



Technicalities

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

October/November 2004

Volume 45, Number 2

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[Run for Office:](#) Did you forget to run for President of the United States? Why not consider running for office in the Rocky Mountain Chapter.

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

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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:

[When Duck and Cover](#)

[Won't Do](#)

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

[Book Review: MS Manual of Style](#)

[September Chapter](#)

[Meeting Review](#)

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.*

[Run for Office](#)

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.

[Letter to the Editor](#)

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The editor can be reached during the day at 303.405.8122, by e-mail at 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.

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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

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>

STC International Office

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stc@stc.org

<http://www.stc.org>



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Chapter News

Council Votes to Not Host Region 7 Conference

The STCRMC Council has voted to not host the Region 7 Conference in Denver next year. After much evaluation and a great deal of work looking into facilities, etc., we decided from both a financial and practical perspective that it would be unwise for us to host the conference. Some of the primary reasons for declining to host included:

- The recent cancellation of the Region 8 conference at the last minute due to poor attendance caused financial problems for the Sacramento chapter, Region 8, and conference attendees and their companies
- The annual conference in Seattle next year may affect regional conference attendance
- A lack of volunteers from the STCRMC (only 22 people responded to the call for volunteers)

Welcome Our New and Returning Members

New and returning members for the months of July and August, 2004:

July 2004	August 2004
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nancy King Aston • John S. Bowie • Mark Burak • Elizabeth Hackerman • Laureen Harris • A. J. Herran • Julie C. Orr • Jodi D. Peterson 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angela A. Burroughs Kelly • Carmen M. Carmack • Mindy Jamiel • Michael S. Knievel • Linda Latenser • Susan Romero • Beth A. Siron

November's Chapter Meeting to Include the Annual Membership Drive

Mark your calendars now for the November Chapter Meeting, which will include the annual Membership Drive and all the door prizes that go along with it. Remember that admission is FREE if you bring a guest! The meeting will be held November 18 at the Tivoli Student Center on the Auraria Campus. For complete details, see the [November meeting page](#).



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Solutions, Inc.

by [Ron Arner](#)

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

Thread #1: Dropdown, drop down, or drop-down menu?

dropdown

drop-down menu

I have also seen it as dropdown for a dropdown list - in some pretty notable publications. Why a list would be different than a menu then...

It's kinda' like cancelled vs. canceled - as long as you're consistent, it's a matter of personal style and preference, and that's what a vote is - personal preference!

dropdown

Hyphenate when used as a unit modifier (e.g., drop-down list)

Use 2 words as a verb, i.e., drop down

Use 1 word when used as a noun (though I can't think of any noun usages for this one)

Consistency is the most important thing, but hyphenation helps with translation and localization. Most software translators know this term. What is

the vote of the MS Style Guide?

MS Style says:

"Use only if necessary to describe how an item such as a menu works or what it looks like. Acceptable in technical documentation if necessary to describe the type of item, as in drop-down arrow, drop-down combo box, or drop-down list box."

MS hyphenates dropdown when used as a unit modifier.

I agree completely with...the overriding editorial principle that there's no need to reinvent the wheel when a perfectly good standard solution fits ("if it ain't broke...").

Thread #2: Software for Rapid Prototyping of GUI Screens

...check into the latest, most expensive version of Visio. I believe it comes with stencils including the Windows "controls" (UI widgets). ...try surfing the Web for free Windows UI stencils.

The trainer at my company just attended an e-learning conference in San Francisco and was telling me on Friday about a tool he learned about there that might be similar to what you are looking for.

The product...is called FireFly at www.kimpact.com

The primary purpose of this product is creating training content for e-learning classes. It works by taking sequenced screenshots of windows as you work through a task in the program you want to train. The nice part about it is that it captures the data layers of the buttons. Once you have the series captured, you are able to open them in a story-board type editor. The feature Kathryn may be able to use is this editor. In addition to adding training pieces to the screens, you can add additional buttons, and map those buttons to other screens you have captured. The software the can act as a feedback tool or a prototyping tool allowing you do add or delete buttons from a window you have captured, then send back a functioning Java demo to your developers.

