



[President's Corner](#)

[Colorado Connections](#)

[Message from the Editor](#)

[Back](#)

[Next](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Honoring our Rocky Mountain Chapter DCSA winner

by *Martha Sippel*

I'd like to tell you about one of our colleagues who received individual honors recently.

Distinguished Chapter Service Award

The Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA) acknowledges the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities.

Introducing the Winner

Linda Gallagher has been instrumental to the Rocky Mountain Chapter's success since she moved here several years ago. She has participated in almost every aspect of our chapter activities and has held numerous offices and manager positions. The inscription on her plaque reads: "For sustained contributions to, and outstanding leadership of, the Rocky Mountain Chapter - for willingly sharing your knowledge and advice and for providing support and encouragement as a mentor in our chapter and profession."

Recognizing Our People

The STC RMC is about people working together to achieve a common goal. We strive to create an atmosphere where we can be successful. Linda has provided leadership, mentoring advice, and consistently makes professional suggestions to improve our chapter and how we accomplish our goals and objectives. Thank you, Linda.

The STC RMC is pleased to congratulate Linda on her well-deserved honor!

Other Awards

Please attend our special meeting in June to view the competition winners and support other members who receive awards. These people are instrumental in providing all the STC RMC information you receive. Your participation is important to the chapter. This meeting will be June 26 at the Daniels Cable Center. Watch the STC RMC website and your mail and email for more details.

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

You can do it!

by *Martha Sippel*

If writer's block is the worst thing I encounter in my daily activities, I should be grateful. But it is rather frustrating!

Inspiration

How do you get inspired? I get most of my daily inspiration from nature. If I can be outside exercising early, I usually have a more productive day. When I cannot be outside in the morning, I often open a door or a window and breathe deeply for a few minutes. I think positive thoughts and internally verbalize that it will be a good day. If I have time during the day and weather permits, I step outside and walk a little.

How do you get your inspiration? Please let me know by emailing me by June 30, 2003 at president@stcrmc.org. I will include your suggestions in a future newsletter article.

Techniques for overcoming writer's block

Overcoming writer's block is a very personal process. Look at this list of suggestions and find what works for you:

- Get into the creative side of your brain by free-writing, brainstorming, or mind-mapping
- Get up early and start writing immediately
- Follow the path of least resistance by starting with the easiest part
- Gain a new perspective by letting it sit for awhile and returning to it later
- Talk with a supportive colleague/friend
- Create your own special place and habits for writing
 - Set aside some uninterrupted time
 - Try listening to music that inspires you
 - Go for a walk or change locations
- Go with the flow
 - Create the mood by getting started
 - Once you're on a roll, try to keep it up
 - Write down ideas when they occur so you don't lose them
- Write about why you're having problems
 - List the worst thing that could happen
 - Use free-writing to "write through" the problems
 - Don't let one difficult word, phrase, or section stop you: skip it, move on, and go back to it later
- Give yourself credit for what you've accomplished
 - Consider a rough draft a good start and an accomplishment
 - Keep at it: the more you write, the more confidence you build

I hope this helps you on your quest to write more frequently! If you write something that you think might interest our members, please consider contributing to Technicalities. Our newsletter can always use articles.

Setting Goals to Achieve Dreams

Setting goals is the hardest part of trying to accomplish my dreams. However, below are some things that have helped me to be more proactive and realistic in setting measurable goals and objectives.

Accomplishing goals and objectives

How do you set realistic goals? I use many methods, but one process on the Internet recently gave me some new ideas for setting achievable goals and prioritizing tasks. The link is <http://www.iss.stthomas.edu/studyguides/scheduling.htm> and it provides a basic primer for setting goals and making schedules. While this site is geared to a student, I believe we can all learn something from reviewing how we spend our time.

As Sophocles said, "Tasks begun well, likely have good finishes." Daily I struggle with which tasks are the most important to accomplish that day. I'm sure I am not alone. Prioritizing tasks and responsibilities often means that a task you think is important moves down the list in favor of another. To me, this is the difference of setting goals and objectives and actually accomplishing them. Most successful people will tell you that they have short-term or long-term goals. Some refer to them daily or use them as daily affirmations.

A quote from Gene Donohue makes sense to me: "The difference between a goal and a dream is the written word." Putting objectives in writing makes it easier to accomplish your goals and achieve your dreams. Another site that I find helpful is <http://www.topachievement.com/goalsetting.html>. This leads you through the steps to put your goals in writing. The site seems a little materialistic, but you'll get the idea.

Also, an affinity diagram approach often works. When teams encountered long-standing problems or issues at work, brainstorming with affinity diagrams often created solutions. A site that defines this approach is <http://www.nsba.org/sbot/toolkit/sgno.html>. These sites provide a starting point for setting goals and planning objectives. Setting goals is a healthy way to overcome both writer's block and depression. In this economy, who couldn't use some help?

