New Media Studies MA program there. During the academic year he divides his time between Chicago and Waterloo, spending most weekdays in Chicago.

As a member of the Chicago STC chapter, Roger has worked on the Education committee for over 5 years. They have organized a series of university courses on technical communication (credit is awarded through Northern Illinois University); he has also been a member of the team that has taught the introductory course for approximately the past five years.

### **Current Work**

Roger is also a member of the chapter's Consulting and Independent Contractors (CIC) Special Interest Group (SIG). As a consultant, Roger is currently working at a large financial services firm to help financial writers to develop their writing skills

### **Communication Technologies**

The changes that new communications technologies bring to technical communication fascinate Roger. The availability of medical information on the internet (although some of it is useless or even toxic) has altered the patient-doctor power dynamic by putting more information into the hands of patients and their proxies. Rogers says that he "could point to any number of technologies that alter our relationships to others and to communication, and not all of them are good. But that they are changing communications is beyond a doubt."

### **Goals**

His goals for the future are to continue to both study and participate in these technologies through his teaching, writing, and consulting work. ♦



## **About Sarah-Beth Doner**

*Sarah-Beth is a student at the University of Waterloo where she is studying English Rhetoric and Professional Writing, and participating in the Applied Studies Co-op Program. Two of her co-op terms have involved technical writing at iAnywhere Solutions in Waterloo.*

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# Candidate for Region 1 Director: The Times They Are A-Changin'



by [Cindy Currie](#), Associate Fellow, Northern New England Chapter

We've all heard this old Bob Dylan tune. It was written in 1963 (or thereabouts), back when the STC was just a young child. But a quick scan of the lyrics (go Google the title and you'll get to them quickly) and you can see that they are timeless and applicable to the change that the STC is currently undergoing.



## A True Understanding of Change

We all know that change is essential. It must be planned for wisely. It must be implemented in a structured and deliberate way. There will be a (sometimes lengthy) period of transition before transformation occurs. Finally, we will reach the point of true transformation, when change is fully understood, operationalized, and embraced by all stakeholders. And, YOU are key stakeholders in STC's current transformation efforts.

To implement change successfully, that is to get to the point of true transformation, the STC needs strong leaders at all levels that truly understand not only what needs to change and why, but also the strategy and roadmap to achieving it. And, I am just the person to bring a deep knowledge and practical experience of those things to bear because I manage change as a core competency of my job at HP.

**The Power of Effective Two-Way Communication:** We all know the power of effective communication. We do this for a living, for goodness sake! But, how many of you feel you have a true understanding of and voice in the current transformation work of the STC?

Do you feel like you're in the loop? Perhaps some of you do, but I suspect that there are those of you who may not. My job as Director will be to ensure that every member (every "voice") in Region 1 has an opportunity to be heard by the Society Board. I will take stewardship of all your issues and concerns (not just those related to the transformation) and take seriously the responsibility you give to me to act as your voice before the STC Board of Directors.

Communication will very much be two-way as I work to ensure the desired results for the members of Region 1. My webpage [www.cindycurrie.com](http://www.cindycurrie.com) will be the hub of

communications, with report outs on recent board meetings and other topics of interest to you. The page will also contain detailed information about how you can contact me with your questions and concerns. I will respond to all who contact me.

## **Experience as a Technical Communicator**

For 24 years, I have been a technical communicator in a wide variety of roles. I have experienced continuous growth beginning as a junior technical writer and evolving to my current position as a senior performance consultant and global program manager. I am often in leadership positions and have always made major contributions to my projects and programs, leading and mentoring other technical communicators. My work has enabled me to leverage and contribute to industry best practices that serve to keep my employers and customers on the forefront of the technical communications field. It is this experience that positions me well to serve as your Region 1 Director.

## **Distinguished Service to STC**

My numerous years of service to STC include significant contributions at the chapter, regional, and Society levels, including participation as:

- A member of the NNE Chapter Board of Directors for over 10 years, serving as the NNE representative to the regional InterChange Technical Writing Conference.
- A member of the regional InterChange Technical Writing Conference Planning Committee for 10 years, serving in a variety of roles, including conference co-chair for three years.
- The Manager of the International Technical Publications Competition, a position I have held for three years.