It's relatively inexpensive. I don't remember the price but it's under \$1000.

My recommendation would be to go find a version of VB and utilize it for creating new apps.

MS Access forms are fine for mockups, but don't expect a lot out of them. If mockups are all she wants, she's heading down the right path.

Thread #3: MS Word XP - Adobe Acrobat 6.0 Conversion

The Current Situation:

My client's source documents (90 pages each, completely styled) is in MS Word XP. It is converted to a .pdf then posted on my client's website. Users like the Adobe Bookmark features for quick navigation, and the web folk like the security features.

The Problems:

- The document is frequently updated, and b/c of the length of the source doc, takes about 10-15 minutes to convert
- The Bookmarks need to be re-organized
- The MS Word source doc has a hyperlink in the footer, which Acrobat does not maintain, and must be manually re-applied, 180 times
- Many users print the .pdf as a reference, and would be reluctant to re-print every time an update is applied, and therefore run the risk of using the wrong document
- There is no good system to announce updates, for many users are inconsistent e-mail users, and reprinting / distributing two 90 page documents is too costly

I know this seems ridiculously obvious, but: suggest to the client they change their header/footer and remove the hyperlink (or move it somewhere else). A 90-page document should NOT take 10-15 minutes to convert to PDF--it should be more on the order of 1 minute MAX. Thus, the ROI (return on investment) from this one simple change could be tremendous!!

I am not aware of a technology-based solution that will prevent people from printing (and using) out-of-date documents. It's something our 3rd-party ISO auditor checks for every time they come to Boulder to perform an ISO audit on our operations. In other words, it's a process issue, not a technology issue.

If you can't get rid of Word as source, which you probably can't, I say invest in FrontPage and publish these things on the web. Email is a horrible way to promulgate information (I know, I've been dealing with a group that does just that for the last year.)

FrontPage also comes with a software 'enhancement' called SharePoint, which makes it easy to publish updated information on the web (in HTML or in source or in whatever format they wish). The customer must have a web-hosting server, though, and the size of the server will depend on the amount of information. But it sounds like they already have a web site and therefore some kind of service.

The other thing you have to do is train users (and clients) that the web itself, not PDF, is the best source for the latest and greatest - and to discourage printing at all costs. FrameMaker and Web Works publisher do a bang-up job in converting things to the web and to PDF; Word is much more cumbersome. But the main thing is, I think, to discourage printing altogether if something gets updated frequently. Forcing users to use the web as source is the only way to ensure they get the latest information, in my opinion.

Another option might be AuthorIT. It publishes stuff to the web and PDF, I think, and takes input from Word and other sources.

Re: Hyperlink in the footer

Check w/ Adobe - this is a bug and maybe they've got a solution now. Adobe used to maintain hyperlinks really well between doc and pdf. I've had the same problem but I'm still on 5.0 so maybe its been fixed in a more current version.

Re: Re-org of the bookmarks

Be sure to pdf via the PDFMaker rather than the Distiller. Bookmarks can be automatically created based on the structure (heading, styles, or both) of the Word doc if you pdf via the PDFMaker. (In Word, PDFMaker is the Adobe icon/ menu usually found on the toolbar/ menubar. Options for PDFMaker are in the Acrobat menu under "Change Conversion Options". Distiller is found in the list of printers when printing the doc and does NOT generate bookmarks automatically - at least I haven't found the option to allow this.)

If your client understands how the use of styles / headers in Word will affect the bookmarked PDF output, then the re-org can be easily maintained - especially if a style Bookmark is created and applied to only the headings that must appear in the PDF. 1st person who forgets can recreate each bookmark manually! (They'll remember after that!) Quick Tip: In Adobe, highlight the text and press CTRL+B to insert bookmarks quickly if you receive a poorly structured Word doc and don't have time to re-structure it.

