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STC Officer Candidates: Get to know this year's candidates

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

This site is best viewed with Internet Explorer 5x or newer.

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Technicalities is published bi-monthly by the Rocky Mountain Chapter (RMC) of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) and is distributed to chapter members, editors of other STC newsletters, and officers of the Society. It is available on request to anyone interested in technical communication. Other STC chapters and publications may reprint material if credit is given.

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles on subjects of interest that they wish to be considered for publication to Society and chapter members. Please credit repeated material and send a copy of the original material to: news@stcrmc.org

Submission Guidelines

Submission deadlines and themes for the next year are as follows:

April/May issue, “Careers/Alternate Careers,” Due April 1
June/July issue, “Policies & Procedures,” Due June 1

The staff will also announce the upcoming issue and its theme via an e-mail to the membership and/or at chapter meetings.

The preferred word count for articles is 500-750 words. If your subject matter warrants it, articles longer than 1,000 words will be serialized between two or more issues.

Please e-mail all submissions to: news@stcrmc.org with the issue date, such as “October/November 2006,” in the subject line. The editor can be reached during the day at 303.956.1906, by e-mail at news@stcrmc.org and by postal mail at 6025 S. Quebec St., Suite 260, Englewood, CO 80111.

Submissions can be pasted into the body of the e-mail, or sent as an attachment. If you send your article as an attachment, it should be in either RTF or DOC format. Please include your contact information.

A “headshot” of yourself to be printed with your article would be appreciated.

Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by
the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

The Technicalities staff reserves the right to edit articles for clarity and length; substantive editing of feature articles will be reviewed with the author prior to publication.

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6025 S. Quebec St., Suite 260  
Englewood, CO 80111  
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**Job Postings**

Send job postings to jobs@stcrmc.org.  
Jobs are posted on the chapter Web site (http://www.stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance.jobs.htm), and are e-mailed to the techcomm-discuss mailing list.

**Chapter Web site**

http://www.stcrmc.org
Message from the Editor:

The Changing Face of Instruction

by Stephen Wertzbaugher

I have to admit up front that, try as I might, I could not think of a suitable subject for this month’s column. I wanted to write a nice, neat tie-in to our theme, “Training and Instructional Design,” but nothing would come. For the first time, it seemed that I would not be able to conquer my writer’s block.

And then I began to think about my heady days as a graduate teaching assistant in the Department of Biological Sciences at Northern Arizona University. I taught several subjects, including three different microbiology classes for majors and non-majors, a biology course for non-majors, and an ecology course.

Back in those days, 1989-1992, personal computers were more novelty than necessity, the Internet was still a new-fangled technology reserved for researchers, we used a mimeograph machine to copy our teaching outlines, the Human Genome Project was barely underway, and we used a film camera to create slides. The first personal computer I used was an Apple 2c. I’m sure that some of you are wondering how I ever survived those dark days. Sometimes I wonder that myself.

But what I remember most about those days were the techniques we used to teach our undergraduate students: overheads, film slides, chalkboards, and of course the ever-popular over-the-top bad stage acting. Yes, even scientists can entertain. Brad Pitt, watch out! Compared to today, our methods were crude and simple, but our task was no less difficult: teaching a classroom of sometimes not-so-eager students.

Fifteen years later, personal computers are the norm as well as a necessity, the Internet is as much a part of our lives as eating and sleeping, and teaching can be performed in person or virtually. A lot has changed. But what hasn’t changed is our search for better, more effective and efficient ways to teach.

As you read this month’s issue, I hope that the articles we’ve included will spark your imaginations and give you some concrete ideas about how to more effectively instruct your users.
President's Corner

by Deb Lockwood

Do you like a bargain? Even though I work in the software industry and I have a steady job, I'm normally pretty frugal. Professionally, I struggle to stay current with changing technology and new ideas in the technical communication field—and staying current can be costly. So...how do I make those things co-exist?

After much research and experimentation, let me share the three most effective and fiscally responsible methods I’ve discovered for staying ahead of the technology game.

1. **Attend Conference Sessions.**

From May 13th through the 16th, 2007, the STC will be holding its 54th annual conference. The conference theme this year is *Technical Communication Summit: Ascend the Summit*. The conference location is Minneapolis, MN.

I have to tell you that I have found no more effective method for exposure to a wide selection of topics in a concentrated time frame. I’ve attended the STC conference for a few years now (yes, at my own cost) and can attest to the quality of sessions and caliber of presenters. The training I’ve received at the conferences has included technology training, publication methods, best practices, and management techniques. You can also talk to vendors who represent products that support our industry, ask questions, and see their products in action.

The preliminary program was published in the February 2007 issue of *Intercom* and is also available on the conference Web site ([http://www.stc.org/54thConf/sessions/index.asp](http://www.stc.org/54thConf/sessions/index.asp)). I encourage you to take a look. This year’s conference has tracks instead of stems. A list of these tracks follows:

- Designing and Assessing User Experiences
- Developing and Delivering Content
- Producing and Publishing Information
- Managing People, Projects and Business
- Applying Research and Theory to Practice
- Developing Your Skills and Promoting Your Profession

Also available are the following roundtable Progressions sessions*:

- Instructional Design & Learning Community
- Best Practices in Management
- Topics in Online Tools and Technologies
- Technical Editing
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Lone Writers
- Keeping Top Employees
Session titles may change between now and the conference. See the online conference program for the latest line-up.


2. **Take College Courses.**

Many community colleges, colleges, and universities in our area serve professionals by offering relevant courses using alternate methods of course delivery including online, evening, and weekend courses.

In my role as STC RMC president I cannot endorse any particular school or course, but I can highly encourage you to talk to your fellow chapter members, either at a meeting or through our online discussion list, and ask for people’s opinions on where to go and what to take. Our chapter boasts many members who are active in their academic communities as instructors and teachers, and who would be happy to talk to you about your interests.

I have taken several online classes to learn software applications and found them to be a great help in the following ways:

- I learned the software applications.
- I was exposed to online courses, which taught me some effective strategies (and not so effective strategies) for course development.
- I was introduced to bulletin boards, blogs, and other online communities and methodologies.
- I was encouraged to do online research and given some tools (e.g., Web site recommendations).

I gained all of these things and paid a minimal cost. Some of you may even be able to enroll in an accredited course and have your employer reimburse you for the class. In that case, what’s there to lose?

3. **Get Involved With Your STC Chapter.**

A business associate of mine who lives in a different state would love to have the opportunities that we have in the Rocky Mountain Chapter! Her chapter has been effectively dormant for a few years and she has been unable to reanimate interest in the group.

We sometimes take the opportunities that are available in our chapter for granted, but I encourage you to not do so. This active community can encourage you to learn new and challenging skills, to hone the skills that you already have, and to teach others what you know.

The current chapter leadership has lots of ideas for programs that could help our membership and the only thing (besides money) that is holding us back is a lack of human resources. You’d be surprised what you can learn by getting involved. And you’ll also establish rewarding relationships with your fellow technical communicators.