Strategic planning for our chapter

One of my objectives for our chapter is to enlist the help of someone experienced in strategic planning for nonprofits to assist our administrative council. Our chapter needs to plan to:

- Encourage smooth transitions between administrations
- Increase membership
- Support our technical programs
- Sustain our relationships with members and other organizations
- Maintain our financial health and growth

I hope to hold meetings to define goals so we can write down our goals and objectives and accomplish them effectively. In addition, I would like to publish this strategic plan for you, our members. I hope to work on this next year, as this year seems to have gotten away from me! If you'd like to participate in this endeavor, please contact me at president@stcrmc.org by June 30, 2003. If you decided to participate at a later date, please look up my information on the RMC website. Thanks and have a great summer!

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[President's Corner](#)
[Colorado Connections](#)
[Message from the Editor](#)
[◀ Back](#)
[Next ▶](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)
[Saving articles](#)
[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)
[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)
[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)
[Showcase your talents](#)
[Welcome our new chapter members](#)
[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)
[PDF version of Technicalities](#)
[Technicalities masthead](#)
[Technicalities home](#)
[STC RMC home](#)
[STC International home](#)

Tips from the trenches

by Deb Lockwood

It's June! And what does that mean? It's summer. Summer is not just a great time to frolic in the lovely Colorado weather and go on vacations, it is a great time to think about going back to school. No...I'm not kidding.

About September, have you ever said to yourself, "Hey, the kids are back in school, and lots of adults I know are going back to school. Maybe I'll just take that (fill in the blank) class I've been wanting to check out"? Well, I have. What usually happens to me at that point is that I find out that (a) the class has already been filled to capacity; (b) the class was canceled because nobody signed up in time; or (c) to get reimbursed by my employer; I had to apply for reimbursement four weeks prior to registration.

It is not only a good idea to take a class now and then in your field of expertise just to brush up on the basics, but it is also helpful to branch out occasionally. If you are a writer or editor, why not take a class in a software language, or in graphic design, or in project management? If you are a procedure writer, try taking a grant and proposal writing course. Stretch yourself.

Assuming I've made my case about checking out courses during the summer, let me give you a few resources that might help with your search.

Colorado Colleges and Universities

Of course, the Internet is a great place to begin. The following links will take you to the Web sites for accredited colleges and universities in Colorado:

- Adams State College <http://www.adams.edu/>
- Colorado Christian University <http://www.ccu.edu/>
- Colorado College <http://www.coloradocollege.edu/index.cfm>
- Colorado Community Colleges Online <http://www.ccconline.org/>
- Colorado State University <http://welcome.colostate.edu/>
- Community College of Denver <http://ccd.rightchoice.org/>
- Fort Lewis College <http://www.fortlewis.edu/>
- Front Range Community College <http://ccd.rightchoice.org/>
- Mesa State College <http://www.mesastate.edu/>
- Metropolitan State College of Denver <http://www.mscd.edu/>
- Red Rocks Community College <http://www.rrcc.ccoes.edu/>
- Regis University <http://www.regis.edu>
- University of Colorado - Boulder <http://www.colorado.edu/>
- University of Colorado - Colorado Springs <http://www.uccs.edu/>
- University of Colorado - Denver <http://www.cudenver.edu/index.htm>
- University of Denver <http://www.du.edu/>
- University of Northern Colorado <http://www.univnorthco.edu/>
- University of Southern Colorado <http://www.uscolo.edu/>

- Western State College <http://www.western.edu/>

This list is far from complete. Just run your own search in the Google search engine, and you'll see more references, including technical colleges.

Other Classes and Information Links

Of course, you should always check out the STC's resources first. Go to <http://www.stcrmc.org> and click the Professional Resources link. Especially check out the Distance Learning Programs at http://www.stcrmc.org/resources/resource_degree.htm.

When I recently researched the topic for a friend who wanted to take a "brush-up" writing course, I was reminded of the InfoMap writing method. See <http://www.infomap.com/> for more information about this method and the classes being offered.

There is a wealth of information at the www.about.com Web site. Type writing or classes in writing and check out those links.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in my opinion, summer is the best time to start thinking about what you are going to be doing this fall. Think seriously about taking a class - online or in person. And don't be afraid to branch out into an area that's not quite so familiar to you. I know that you will be glad you did!

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

All I want for Christmas...

by Ron Arner

I've procrastinated long enough! It's time to share with you my long awaited, provocative, and controversial *Technicalities* wish list. A wish list can't be all those things, you say? You're probably correct, but I couldn't think of a better way to close the current year's volume (43) of *Technicalities*, and get ready for the next one, which begins with the August/September 2003 edition.

I'm sure many of you know that last year at this time Steve Wertzbaugher was the *Technicalities* editor, and had to relinquish those reins when layoffs at his company forced him to absorb the workload of all other tech writers on the staff. Although I had already volunteered to be on the newsletter committee, I wasn't expecting such a big responsibility so soon. Thanks to Webbies Steve Kavalec and Anne Halsey and editorial staff Jay Mead and Bridget Julian, it hasn't been nearly as difficult a responsibility as I thought it would be.