Re: Version control, updates, etc

Can you re-examine the kind of information that changes frequently and perhaps pull that out of the more static info? Could the info that changes frequently appear on the web site with links to the pdfs and the pdf'd content could point back to the web for the "changing" info? (Are there parallels you can draw to this example: Things like hardware requirements, installation instructions, and troubleshooting tips would point to the web - more static info like process flows, procedures, and field definitions would appear in the pdfs.)

Another option - can you break down the 90 page doc into pdf'd individual chapters/ modules and the pdf'd TOC/ Index? All modules could be downloaded from the web if needed or users could download only the sections that apply to their job duties. The website could have a Revision History with links to the relevant pdf containing the change. When changes occur, users only need to download, reprint, and replace a small section rather than all 90 pages. You would also be able to keep the TOC/Index up to date.

Beyond your control/ scope

The other part of this is to recommend that internal Employees/ Customer Support people start referencing the web as the ONE place to go for current info. Sounds like the customer base needs a little re-training and that requires the efforts of everyone internally.

Haven't had time to test - potential solutions:

1. From Adobe Support: If the document contains hyperlinks, make sure that the page margins are .8 inch or larger and re-pdf (also seems to be the solution if hyperlinks appear in the wrong place in the pdf) <http://www.adobe.com/support/techdocs/326009.html>
<http://www.adobe.com/support/techdocs/323141.html>
 2. According to someone on the Adobe forums: <http://www.adobeforums.com/cgi-bin/webx?50@254.9Am2cW4Gbce.1@.3bb5dada>
-

The following solution worked for me:

- Uninstall software
- Turn the clock on the computer back a yea
- Re-install software
- Ensure the clock is correct (current date and year)

Once you have an open document in Word, although it is already saved, you are prompted to save it again once you click on the ADOBE icon. Close this screen. Click on your Word Save Icon. Now click on the ADOBE icon again and it works just like it used to.

For version control, I have a page following the TOC that lists dates & briefly what changes were made in the document. I list the most current edit on the Web page. e.g. 9-28-2005 Update table on page 18, and add "How do I access the Configurator" topic on page 53.

One of my documents is sometimes changed several times a month, and this update system seems to work well. (We're starting the third page of changes) We have taught (hopefully) our users to check the Website for updates before they undertake any major project. I do send out an email notification to the Super Users only. They are the ones who answer questions when the users mess something up when they didn't check the document. This would not help with clients unfortunately.

There probably **is** a technology solution for your client, but it's a software solution, not one you can implement. If, for example, you use McAfee for virus protection, you can subscribe to their automatic update service. This service automatically updates the virus definition file on your computer. Similar software could notify your client's customers when updated docs were available. But as I said, this is a solution that requires software development. And it has a number of potential downsides.

Depending on what your client's line of business is, writing and delivering such a piece of software for their customers may be feasible. Unless anyone knows of an off-the-shelf product that can accomplish this...



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Tips from the Trenches

by [Deb Lockwood](#)

Editor's note: *Some of the sites listed in the Humor and cartoons section contain material that might be considered offensive to some readers. All links in this article worked at the time of publication.*

With the World Wide Web being so dynamic, and hundreds of new sites being added daily, I thought it would be helpful to our group if I compiled a list of our favorites and published that list in of *Technicalities*. The contributors submitted some wonderful resources, and I organized them into the following categories:

- Books, Magazines, and E-zines
- Editing
- Humor and Cartoons
- Information Architecture
- Human Computer Interaction
- List Serves
- Professional Organizations
- References
- Research
- Resources, Technical
- Search Engines
- Small Business Operations
- Standards
- System Development Life Cycle
- Teaching Resources
- Tools
- Usability
- Web Development
- Writing