In summary, I have made three cost-effective suggestions for keeping yourself current with regard to professional technology:

1. Attend the STC conference in May.
2. Take a college course or two.
3. Get involved in your local STC chapter.

Now that you are armed with information, the next step is yours.
Technical Communicators as Teachers: Creating E-Learning that Matters

by Kristine Olka

Used with permission from INTERCOM, the magazine of the Society for Technical Communication, Arlington, VA U.S.A.

In today’s technology-driven world, more and more companies are embracing the concept of e-learning as a way to replace traditional classroom education with “anywhere, anytime” online learning modules. There’s much discussion about the tools and technologies for creating and accessing e-learning, and universities are scrambling to offer online alternatives to traditional classroom settings. But, in our hurry to embrace technology, have we, as technical communicators, forgotten that e-learning is all about—well—learning? Understanding how adults learn and applying these principles as we create e-learning content can help us produce more effective and engaging information that users truly learn.

How do adults learn?

Adult learning theory, also referred to as andragogy, is a relatively new field of study. Although there are ongoing debates in academic circles about how adult learning differs from child learning, the ideas of adult education expert Malcolm Knowles are generally accepted as a foundation of adult learning theory. He identified the following characteristics of adult learners:

They are autonomous.

Adults are independent and self-directed. They need to be free to direct themselves in learning activities and often do not function well in the teacher-directed realm, where they are given strict instructions and guidelines to follow.

They have life experiences.

Unlike children, adults bring a foundation of experience and knowledge to any learning experience. This base might include professional knowledge, previous education and training, and family experience. Adults can connect learning to their life experiences and should be respected for having that knowledge.

They are goal-oriented.

Adults are ready to learn something when, as Knowles explains, “They experience a need to learn it in order to cope more satisfyingly with real-life tasks or problems.” Upon enrolling in a course, for example, adults usually know what goals they want to accomplish. They therefore appreciate an organized and well-defined educational program. They need relevancy. Adults normally must see a reason for learning something. Learning has to apply to their work or other responsibilities to be of value.
They are practical.

Adults are practical, focusing on the parts of a lesson that are most useful to them. They may be interested in knowledge for its own sake but it is more important for them to understand the usefulness of a lesson.

They need motivation.

While external forces, such as a manager’s expecting them to take a specific course or learn a specific skill, motivate adult learners, internal incentives motivate them more. According to Stephen Lieb, senior technical writer and planner at the Arizona Department of Health Services and part-time instructor at South Mountain Community College, sources of internal motivation include building social relationships, improving self-esteem, achieving higher professional status, securing professional advancement, relieving boredom, and satisfying an inquiring mind.

How do we apply adult learning principles to e-learning?

No matter what type of content we are dealing with, learning will always be a reflection of the course curriculum, student goals, and instructor skills. There is no e-learning theory separate from adult learning theory because the same tenets can be applied to both. For example, class discussions can still take place in a distance learning setting, in the form of bulletin boards or chat rooms. Course assessments still occur, using Web site forms instead of paper and pencil. Although the technology of learning is changing and will continue to evolve, the principles of adult learning have not changed.

Developers of e-learning courses, therefore, must continue to focus on curricula that can lead to enhanced productivity for the corporation or institution. We must design courses that meet the needs and educational goals of adult learners. We must create courses that motivate adults, show relevancy to their job tasks, and respect their autonomy and diverse backgrounds.

We can achieve these aims by understanding what adults need in the learning environment when technology is used. Following are some suggestions for structuring e-learning environments around the needs of learners, as outlined in adult learning theory and the best practices of experts in the field.

Motivate your learners.

People are motivated to learn in different ways and for different reasons. For one person, the impetus for learning might be the expectation of improved social interaction; for another, it may be the promise of working more efficiently; and for yet another, it may be satisfying an academic or managerial requirement to achieve rewards or recognition.

Roberta Lacefield, a professor at Waycross College, has said that “while it is not important to know all reasons for all students, it is important to realize not all students are there for the same reason. If assumptions are made about the motivation of learners or if courses are designed as if there is but one motivation for all learners, retention may be a problem. Understanding the diversity of motivation of your students is the first step toward designing effective courses.”

So, for example, a lecture-only or read only e-learning course may not motivate those interested in the social consequences of learning. It is important to provide opportunities for collaboration in such courses. Learners motivated by credit for a course might prefer to receive an online certificate that they can forward to their managers or hang on an office wall. Those motivated to learn a specific skill will prefer e-learning content that is well-designed, relevant and engaging, and they will need references to resources they can use if they need additional information. In most cases, a culture that supports learning and provides incentives and rewards for educational achievements can provide motivation for adult learners.

Relate information to learners’ life experiences.
Adults bring a diversity of backgrounds, life experiences, and knowledge to any learning experience. Not only do they want these life experiences acknowledged by the instructor or fellow classmates, they are more likely to remember course materials if the information can be related to these experiences. According to Lacefield, “Retrieval of information in long-term memory is easier when it has been related to something already known. The more ways a meaning structure is connected to our existing knowledge, the more likely we will be able to retrieve it.”

It is important to acknowledge learners’ life experiences in course materials. E-learning authors must keep in mind that individual learners come from diverse backgrounds and will have multiple perspectives based on religion, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, physical abilities, marital status, and membership in certain social groups. It is important to value this diversity, reflect these perspectives, and use these experiences as a basis of learning and assessment. One important way to value diversity in course materials is to be aware of the characteristics assigned to fictional persons and situations used in course scenarios and examples. Make sure these characteristics reflect the diversity found in adult learners.

Skill levels are also part of the background adult learners bring to an educational experience. All learners do not bring with them the same ability to understand technology, think critically, communicate at a professional level, and so on. To accommodate these differing skill levels within e-learning courses, consider providing differing paths of learning. For example, a managerial course requires a basic understanding of accounting practices. The first part of the online course might test an individual’s skill level with respect to that liability. Learners who receive high scores can test out of the early topics because they have already demonstrated an understanding of that material.

Show learners how they can solve problems.

In general, adults want to learn something when they believe it is needed to satisfy a real-life requirement. So problem-solving is a highly beneficial skill for adults. According to Susan Imel, director of the Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, whenever possible, e-learning assessment exercises should do more than provide opportunities for drill and practice. They should encourage the development of high-level problem-solving.

E-learning can incorporate experiences when users are presented with problem scenarios that simulate real life. Technologies such as collaboration, interactivity, modeling, virtual reality interfaces, and gaming can help adults practice certain skills. For example, instant messaging and chat room technologies can be used to build negotiation, communication, and foreign language skills. Software simulations can also be used to provide feedback about the use of software applications within the safety of an educational environment.

Give learners some control over their learning experiences.

Adults strive for control over their own learning experiences. E-learning can accommodate this desire very well, as it can customize elements for individual learners more easily than traditional classroom education. Online learners can often select only the topics they want to take and skip those they do not need. Learners can fast-forward or rewind videotaped or videostreamed instruction to listen repeatedly to information they feel is most important to them.