Now, before I reveal my wish list, note that it's not my birthday (you missed it already), or Christmas, or any other gift-giving holiday. Nevertheless, if you're wondering what you can do to contribute to *Technicalities*, I thought I would help by eliminating the guesswork. So, without further ado, here are my wishes in ascending order:

#5: Feedback/comments from the members of STC RMC. For consistency's sake, I would prefer to make any changes to the design of *Technicalities* starting with the next issue (August/September 2003), so that all of next year's issues follow the same format. In other words, if you have something you want to share, [speak now](#) or forever hold your peace.

#4: Letters to the Editor. I think an actual column's worth of letters to the editor would make a wonderful contribution to the newsletter. (Even two or three per issue would be great!) [Send a letter right now by clicking here](#). Sound off about what you think of our chapter, the STC, or technical communications in general, and maybe we can get some lively discussions going about current events affecting our field.

#3: A technical column. Dana Cline was writing the "Tools and Technology" column for *Technicalities* until he had to resign for the same reason as Steve Wertzbaugher—too much to do at his regular job. [If you are interested](#) in writing a column about the latest technological advances in our field, [please let me know](#).

#4: An Assistant Editor. I originally volunteered to be on the newsletter committee to help with the conversion from print to online format, and to update the newsletter bimonthly thereafter. I love being editor, and with three wonderful volunteers to edit articles (Lynnette Reveling recently joined Bridget Julian and Jay Mead on the editing staff), I have no complaints. However, two heads are better than one. I think it would improve the quality of the newsletter if someone else helped by coordinating issue themes, gathering and distributing articles for editing, writing filler material or last minute articles, and tackling other tasks. The newsletter is a large project for one person—can you help out? Just [send me an email at: news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org).

#1: [Articles](#). As editor for three issues now, the only thing I've found puzzling is why contributing articles don't pour in. I thought that a professional organization organized around the art of technical writing would yield reams of contributing articles on the ins and outs of our trade. I've read messages in the Newsletter Editor Listserv from other editors who have to turn articles away because their newsletters are so full. Newsletter articles provide an excellent opportunity to practice your writing and flaunt your talents. This summer, or anytime over the next year, when you find yourself feeling "blah" and need to do something to keep fit professionally, whip up an article on something you're interested in and send it to news@stcrmc.org.

The [opening article](#) of the current issue of *Technicalities* is about a member of our chapter, Linda Gallagher, who won the Distinguished Chapter Service Award. We all need to contribute to our chapter, even if we can't do as much as Linda does, whether it's by contributing to the newsletter or some other volunteer project. It is only by working together that we can make STC RMC successful. We have joined this organization to help ourselves professionally, but we can only do that by helping each other as well. Please send me an email if any of my requests above seem reasonable; I am looking forward to hearing from you!

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[President's Corner](#)
[Colorado Connections](#)
[Message from the Editor](#)
[◀ Back](#)
[Next ▶](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)
[Saving articles](#)
[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)
[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)
[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)
[Showcase your talents](#)
[Welcome our new chapter members](#)
[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)
[PDF version of Technicalities](#)
[Technicalities masthead](#)
[Technicalities home](#)
[STC RMC home](#)
[STC International home](#)

The tech comm job market: Where we've been, where we are, where we're going

by *Rahel Anne Bailie, STC Region 7 Director-Sponsor*

Before I launch into my opinions of trends for the technical communication field, I should provide a bit of context for my comments. I entered the industry in the late 1980s, when the PC market was just taking off. I worked for a PC manufacturer, developing the documentation launching their line of 286 computers. I've worked in the field through the economic downturn of 1992, the boom years of the late 1990s, and the recent downturn of 2002. My experience has given me a long look at where we've been, which is important when looking at where we're going.

The number of technical writers seemed to grow exponentially in the 1990s. It was the "weatherproof" profession that grew, first because of the proliferation of software programs being created for PCs, and later because the need for technical communicators grew as access to the Internet became as ubiquitous as the PC.

Four important shifts happened during that time. First, the vast number of technical communicators working in the software industry radically shifted the focus of the profession. New, exciting trends had the technical communication community exploring exciting new areas such as single-sourcing, visual communication, and document design. Second, technical writers were expected to increase their depth of skills: word processing to input our own text, desktop publishing software to design our own documents, and even drawing our own graphics using graphic programs—we became technical communicators, with a wider skill set and a steep learning curve. Third, these changes brought new ways of working, shorter publication cycles, and a consolidation of tasks and increasing breadth of skills. And fourth, many of us moved into spin-off professions, and though we stayed under the STC umbrella, we became content developers and translation coordinators, defining ourselves in broader terms.