Books, magazines, and e-zines

Fast Company contains business information from a unique perspective, including interesting articles that seem to capture trends. <http://www.fastcompany.com/homepage>

Forbes highlights business news. <http://www.forbes.com>

Inc. contains articles and information that focuses primarily on leadership and high-tech. <http://www.inc.com>

Writer's Digest contains hints for writers and promotes various writing classes. <http://www.writersdigest.com>

Editing

Editorial Freelancers Association's What Members Do page contains a description of the different types of edits an editor might perform. <http://www.the-efa.org/clients.html#WhatMembersDo>

Editorial Services Guide, sponsored by the Bay Area Editor's Forum, contains definitions of editorial services. http://www.editorsforum.org/what_do_sup_pages/definitions.html

Editors' Association of Canada's Definitions of Editorial Skills page contains a list of various editorial tasks. <http://www.editors.ca/hiring/skills.htm>

Levels of Edit is a Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) booklet (second edition) that Robert Van Buren and Mary Fran Buehler wrote about the levels of editing. http://www.io.com/~tcm/etwr2371/planners/levels_of_edit.pdf

Levels of Edit (JPL) is a table that shows the give levels of edit by edit type. <http://www.uah.edu/editing/LEVELS.DOC>

Humor and cartoons

Bulwer-Lytton sponsors a contest for the worst opening paragraph to a story. Good for a laugh and 15 seconds of fame, if you're lucky. <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>

Douglas Adams' site is for those cult followers of Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy. <http://www.douglasadams.com>

Darwin Awards is for those among us who enjoy reading about the shallow end of the gene pool. <http://www.darwinawards.com>

Dilbert is the premier comic strip about life in cubeland from Scott Adams. <http://www.dilbert.com>

Engrish site contains real-life examples of "flawed English." <http://www.english.com>

The Onion contains twisted national news. <http://www.theonion.com>

Rinkworks allows you to convert any corporate memo to a comic dialect such as Redneck, Elmer Fudd, or Swedish Chef [think Muppets]. <http://www.rinkworks.com/dialect>

Information architecture

American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) hosts this site, which contains information about the discipline, practice, and culture of designing. Use the "What is Experience Design" link to go to helpful information, including a case study archive. <http://www.aiga.org/content.cfm?Alias=experiencedesign>

Asilomar Institute for Information Architecture (AIFIA) provides resources for the information architecture community. Information available through the Design Tools link is especially helpful. <http://www.aifia.org>

Boxes and Arrows is a peer-written journal dedicated to discussing, improving and promoting the work of information architecture, information design, interaction design, and interface design community. <http://www.boxesandarrows.com>

Human computer interaction

Human Computer Interaction (HCI) bibliography information categories include Learn about HCI, The Bibliography, HCI Columns and News, and Developer Resources. <http://www.hcibib.org>

List serves

(Note: List serves are online discussion groups about topics that interest members of the list. These lists are of particular interest to technical communicators. One caveat though-these lists can generate a high volume of e-mail, so you might strongly consider requesting the digest version.)

FrameMaker users, go to <http://www.frameusers.com> and select E-mail lists from the menu subsection labeled "Website Subsections." This is the premier list for folks who use FrameMaker. This site includes links to product news, training classes, job opportunities, and a resource guide section.

TECHWR-L, go to <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl/subscribercentral.html>. This is the premier list for technical communicators and a source of great information that ranges from tool issues to professional development. The home page for this site is full of other interesting tidbits and links. Be sure to read the rules since Eric, the moderator, can get crabby when people stray from the topic.

XML, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com/messages/xml-doc>. This Yahoo group is specifically about applying XML to technical documentation.

