



# Technicalities

Newsletter of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

August/September 2004

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COMMUNICATION

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

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## Technicalities

Columns:

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[Message from the Editor](#)

### Editorial Staff

[President's Corner](#)

Managing Editor: Ron Arner  
Assistant Editor: Kristy Lantz Astry  
Article Editors: Bridget Julian, Jay Mead, Lynnette Reveling  
Newsletter Staff: Deb Lockwood  
Newsletter design by Steve Kavalec and Ron Arner

[Tips from the Trenches](#)

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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.

Features:

[Transformation Update...  
or Introduction?](#)

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication.

[Book Review: \*Eats  
Shoots and Leaves\*](#)

**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.*

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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](mailto:news@stcrmc.org).

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The editor can be reached during the day at 303.405.8122, by e-mail at [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org), and by postal mail at 820 S. Monaco Pkwy. #286, Denver, CO 80224. 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).

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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.

## **STC RMC 2004-2005 Officers**

### **Administrative Council**

President: [Marc Lee](#), 303.460.8391  
Vice President: [Marella Colyvas](#), 303.763.4044  
Secretary: [Ruth Gaulke](#), 720.851.9737  
Treasurer: [Lynnette Reveling](#), 303.768.1253  
Past President: [Frank Tagader](#), 303.758.2285

### **Region 7 Director-Sponsor:**

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Database: Karen Kraft-Miller  
Education: Donald Zimmerman  
Jobs/Professionalism: Anne Halsey  
List Server: Alana Cote  
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Mentoring: Deb Lockwood  
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Programs: Michael Livsey  
Publicity: Carla Mead  
Seminars: Julie Welander  
Volunteers: Kim Bell  
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### **STC RMC SIG Managers**

Contractors and Independent Consultants: Linda Gallagher  
FrameMaker: Larry Prado, Terese St. Jacques  
Information Design and Usability: Laurie Lamar  
Northern Colorado: Ralph Towers  
Online and Multimedia: Marella Colyvas and Kathy Ramsey  
Western Slope: Victoria Thomas

## **Society for Technical Communication, Rocky Mountain Chapter**

### **General Chapter Business**

Rocky Mountain Chapter  
Society for Technical Communication  
820 S. Monaco Pkwy. #286  
Denver, CO 80224

[info@stcrmc.org](mailto:info@stcrmc.org)

### **Job Postings**

Send job postings to [jobs@stcrmc.org](mailto:jobs@stcrmc.org)

Jobs are posted on the chapter website ([http://www.stcrmc.org/jobs\\_freelance.jobs.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance.jobs.htm)), and are emailed to the techcomm-discuss mailing list.

### **Chapter website**

<http://www.stcrmc.org>

### **STC International Office**

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

703.522.4114

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

<http://www.stc.org>

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## Chapter News

### Competition Update

Once again the annual Awards Banquet was held at The Cable Center on the DU campus for the winners of the 2003-2004 Art, Publication, and Online Communication Competitions last May. The keynote speaker was [Deborah Fine](#), who entertained all present with her presentation entitled "The Fine Art of Small Talk."

You've probably heard that the Rocky Mountain Chapter's competitions are on a one-year hiatus while they undergo a reorganization. If you or someone you know is still interested in competing, don't despair! Just go to [http://www.stcrmc.org/competitions\\_2004\\_2005/compete.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/competitions_2004_2005/compete.htm) for a list of other STC chapters that will be accepting entrants in their competitions.

### Chapter Meetings

Don't miss the first chapter meeting of the season to be held on September 16, 2004, at the Mile High Inn in Lakewood. The presenters will be Greg Laugero and Ben Martin of Industrial Wisdom, LLC. They will be presenting on the topic of Value-based Content Management. For more details, go to the [September meeting page](#) on the chapter Website.

Speaking about chapter meetings, the program survey results have been tallied and the remaining programs for the year are being planned. Look for a detailed listing of the survey results and upcoming meeting programs in the next issue of *Technicalities*.

### Senior Members

Congratulations to the following new and/or returning Senior Members of the Rocky Mountain Chapter:

- Gail Bernstein
- Chantal Davidchuk
- Kathryn Elliott
- Troy Holmes

- Joel Meier
- Carrie Pruckler



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## Solutions, Inc.

by [Ron Arner](#)

Welcome to a new column in *Technicalities* called *Solutions, Inc.*! *Solutions, Inc.* has been designed as a helpful-hint-for-the-techie-style column comprised of tips that might come from the STCRMC Tech-Comm Discuss listserve, one of our chapter's gurus, or some unexpected source of technological wisdom. If you'd like to share your subject matter expertise in *Solutions, Inc.*, please email your contribution to: [news@stcrmc.org](mailto:news@stcrmc.org).

Some recent tips, how-to's, and advice from the Rocky Mountain Chapter Listserve:

### Thread #1: Summary of a Word repagination issue

Many thanks to those who rushed to my rescue. I've summarized the solutions I received from the wonderful people in STC and BWA. If MS Word blows a repagination fuse on you, here are some possible fixes.

Some Additional Notes:

The solution that worked for me was to go to normal view and remove all the manually inserted page and section breaks. B\*\*\* B\*\*\* gave me the idea that my tables might be corrupted. Though the repagination did not cease upon their removal, I'm convinced they were a part of the problem. I had inserted an Excel table via the Insert | Object command, thinking it would insert only the print area. Not so, it inserted the whole dang thing. I immediately removed it, but maybe some gnarly code hung on.

Solutions:

I had Word create hundreds of pages in a 50 page doc this fall. It turned out to be corrupted tables. What I did to correct this was to convert the tables to text and then save a copy of the file. To be safe, save it as a Word doc and then do a second save as a rich text file. Bring the document back into Word and convert the table text back into a table. After that the extra pages disappeared (or you can delete them) and the repaginating stopped.