In the early 2000s, the downturn began in the telecommunications industry and seemed like it would never bottom out. Companies made deep cuts, and technical communicators moved into adjacent career spaces to continue working in the industry—marketing communication, instructional design—or into new work such as interaction design, usability analysis, or information architecture. The STC has 21 Special Interest Groups, reflecting the range of work done by people who identify with some variation of technical communication.

Today, the biggest single issue seems to be unemployment. Technical communicators are looking for jobs, but the jobs aren't coming. They're not being listed on the job banks, and they're not being published in the newspapers. And though the job market in North America seems to have turned a corner, far too many technical communicators are still looking for jobs instead of working. So where is the disconnect?

One of the shifts I see in the marketplace is that while there is lots of work available, there are few jobs advertised. Companies don't want to post an ad on a job board and get bombarded with hundreds of resumes. Right now, they don't even want to commit to having a job. The software industry tends to be a young industry. Some of the engineers I've worked with are younger than my own child; I've reported to Engineering Directors

and VPs with children the same age as my grandchildren. These professionals may have their first economic downturn, and are still smarting from the heavy layoffs of the past couple of years. They aren't ready to commit to a new relationship, and their CFOs aren't confident enough about the financial picture to commit to the expense of a salary. In addition, the documentation has traditionally been seen as a burdensome expense, a cost center that takes away from profits, much like accounting and human resources.

To meet this new shift in perspective, we need to shift our own perspectives. Technical communicators need to think more like entrepreneurs, think of ourselves as "free agents," and prove how investing in us will bring a return on investment for the product. We need to prove this not just in "soft and fuzzy" terms, but in arguments that business people understand. We're more likely to find freelance, contract, and consulting opportunities than we are to find a job. We know that the users' point of view is important, and that we can affect the quality of the entire product, not just the documentation. But we haven't been very good at proving it in ways that can be quantified for the bean counters.

I can hear the next question in your minds: Where are these opportunities, and how do I tap into them? Herein lies the conundrum. By nature perhaps, and by numbers certainly, technical communicators are introverts. On the Meyers-Briggs scale, the number one profession for INTPs is writer. This doesn't mean that we're shy or retiring, but it does mean that we tend not to like to engage in professional socializing. We shun small talk and would rather communicate by email than by schmoozing with the executive crowd. In other words, we don't like to network. Ah yes, there's that word again, and here's how it plays out in the marketplace today and in the future.

We need to be able to look at our offerings differently, explain what we can contribute, and show how we enhance the product. We need to become comfortable with volunteering the cost-benefit analysis that makes companies want to write out a contract on the spot. We need to rewrite our resumes as profiles, to highlight what we can bring to the table, instead of documenting where we've been. Once we've done that, we need to network with the people who can lead us to the opportunities that exist, and the opportunities that are still just a gleam in a software developer's eye. I notice that we tend to organize get-togethers with our peers: other communicators and job seekers in technology professions. This is socializing, but it's not networking. These encounters rarely lead to the decision-makers. We need to work our professional selves into the rooms where decisions are made. We need to develop relationships with people who want to know more about what we do, not because they are do something similar, but because they can assess whether their companies need our services.

Statistics put out by various governments continue to point to technical communication as a growth profession, and as the market becomes more stabilized, there will again be more jobs. But we'll never return to the heyday of the 1990s, when employers faced such a shortage of professional staff that they wore their desperation on their sleeves. Meanwhile, we are in a perfect position to learn yet another a new skill: marketing ourselves like the professionals we are.

Resources

Free agents: www.fastcompany.com: Keywords: free agent, entrepreneurship

Options in technical communication: www.stcsig.org

Networking: [Email rabailie@intentionaldesign.ca for archive article request](mailto:rabailie@intentionaldesign.ca)

Showing ROI: www.computerworld.com/managementtopics/roi?from=3Dleft

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Saving articles

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John Hedtke will be the keynote speaker at our June Awards Reception. For more details, check out the [STC RMC home page](#).

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Some years ago, Carole Tomme Thiel, then senior editor for *Infosystems* magazine, wrote an excellent editorial entitled "Are You in the Top 5%?" In this article, Ms. Thiel stated that if you read a single book about your career topic each month for a year, you'll be doing more to develop your professional skills than 95% of your colleagues.

If you don't think you have the time for a book, consider saving articles. A well-written article can have as much as a book, and it's short and to the point. Moreover, articles are likely to be more current. Here's how:

1. Read or skim as many professional magazines as you can.
 - Your company probably already receives half a dozen of these. Many magazines are also available free to qualifying companies in return for filling out a subscription information card.
2. Tear out or copy interesting articles.
 - Make sure the magazine's name and issue date appear on the article, even if you have to write it in yourself. It's very frustrating to have half of a good article and not know where to look to find the other half.
3. Develop a list of article topics that interest you.
 - You won't know exactly what articles you'll want to save at first. Just start clipping articles and see what topics they fall into, then look for more. This list will probably change as time passes and your interests shift.
 - Keep a tally of the type and number of articles you are saving. You may be surprised at where some of your interests lie.
 - Save articles for **yourself**. Don't save them because your boss reads them, or because you think that the article is something you "should" be interested in. If you aren't interested, it's just so much sludge.
4. Store articles so you can find them again easily.
 - Use manila folders or 3-ring binders with notebook dividers to separate articles into topics. Keep the fun stuff separate from the rest of the articles (the "fun stuff" category will grow fastest).
 - When you have twenty or thirty articles in a category, subdivide the category into several more specific topics, or create a table of contents for the category.
5. Once you develop a library of articles, **use it**.
 - A good article file is a valuable resource. You can use articles to back up a report or proposal. Circulate copies of your favorites.