Other learners can take advantage of a blended learning approach to absorb information at their own pace before coming into a classroom setting for hands-on training. Blended learning, the biggest trend in e-learning, combines stand-alone, online learning with classroom training. Susan Imel suggests that, because adults generally want autonomy yet also are motivated by social affiliation (they do not want to learn in total isolation), blended learning is an ideal approach, providing an environment that promotes both independent and interdependent activities.

Create relevant content.

Adult learners need to see a personal benefit in education and understand how information relates to settings that are familiar to them. Learning is unsuccessful without relevancy. According to Lacefield, adults experience problems with memory when they feel that
Information is superfluous, or that learning involves reassessment of old knowledge and pure memorization.

E-learning courses should contain options for testing out of materials so that basic knowledge is not presented to more advanced learners. Assessments should test learner problem-solving, analytical abilities, and comprehension skills, not just the memorization of terminology. Learning objectives and examples should strive to show relevancy to real situations.

E-learning should also provide relevancy through, for example, referring learners to Internet-based resources that provide content relative to their life situations and including teaching of skills in context. According to Imel, this approach allows learners to develop skills that can benefit them outside the instructional setting.

**Incorporate active learning.**

Adult learners want to know how course materials will be useful in their lives. Imel states that “skills are learned best when imbedded in context of interest to the learner and when learning is active.” This concept of active learning is also supported by Lacefield’s research: “Students in courses which encouraged active learning versus courses which involved strictly lecture earned similar scores on knowledge tests but much higher scores on tests of ability to self-correct, consider multiple perspectives, understand the larger context of a problem, or relate theory and practice.”

E-learning courses can incorporate active learning through the following activities:

- Assignments that require the learner to complete a task outside the e-learning experience and report the findings before continuing
- Assessments that measure learner abilities
- Assignments that require integrating ideas from several sources
- Performing group assignments, presentations, and case studies
- Posting homework to class bulletin boards for feedback

It is admittedly difficult to incorporate active learning into stand-alone courses. In designing stand-alone courses, the tendency may be to use a lecture format in which the learner reads, clicks the next button, and reads more. However, active learning can be incorporated into stand-alone courses through assessments, simulations, and problem-solving exercises that require interaction from the learner.

**Understand the physical and mental limitations of your learners.**

Although not a specific component of Knowles’s adult learning theory, it is also appropriate to focus on the physical and cognitive needs of adult learners when developing e-learning courses.

According to Lacefield, short-term memory capacity in adults is limited to about five to nine bits of new information at a time. Information in short-term memory is lost with the passage of time and when the memory is overloaded. Categorizing e-learning content into smaller chunks of information helps learners to increase retention.

Ruth Clark’s book, *E-Learning and the Science of Instruction*, is full of helpful guidelines on how to develop e-learning (especially stand-alone courses) that is designed to help learners focus on the content without distraction. Suggestions include avoiding presentation of text and audio at the same time, writing in a conversational style, avoiding irrelevant graphics and text, and grouping information that must be integrated for learning.

**Ready to teach?**

Technical communicators are no longer restricted to the use of paper documentation to convey information to adults. And students are no longer restricted to classroom education models for learning. The line between technical communicator and teacher is blurring, especially in large IT enterprises where e-learning content cannot be produced quickly enough. As the role of technical communicators expands to include designing and
developing e-learning content, it is important that we understand adult learning theory and its application to the various types of e-learning we will be asked to create, both today and in the future.

Suggested Reading


Kristine Olka is an e-learning project manager and a certified instructional designer and developer in the IBM Design and Information Development (D&ID) group. Her team recently received a Best of Show award in STC’s international online communication competition for the SAN File System e-learning course. Her experience includes project management, Web site development, content development, editing, usability analysis, and instructional design and development. She is currently pursuing a master’s degree in technical communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute.
Dear Insider,

I graduated with a B.S. in Technical Communications in the fall of 2003. I am currently employed in technical support and I haven’t been able to obtain a technical writing position. I haven’t seen a posting for a technical writing position that requires less than three years of experience and it is very frustrating. I think the only good news is that I am no longer seeing positions requiring 8-10 years experience, but they are far from entry level.

Longing to write

Dear Longing to write,

Yes, it is true that breaking into a field and getting your first job is difficult. This has been the case for many years and many professions.

Here is what I recommend:

- If you are not already a member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), plan to join and become involved. This is an excellent place to network and learn about the vast array of jobs available in this ever-expanding field. It goes without saying that networking is critical to finding a job in today’s market. Also, STC has the best job line for technical communicators in the region. Check out their job site at [http://stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance/jobline.htm](http://stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance/jobline.htm).
- Have you done a critical review of your resume? Does it summarize the skill set that you possess followed by a work history, education, and other professional skills that may interest an employer in this field? Or is your resume dull and lifeless and read more like an obituary? Does it truly reflect your personal style and skill set?
- Do you have a writing portfolio that showcases samples of your writing or other types of technical communication? As an emerging professional, you probably don’t have many professional samples. But what about writing articles in a local newsletter for an organization to which you are a member? Or how about including class projects that were well planned and well executed? These could be great substitutes to professional samples.
- Can you in any way differentiate yourself from other candidates? In other words, do you have job experience in a particular field that would make you a viable candidate as a technical communicator in that field? Can you apply as a technical communicator within your own company?
- Are your interviewing skills up to par? Do you know what employers are looking for in the interview for the type of job you are seeking? If not, have you contacted companies and other professionals to conduct informational interviews to gain that insight? I am sure that you can find such individuals through the STC.
- Does your professional life allow for some flexibility, such as relocating for a first job, or traveling as a consultant? I am aware of two such companies in the Denver area that hire and train new professionals but do require travel as a part of the job.
- Are your writing and technical skills up to par or could they stand some refreshing and improvement? Most companies today require that applicants pass a writing test and a technical interview to land the job as a technical communicator. Are you able to do both of these tasks?
If you are new to the profession, transitioning from another profession, or finishing up coursework in the field of technical communications, feel free to submit your questions to Insider at news@stcrmc.org. We will do our best to provide you will valuable insights and information to help you get a start.
Chapter News

Membership News

Molly Malsam’s article “A Way Last Resort” was published in the February issue of TechniScribe, and can be read online at http://www.ocstc.org/pdf/ts022007.pdf

Chapter Meetings

March 15, 2007 – Senior Member Dinner (With a Special Guest)

April 19, 2007 – Communicating Clearly with Colleagues and Clients (Ginny Redish)

May 24, 2007 – How to Build a Business Case (Jack Molisani) and chapter business meeting

Upcoming Events

April 2007-2008 Elections

Our chapter will be holding 2007-2008 elections in April 2007, and that means we need to have a slate of candidates. Elected positions follow:

- Vice President (automatically advances to President during the 2008-2009 chapter year, and advances to Past President the year after)
- Secretary
- Treasurer
- Two Nominating Committee positions

If you are interested in running for office, please contact our nomination committee: Martha Sippel (azuwrite@comcast.net) or Mary Jo Stark (mjstark@lgc.com).