I'm not sure if this will help but I'd turn off automatic repagination. If you are in page layout view, switch to normal view. (page layout view automatically repaginates and won't allow you to turn off the pagination.) Click Tools. On the drop down menu select Options and go to the General tab. Remove the check mark from the box for Background Pagination.

---

Although I haven't had that particular tommyknocker, I have had odd difficulties with Word from time to time. The problem is that you can't see the code so you don't know where the garbage is. I have remedied these by creating a new file and copy/paste each section, but not the section break, then recreating the sections. If you don't have sections, I would copy/paste 10 or so pages at a time, navigate, and if it works ok, continue with the next 10. At least you can isolate the garbage area if the error starts up again. Hope this helps although it's the long way around.

---

I've had that happen with a file from someone else and it's basically corrupted...I think I saved the the file as text, then reopened and saved it as a Word doc. You lose all your formatting that way (and have to re-do your tables). Another possibility is to display formatting marks (Ctrl+\*) and see if you can spot a lot of inserted page breaks (alternatively, search and replace all manual page breaks: it's possible one may be looping for some bizarre reason).

---

Not sure where you inherited this document from but it sounds like it has some kind of field codes in it that are causing temporary insanity. Under Tools options, use the View option to show you ALL the possible codes and hidden text. You might be able to see what is going on then.

Also you might try the old cut and paste to a new doc trick, and seeing the codes and hidden text will help you cut only what you need. I've never seen this exact thing, but I've seen Word do just about everything it can do.

## **Thread #2: Seeking information on Blogging**

Problem: I've just been volunteered by my boss to lead a session on blogging at a district-wide inservice tomorrow. Besides a general concept of what a (We)blog is, I've not had any experience with them. Can anyone suggest some good and/or personal blog sites that I can study and/or use as examples?

Solutions:

I love LiveJournal.com - I have an account there (but haven't used it - no time!) There's another one that I looked into but didn't like it as much (and don't remember what it was). I was trying to set one up for an online writers' group but ran out of time.

Do a google search on blogs and you can find tons of them.

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This is the blog of my grad school advisor: <http://augustcouncil.com/~jdunlap/weblog/> Hope this is the sort of examples you are looking for...

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I don't have any direct experience with blogs but I did an internet search on "educational blogs" and found this...hopefully it will point you in the direction of what you need?

<http://educational.blogs.com/> [http://educational.blogs.com/instructional\\_technology\\_/](http://educational.blogs.com/instructional_technology_/)

Another helpful search may be "blogs in the classroom". I found this article "Using Blogs in the Classroom" which covers the effects on students who write for an authentic audience and collaborate with people outside their local community <http://husd4-tr.blogspot.com/>

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If you have not looked at blogger.com already, you might give it a try. Also <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog> . A simple blog is <http://www.cafuego.net/> Many different examples of blogs are in the right-hand column at <http://design.weblogsinc.com/>. The most sophisticated blog I have ever seen -- going beyond a blog to a true online community, IMO -- is [www.slashdot.org](http://www.slashdot.org).

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<http://www.salon.com/blogs/>

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<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/19/technology/circuits/19blog.html?ex=1093933432&ei=1&en=76e239ecd4e847cb>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2004/08/16/technology/16song.html?ex=1093933122&ei=1&en=4c34444bf5981919>

### **Thread #3: Information storage advice**

I admit that I am an information addict and that my addiction has gotten out of control. Afraid of forgetting where on the Internet I saw a useful tidbit of information, or worse yet, that the site may be moved and I won't be able to find it, I resort to either grabbing it with Adobe as a PDF file or printing the page. My harddrive is overflowing and I'm destroying forests of trees.

I may have found a solution: <http://www.furl.net>—and it's free.

Furl is an online filing cabinet for useful web pages. Now, with Furl, each time you see something interesting or important online you can save it with a single click into a folder (called "topics") that you define.

Once saved, you can search your collection with a full text search tool. You can organize your collection by title, date saved, topic, rating. If you are into the group thing, you can share your collection with others as they can share with you.

If you get paranoid that all of this information you've saved might suddenly disappear or be held hostage for a fee, you can export your documents in a zipped file or save them as bookmarks for your browser.

I'm impressed with this tool and thought you might find it handy.



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## Tips from the Trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

For this month's article, I asked our membership two questions:

1. If you had it to do all over again, what one thing (or things) would you avoid this time around?
2. What thing (or things) would you most definitely do again?

The responses I received included comments about job choices, career path choices, and education choices. Thank you to everyone who submitted a response. I appreciate everyone's input and willingness to share their experiences.

### I would never do this again

"I really cannot think of any major decision that I would do differently. Not to imply that I'm perfect, by any means, but I don't sit around regretting any significant decisions that I've made. Even ones that were not so great taught me something useful. Either that or I've managed to put them behind me so that I don't even think about them any more."

"My responses are based on back-dooring into the profession in the early 80's when you could still do that. I have 20+ years of experience in the field, a BS in Journalism with an English minor, and an MS in Technical Communication with post-graduate work in usability. If you had it to do all over again, what one thing (or things) would you avoid this time around? Playing politics (this is much easier to do if you're a contractor rather than a captive). The need to believe absolutely in the rightness of the business decisions made by corporate decision-makers (again, much easier to do if you're a contractor)."

"My answer is not what would I avoid, but what I would do if I had it to do all over again. I would have started a career in technical communications earlier in life. I get so excited when I see the 20-30 year olds coming to our meetings because they have so many exciting things to learn and time to do it."