By saving articles, you rapidly develop a sense of where an industry is going and what is about to happen. People are impressed with someone who has always has just the right article at hand. Best of all, you'll have the largest cartoon file in the office.

==/==

John Hedtke is the award-winning author of 23 books, including *RoboHelp for the Web* (with Brenda Huettner, Wordware Press, 2002). He is an Associate Fellow and a member of the STC Nominating Committee. He can be reached through his website www.hedtke.com. John lives in Ft. Wayne, IN, and is President of the Hoosier Chapter.

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Proofreading your way to quality products

by Lynnette Reveling

In the January 2003 *Intercom*, Thomas Barker talked about quality in his article "Consulting: Keeping Up in a Down Economy":

When capital dries up, businesses tend to fund known and trusted ventures rather than innovative or less-known ones. So it's **customer service**, guaranteed return, and efficiency that sell during a recession.

What it means in our business is that to improve efficiency and avoid layoffs, we need top quality in customer service, which will avoid return questions and complaints. Working with our writers who correspond with our clients, I teach proofing and editing techniques to help make our client communications as succinct and error-free as possible. Recently, I created the following Job Aid to give our writers some guidelines and tips that can be used to proofread and edit.

Job Aid: Proofreading and Editing

Proofreading is examination of a document to find errors that should be corrected. Proofreading tasks range from checking to see that nothing was omitted to checking for consistency in format. Here are types of proofreading:

- Verification proofreading—comparing final copy with previous draft.
- Partnership proofreading—the author reads aloud from the draft as a second person verifies the final copy. This is the best method for proofreading statistical and technical documents.
- Proofreading on a computer screen—similar to printed copy: use various tools to assist you.
- Proofreading without an original document—most difficult: check content word for word.

Editing involves revising a document to make it more effective.

WHOOPS!

An official for a convention center in a midwestern city was demoted as the result of overlooking an error in a letter he proofread. The official failed to notice that a football game was mistakenly scheduled for the same date that a convention was to take place. As a result, the convention was moved to another city, resulting in a loss of at least \$10 million those convention attendees would have spent. The official who overlooked the error was reassigned to another job and took a 10 percent cut in pay. *Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

Proofreading - Check keyboarding errors

- Misstrokes: "from" instead of "form"

- Omissions: "unit" vs. "unite, " "soon possible" vs. "soon as possible"
- Repetitions: "the the Web" vs. "the Web"

Proofreading - Names, addresses, and telephone numbers

- Check the spelling of each part of a person's name (first, middle, and last) and check any initials.
- Carefully check the spelling of unusual or unfamiliar names.
- Verify possible alternate spellings of names (Stephen or Steven, Catherine or Katherine).
- Check courtesy titles so that you use the appropriate one: Mr., Ms., Miss, Mrs., or Dr.
- Check each keystroke when verifying addresses.
- Check for errors at the end of words and within numbers. Errors frequently occur in these places.
- Check each part of an address to make sure every detail is correct.
- Make sure the last line of an address includes only the city, state, and zip code. For international addresses, make sure the country name appears by itself on the last line of the address.
- Read each telephone number in parts (e.g., read the number 919-555-8321 in three parts: "nine-one-nine, five-five-five, eight-three-two-one").
- Check all numbers as a separate proofreading step.
- Make sure that numbers have the appropriate number of digits. For example, Social Security numbers have nine digits separated by hyphens. North American phone numbers have ten digits in this pattern: 000-000-0000.

Proofreading - Omissions and Repetitions

Spell checkers or grammar checkers do not usually catch omission errors. While most spell checkers will highlight repetitions of letters that result in misspelled words, and highlight repetitions of single words or of numbers, they usually will not highlight repeated segments of words or numbers (e.g., "Turn to page 2 turn to page 2."). You need to be alert when you proofread.

- Look for omission and repetition errors especially at the beginning and end of words and sentences.
- Look for omission and repetition errors with vowels.
- Read for accuracy and for meaning.

Proofreading - Transpositions and Spacing Errors

When you proofread a hard copy of a document, you can spot transpositions by reading word for word and letter for letter. If you proofread on the computer, the spell checker usually will detect transpositions that result in misspelled words. However, a spell checker will not detect transpositions that spell actual words (e.g., "We ordered the software for a 30-day free trail").