May 13-16 Annual STC Conference

This year’s annual STC conference will be held in Minneapolis, MN. Early registration is open and is available at a discounted price. Go to http://www.stc.org/54thConf/index.asp for details.

Open Volunteer Positions

Ron Arner is currently serving as our chapter’s Volunteer Coordinator, and as such, is soliciting people to serve in the following positions:

- Publicity Manager who generates interest in the community by submitting press releases, etc., in advance of chapter events.
- Volunteer Coordinator promotes volunteerism within the chapter and assists people in finding positions that match members' skills and meet their professional goals.
- Project Manager and Website Manager, who manages the chapter website, ensuring timely and accurate content, participates in and manages the resources for the
If you have the interest in these areas and the skills to perform these tasks, please contact Ron at vicepresident@stcrmc.org.

Networking Opportunities

Get connected ... If you're an STC RMC member, consider joining techcomm-discuss, the chapter's email list. For information about the list, including how to join, view the list FAQ page and the posting rules.

Employment News, Trends, and Opportunities


Education News, Trends, and Opportunities

Event: WritersUA Conference Registration Now Open All the information is now available for The 15th Annual WritersUA Conference for Software User Assistance, March 25-28, at the Hyatt Regency in Long Beach, CA.
**STC News**

**Registration Open for the Technical Communication Summit**


**Register Today for Upcoming Certificate Programs**

STC's [Technical Communication Summit Certificate Programs](http://www.stc.org/54thConf/register/index.asp) allow you to develop needed skills and explore subjects in depth over the course of the Conference.

2007 Certificate Program subject areas include:

- TechComm 101 - Basic Technical Communications.
- MasterWriters - Undiscovered Country: Taking Your Information Design to the Next Level.
- Usability - The Science and Art of Effective Interface Design.
- Content Management - Moving to Content Management: From Justification to Implementation.

For just $1295 (USD) you can enroll in a [Certificate Program](http://www.stc.org/54thConf/register/index.asp) AND you receive full conference registration too!

Don't just attend the Conference this year - participate, learn, earn a certificate, and exchange ideas and tools with other attendees - enroll in a [Certificate Program](http://www.stc.org/54thConf/register/index.asp) today!

[Register online](http://www.stc.org/54thConf/register/index.asp).
Creating a Low-Cost Video Web Seminar

by Guy Ball, STC Senior member, Orange County (CA) chapter

While text is still best for presenting many types of reference and procedural information, video can be very effective when illustrating product features, clarifying system configurations, and supplementing complex written procedures. The trick is to merge the two so they complement each other and deliver a dynamic documentation package as an online or CD-based web seminar.

Although the multimedia concept has been around for some time, creating a seminar like this traditionally requires a good-sized team of writers, videographers, graphic artists, subject matter experts (SMEs), and a manager to keep the team working smoothly. If you already have a large staff or access to graphic professionals, congratulations!

Our staffing situation is the opposite: we have to make do with a single writer and a few SMEs. The plus of this situation is that it allows us to deliver the final product faster and less expensively—both important considerations for our cost-conscious management.

We take advantage of our low-cost (but high-quality) video camera and simplified video-editing software to deliver additional "visual documentation" to our service support team and customers. For us the trick is to look clean and professional while not getting caught producing a Hollywood extravaganza that would demand extra staff time and weeks of extra work with little extra benefit. Instead of "fancy," we make sure our content and delivery is effective both from communications and cost perspectives.

Our final output (web or CD) includes a combination of video, Adobe PDF, and HTML files. Our worldwide service team members all have laptops, so if they can’t access the Internet from their work facilities, they can use the CD.

The first step in creating a project efficiently is to understand and plan well—no secret there. We ask what our purpose is:

- Fix a problem?
- Document a new process or tool?
- Highlight some feature of the product or its servicing?

More-specific concerns are:

- What will the project look like?
- Is it important to include a video?
- Will a single video be enough?
- Will the video show live-action (with a person or the system)?
- Will we use a screen capture program to demonstrate how the software behaves?
- Are written procedures and reference drawings included?

Usually, we decide on some sort of video and add some text-based procedures in PDF or online Help. By adding video, we’ve improved the comprehension of the written procedures so that the service staff can use the text portion for reference and detailed information.
In my case, the “actors” are more knowledgeable engineers or first-tier support engineers. (Oddly enough, some of the quiet ones do quite well when you turn the camera on them.) We meet and roughly plan what the content will be and how we will break it up into manageable chunks.

I try to stick to 4–6 minutes for each video. (Although it doesn’t always work, that’s the goal.) Any longer and most viewers get antsy and click away.

Long discussions are often divided into shorter “chapters.” This also forces us to develop our content more efficiently and not include more than we need to. It’s a good bargaining chip with the SMEs, who too often want to explain every nuance of a system while on video. (I offer to let them speak in depth on other video segments, thus keeping my main one short.)

In most cases, we use live-action video. Our SMEs usually have a good idea of what they want to say, and I just videotape them while they’re performing the procedure they’re discussing.

This is all “live” and often handheld—I use a tripod when I can, but often I just try to be steady as I move along with the expert. I also later shoot some secondary close-up footage (“B-roll,” in the jargon) so I can edit it into the main footage during cuts, narration flubs, or when I don’t follow with the camera well enough.

I’ve gotten good at doing the video with one or two takes. The better experts don’t need to memorize their lines if they just speak to the subject matter, and a couple of minor flubs will not hurt you. In fact, I suspect the help our experts become more “human” to the audience—and our service team members like to see what the engineer back in Irvine looks like.

And when experts drone on, I use my video editing tools to crop or cut during the final edit. (This is where the B-roll footage becomes important: to cover abrupt changes.)

So when we have the video shot and “in the can” (I love that Hollywood talk), I’ll edit the video. You can use the higher-priced video-editing software packages if you’re familiar with them, but if you aren’t, I recommend you stick with something simpler and easier to learn, unless your company will pay for training or you have a coworker who can help.

I was a user of Adobe’s Premiere Pro, but our department budget allowed only for Premiere Elements, which I’ve been happy with. I export the final edited video to a high-quality WMV (Windows Media Video) format, which is easily displayed by our Windows-based laptops.

I also use Techsmith Camtasia to record the installation, configuration, and use of software. It’s a wonderfully simple program that captures every on-screen move, and you can narrate while recording or dub in narration later. This is great for getting programmers involved. (Also, you can edit it to shorten pauses or correct errors.) Adobe Captivate is a similar program.

Let’s skip ahead to where you have collected the finished videos, PDFs of a procedure or two, and maybe some drawings for reference.

Rather than release a disk just with a couple of files on it, I want to offer a more sophisticated media piece. It’s not really difficult. I use a web-page program such as FrontPage to create a simple HTML home page and have it automatically start when the disk is inserted into the user’s drive.