"Based on my experience so far, there are a couple of things I would do differently:

1. I would spend less time training and acquiring skills and more time job hunting and networking.
2. Not to contrast the above, but the basic training classes (e.g., introduction to Microsoft Office, HTML) that I've taken have been essential because I can associate the skills learned with more difficult software applications."

"I try to concentrate on the positive, set goals, look toward the future, do my best, and accomplish what I can. I don't second-guess decisions any more because I find it is more productive to learn from your mistakes and move forward. Having said that, if I had it to do over again, I would have done more research on pursuing my second (graduate) degree. I talked to someone in the Technical Communications department at CU Denver who told me I couldn't get an MS degree in Technical Communications with a BS in another field (geology). Because I was unaware that this advice was incorrect, instead of pursuing an MS in Tech Comm, I acquired a BS in Tech Comm. I don't think it has really affected my career other than an MS would have allowed me to teach some classes."

### **I would do this again**

"If I did everything over again, I would most definitely do the following:

- Go to college
- Learn about and work with computer technology
- Become a technical communicator
- Learn to be more extroverted by giving presentations and networking at meetings
- Start my own business
- Join and become active in STC
- Learn FrameMaker
- Learn basic HTML
- Learn WebWorks Publisher
- Mentor colleagues on working as an independent or using FrameMaker and WebWorks Publisher"

"I'd definitely still seek a master's degree in technical communication. With the skills I developed through a master's program, I went from being a good writer to being a good communicator. I use those skills every day, and I don't think I'd be nearly as effective as I am without them. I could probably still do my job with what I learned in college, but I'm a much better medical writer now that I know more about technical communication."

"These are the things I would do again:

- Continue my education.
- Seek out the best and the brightest employees at every company, and learn from them.
- Make sure that my own standards for my work exceed those of my employer.
- Meet every deliverable on time and, preferably, under budget.
- Never, never, never miss a deadline.

- Always, always, always take gleeful, effective advantage of schedule slips. Ensure that every document I produce is complete, accurate, consistent, and meets the needs of the audience.
- View every assignment as an opportunity to learn something new."

"I would answer a request for volunteers, whether it be with the competitions or editing the newsletter or helping with new members, just jump in, do what you can, and you'll only gain. You meet the members and gain friends. It is strictly a win-win situation."

"Six years ago, I was working as an ISO 9001 coordinator for a small manufacturing company. I'd been in the position for more than four years, and I was bored and depressed with my job. Even though change has always been especially hard for me, I realized it was time to find something else. Soon after I started looking, I received an opportunity to work for a large corporation. After a month-long orientation in Texas, I would work remotely from home, and the job could involve some travel. The unknowns were overwhelming: Did I have the discipline to work at home? Could I work effectively over the phone and the computer? Could I handle travel? How would I form and maintain relationships with my manager, co-workers, and clients without seeing them face to face? Would I get lonely? I took the plunge. My first virtual team meeting was frightening. I couldn't keep track of who was speaking, and I was afraid to speak myself. However, a few weeks later I was nearly as comfortable participating over the phone as in person. I learned that as long as I have a deadline, I work more effectively at home than in an office, and I absolutely love not having to wear dress clothes, drive to work, or pack a lunch. Telecommuting is perfect for me. The only thing I would have done differently is to leave that ISO coordinator job earlier."

"I would still finish college and return to college for more education. I would choose to work in different high tech industries with various professionals, learn more about computers working in a highly advanced and technical IT department, and leave a permanent position to pursue work as an independent consultant/contractor."

"I enjoyed my career as a geologist and technical communicator because I worked with and mentored highly intelligent professionals in exciting businesses. Managing large projects in various industries required extensive technical communication and the ability to successfully communicate with many people at different levels. As an effective researcher and technical writer, I provided a considerable amount of technical communication before it was offered as an education major. I enjoyed returning to school at 39 as I concentrated more on studies than I did when I was younger. I still enjoy providing technical communication in whatever form it takes."

"I have learned that the shorter a document will be, the longer it will take to finish; not longer to write, but longer to finish."

"I would stay the same course if I had to do it all again, despite a few unpleasant moments in the grand scheme of things."

"I knew that I wanted to be a writer, but didn't know how to go about doing that. I was in financial services at the time, and my favorite part of my job was writing policies and procedures. My manager, who was a true mentor,

advised me to finish my bachelor's degree and get an advanced degree in writing. I heeded her advice, and have never regretted my career change from banking to technical communication. In fact, my only regret is that I didn't make the change sooner."

Contributors: Ron Arner, Linda G. Gallagher, Anne C. Halsey, Karen Miller, Kathy Ramsey, Lynnette Reveling, Martha Sippel, Elizabeth W. Staton, and Frank Tagader.



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## President's Corner

by [Marc Lee](#), President, Rocky Mountain Chapter

Greetings! My name is Marc Lee and I am the president of the Rocky Mountain chapter of STC for the year 2004-2005. I am observing my 20th anniversary as a technical communicator this week and I have been involved in the chapter for about 15 years. For the past four years I have been a judge in the online technical communication competition.

For the coming year, I'll be reporting to you about your chapter both here in *Technicalities* and by monthly eBlasts. You should have received two eBlasts by now. If you haven't, [let me know](#): it means that we don't have a current email address for you. By these means, as well as through our regular chapter meetings, I will try to keep you up-to-date with the chapter's activities and plans.