Some other examples:

"you daughter's accounts" vs. " your daughter's accounts"

"youraddress" vs. "your address"

"shortterm" vs. "short term"

- Take time when using the spell checker to verify spelling. Make sure you look to see if the spell checker suggests any alternative words or spellings that may be better suited to your document.
- Proofread backward (from right to left) to make transpositions more obvious.
- Look for transpositions in short words and at the ends of words.
- Watch for transpositions of vowels, especially the letters i and e.

Tips for Proofreading on the Computer Screen

Proofread the document on the screen before printing it. Use the proofreading method or combination of methods that works best for you:

- Scroll through the document and proofread line by line as each line appears at the bottom of the screen.
- Move the cursor through the document, and check each word and number as you come to it.
- Run the spell checker.
- Make corrections or changes and save the corrected document.
- Print the document and proofread it.
- If additional errors are found, make the corrections and save the corrected document.

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[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

New Northern Colorado SIG Manager steps up

by Frank Tagader

Ralph Tower has taken on the responsibility of managing the Northern Colorado special interest group for the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. A large percentage of our chapter membership is spread across the communities of Fort Collins, Greeley, Loveland, Longmont, and other towns. The Northern Colorado SIG seeks to reach out to technical communicators in this area that might not always be able to attend regular chapter meetings in Denver. It also serves as a general networking opportunity for these technical communicators.

A 14-year veteran of the technical writing profession, Ralph is a relative "newbie" to the chapter and STC as a whole. His background is in technical writing for manufacturing facilities. As Ralph says, "I have written about everything from restaurant equipment to industrial machinery, with a little software documentation in between."

While Ralph joined the STC and the RMC last fall, he has been attending meetings and SIGs as a guest for nearly three years. This is his first position within the chapter. He is also a long-time member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME).


Ralph sums up his goals for the Northern Colorado SIG, as "I want to encourage more members to attend SIG meetings. We need to have more people get involved in activities planning and SIG development. I would also like to bring in some reasonably priced training seminars, if there is enough interest."

SIG plans in the works are to schedule programs farther out next year. Ralph is scouting out relevant plant and facility tours as well. "We have had some success this season with "encore" presentations from RMC meetings. I would also like to post more general interest material on our listserv; it is mostly used for meeting announcements at present."

When asked about the most significant issues facing technical communicators in Northern Colorado, Ralph responded by saying, "Meaningful employment is one. Professional development is another. These are not unique to Northern Colorado, but there are fewer places to work in this immediate area and unfortunately many of the larger employers here have been disproportionately affected by the slowdown in the technology sector."

In regards to what the chapter can do to reach out to its Northern Colorado members, Ralph stated, "First I try to remind everyone here that Denver is really only an hour away when driving south in the early evening. I want to offer more carpools to RMC meetings, especially for those in Broomfield. If there are members that are involved in something they would like to share with us, we would be happy to host their presentation or roundtable discussion."

Ralph would also like to explore some SIG manager planning/brainstorming sessions. He'd be interested in hearing from other SIG managers and leaders on how they developed their groups and generated program ideas. "I attended a membership orientation at my last RMC meeting. A SIG Manager orientation might also be worthwhile."



If you are interested in participating in the Northern Colorado SIG or just want more information, Ralph can be reached via email at retowers@hotmail.com. You can also get information through the Northern Colorado listserv at NCTWG@yahoogroups.com. If you wish to participate in the listserv, please send an email to NCTWG-subscribe@yahoogroups.com and you will be automatically added.

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition

by Joel Meier

A review of Silke Fleischer's presentation at the April Chapter Meeting

In just 35 minutes, Silke Fleischer demonstrated how you can easily create tutorials using RoboDemo 4.0. The tool records your movements in any application, or on-screen activity, and then turns those recordings into Macromedia Flash format with visible and audible mouse clicks.

She first demonstrated the speech recognition feature—very nice! She cautions that you do need to use a unidirectional microphone. I can attest to that: I just bought Office Professional and have used the speech recognition feature with a desktop microphone and headset; the headset works better. You can purchase a unidirectional microphone for \$8.00 to \$35.00.


One thing that I noticed right away was the AutoText captions feature. Silke did not have to write any of the captions—RoboDemo did it all. This feature is a huge timesaving. Once she created a basic tutorial, she added rollovers, images, audio, click-boxes, a few other special effects.

Silke pointed out that each frame of the presentation is a self-contained unit. The video and audio for that frame is editable at the frame level. If you make a mistake, you do not have to start over! Compared to Camtasia, this is a huge plus. I am not an expert Camtasia user, but when I have used it and made a mistake in my presentation, I always have had to start over from the beginning to fix it. Very frustrating.