On that first page, I have a menu of links to the videos or other selections. I’ll add some photos as clickable links and select fonts that are resident on their computers. (Clickable icons can be created in Photoshop.) I make it look pleasing (mimicking other pages I have in my idea file), and I’m done.

On some feature-packed web seminars, I’ve included several layers of web pages that offer something more like a full website. I’ll add technical bulletins, original manufacturer manuals, and troubleshooting aids. I also offer links to external sites and contact e-mails to encourage the user to keep coming back to this CD as a resource.
If I had more space, I would continue about field testing your work, developing a collection of website seminar examples to provide ideas for the graphically challenged (like me), dealing with tough SMEs (and tougher managers) who want a larger and costlier seminar, and how to sneak in your first multimedia project when no one wants to give you the opportunity. But that gives me reasons to write more articles.

To sum up, we’ve developed a solid formula that delivers quality video-based seminars fast and inexpensively. We get rave reviews from our service staff and customers for their clarity and ease of use. Our major customers love it because they can see the quality of the training and that it’s uniformly delivered. My management likes it because we’re delivering effective service instruction without hurting our financial bottom line. And if they’re happy, I’m happy (and gainfully employed).

Guy D. Ball is a senior technical writer for EADS-North America Defense Test and Services in Irvine, CA. He has helped develop more than 80 multimedia presentations. His latest book, Early Santa Ana, was published this summer. He lives in Tustin, CA, and can be contacted at guyball@pacbell.net.
Teaching Online: All About Communication

by Alida Franco, STC RMC member

I recently had the opportunity to teach an undergraduate course in Usability Testing at a local college. More than 10 years ago, as Director of Learning Systems at that same college, I instituted the online program as a cost-effective method of providing college courses to students throughout the state of Colorado. Now, more than a decade later, I was myself tasked to teach an online course as adjunct faculty in the Department of Technical Communication.

As I plunged into designing the online course material, I asked myself how I would communicate information, guide the learning process, and ensure that the students were on track. The mechanisms for posting a syllabus and exams, presenting weekly discussion questions, and providing simple support for daily questions and answers were features of the courseware itself. But how would I be able to develop the new and important concepts that the students had to master, and assist students in integrating these new concepts into existing mental schemas? To me, teaching was essentially about effective communication, so I focused on discovering ways to optimize the communication process throughout the course.

Virtual Lectures

I began by thinking back to the days when I created the online program. I had been convinced that the World Wide Web would provide the essential structure the college needed to enable interactive learning at a distance. I thought back to the research and practical experience I had gathered before instituting the online program. At that time, I actually enrolled as a student in a non-credit online college course in order to observe the communication exchange firsthand and analyze its effectiveness. As I vividly recall, I had enrolled in the right course because the instructor was quick to engage me in the course material.

He began each week’s unit with an online lecture. It was not a PowerPoint presentation of bullet points; it was a simple monologue, presented in a text-based format with no animation, no illustrations, and no special fonts, colors, or design. But what struck me at the time was that it was as if he were speaking directly to me, just as if I were sitting in class face-to-face with him.

So I began to analyze why this was so. The power of his lecture lay in his ability to communicate his ideas through the skillful use of words. First, he employed first and second person to address the class directly. Second, he laid out a plan of attack for that week’s material. He emphasized important points, made distinctions, and encouraged the class to explore the material as they began their readings. Without much effort on my part as a student, the instructor immediately engaged me in the concepts and ideas he was attempting to introduce in that week’s lecture.

So, I decided to implement this technique in my own online class. I would begin each week’s material with an engaging, thought-provoking lecture. I did this by creating a category in the main course menu called "Virtual Classroom," and each week before a new unit of material was to begin I posted a lecture, appropriately labeled and sequenced. I instructed the class to begin their week of study with a Virtual Classroom lecture, thereby providing each student with a roadmap for the week while setting the tone for the
discussion that was to come.

**Classroom Discussions**

My second communication was to provide the students with interactive, online discussion of the main concepts and points that were introduced in the lectures.

In an ideal world, the students would participate in scheduled, synchronous discussions, but the courseware did not provide this feature. So I settled on interactive asynchronous discussions. Again, each week I posted a series of questions, requiring students to choose and discuss two from the list and to respond to one other student's posting.

I freely allowed students to manipulate the concepts during discussion, and because of the asynchronous nature of the discussions I decided to participate only after the discussion was closed. At that point, I would review all of the comments and questions, and then post a Discussion Recap for the entire class. In the recap I would reiterate important points, draw distinctions, classify ideas, clarify confusions, and, of course, answer questions that applied to the entire class.

**Study Aids**

About midway through the online course, as I began preparations for the mid-term exam, it occurred to me that these two tools, the virtual classroom lectures and the discussion recaps, could also serve as a great set of study aids for mid-term and final exam preparation. The lectures and recaps were labeled by unit for easy reference and posted online for easy downloading or printing, and thus they could easily be added to the course notebook I had encouraged students to create.

**Conclusions**

The online course structure is a great method for alternative course delivery and an excellent means for providing greater access to learning. However, it is not an ideal system for all and can require significant readjustment to the new teaching/learning experience for instructors and students alike. For some, the loss of important paralinguistic features such as gestures, voice intonation, and eye contact, which provide the richness in human communication, makes the online course experience ineffective. Clearly, much more research and innovation needs to be done before the online education experience can equal the effectiveness of face-to-face discussion and learning. For those of you involved in online teaching or computer-based instruction and content development, I invite you all to examine the issues and share your experiences.

*Alida Franco is a senior technical writer at Sybase, Inc. and can be reached at alida.franc@sybase.com.*
Technical Communicators Learn about Intelligent Disobedience at January Chapter Meeting

by Al Kemp

President Deb Lockwood welcomed attendees to the new year and the January chapter meeting. After announcements about job openings, a FrameMaker class at Metro in March, volunteer needs, upcoming newsletters, scholarship awards, nominations for chapter officers, and the senior member dinner, Lockwood introduced the speaker.

Bob McGannon is a PMI certified Project Management Professional, an IBM certified Executive Project Manager, and a certified coach for the Boeing Corporation. He has published many papers and business articles including topics such as recharacterizing problems to find new solutions, structuring teams for success, and managing change.

McGannon's entertaining and thought-provoking presentation, "Intelligent Disobedience: The Difference Between Good and Great Leaders," explained why saying "yes" all the time is not a good idea.

The term intelligent disobedience comes from the world of seeing-eye dogs. Those dogs must disobey their owner's commands when following a command will place the dog's owner in danger.

The purpose of intelligent disobedience is to:

- Enhance personal success
- Expand the success of the businesses that employ us
- Ensure the ongoing success of our profession

McGannon pointed out that falling victim to learned helplessness is easy. People who use excuses like "They never let us do that" have made the decision to accept conditions as
they exist.

When traditional means don't work, intelligent disobedience provides a way to achieve an outcome by nontraditional means.