For my continued involvement in STC conferences and competitions, both in terms of planning and participation, I was awarded a Distinguished Chapter Service Award in 2000.

## **Continued Dedication and Commitment**

Clearly, the technical communications profession and the STC are near and dear to my heart. I would not have served the profession or the Society as well or as long as I have if it was not the case. I very much look forward to the opportunity to YOU in the position of Region 1 Director. Let's make a difference together! 💎

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# Candidate for Region 1 Director: The Change of Transformation



by [Rich Maggiani](#), Vermont Chapter STC

Change can be at once both scary and exciting.

Change is part of our everyday life. Compare life now to only ten years ago, both personal and societal. Some aspects of the world are vastly different. I suspect parts of your life are too. Sometimes change can be inexorably slow, and at other times, excruciatingly swift.



## Change Happens

One thing is a constant though: change happens. Peter Drucker, the recognized business guru, once said: "The most effective way to manage change successfully is to create it." And yet it's difficult to embrace change when you perceive a loss. Still, a positive, well-conceived, and well-planned change almost always brings more positive results.

Such is the case with STC's current transformation.

The transformation is all about giving us - the STC member - more value as members: to better serve our needs as professionals and as technical communicators. To this end, STC endeavors to provide its members with the services we need to retain and enhance our skills; to keep up and lead the trends in our industry; to increase our worth as employees, as consultants, as contractors; to both our employers, our own businesses, and our clients.

## The Challenge

It is just this challenge - this change opportunity - that has lead me to run for the office of Region One Director: your representative on STC's Board of Directors; your voice on the Board, where the decisions about STC are debated, discussed, and decided. I have been fortunate to be nominated as a candidate for this position, and would be honored to serve as your Region One Director.

## Your Representative

For me, the Region One Director is not just another Board position; I hope to be the Board member who represents you. I intend to both lead and follow: lead when leadership is needed to assimilate your ideas into a cohesive initiative, and

follow when you have made your intentions clear. Towards that end, I urge you to contact me with your thoughts, concerns, suggestions, and any other comments about how STC can better serve you.

### **Experienced as a Technical Communicator**

For approaching 25 years, I have practiced many aspects of technical communication. I have worked for small and large firms, education and government, and run my own company; wrote both technical and marketing materials, worked on radio and video productions, taught writing and business to graduate students, and successfully founded and operated a communications firm for over 14 years. Being a practitioner, manager, and leader contributed richly to a deep understanding and appreciation of our profession, what it takes to work in it, and what it takes to run it.

### **Experienced as a Board Member**

I have served on several boards, both as a member and as Chair, for businesses, nonprofits, and organizations, so I understand how Board's operate. As the Chair of the Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility Board, I successfully oversaw the change in governance as the organization and board moved from a core group of founders to a broader base of committed members.

### **Service to STC**

My service includes both local and national. Ten years ago, I helped found the Vermont Chapter, then served in a variety of positions for five years. At the national level, I have presented numerous sessions at local, regional, and international conferences; served as Art judge in three International Competitions and Management Stem Manager for the annual conference in Baltimore, and currently serve as the Membership Manager for the CIC SIG and on the Transformation Communication Committee.

### **You, the Region One Membership**

Much work remains to be accomplished in STC's transformation. With your help and support, I can help ensure that the transformation benefits our profession, the Society, and ultimately, you. ♦

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## Candidate for 2nd Vice-President



by [Deborah F. Sauer](#), Candidate for 2nd Vice-President

My name is Deborah Sauer and I am writing to you about why I am running for second vice president and why I am qualified to serve in this office. I am running because I want to work with you to ensure that the STC serves you in the best way possible. I will represent your interests in this critical time of change. My professional career and STC experience gives me the skills necessary to achieve this.



I have clear priorities. You, the members, are first. The STC is a member-based organization. Everything in the STC, the board, the office, the communities (chapters and SIGs), exists because of you. In fact, it exists to serve you. The board is at the bottom of the organization; you, the members, are at the top. I want to find out how you want the STC to serve you and then work to implement that vision. Tell me what you want your organization to be in three years, five years, or ten years. I'll ensure that your voices are heard, not just the voices of the vocal few.