Here are some other features (the list is from the eHelp website):

- **AutoText Captions**
RoboDemo automatically writes and inserts text captions that describe each step taken by the user during the recording session.
- **Movie Gallery**
A convenient way for you to showcase a set of RoboDemo movies for easy posting on a Web site or intranet.
- **Animated Introductions, Trailers, and Transitions**
Add animated introductions, trailers, and transitions to make tutorials and demos more visually appealing.
- **Email Project Files**
Share your RoboDemo project files by email to dramatically simplify and shorten the collaboration and editing process.
- **Expiration Date**
Add an expiration date to tutorials and demos containing time-sensitive data to help avoid the circulation of old information.

Other significant features in RoboDemo 4.0 include the ability to quickly edit movies by making universal changes to objects without having to edit frame by frame, and the



ability to copy and paste multiple frames and objects multiple times. The new fade feature allows users to create smooth frame transitions, giving RoboDemo movies a more professional look.

Download the [free demo](#) and see for yourself how you can quickly create highly interactive Flash-based software demos.

RoboDemo 4.0 list price is \$349. RoboDemo eLearning Edition list price is \$449. For more information, visit www.eHelp.com, call 800-388-4332 (from within the U.S.), or email robodemopr@ehelp.com.

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Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Showcase your talents

by *Rahel Bailie*

Resumes. We know we need one. Most of us have one. But are we using our resumes to showcase what we can do, and to put our skills and talents in the best light? We can agree that a resume contains information about our work histories. And that potential employers use them to pick a short list of candidates to interview for a job. In other words, potential employers use resumes to screen out candidates they decide aren't qualified for the short list. So how do you use a resume to your advantage?

A resume can be several things:

A document you leave with your interviewers — When you meet with a company executive who likes the way you think and wants to explore collaborative possibilities, you can leave a resume behind to remind that executive about your capabilities. This is the optimal way to use a resume.

A tool you use to market yourself — Though one of the most common uses of a resume, this is also one of the least effective ways to use the document. Sending out a resume to a company is similar to a company sending out flyers to your home. You bring yourself to the attention of the human resources departments of companies — along with hundreds of other hopeful candidates.

A focal point during an interview — When an inexperienced interviewer begins to meander, you can bring the focus back to your qualifications by making reference to specific points in your resume. This will not only help you point out what you need to interviewer to remember about you, it also helps the interviewer remember you.

Your life story — A particular type of resume, the curriculum vitae, contains a history of your life's accomplishments. This type of document is more common in certain countries and in specific job markets.

What goes in, what doesn't

Information such as career objective, work and educational history, credentials, and accomplishments are universally accepted, and expected, in a resume. Particular industries and professions have additional, specific expectations. For example, academics list publications in their resumes, while software developers list the coding languages they know.

Oh, and don't forget the basics. Include your name, address, phone number, fax number, and personal email address in the body of your resume. You'd be surprised how many resumes don't provide adequate contact information for candidates.

What should be left off a resume is extraneous information that companies can use as part of the screening process. When a company is trying to reduce a stack of several hundred submissions to a short list of under ten, you don't want to give them any information that may help them sort you out. Let them judge your skills and abilities.

Personal information — Your height, weight, age, and marital status are nobody's business. In fact, many countries forbid employers to ask for this information. Your social security (US) or social insurance number (Canada) should also be off limits, at least until you need to fill out forms after you've been hired.

Hobbies and interests — For every person who claims they've been hired because they bonded over their love of gardening or music, there are an equal or larger number of people who have been sorted out, unbeknownst to them, because the resume sorters decided ahead of time that the person wouldn't fit into the team. The only exception to this rule is if your hobby or interest relates directly to the type of job you're seeking. For example, if the position requires budgeting experience and your volunteer work includes important budgeting tasks, that fact demonstrates your abilities.

References — You may indicate that you can supply references upon request, but this should be the last step in an employer's hiring process before signing an offer. You don't want your references to be taken by surprise and have to provide off-the-cuff answers to questions that may determine your future. Instead, you'll want to call your references and prepare them to receive the employer's phone call. If you are offered a position pending good reference checks, you can explain what you need to do and offer to give them a list once you've had a chance to prepare your references.

Resume structures

A resume begins with a career objective. Everyone wants "an exciting job in a progressive company," so be specific enough to make your objective meaningful. State briefly what type of position you're seeking, what you can contribute to the company you're approaching, and what type of company you'd like to work for. For example, an objective for a technical editing job could be: "To contribute my exceptional editing skills to a technical writing team in a mid-size to large software development organization." A well-written objective also helps the resume sorters determine which job in the company you are applying for.

Many resumes contain a section that lists skills and abilities, areas of expertise, or lists industry-specific information such as tools mastered. Such a list should not be so prominent as to detract from your skills. After all, listing the fact that you play the violin does not guarantee that you can play skillfully; neither does a list of software programs guarantee the quality of your writing, editing, or management skills.

Educational background, professional development, professional memberships, and any publications and awards should be listed, as well. However, unless you have a newly-minted advanced degree in a sexy new discipline, don't make this information particularly prominent.

You can structure your resume in four basic ways. How you structure your resume depends on how much experience you have and what you want to emphasize.