McGannon stressed that he is not promoting unethical conduct such as holding back information, telling half-truths, or breaking corporate rules. On the contrary, intelligent disobedience should always be ethical. When unethical decisions are made, we have a moral duty to follow the principles of intelligent disobedience and present ethical alternatives to management.

Intelligent disobedience requires a project manager to:

- Take risks
- Employ creativity
- Be persistent (overcome learned helplessness!)

Regarding risk, McGannon recommended "Take pain now, later is deadly." The earlier we address problems, the more likely we are to solve them. As a project manager, if we don't have enough authority, we should ask for more at the start of the project. If we get the authority, great! If we don't, we have taken advantage of an opportunity to discuss with our management and project sponsors why we need the authority.

![Bob McGannon with Martha Sippel and Tammy Van Boening](image)

Bob McGannon with Martha Sippel and Tammy Van Boening

If using our style doesn't get our point across to someone, we should take a risk and try using their style. For example, if we are logical and we are trying to persuade an emotional person, we should be more emotional.

McGannon warned that being careful of what we say so we can preserve a relationship is a fallacy. If we can't say what we need to say, we don't have a relationship. We should never be rude, but we should not need to be careful. To illustrate his point further, he recommended the book *Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott.

Doing something different, something out of character, can get people to listen to you. McGannon told a story about a manager who creatively encouraged employees to test a product thoroughly by offering rewards for finding errors. At the end of the test period, the company shipped an extremely high-quality product.

During the presentation, McGannon asked the audience to write down creative ways to say "no." He read several of the most creative examples and gave away several large plastic noses to promote the big change in saying "No."

He left us with some key ideas: persistence is important; don't assume that people know what you want, help them to understand your needs. McGannon suggested that if we are having trouble getting a manager to attend project meetings, we should not give up. We might, for example, ask the manager to sign a memo granting us authority to act in
the manager's place. We may not get a signed memo, but the manager will show up at the project meetings!

In the words of Gandi: "A 'no' uttered from the deepest conviction is better than a 'yes' uttered merely to please."
Review of Cladonia Exchanger XML Editor ver 3.2

by Tony Self


This article is a review of the Exchanger XML Editor version 3.2 from the Cladonia company. Being such a broad field, the XML Editor category is necessarily far-reaching, and can cover both database management systems and authoring tools. For this reason, this review narrows the scope by looking at the suitability of Exchanger for use by technical communicators and Help authors to create and edit manuals, user guides and Help systems. Much of the focus of this article is therefore on the software's suitability for DocBook or DITA authoring, and its appropriateness for users without coding skills.

Introduction

Having spent some time working with Cladonia's Exchanger XML Editor, I can attest to the claim that this is a good, solid, well-featured and extensible XML editor. However, the software is not suitable for authoring documents. It is designed for working with XML data in many forms, but it is not designed for textual content. Let me explain.

XML authoring tools fit into the categories of text editors, WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) editors, and content management systems. Text editors require the user to be very familiar with XML tagging concepts, and to be comfortable working in a code-based environment. WYSIWYG editors (although WYSIWYG is not really an accurate term, because in XML, what you get depends on what you need to see!) are closer to conventional authoring tools such as Framemaker, RoboHelp or Word. Content management systems attempt to take the XML out of the picture, and provide a form-filling, online authoring environment.

If you have the technical expertise and orientation to work with text editors, then you're ahead of the pack. If you don't, then you may need to find a technical support resource in your organisation, or abandon the idea of working with text editors. Some WYSIWYG (or WYSIIOO - What You See Is One Option) and content management systems may also require the backup of people with the expertise to keep you on the right track. Most of the tools on the market don't have associated training courses yet, so be prepared to invest some time teaching yourself the tool. If this type of learning doesn't agree with you, then finding a tool with training support should be your objective.

Working with Exchanger

The Exchanger user interface is made up of the Main pane, Output pane, and the Controller pane.

As the name implies, the Main pane displays the document content, in an Editor view, a Schema view, an Outliner view, a Grid (tree) view. For DocBook authoring, the Schema view and the Outliner view are of little use. The Grid view may be useful for a birds-eye view of the document structure, but the hard work is all done in the Editor view. (There is provision for a Viewer view, but this does not seem to be implemented yet.) Exchanger is a code editor, so you only get to work with a tagged ASCII view of the document.
The Output pane dynamically displays system messages, with tabs to switch between error messages, XPath information (more on that later), a list of bookmarks (more on this great little feature later too), and search results.

The Controller pane has three tabs, to display the Projects tree, the Navigator, or the Helper. The Projects view shows a categorised view of XML editing projects, allowing you to more easily locate working files. By default, the system installs with a good range of sample files (in various schemas) in the Projects tree. The Navigator displays a tree view of the nodes in the current document, providing a very easy to use means of navigating to a point in a long document. Double-clicking on a node takes you to that position in the document. If you want to get fancy, you can also use an XPath query to locate a particular node in the document. This is not particularly useful in DocBook documents, but is a fantastic feature for XML data documents. The Helpers tab is extremely helpful, in that it displays a list of valid child elements for the currently selected element. For example, in the DocBook schema, an <abstract> element can contain <formalpara>, <para>, <simplepara> and <title> elements. So if the cursor is in within a <abstract> tag in the Main pane, the Helper shows those four valid elements, as well as valid attributes for the <abstract> tag. Double-clicking on an element in the Helper view will add that tag to the document in the Main pane.
One of the most powerful features of Exchanger is the XPath facility. XPath is a syntax for nominating a portion of an XML document by specifying its position through a hierarchical route to the location. For example, /article/section/para nominates all <para> elements within <section> tags within the <article> element. A more complicated example might be /article/section[2]/para[3]/text(), which identifies the text of the third <para> in the second <section> of the <article>. An XPath statement can be entered into XPath field in Exchanger to quickly locate that part of the document. The system not only remembers early statements for quick recall through a dropdown, but also displays, in the Output pane, a hyperlinked list of nodes that met the XPath search criteria.

Another simple but effectively implemented feature is the bookmarks. In the Main pane, there are actually four narrow columns to the left of the content. These columns are used to display the line number, to collapse and expand an element, to access shortcut buttons, and to add and remove bookmarks. Bookmarks are simply recallable markers placed on a line of a document. Once a bookmark is added, that position in that document can be returned to at a later date by clicking on the bookmark's name in the Output pane.
With only a bit of technical aptitude, you can start customising the user interface. Shortcut buttons for common element structures, such as tables and numbered lists, make it a bit easier to work with the more complex coding. (However, not being able to see the table in, well, a tabular form, makes it very difficult to focus on the table's content.) It is very easy to add new shortcut buttons to custom code fragments.

Multiple documents can be open at one time in Exchanger, with a tabbed divider control being used to switch between them. There is some drag and drop support, which can make editing tasks easier. The undo/redo feature works consistently and logically. There is an impressive array of handy tools for working with elements, including tag highlighting, toggling case, code formatting, and parent element selection. Unfortunately, there's no spell-checker.