This year, we are hoping to make your involvement in the chapter more meaningful and make the chapter more responsive to your needs. Here are our main objectives for 2004-2005:

1. Increase the appeal and relevance of our meeting programs to the members. We have been working to establish a full year's program for you early in the chapter year. A survey soliciting your suggestions for program topics went out and the results have been tallied. Thank you to those of you who responded. The survey gave us very interesting and valid results. The response rate was nearly 25%, and we are acting quickly to provide a survey-centric schedule of meeting programs for 2004-2005.
2. Increase attendance at our meetings. The more people attending, the more networking possibilities that exist. Also, I hope to attract additional non-members including business leaders, university affiliates and others to our meetings.
3. Increase the publicity for our chapter and our industry. We have an award-winning publicity team, but are planning to increase the impact of our publicity. We are working on promotional press and general business kits that will underscore the importance of technical communications to the wider community.
4. Streamline our competitions. Our online, pubs, and art competitions have been some of the most dynamic areas of chapter activity -- involving dozens of entries and volunteers. This year, we're re-

designing our competition program, and will take a year off from holding the competition. It's not a year off from competition work, however. We'll be meeting to plan even better competitions for the year 2005-2006, including a detailed schedule of competition dates and deadlines that will better integrate with the International competition schedule.

5. Follow up with the International Society's 'transformation' plans. While the transformation is still a little vague as to details, it is going to happen eventually. For this reason, our chapter will keep abreast of the process and keep you informed. We've already volunteered for a pilot 're-chartering', which has been submitted to the International.

Beyond the official agenda, I have some additional ideas that represent, to me, some important opportunities that the chapter and Society have not successfully addressed in the past. These are areas that could potentially improve our chapter and our individual careers. At this point, however, I would call the following more of a wish list:

- Find additional forums for addressing the key issues in our industry. Important topics include new technology, return on technical communications investment, and new markets for technical communicators. These might include SIGs or just informal discussions.
- Make a more robust members' database available to all members. This tool could be used for exchanges within the membership. Would you like to find people with Unix 'troff' background who worked on Berkeley BSD? Find someone with an interest in game design for e-learning? Find someone who has basic electronic component knowledge and has an aviation background? Our database could be such a tool. Undertaking general education among influentials and leaders in business about technical communications. I would like to find a way to include a broader community. We should attract industry leaders, government officials, and academics to our chapter meetings or specially designed forums. One immediate goal could be to compile a database of the 100 most influential users of technical communication services in our area. This could serve as the basis for outreach programs to communicate the benefits of our discipline.
- Address the importance of 'domain' knowledge in our business. You can't write about or program about something you don't understand. I would like to have an arena within our chapter for members to learn basic electronics concepts; basic or advanced software engineering concepts; basic telephony; and basic science or technology in emerging areas of technical communication such as bio-engineering, pharmaceuticals, or agribusiness.

No activity gets done without the involvement of the members. This takes time, effort and commitment. We have a cadre of chapter leaders who have volunteered hundreds of hours to make your chapter 'go' and provide better benefits to you. Still, we are always in need of additional support.

The difference between the numbered 'objectives' and the bulleted 'wish list' is that we have a program and people behind the objectives. That doesn't mean those activities are fully staffed; they're not. But the bulleted items are just ideas on paper at this point -- without even a name attached to them. If any of them interest you, please contact me about becoming involved in making them real. If there is no interest expressed by one or more members,

most likely that item will not get done this year.

Finally, please just communicate -- negative, positive or in between -- about your ideas for the chapter. Use my email or phone to communicate directly.

Hoping to see each of you at some activity or meeting of the chapter this year,

Sincerely,

Marc Lee  
STC RMC President,  
2004-2005

303 460 8391  
[marc@mlmultimedia.com](mailto:marc@mlmultimedia.com)



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## On New Beginnings

by [Ron Arner](#)

I hate being late to the first class of the semester; somehow it just makes me feel more comfortable with my teacher, fellow students, and the subject matter. I hate being late to a movie even more because that usually means I'll miss the previews of coming attractions, which I feel are the greatest freebie there is. NO matter how hard I try, I can't shake the feeling that I'm late with the first issue of Volume 45 of *Technicalities*, because I know that this will be my last year as Managing Editor.

As some of you know, I have been (slowly) working on an M.S. in Technical Communications degree and am now taking my last required class. If all goes well, I'll take a one-hour capstone class next spring and graduate in May. Besides taking a well-deserved vacation next summer, I plan on concentrating on my career more and trying to find a better paying job that will help me liquidate my student loans quickly. I hope to move on to other volunteer opportunities with the Rocky Mountain Chapter, and relinquish the reins of *Technicalities* to some other well-deserving soul.

### New beginnings

The STC and our Rocky Mountain Chapter are on the verge of a great new beginning. In a few short months the STC transformation will take place. We will be doing our best to keep you informed and up to date about all the latest developments of the transition in future issues of *Technicalities*. In the current issue, you'll find articles on the transition from [STC's President Andrea Ames](#) and [Jackie Damrau](#), President of the Lone Star Chapter.

The Rocky Mountain Chapter has recently undergone its own new beginnings, with the annual transition of our officers and other changes. You can find a [greeting from Marc Lee](#), the new STC RMC President, in this edition, as well as a list of new members and information on the competition hiatus in the [Chapter News](#) section.

One place you won't see many changes this year is in the format of *Technicalities*. Although some minor nips and tucks have been made to become more compliant with the STC newsletter competition, we've tried to remain faithful to the belief that "If it ain't broke, don't fix it!" One new

column has been added called [Solutions, Inc.](#), which will contain a variety of helpful technological tips in varying formats. Another much-needed change (in my opinion) is the addition of an Assistant Editor. Kristy Astry has graciously agreed to step up her role of article editor and summarizer to lend me some much needed assistance.