Professional organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is a professional society catering to technical communicators work in the medical and biotechnology industries. <http://www.amwa.org>

Association of Training and Development (ASTD) is the leading association of workplace learning and performance professionals. <http://www.astd.org/astd>

Boulder Writer's Alliance (BWA) is a nonprofit organization of communications professionals in Boulder and throughout Colorado. <http://www.bwa.org>

Localization Industry Standards Association (LISA) is a localization standards organization for the GILT (Globalization, Internationalization, Localization, and Translation) business community. <http://www.lisa.unige.ch>

Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the largest organization for technical communications. <http://www.stc.org>

STC's Rocky Mountain Chapter. <http://www.stcrrmc.org>

STC's Snake River chapter. <http://www.stc-src.org>

References

Acronyms Finder, sponsored by Mountain Data Systems, is a comprehensive dictionary of acronyms, abbreviations, and "initial-isms." <http://www.acronymfinder.com>.

Babel Fish Translation is an application that translates blocks of text into other languages, sponsored by AltaVista. <http://babel.altavista.com/sites/babelfish/tr>

Barleby is the preeminent Internet publisher of literature, reference, and verse providing students, researchers, and the intellectually curious with unlimited access to books and information on the Web, free of charge. <http://bartleby.com>

Dictionary, sponsored by Lexico Publishing Group, LLC, is an online dictionary. <http://www.dictionary.com>

Earthlink contains a glossary of high speed Internet access terminology. <http://www.earthlink.net/highspeed101/glossary>

Free On-Line Dictionary of Computing, sponsored by the Imperial College Department of Computing, contains a searchable dictionary. <http://foldoc.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc.index.html>

Glossarist contains links to glossaries and dictionaries on all subjects. <http://glossarist.com>

IT Storage White Papers and Case Studies contain articles about data storage issues. http://www.itstorage.co.uk/default.asp?page=/Resources/WhitPapers/item_list.asp

Jargon Scout contains jargon that is about to hatch into the popular language use on the Internet. <http://tbtf.com/jargon-scout.html>

Merriam-Webster Online includes an online dictionary and thesaurus. You can also look up the word of the day, or play word games. <http://www.mw.com>

Microsoft Press Books is a good source for Microsoft publications. <http://www.microsoft.com/learning/books>

Microsoft's Resources to Decode Technical Jargon site lists several technical dictionary-type resources. <http://www.microsoft.com/learning/start/terms.asp>

NetLingo contains a dictionary of Internet terms. <http://www.netlingo.com>

Official U.S. Time Clock contains (of all things) the official time in the U.S. This particular link takes you to the Mountain timezone. <http://www.time.gov/timezone.cgi?Mountain/d/-7/java>

One Look is a dictionary search that looks at 970 indexed dictionaries. <http://onelook.com>

Online Dictionary contains a listing of various dictionaries, including lists of English and non-English language dictionaries, as well as such diverse topics as law and rhyming dictionaries. <http://www.online-dictionary.net>

PC Webopedia contains a dictionary and search engine for computer and Internet technology definitions. <http://www.pcwebopedia.com>

Silicon Graphics Inc. (SGI) contains a Standard Template Library Programmer's Guide in the Services and Support section. <http://www.sgi.com/tech/stl>

Techtionary is an animated dictionary about technology. http://www.techtionary.com/index_in.html

TechWeb contains definitions of IT terms. <http://www.techweb.com>

Telecommuting and "alternative officing" by Gill Gordon includes resources for the telecommuter. <http://www.gilgordon.com>

Virtual Reference Desk provides links to other reference information, such as encyclopedias, dictionaries, and style guides. <http://www.lib.purdue.edu/eresources/readyref>

Webopedia contains a dictionary and search engine for computer and Internet technology definitions. <http://www.webopedia.com>

What Is contains definitions for technical acronyms and terms. <http://www.whatis.com>

Word Smith, a community of more than 550,000 linguaphiles, allows you to sign up for a Word-A-Day e-mail program. <http://wordsmith.org/awad/index.html>.