Exchanger has, like all good XML editors, the ability to confirm that the document is well-formed (complies with the general XML tagging rules), and valid (complies with the particular schema). The validation error logging is quite good. An error message is displayed that explains the problem, and the corresponding code line number highlighted. Provided you learn the syntax syntax used in the error message, it is relatively easy to decipher the problem and devise a method to correct it.

### A DocBook or DITA Authoring Tool?

Exchanger ships with a DocBook type. (The concept of Type in Exchanger XML Editor is a specification of a particular XML application by nominating rules for for validation, tag completion and Schema Viewer/Outliner functionality.) This means that right after installing, you can go to the File menu, choose New, and select a DocBook type. It is a relatively easy exercise to add a DITA type to Exchanger. However, being technically capable of quickly creating an empty DocBook or DITA file is one thing; providing an efficient and workable authoring environment is another. Exchanger XML Editor does not provide such an environment.

A good authoring environment allows the user to focus on the text rather than the code. With Exchanger, you just can't escape from the code. I started writing this article in Exchanger, but had to change to an alternative tool, because it became too difficult to compose words. Instead, I found myself struggling to cope with the coding, and this was not just because of a lack of familiarity with the tool. This problem is simply a limitation of working with text or code editors. Writing tasks can only be practically accomplished using a WYSIWO editors such as XXE and Serna.

### Transformations

DocBook and DITA are storage formats, and not presentation formats. So to deliver a document to an end-user, the DocBook or DITA code has to be transformed into a delivery format such as PDF, RTF, or HTML.

Exchanger has good transformation features, but they are not terribly easy for a non-coder to work with. Before you start transforming, you have to have XSL-T and/or XSL-FO files at the ready (although you can download a good collection of DITA and DocBook XSL files from their respective Web sites), and be familiar with the file names. To transform, you select the XML document to transform, and the XSL file to transform it with, and then the processor to transform it with. If you're familiar with processors such as Saxon and Xalan, this is all logical, straightforward and controllable. But for the novice, this procedure can be
A typical transformation to XHTML displays the output (in code format, of course) as a separate document in Exchanger’s main pane. You can preview the file in a browser with a shortcut key.

**Summary**

There are a number of features within Exchanger that I haven’t even touched on, but which are very useful for non-writing XML tasks. Exchanger is a great XML code editor, with great features. But the features it has are of little benefit to authoring tasks, and the features it lacks (in particular the lack of a WYSIOO editing mode) are of great importance to those authoring tasks. I tried creating and editing some XML data files, such as a schema for a library card system, and found that Exchanger was well-suited to the task, and very easy to use. However, for DocBook documents, I found I could not use the tool in a practical way. The software costs USD130 for a single licence, and a time-limited evaluation version is available from the Exchanger Web Site. As a Java-based program, Exchanger runs on Windows, Mac, and all types of Unix. If you are looking for an introductory tool for DocBook or DITA authoring, then this tool is definitely not for you. But if you’re in the market for a solid, hard-working general purpose XML data editor, then Exchanger XML Editor is a good choice.

Tony Self is a founding partner in HyperWrite Pty Ltd, which was the first hypertext document development company in Australia. Tony has over 20 years documentation experience, including 10 years with online and hypertext documents in WinHelp and HTML formats. He has managed large online documentation projects in Australia and New Zealand. Tony has undertaken roles in technology training design and delivery, and computer-based training development, in Australia and Ireland. He has spoken at conferences in Australia, the United States, New Zealand and the United Kingdom. In addition to consulting, Tony lectures in technical communication at Swinburne University. *He is the co-author of Swimming With the Tide, a Business Guide to the Internet.*
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Transitioning from Technical Writer to Instructional Designer: What You Already Know and What You Can Learn

by Angela Athy

There’s this great Dilbert cartoon where Dilbert and a female friend are talking. His friend complains about not receiving any training for the new computer system at work. When Dilbert suggests that she read the user manual, she replies with something like, “Read the manual? Are you serious? I don’t have time for that!” Dilbert responds: “So you have time to sit in training for an entire day, but you don’t have time to read the manual?”

Technical communicators face the almost daily frustration of their hard work being ignored. Let’s face it, the idea that “If we build it, they will come” might apply to a magical baseball field in Iowa, but not necessarily to manuals, guides, and online help. How many times has a colleague (probably one not in your department) asked you how to do something in Microsoft Word, to which you’ve asked, “Have you checked the online help?” You are asking them this question to promote your profession. You are met with a blank look which translates to: “Why would I look there?”

Learners yearn for instruction but often have no interest in teaching themselves. I am not suggesting that documentation can replace training; however, the pain of no training could be eased by searching the online help, or by reading a user’s guide or owner’s manual. To that end, and put most simply, technical communicators are instructional designers. Technical communicators design materials that help people learn.

Technical communicators welcome the chance to take something apart, ask questions about it, read about it, and write about it. They also focus on audience—who are the users, what do they know, what do they need to know, and how will they use this product? When I transitioned from being a technical writer to an instructional designer, I realized that the skills I developed as a technical writer were quite applicable. The best technical writing doesn’t document the features of a device or software, it documents user tasks—how and when the user will use that feature. Instructional designers insist on this same principle: focusing on a specific audience and writing targeted objectives based on what that audience needs to learn.

While there are some similarities between the fields of technical communication and instructional design, those connections are not enough to pave the way for an effortless transition from one role to the other. If you are interested in making that transition, here are five simple suggestions.

Learn Some Theory

Having some advanced knowledge in adult learning and instructional design will assist you in creating solid learning. There are plenty of online resources and texts, so if you don’t have the time or inclination to go back to school, educate yourself. The more you know, the better your design choices, and the easier it will be for you to defend those choices.

Learn Some Models

Instructional design is a process, and there are various models out there for implementing that process. Learn about the models, chose one, and stick to it. Using a solid design model, like ADDIE (Analyze, Design, Develop, Implement, and Evaluate) will also help to
ensure that the training you create hits the mark.

**Look at Examples**
Observation is a powerful learning tool. As you attend training, analyze what you see. Review online learning, look at training guides and examples of job aids. As a learner, what engages you? Think about how you can create learning that’s like the best of what you’ve seen.

**Find Opportunities to Practice**
Being a facilitator can provide you a better understanding of usable instructional materials. Opportunities to design learning may also be available. Maybe your work group is implementing a new process and you can serve as the training champion by writing a job aid and conducting brief sessions. If you cannot find an opportunity within your organization, look outside. You might attend your local American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) chapter meetings and look for volunteer opportunities with the organization that will give you the chance to advance your skills.

**Find a Mentor**
I learned 95% of what I know about instructional design from my mentor. When I started in the profession, I was fortunate to work with an extremely knowledgeable instructional designer. She suggested texts, reviewed my drafts, and provided me with constructive feedback throughout my growth. That kind of coaching is invaluable, and I am forever grateful for her guidance.