## Resistance to change

You may have noticed that nothing has been mentioned about *Technicalities'* showing in last year's newsletter competition. That's because for the first year in a long time, we didn't win an award. After some pride swallowing and reviewing of the newsletter competition rules, I came to the realization that our new online format was not in complete compliance with the competition, but found several areas where the competition is outdated and its judging arbitrary as well. For example, although many chapter newsletters are now online, there have been no qualifications added for usability, navigation, etc. The only adjustment that has been made for online newsletters is the increase of required topics in every issue for a perfect score from 10 to 12 out of 14 items such as book reviews, letters to the editor, and chapter meeting reviews. Although the competition calls for three judges to review each newsletter, we only had two review ours, and then their scores were averaged. We did not receive credit for having senior officer contact information in one of our reviewed issues, although our masthead always contains senior officer names, titles, and email addresses, in complete compliance with competition rules.

After careful consideration of the newsletter competition at a meeting with my dedicated staff and new STC RMC President Marc Lee, it was decided to try to do better in this year's competition, without getting caught up in the hype and hoopla associated with an Award of Distinguished or Best of Show. We will continue to bring you a fun, well-designed, and informative newsletter about your Rocky Mountain Chapter, and if by chance the award gods decide to favor us with recognition for our efforts this year, we certainly won't turn them down!



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## 7 Leadership Qualities

by [Jackie Damrau](#), Senior Member and President, Lone Star Chapter

As a leader, I'm always reading. I don't get enough time to read, but I do have a reading folder that I carry with me in my briefcase. This folder contains articles that are torn out of magazines, printed from online e-zines, and from personal emails that come to me that spark an interest that I say to myself, "Aha! That will make a great article to write for one of the SIGs or chapter newsletters."

The article that spurred this one came from *Selling Power's* May 2004 issue, entitled "Tap into the 7 Qualities of the Best Sales Managers: Improvement isn't optional, it's mandatory (if you want to survive)" written by Maryann Hammers and Gerhard Gschwandtner (pp. 61-65, 91). While reading this article and the seven qualities, it made me realize that Transformation and chapter leadership fit very well with applying these quality initiatives. So I'd like to share with you my views using Hammers and Gschwandtner's seven qualities.

### Quality 1: Become a master of change

The Transformation Initiative is asking all chapter leaders to support the change, communicate it to the chapter members, and be the master of change when this Initiative starts rolling. Many chapter leaders are for it; many are against it; and many are not sure where they stand. Change has been in the business world for many years.

The STC itself has been set in one mold for too many years. With the economic swings that rise and fall, so does participation in non-profit organizations. I am a member of two non-profit professional organizations, and both are suffering from a decrease in membership and conference attendance. Our organization is not alone!

Peter Drucker (as quoted in the *Selling Power* article) says, "Every organization has to prepare for the abandonment of everything it does." The STC has started doing this through its Transformation efforts. This follows on the heels of so many members saying, "If you increase my dues, what additional benefits (values) will I get?" In one respect, the member is trying to justify the additional cost (especially if they are not receiving company

monetary support). Yet, the member needs to be asking, "What can I do to make STC become a better organization for me and others?"

This leads to the next quality.

## Quality 2: Earn their trust

The STC leadership (the STC Board of Directors and a team of volunteers) needs to earn the trust of its members that our leaders have a solid direction in which they are taking us. Without this, the members may envision a sinking ship and jump to other professional organizations to get the services they need. During the STC 51st Annual Conference, our leadership held several sessions about Transformation, and what the plans to date are, and how they will communicate the plans to our members.

For me as the newly elected Lone Star chapter president, I felt that our leadership shared as much as they could with us. The two subsequent publications that they provided during the conference (check out [www.stc-org/transformation](http://www.stc-org/transformation)) earned them my trust.

Remember, trust is a relationship foundation. My belief is that they are not intentionally keeping things from us. They are communicating when they have a solid decision and direction that will fit all our needs.

Trust builds upon and requires your feedback.

## Quality 3: Give feedback

Giving feedback requires setting clear expectations and realistic goals. As the Society leaders are mapping out the expectations and goals for the Transformation Initiative, we need to be prepared to offer our *constructive* (not destructive) feedback. Through our support and our voice, they will be able to make the necessary changes that will (hopefully) infuse members back into the organization by providing additional member benefits. Will these benefits be a little costly? Sure, but the cost of a quality education is also high. We need to invest in our own education and professional development. What better organization to support than our own?

Our leadership needs feedback on our individual and collective thoughts about this Transformation. As chapter leaders, we are the ones that our members will look to for direction about the Transformation Initiative. Our responsibility is to provide both the positives and negatives of what Transformation means to the Society as a whole and to the Chapters individually. Yes, we may lose a few members to other new or renewed communities. Yet, if we determine who we are and make known to ourselves and to them the value we provide to our members, those members will return. Under the new STC organization, it will be easier for members to choose what type of community to belong to, and can easily choose more than one community to be part of.

From trust to giving feedback, we turn to the fourth quality of building enthusiasm.

## Quality 4: Building enthusiasm

The wheels of Transformation are beginning to roll. The first major outpouring of the Society's direction started at the 51st Annual Conference in Baltimore. The chapter leaders that attended the two Transformation Q&A sessions and the members that attended the Transformation progression received the latest information available at the time. The Society's goal is to openly communicate with the membership at large when it has a solid decision.

Does this mean that you do not have a voice in the decision? No! It means that you need to look for the silver lining for your chapter, your members, or yourself, and support the Initiative enthusiastically. We are the foundation builders, cheerleaders, or support group for this Initiative. Let's embrace this and move into a new era of professional development.

Embracing our professional development and the direction of the Society has one key element: our involvement.