Word Spy contains new terms in our evolving language. <http://www.wordspy.com/index.asp>

Your Dictionary is a language portal containing more than 2500 dictionaries and grammars in over 300 languages. <http://yourdictionary.com>

Research

Encyclopedia Britannica sponsors a Web site from you can use to browse their 32-volume encyclopedia, as well as the student and concise encyclopedias, Web sites, multimedia, and magazines. <http://www.britannica.com>

Forrester Research is an independent technology research company that provides pragmatic and forward-thinking advice about technology's impact on business. <http://www.forrester.com/my/1,,1-0,FF.html>

Hints-N-Tips is an exchange center for practical information. <http://www.hints-n-tips.com>

Internet Public Library, sponsored by the School of Information of the University of Michigan, contains a wealth of information about a host of subjects, and includes a reading room with books, magazines, and newspapers. <http://www.ipl.org>

Public Library, Chicago, contains library resources. <http://www.chipublib.org/cpl.html>

Public Library, Denver, contains library resources. <http://www.denver.lib.co.us>

Public Library, New York City, contains library resources. <http://www.nypl.org>

Reference Desk is the single best source for facts on the Web. <http://www.refdesk.com>

Resources, technical

Computer Knowledge contains tutorials, information, acronyms, and more

about computers. <http://www.cknow.com>

Convert Me, by Sergey & Anna Gershteins, contains an online units of conversion and metric conversion calculator. <http://www.convert-me.com/en>

Doxygen is a documentation system for C++, C, Java, Objective-C, IDL (Corba and Microsoft flavors) and to some extent PHP, C#, and D. <http://www.stack.nl/~dimitri/doxygen>

National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) develops and promotes measurement, standards, and technology to enhance productivity, facilitate trade, and improve the quality of life. <http://nist.gov>

NIST's Time and Frequency division maintains the standard for frequency and time interval for the U.S. <http://www.boulder.nist.gov/timefreq/index.html>

Physics, National Institute of Standards and Technology, contains the NIST Reference on Constants, Units, and Uncertainty: International System of Units (SI) prefixes for binary multiples. <http://physics.nist.gov/cuu/Units/binary.html>

Science World is Eric Weisstein's World of Science, A Wolfram Web Resource: A resource for math and science. <http://scienceworld.wolfram.com>

Wiha Metric Conversions, sponsored by Wiha Quality Tools, is a conversion tool that you can use to convert standard units of measure to metric. <http://www.wihatools.com/conversion.htm>

Search engines

Search engines help you locate information on the Internet by searching for sites with a particular keyword or subject. Since the way each search engine works is unique, read each engine's search criteria "how to" information so that you can effectively limit your search to relevant data.

Altavista <http://www.altavista.com>

Ask Jeeves <http://www.ask.com>

Dogpile <http://www.dogpile.com> (a meta search engine)

Google <http://www.google.com>

Lycos <http://www.lycos.com>

Search Engine Guide <http://www.searchengineguide.com>

Yahoo <http://www.yahoo.com>

Small business operations

Business Filings Incorporated (Bizfilings) includes information about incorporating your small business. <http://www.bizfilings.com/learning/index.html>

Colorado Small Business Association contains resources for small businesses published by the SBA in Denver, CO. <http://www.sba.gov/co>

Getting Started in Consulting and Independent Contracting, sponsored by the University of Texas Tech's University Writing Center includes information expressly for technical writers, including articles about getting ready, working as an independent (including an article by our chapter's Linda Gallagher), and taking care of business. <http://english.ttu.edu/gscic>

Small Business Association is a U.S. government site that contains valuable resources for starting your own business, including a guide to structuring your business. <http://www.sba.gov>

STC Rocky Mountain Chapter's website offers a variety of resources for small business owners. http://www.stcrmc.org/resources/resource_internet.htm

Standards

InfoDev Development Standards site contains code, database, and documentation standards. These information development standards are brought to you by the Application Management and Innovation Services Directorate (AMIS) of Canada. http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/epic/internet/ininfodev.nsf/en/h_00157e.html