I am a leader and a manager. The Boston chapter experienced a great deal of change during my presidency. We changed our approach to managing our newsletter by creating an editorial team, we changed our approach to planning for the future by creating a strategic plan, and we changed the way we managed our chapter affairs by revising the chapter bylaws. I initiated, facilitated, and participated in these changes.

I am a team player. My experience on several annual conference program committees and as assistant to the president for conferences proves that I work well with individual members, committees, and the office staff. In managing the annual conference, I consult with leaders and members to ensure that we all have a balance of input before making changes or launching new initiatives. This experience will be useful in managing the Transformation as we need to consider all of the ramifications and make careful decisions before proceeding.

I can balance long-term vision with near-term results. While vision is important, the ability to execute it in a practical and timely fashion is critical. I have a proven history of taking input, processing it, distilling it, and acting on it with clarity and focus. I have done this in various aspects of my professional life, including my career as an employee, as the owner of a consulting business, and as an STC volunteer in the role of assistant to the president for conferences for the past five years.

I have listened to your input and provided results. Post-conference survey feedback from attendees showed that you felt that 30 concurrent sessions was too many. There are now about 20 concurrent sessions, so there's less risk of missing a session that you want to attend. Conference attendees also wanted more time in the exhibit hall. Now, you can visit the exhibits after the keynote session and there's extra time before lunch one day. There have been many other changes. So, you see, we've been listening to you.

I have a vision as to what the Society can be for you in the future. You said that you want more in-depth training. In October, 2005, the Society will offer the pilot program of what we hope will be a series of two-day training courses taught by well-known, experienced instructors. A variety of people contributed their ideas to this program, so I will not take sole credit. But, the idea started with the seeds you planted in your post-conference surveys, and my vision for what the Society can provide to its members. The pilot for the training program is just one aspect of that vision. We're working on other initiatives that will add value to your membership.

I am a diplomat. I have successfully managed difficult situations with positive results in which all parties feel that their needs have been addressed. I work to ensure that everyone feels that their concerns have been heard, that they have been treated fairly, and that they can live with the solution. These skills are important in managing the Transformation.

I hear your concerns about your relationship with the STC. The primary goal of the Transformation is to provide member value. Value as you define it, not as I define, it, or as the board defines it, or as the office defines it. Defining that value and providing it to you requires that the members, the board, and the office to work together. I have a proven track record of working well with all of these groups. I will work to provide member value while closing the gap that members feel between themselves (as individuals and as communities) and the Society (both the board and the office).

I foster an environment that encourages change, innovation, and idea exchange. We must have the vision to embrace change to our advantage. We must view change as an opportunity. It allows us to reinvent ourselves, or, in this case, reinvent your Society. This is your organization. You must provide the direction for the change.

As second vice president, I'll be your voice in a place where voices can sometimes get lost, to make sure that your voices are heard, and to help set the direction of the Society in light of what you, the members, want the Society to become. For these reasons, I am asking for your vote in the upcoming election. Let's work

together to make a better STC. ♦

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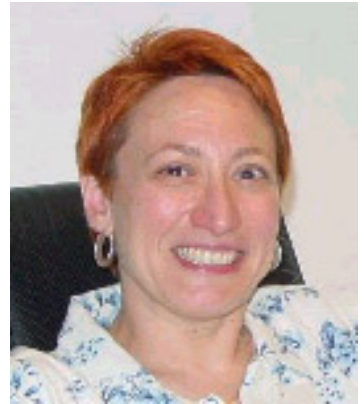
# Candidate for 2nd Vice President



by [Paula Berger](#), Candidate for 2nd Vice President

I want to thank the STC membership for giving me this opportunity to run for 2nd Vice President. Many people asked me to run for this office because STC and our profession need strong leaders.

I have been a voice for change and progress in STC for years, I have a clear vision of where our profession and our society need to be, and I have the strength and willingness to lead us through these changes.



This article presents my views on the major issues that STC must address. The ballot materials and the candidate information printed in Intercom offer a brief summary of these issues. You can read more about my views, my STC experience, and my professional experience at [www.paulaberger.com](http://www.paulaberger.com).

## Providing Better Value to Members

Membership has dropped in recent years, partly because members and employers no longer believe STC provides enough value. We must re-engage technical communicators by redefining and improving our services. This is a major goal of STC's Transformation.