## Quality 5: Get involved

It is well and good to sit on the sidelines and squeal our disgust at the direction that the Society is going in. Have you made your concerns known? Have you read the information on the Transformation web site ([www.stc.org/transformation](http://www.stc.org/transformation))?

The Society does have certain things that cannot be discussed in an open forum. However, those things that are for open discussion are made available to us. The Society officers have established independent committees that are looking into various aspects of the Transformation. These committees include Communication, Communities, Education, Finance, Governance, Membership, and Technology.

Take the time to go to the website and read Newsletter Issue 2: Communities. The purpose for each committee appears in that issue. I encourage you to get involved in embracing this effort by providing your feedback (positive/negative) to the officer(s) of the committees. They are not doing all of this in a "closed-door" environment.

Just like we grow from baby to child to teen to adult, the Society needs to grow and develop into a more viable professional organization. This takes us to the next to last quality, Growth and Development.

## Quality 6: Growth and development

The Society has reached its zenith. It is time to launch a new nova that will help the Society to grow back into an organization that meets our ever-changing needs. In years past, Society members were *only* technical writers inside technical industries. Through the years, we have been able to redevelop ourselves into webmasters, instructional designers, facilitators, project managers, proposal developers, and the list goes on.

Regardless of your profession today, the world of technical communication is growing into new areas. Many other professional organizations exist that may directly focus on one particular aspect of what we do, but STC offers you a more rounded opportunity to meet with other technical communicators to learn from their experiences. The Society and each chapter/SIG/community will be growing and developing as a result of the Transformation effort.

We can focus on the good side, which is to return to a successful professional organization. Or, we can focus on the bad side, which means the demise of the Society, in general. Should this happen, we will turn to one of the other professional organizations to meet our needs. Will we be any happier with that organization? Will it address our specific needs as technical communicators? Will they experience the same growth and development pains?

The final quality is leading people to improvement. I'd like to rephrase this to:

### **Quality 7: Lead STC improvement**

Hammers and Gschwandtner say:

"There are subtle, yet profound differences between innovation and ongoing improvement. Innovation demands big steps leading to breakthroughs and fast results. Ongoing improvement depends on small steps, relies on conventional common sense, pays great attention to process, and teases out results in small doses over time." (p. 65)

Leading the Transformation Initiative requires innovation and ongoing improvement—innovation to provide additional membership value; ongoing improvement to look at how to restructure itself into a viable professional organization that can continue meeting STC members' ever changing needs for their professional growth and development.

As Hammers and Gschwandtner said, "it takes small steps, common sense, attention to process, and communication in small doses to affect a major change." The Transformation Initiative is following this process.

We are the future of the Society. Without our acceptance of change, trust, feedback, enthusiasm, growth and development, and ability to improve, we will not have a Society that meets our professional careers. Let's support the Society and stand behind them as they take the baby steps needed to transform us into a renewed professional organization.



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## GIS and Community Mapping: How Children Can Use Technology to Help Shape Our Future

 by [Ron Arner](#)

Have you ever had one of those experiences where something turns out to be much more challenging and fun than you thought it was going to be? I had such an experience this summer when I enrolled in a Community Mapping Institute. If you're not familiar with [Community Mapping](#), you may want to be; it's a trend that could change the way city planning is done.

The Community Mapping Institute was sponsored by the [Orton Family Foundation](#), a non-profit organization started by the same family that runs the [Vermont Country Store](#). Although the class was primarily offered for science and social studies teachers in Denver Public Schools, the department I work for will also be involved in the community mapping projects that are done, so I was allowed to take the class as well.

While the class emphasized how to get students involved in their communities, it also revolved around GIS and GPS technologies, which is how members of the community (students) help local agencies plan new projects by gathering and compiling field data using GPS units and GIS software. If you've used Mapquest, Realtor.com, or any similar site, you've seen GPA and GIS technologies in action. In fact, if you stop to think about it, everything from paper maps to daily weather forecasts now rely on GPS and GIS.

So what are GPS and GIS, and what's the difference? [GPS](#) refers to the Global Positioning System, which consists of 24 positioning satellites owned by the U. S. Department of Defense that orbit the earth. [GIS](#), on the other hand, stands for Geographic Information Systems, and refers to the manipulation of the data transmitted by the GPS, or more specifically, any software, database, workstation, network, etc., that is used to convert GPS information into user-friendly communication.

In my class, the GIS software used was ArcView, which is manufactured by [ESRI](#), the leading GIS software manufacturer. ArcView is just one of many software programs made by ESRI, and is slowly being replaced by ArcGIS. GIS technology has become so prevalent on the Web that it now has its own XML schema.

After learning the basics of GIS and getting to field test our GPS handheld units, my team got to map out traffic signs around the CU Denver campus, and then overlay our map with a second key that showed which signs are in need of repair. Although our project was for test purposes only, this is a good example of how GIS can be used by students to contribute to local government agencies. For examples of projects students have already completed in Colorado and other states, go to <http://www.orton.org/cmapgallery/>.



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## June Chapter Meeting Review: Style, Format, and Production Guides, Tools for Technical Communicators

by [Ruth Gaulke](#)

STC-RMC's last meeting before the summer break starred two well-known technical writers: Kathy Ingraham, Sr. Technical Writer, Qualstar Corporation, and Kathy Ramsey, Sr. Technical Writer, Quantum Corporation, who spoke about style, format, and production guides.

Those who attended learned how to apply these three helpful tools to save time and ensure accuracy and consistency in their projects. After a little juggling and coaxing, the LCD projector finally cooperated and Kathy Ingraham began the presentation.

"A style guide provides a collection of rules and guidelines for presenting information, writing style, grammar, punctuation, specialized terminology, and much more," said Ingraham.