Chronological — A chronological resume lists the positions you've held, in reverse chronological order. This type of resume works to show a steady career progression in a single stream, such as junior writer, writer, senior writer, team lead. The information includes the position you held, the name of the company and location, and the year you started and left. The description is divided into the mandate — this is what you were hired to do — and your accomplishments, or what you did above and beyond the call of duty (and particularly well). Be sure to mention the industry, as it may not be obvious from the company name.

Functional — A functional resume groups information by function rather than by date. This works for career-changers who want to demonstrate a particular skill. For example, a technician who wants to make a transition to a writing position would list positions with

a writing component, highlighting the types of writing done and downplaying the actual position title.

Hybrid — A hybrid resume groups information according to function, but also contains a chronological section. Structuring a resume this way helps to demonstrate work continuity in cases where a gap occurs that could distract the reviewer from your skills and abilities.

Skills and achievement-based — This type of resume uses the first page to demonstrate to a potential employer what you've done in the past that you could also do for the new company. This takes the focus off the "circumstantial evidence" of your past, and turns attention to what you have actually accomplished. Generally, the resume is two pages long, front and back, and the second page provides a brief chronological work history of relevant positions.

Developing the right kind of resume is an important part of any job search. It is your public face, your marketing brochure, the "leave-behind" that can be read and passed around once you have left the premises. The most important aspect of your resume is not to show your history, but your potential to an employer. Show off your talents, and let employers give you a chance to use them.

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[President's Corner](#)

[Colorado Connections](#)

[Message from the Editor](#)

[◀ Back](#)

[Next ▶](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Welcome our new chapter members!

by *Helen Tuttle*

Please welcome the following new and renewing members to our Rocky Mountain Chapter of the STC:

March 2003		
Michael Ballard	Aaron Brown	Meredith Curtin
Terrence Lee		

April 2003		
Eva Fisher	Leslie Harper	Erin Humpage
Chalyce Petersen-Nollsch		Lee Wilson

If you see an old friend amongst them, and/or would like to make contact with someone on the list, please email Helen Tuttle, Membership Manager, at A1Newwoman@hotmail.com.

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[President's Corner](#)

[Colorado Connections](#)

[Message from the Editor](#)

[◀ Back](#)

[Next ▶](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)

[Saving articles](#)

[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)

[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)

[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)

[Showcase your talents](#)

[Welcome our new chapter members](#)

[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)

[PDF version of Technicalities](#)

[Technicalities masthead](#)

[Technicalities home](#)

[STC RMC home](#)

[STC International home](#)

Tech-Comm classes for fall

by *Fil Sapienza*

(Note: *Technicalities* is happy to publish information on behalf of other organizations, as long as it falls within the International Newsletter Competition Guidelines. All articles should be submitted to: news@stcrmc.org.)

The Communication Department of the University of Colorado at Denver is offering the following courses of interest in the fall of 2003:

XML and Single-Source Documentation (CMMU 4320/5320). This course introduces students to large-scale web site development using XML and XSLT. Students will learn both the theory and practice of "single-source" documentation management, a cost-effective way to centralize information and extend it across different platforms (wireless, web, print) and audiences (specialists, managers, customers).

User Interface Design and Analysis (CMMU 4130/5130). This course introduces the theory of graphical user interface design through analysis of empirical studies and hands-on application of human-computer interaction principles using Macromedia Flash.

International Internet Communication (CMMU 4755/5755). This course introduces students to writing web pages for diverse audiences. Students will learn HTML, CSS style sheets, Photoshop techniques, theories of intercultural design, usability, navigability, structure, typography and color on the web for international and disabled users.

Interested? Please email fsapienz@carbon.cudenver.edu for further information on how to register.

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[President's Corner](#)
[Colorado Connections](#)
[Message from the Editor](#)
[◀ Back](#)
[Next ▶](#)

Features:

[The TechComm job market](#)
[Saving articles](#)
[Proofreading your way to quality products](#)
[New Northern Colorado SIG manager steps up](#)
[Introducing RoboDemo eLearning Edition](#)
[Showcase your talents](#)
[Welcome our new chapter members](#)
[Tech-Comm classes for fall](#)
[PDF version of Technicalities](#)
[Technicalities masthead](#)
[Technicalities home](#)
[STC RMC home](#)
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Technicalities

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

Editorial

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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 that they wish to be considered for publication.

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Readers are encouraged to submit material on subjects of interest to Society and chapter members. Please credit repeated material and send a copy of the original material to: news@stcrmc.org.

The editor can be reached during the day at 303.405.8122 and by e-mail at news@stcrmc.org. Please submit electronic files in ASCII text format and include a telephone number where you can be reached. If you need to mail or fax articles and/or artwork, please contact the editor for a mailing address and fax number. The deadline for article submission is one month prior to issue release (first of the month, every other month).

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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Job Postings

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

Chapter website

<http://www.stcrmc.org>

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