One of STC's primary duties is to foster the career growth of members by defining and supporting career paths they can follow in their own discipline or related ones. Our activities and offerings must focus on lifelong professional development.

- STC must increase educational opportunities for both newcomers and for senior members. We need to add educational offerings that focus on advanced skills for advanced practitioners.
- STC needs to develop comprehensive, industry-supported training programs that provides clear value to members and employers. Our strong special interest groups should work with education and industry experts to define curricula for basic and advanced certificates in their disciplines.
- Webinar topics and other educational offerings must be part of a coherent training structure, with the value of each topic defined in context of the focused training programs.

STC's financial arrangements must respond to the day-to-day concerns of members. Our membership fees must be appropriate and manageable. We must

provide additional financial value to members, such as STC discounts on software products and reduced prices at an online bookstore. We should also partner with other associations to offer reciprocal discounts on events and membership.

## **Promoting the Technical Communication Profession**

STC must embrace the multi-disciplinary nature of technical communication. Our diversity is a positive sign that our profession is evolving and we must welcome and support the many disciplines that constitute technical communication. As one society with communities from many related disciplines, we can take advantage of the stronger voice we have because of our diversity.

We must truly lead the profession, promoting best practices and educating the public, employers, and industry about the importance, usefulness, and diversity of technical communication. We must define where technical communication fits in the global business landscape of 2005 and beyond.

To better define and increase our business value, we should solicit high-level industry leaders to join a new STC Board of Advisors. Greater corporate support is key to STC's future.

We must aggressively solicit support from companies that understand the benefits of a strong technical communication profession. We must promote corporate sponsorships for education programs, scholarships, and even specific recognition awards. We must have a strong global presence and actively pursue new members and corporate involvement outside the U.S.

Working outside the U.S. and belonging to a chapter in Europe for several years has helped me understand the global business of technical communication. Other societies exist to support many of the technical communication disciplines - user experience, information design, and more. STC needs to look outside its boundaries and interact with other societies. We must build alliances with them, arranging reciprocal discounts on events, offering shared educational offerings, and perhaps even holding joint conferences.

## **Supporting STC's Communities**

Communities have always been a real strength of STC. While many associations boast strong networks, STC is truly unique in the quality of the relationships that members form. Our members are committed professionals who care a great deal about what they do and about each other. STC has been a wonderful part of my personal and business life, with many STC members I consider both colleagues and friends.

We must nurture all our communities and help them thrive. "Seasoned" STC members usually have close ties to their chapters. Now, more people have also developed close ties to virtual communities. All our communities have great value and need to be supported fairly and equitably.

Our annual conference is an important part of the society year and offers wonderful networking opportunities. We can strengthen the conference by updating our approach to reflect our changing community structure.

It may be time to align the conference stems with the special interest groups and have these communities take responsibility for defining the offerings in their stems. Perhaps our smaller conferences throughout the year can be based on disciplines and run by larger interest groups, either instead of or in conjunction with regional conferences.

We must also provide society-wide technology solutions that simplify community operations and communication, such as portals, job banks, event listings, online classes, and forums. We must provide additional training and support for community leaders, particularly in light of the proposed changes to the sponsor role.

## **Improving Our Management of STC**

It is no secret that we need some internal changes in STC. The Transformation is a good start, but the STC Board needs to communicate better than it has. The Board needs to listen to members, to invite participation in discussions and decisions, and to explain what the Board is doing.. If I am elected, sharing information will be one of my key priorities.

We need to improve our management of the society's resources. STC needs to "open the books" to a greater degree, allowing members to understand how the society's resources are used. We also need to be sure we are deriving the maximum benefit from the STC office and directing them effectively.

Another area for change is the election process. Very few STC members vote, because our election process does not foster member involvement or bring issues into discussion. We should evaluate alternatives, such as requiring all potential candidates to submit petition signatures showing demonstrating member support.

## **Please Vote**

STC is at a crossroads. We need leaders who are not afraid to take the more difficult path if it leads to greater benefits. Please give me the chance to help STC help us all. Thank you. ♦

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# Candidate for 2nd Vice-President: My Thoughts About STC



by [Linda L. Oestreich](#)

Hi, I'm Linda Oestreich, one of your 2005 candidates for STC 2nd Vice-President. I have been an active, dedicated member of STC ever since I became a technical communicator in 1979. In fact, in 1996, I was honored by the Society with the title of Fellow. And, for the past three years, I have been Director-Sponsor of Region 5.