Using a style guide will help you maintain corporate standards, improve productivity, and ensure document consistency. The tool allows a publishing team to work from one set of rules, which increases the chance of meeting deadlines with accurate and usable content.

Ingraham continued her presentation introducing another helpful tool, format guides. A format guide contains examples and specifications for each element used in a style sheet or template, such as page layouts, paragraph tags, character formats, etc.

"Regardless of the publishing tool, you can use a format guide," said Ingraham. "Use it to describe specifications for the document—headers, footers, front matter, table of contents (TOC), chapters, appendixes, glossary, and index."

A format guide will also list the specifications for document elements, such as headings, lists, figures, tables, cross-references, and instructions.

"A format guide helps your document maintain a corporate look and feel,"

said Ingraham. "It will help to improve productivity and help automate document conversion."

Ingraham provided examples in her presentation for both style and format guides. You can find them on the STC-RMC web site. ([http://www.stcrmc.org/news\\_events/meetings.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/news_events/meetings.htm))

Kathy Ramsey took the floor and spoke about a less familiar tool, production guides. This type of guide is not the same as a style guide or a writer's handbook. According to Ramsey, it's essential to have a production guide if you're redirecting information into different forms, such as print, HTML, and CD.

"A production guide focuses on the mechanics of getting the work done," said Ramsey. "A production guide is more than just a series of procedures. It provides important conceptual, background, and summary information, and describes the structure of the project and the rationale behind the structure."

If you use a production guide, it should contain the following:

- The mechanics of your process; how the document will be distributed (print, HTML, CD, etc.)
- Housekeeping issues; graphics, templates, indexing guidelines, backups, file storage locations
- Methods of publishing; PDF, HTML, XML, CD, web site, paper
- Miscellaneous general pointers; file locations, graphic settings, troubleshooting tips
- Special processes; scripts or macros, spreadsheets, job aids, checklists
- Font tips and techniques; font types, font substitutions, special characters, Asian or Arabic fonts

Ramsey also provided sample spreadsheets, document outline worksheets, and other examples, which can be found on the STC-RMC web site. ([http://www.stcrmc.org/news\\_events/meetings.htm](http://www.stcrmc.org/news_events/meetings.htm))



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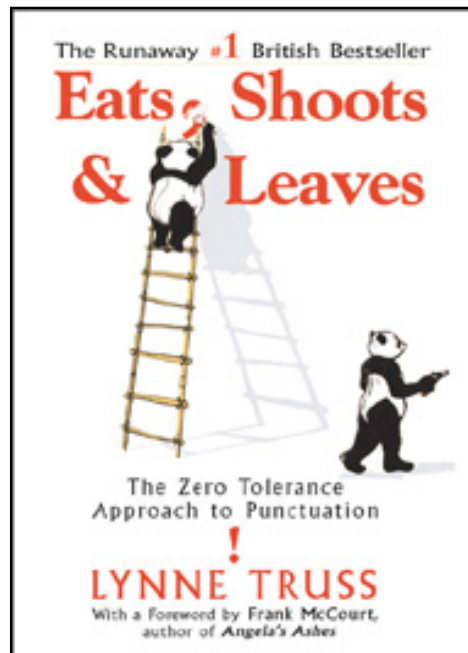
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## Book Review: *Eats Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*

by [Deb Lockwood](#)



Here is an anomaly: A book about punctuation, written in narrative form, that is an international bestseller. Yes, there really is such a thing! Lynne Truss, an author, television critic, sports columnist, and book reviewer, cuts through the boredom and creates a work that is literate, correct, concise, and chock full of dry wit. A quick read, it's not only a terrific reminder to be on the watch for incorrect punctuation usage, but is also very entertaining.

Truss uses many effective examples of how different punctuation changes the written message. The most relevant example for this review is the one referenced in the book's title. On the back cover of the book, the author explains the situation as follows:

- "A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.
- 'Why?' asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.
- 'I'm a panda,' he says, at the door. 'Look it up.'
- The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.
- 'Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves.'

The information in the book is separated into the following chapters:

- Introduction - The Seventh Sense
- The Tractable Apostrophe

- That'll Do, Comma
- Airs and Graces
- Cutting a Dash
- A Little Used Punctuation Mark
- Merely Conventional Signs

Truss speaks of the "ignorance and indifference" (p. 2) we find everywhere these days when it comes to exactness in our language, including our punctuation.

On page 1, Truss begins explaining the painful process that a "true stickler" experiences when he or she is confronted with a punctuation error:

"For the true stickler, you see, the sight of the plural word 'Book's' with an apostrophe in it will trigger a ghastly private emotional process similar to the stages of bereavement, though greatly accelerated. First there is shock. Within seconds, shock gives way to disbelief, disbelief to pain, and pain to anger. Finally (and this is where the analogy breaks down), anger gives way to a righteous urge to perpetrate an act of criminal damage with the aid of a permanent marker."

If punctuation errors have ever stopped you cold, or made you angry, then this is the book for you.

It's the rare book indeed that tackles a potentially dry subject with such a clever treatment. Even though the book is published exactly as it was in the original British edition, and there are a few differences between American and British English usage and punctuation, you will find enough (American) truth to be well satisfied with this work of humor and fact. Reading this book gives you a good refresher for using correct punctuation while allowing you to laugh out loud.

***Eats Shoots and Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*** by Lynne Truss. 2003. 1st ed. New York: Gotham Books. [ISBN: 1-592-40087-6. 209 pages. \$17.50 (hardcover).]