So what’s the benefit of being an instructional designer? Besides the fact that it builds on what I already liked to do as a technical communicator, I also have the satisfaction of knowing that people are reading and using what I write. I’ve sat in classrooms and witnessed it. That’s not something that you regularly, if ever, get the chance to see as a technical communicator, and it can provide affirmation for what you do.

*Angela Athy holds a Master’s Degree in English from the University of Nebraska at Omaha and worked as a technical communicator from 1999-2004. She began her tenure in instructional design in 2004 as an Information Design Manager with CSG Systems, Inc. She’s now a Program Manager of Training Development in the HR Department at the Union Pacific Railroad.*
STC Officer Candidates

The following messages are from STC officer candidates for 2007. To learn more about all of this year's candidates and to ask questions, please go to http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp

Cindy Currie, Candidate for STC Second Vice President

Taking Technical Communication to New Heights!

Hello STC members! I’m Cindy Currie, a candidate for Second Vice President (2VP). I’m currently a Director, Community Affairs Committee chair, and a Strategic Planning Committee member. I belong to the Northern New England and UK chapters and five SIGs. I’ve been a member since 1991 and a Fellow since 2005.

For the past two years, I’ve worked hard to help STC deliver more value for all members. I want to continue this work, and I feel that I can best do that by increasing my commitment to STC through the office of 2VP.

My primary focus is promoting the value of technical communication to business. We need to ensure that senior management fully understands the role we play in helping to increase the bottom line of business. It is through relationships at this level that we will succeed in bringing the profession closer to the core of business, raising its profile, and creating new and higher-level roles for technical communicators. I know we can do this by concentrating on four key areas:

Codifying our body of knowledge – The certification debate continues, with strong feelings on both sides. Certification – if we choose to go in that direction – isn’t possible without a body of knowledge (BoK) against which to certify TCs. In either case, a BoK is essential to elevating the profession in the global business hierarchy, helping to further legitimize it.

Enhancing and expanding professional growth opportunities – Members must be ready to meet new and exciting challenges, so we must provide a variety of business and leadership learning opportunities, as well as education and training on methods and tools.

Creating a solid identity for STC – We need strong brand identity that loudly trumpets STC’s industry leadership of the profession, and is quickly and easily recognized as one that means quality – of both the practice and its practitioners.

Reworking our business model and infrastructure – We must be able to identify, support, and promote changes and improvements with clarity, speed, and agility. STC is a business and we need to run it like a business with all the right frameworks in place to deliver on all of our commitments – to members, partners, academe, and business.

So, let’s take technical communication to new heights!

To learn more about all of this year’s candidates and to ask questions, please go to http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/index.asp

Mollye Barrett, Candidate for STC Director
Hi! I’m Mollye Barrett and I’m a candidate for STC Director. I’m asking for your vote in the coming STC elections because I support technical communicators and the needs of STC members. I believe every member counts.

I place great store in technical communicators, the work you perform and the value you add to society. You’re important and so is your work. As an STC Director, I will listen to members and learn about your challenges, I’ll work to support your needs and as a result, I’ll ensure that STC’s governance is transparent and responsive.

As a past president of the Wisconsin Chapter and a Region 6 Conference Committee member, I understand the challenges of STC leadership. These positions have led me to recognize that the society requires changes that will facilitate growth and renewal.

My experience as a chapter mentoring program manager has connected me with professionals and students seeking a rewarding career as technical communicators. I’ve learned that by listening, offering encouragement and guidance, I’ve helped others acquire the skills and knowledge to become valuable practitioners in their field.

My role as Director would be that of a facilitator and I’ll consider every issue by asking, "What do members want and need? What resources can the Society offer to support the members?"

My career has benefited from the educational opportunities of countless chapter meetings as well as many regional and international conferences. Further, I have developed a rich network of high-functioning technical communication professionals that are both colleagues and friends.

Service is the heart of a volunteer organization like STC and service is why I am a Director candidate. To the role of Director I offer my energy, creativity, and best communication skills.

My goals are clear: offer members the education, programming, and support they need to thrive in their careers, lead the society in changes that will facilitate growth and renewal, and enjoy the opportunity to work with everyone. Some inititatives I support and propose include:

- Regularly survey members on their interests and expectations
- Ensure that STC is a member-driven organization
- Focus on STC as both a professional development and social networking organization
- Build an international mentoring program
- Recognize and honor working technical communicators
- Support STC as a business focused on the needs of members
- Support a strong membership drive for new members and contact lapsed members, encouraging them to rejoin

I have been a member of STC since 1995 and have benefited from the service of others. Please contact me with questions, concerns, ideas or just to say hello.

You can view my candidate information on the STC candidate site (www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/candBio01.asp?candID=22) and additional information on my campaign site (www.mollyebarrett.org). I look forward to your vote of support and the opportunity to serve STC.

Mollye Barrett
mollyeb@kencook.com
414-847-1271

Nicky Bleiel, Candidate for STC Director

Hi, I’m Nicky Bleiel, candidate for Director in 2007.
I will get right to the point – I would like your vote in the upcoming election.

**My vision:**
Technical communicators make users more successful. I would like to help STC make technical communicators more successful by expanding its educational offerings, adding more training courses, seminars, conferences, and even books. One of STC’s goals is to "Tell our powerful story," and I plan to work on projects that help promote our profession to the business community.

**Leadership experience:**
I am the immediate past president of the Pittsburgh chapter. During my presidency, Pittsburgh was recognized as a chapter of excellence; during my vice presidency, as a chapter of distinction. I also served as membership chair and have been involved in program planning for four years; including serving on the planning committee for the successful Region 4 Conference held April 2004 in Pittsburgh. I am proud that I helped launch the popular "Software Saturdays" training program, which has been adopted by other chapters.

**Professional experience:**
I have been a technical communicator for twelve years. Like many of us, I started my career writing books and producing them in hardcopy format, but have since embraced online help and user assistance, Web design, single-sourcing, usability, e-learning, and knowledge management. I have experience writing for products in a variety of industries; including media sales, industrial automation, simulation, and pharmaceutical.

**Speaking and writing:**
I have presented talks at several STC annual conferences, both during general sessions and on Leadership Day. I have also presented at local and regional STC events, including Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Pittsburgh. Topics have included tools and technologies, user assistance design, single-sourcing, and wikis. I have been published in conference proceedings, on the web, and in STC’s *Tieline* (the Society leaders’ newsletter) and STC Pittsburgh’s *Blue Pencil*.

**Results-oriented:**
Accomplishing any goal – personal, professional, or as an STC leader – requires innovation, organizational skills, and focus. As a Director, I would use these traits to deliver results to our membership. I will work with the STC Board, as well as the members, to find new ways to tackle problems and drive initiatives that will make the Society a valuable resource for technical communicators.

You can contact me at bleiel@zoominternet.net. Thank you, and I would appreciate your vote in March.


You can ask all the candidates for Director a question at: [http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/candAsk01.asp?runPosition=Director](http://www.stc.org/candidatesFAQ/candAsk01.asp?runPosition=Director)