You will have my "official" write-up with your ballot materials and in Intercom. So, this article is my way of bringing to you some of my ideas about the Society and our profession that I hope will help you understand who I am.

You have three choices for this office this year. Each candidate brings with her a wealth of experience, wisdom, and dedication. Naturally, I hope you decide to vote for me, but no matter whom you choose, please do vote!

## Relationships and Communities

Our profession and our Society are about relationships and communities. Merriam-Webster says relationship means [the state of] "having an aspect or quality (as resemblance) that connects two or more things or parts as being or belonging or working together or as being of the same kind." Sounds like a bunch of STCers, doesn't it?

Many of you have heard about the move to call all of our chapters and SIGs communities. Merriam-Webster gives its first definition of community as "a unified body of individuals." Even better, a second definition is "a group of people with a common characteristic or interest living together within a larger society." Change the word living to working, and we have a perfect fit!

Relationships naturally exist within communities. And communities exist to help their members, to provide support, and to offer growth. Communities also have relationships with other communities.

STC is, has been, and I hope, will always be, about the relationships within, among, and between communities and the individuals within those communities. It is this aspect of the Society that has kept me excited about being a member and leader for more than 20 years. If you have ever heard me speak, you know that I love what I do, but even more so, I love helping others be better at doing what they do!

## **The STC Community**

The Society for Technical Communication is a vehicle to help all of us be better at what we do. In these days of change, turnover, outsourcing, and offshoring, the global community absolutely needs what we do. Technical communication is necessary.

As long as we have technology and change, we will have people who need good technical communicators who can provide bridges to understanding.

I believe in the STC community. I believe that the Society provides and will continue to provide a path for our success. Just as the work we do provides the words and tools that act as bridges to better understanding, I believe that STC provides a way for us to excel in that work. STC communities even help us better understand technical communicators in other fields, in other cities, and in other parts of the world.

## **A Two-Way Love Affair**

Our world is about relationships. Sometimes we forget that relationships need two-way energy. They need feedback and they need care. If you are one of the STC members who wants more value for your membership, perhaps you need to give more than your membership fee to STC.

I have loved STC for more than 20 years, and I have worked hard to be part of its success.

STC has loved me back with opportunities. It has shown me the way to new employment, to new heights of my profession, to higher salary levels, and to lifelong friendships that I treasure. For me, it has been you, the people of the Society who have made those benefits possible.

I want to be 2nd Vice-President and ultimately President of this Society because I believe in you. You are the people of the Society. I believe you are its heart, and I believe that the changes the Society is experiencing are for ultimate good.

Our organization must be known and respected by industry, by academe, by government, and by everyday people. I want STC to be a recognized acronym—even with people who have never written a users guide, a journal article, a research grant, a help file, or a hardware manual. I want our spouses, our children, and our parents to understand the value we bring to the world. We, as members of the Society, can make that happen through better marketing, varied and accessible educational programs, enthusiastic grass root activities, and strong

communities.

## Relationships are Our Strength

Communities of practice; communities of interest; communities of geography, communities of communities! It doesn't matter what we call ourselves when we form relationships, what matters is the relationship.

Our STC relationships provide ongoing mentoring and form a substructure of strength that we can depend on. As the Society moves forward with new programs and new technologies, we find areas of the Society that are in need of repair, recycling, and retirement. However, we also find areas that are strong, viable, and valuable. As we live our professional lives, we choose the parts of the Society that work best for us. Yet, no matter what programs or technologies we embrace, the relationships and the communities of STC are at the core.

I will do all I can to make my belief in this Society contagious. But, you are the key. As a member of the Society, you have a relationship with other members, and you have a relationship with your SIGs, your chapters, your competitions, and your conferences. You can make those relationships strong and reciprocal. As a Society leader, my job is to help ensure that the Society returns your efforts with value.

I am passionate about STC. I believe that passion will help me lead the Society with wisdom and integrity. I hope you believe so, too. ♦

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