[www.eatsshootsandleaves.com](http://www.eatsshootsandleaves.com)



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## Transformation Update...or Introduction?

by [Andrea Ames](#), STC President

Are you a chapter or SIG leader? If so, chances are you've heard of the STC transformation. If not, there's a good chance you haven't. Here is a brief introduction to the transformation work, preceded by a list of some resources that will provide you with more details and updates.

[transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org)

Use this email address to get answers to questions or provide suggestions and comments. You will get a response within two business days.

**Transformation News Listserv:** [transform@lists.stc.org](mailto:transform@lists.stc.org)

Opt in to this listserv and receive updates and news about the transformation, status/progress updates, and notifications of Web site updates. Sign up via the transformation Web page, below, beginning Thursday, July 15.

[www.stc.org/transformation](http://www.stc.org/transformation)

Visit this site often to see the main repository of transformation information, and sign up for the Transformation News listserv (above) for update information.

## What started all this? And what's it really all about?

Frankly, the economy started all this. STC income—both membership dues income and the conference income that underwrites the cost of membership—began to drop a few years ago, and the efforts of the STC Board of Directors to cut costs did not solve the problem. We were losing members; we found, for example, that many former members were unwilling to renew because it meant paying for memberships that their companies had formerly covered.

Although the economy moved the Board to act, we found that finances were merely a symptom of a greater problem—perceived member value. That's what the transformation is really about: providing value that members want and need to develop professionally.

Our research confirmed something we already knew: our members are

incredibly diverse, with interests ranging from usability to editing, with skills and experience from entry-level to senior, and working in industries from financial to scientific to medical and beyond. We asked ourselves, "Can one Society really meet the needs and provide significant professional-development value in all of these areas and industries to this entire range of people?" In answering this question, we confirmed something else we already knew: Our strength is in our *communities* -- what we currently call *chapters* and *SIGs*. The Society does not provide direct value to members in any or all of these areas; instead, the Society provides the infrastructure, mentoring, financial and administrative support, and policy that lets those communities exist and flourish, and supports member value indirectly through those communities. However, we found that Society support for and representation of communities today—and the members' experience across communities—is inconsistent.

## The bottom line

Members want value, and value means something different to each of us. For the Society to rebuild its membership ranks, we need to provide:

- Consistent, equitably supported and represented communities from which members can derive professional development value (through the Communities, Finance, and Governance initiatives)
- A flexible membership model (through the Membership initiative), enabling members to opt in and out of various services and community memberships to customize their professional development experience
- Rich content—education (through the Education initiative), knowledge base, research, intellectual property of all types—that provides depth of practice in member-identified practice areas (through the Communities initiative by supporting practice-based communities) and is readily accessed (through the Technology initiative)
- Richer opportunities to network, within and beyond geographies (through the Communities initiative by supporting geographic communities and brand new kinds of communities)

And we need to communicate information (through the Communication initiative) about the transformation and its initiatives, as well as solicit feedback from members and leaders, to ensure that we all understand our options, make informed choices and decisions, and implement the appropriate changes during the transformation process.

## What we're doing about it: The transformation

Some of these needs are met through today's community success stories, of which there are many! In our efforts to improve consistency and equality of support and experiences across communities, we're not losing sight of those that are working. Instead, we're building on the foundation of their successes...and planning to go a step further to provide even more to those communities to enhance their successes. For communities that are struggling, the support we will provide is designed to help, not hinder, their progress toward providing as much member value as possible.

The work to meet all of these needs is complex. As we change our community

support model to be more consistent, many changes are required, in the financial, governance, and technology (infrastructure) areas, as well as the expected community policy changes.

We have a roadmap that we're following, outlining what we need to do at a very high level similar to the bulleted items above. We don't have all the answers. We need your input and your help. Contact us at [transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org) to contribute to the transformation.

## **Myths and misinformation abound!**

If you have heard of the transformation, you might be concerned about some misinformation circulating. Here are a few of the most tenacious myths, debunked. For answers to frequently asked questions and more corrections to misinformation, sign up for the Transformation News listserv (via the Transformation Web page, starting Thursday, July 15) to get notification when we add the FAQs to the Web site!

- STC is not a chapter-based organization; it is a member-based organization, according to our Bylaws.
- The transformation is not about finances; it's about member value. Although the economic environment and STC's financial situation in that environment was a symptom that alerted us to the problem, the real issue was members' perception of the value of STC membership.
- The transformation is not about marginalizing, de-emphasizing, or eliminating chapters. Chapters are communities, just as SIGs are. The goal of the transformation is to equally support and represent all communities-chapters, SIGs, and new, currently undefined communities.
- We are not taking away any chapters' money. At a Transformation Q&A session on Leadership Day at the STC conference in May, John Nardone, our Transformation Consultant, mentioned the well-known fact that STC's chapters have a greater net worth than the Society, and he suggested that chapters with large reserves might want to volunteer to donate some of those reserves to the transformation effort. (Some chapters have already contacted me to offer to support the transformation financially.)
- The transformation was not instigated by STC's Washington, D.C.-based organization. STC's decision-making, policy-setting body is the Board of Directors, your elected representatives, who are volunteers and live and work around the world. STC's implementation and operations body is the paid staff at the STC Office, located in northern Virginia. Your elected Board of Directors voted to engage the transformation consultant (in May 2003) and to adopt the transformation roadmap (in January 2004) that the consultant and the initial transformation team proposed. The STC Office in northern VA does not determine how money is spent; they implement disbursements based on STC Board decisions.
- The current dues rebates that fund chapters are not part of the transformed financial model. The new financial model has not yet been developed. Until it is, the Board of Directors will continue with the chapter dues rebate process: According to STC Bylaws, each year the Board analyzes the current financial situation, including the budget, membership renewals, and conference income, and determines an

amount to rebate to chapters.



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