International Standard Paper Sizes site by Markus Kuhn includes information about the ISO 216 paper size system. <http://www.cl.cam.ac.uk/~mgk25/iso-paper.html>

W3C World Wide Web Consortium is the standards organization for all things Web-related, and their Web site contains a great deal of resource information. <http://www.w3c.org>

System development life cycle

Software Partners LLC is a provider of highly functional web applications. The Methodology section, especially the Detailed Design information, can be helpful to anyone researching the system development life cycle. <http://www.swpartners.com/methodology.html>

Teaching resources

Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) portal includes a digital library

with journals, magazines, proceedings, and newsletters from the ACM and other affiliated organizations. One instructor said "I can't believe how much free text is available here. And it catalogs articles I'd never find elsewhere."

[http://portal.acm.org/dl.cfm?](http://portal.acm.org/dl.cfm?coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=18231056&CFTOKEN=23957066)

[coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=18231056&CFTOKEN=23957066](http://portal.acm.org/dl.cfm?coll=portal&dl=ACM&CFID=18231056&CFTOKEN=23957066)

EServer TC Library, a cooperative library for tech communicators is an experiment in community libraries - part library index, part Web portal - for professional, scientific, and technical communicators. This site includes many articles about various topics, career suggestions (e.g., resume, portfolios), and instruction ideas. <http://tc.eserver.org>

Normandy Sandhills contains links to various education topics, including the following: online research, list of education links, online and distance learning courses, children's and curious person's links, book reviews, book publishers and sellers, online encyclopedias, libraries and e-texts, writing and research guides, word processing with Microsoft Word, dictionaries, word origins, quotations, and teaching. <http://normandy.sandhills.cc.nc.us/education.html>

Tools

Adobe includes information about all Adobe products. The site includes technical support areas where you can research issues related to the products.

<http://www.adobe.com>

FrameMaker provides reference information about Frame and Frame training and system bugs. This site is independent from the Adobe site. You can also subscribe to the Framers list from here. <http://www.frameusers.com>

FrameMaker Plug-ins is Steve Kubis' Silicon Prairie Software site, which includes auto-text, indexing, and master page tools. <http://www.kagi.com/SPSoftware>

Microsoft contains a plethora of information about MS products, tech support issues, goings on, and other stuff. <http://www.microsoft.com>

Microsoft Longhorn Help is the next generation of Help engine currently in progress at Microsoft. <http://longhorn.msdn.microsoft.com/???/longhorn.msdn.microsoft.com/>

[lhSDK/help/hachelpauthoringguide.aspx](http://longhorn.msdn.microsoft.com/???/longhorn.msdn.microsoft.com/lhSDK/help/hachelpauthoringguide.aspx)

Webex is a web conferencing, video conferencing, and online meeting services software application. Using Webex, you can set up the meeting so that you can access other meeting attendees' computers. This functionality is very useful for troubleshooting. <http://www.webex.com>

Usability

Alertbox, which is published by Dr. Jakob Nielsen, contains a list of articles available that address current issues in Web usability. Available articles are

dated from today back to 1995. <http://www.useit.com/alertbox>

Nielsen Norman Group Information's site contains information about interaction design solutions for the real world. <http://www.asktog.com>

U.B. Department of Health and Human Services sponsors this resource for designing usable, useful, and accessible Web sites and user interfaces. <http://www.usability.gov>

Usable Web contains 1056 links to other sites containing information about web usability. <http://www.usableweb.com>

Use It is a Web site, written Jakob Nielsen, that includes his Web usability column and new about the profession. <http://www.useit.com>

User Interface Engineering is Jared M. Spool's company, and this site contains white papers and other resource information about usability. <http://www.ue.com/publications>

Web development

CNET's "Beyond the Code" site contains resources about building Web sites, useful HTML tags and their attributes, and other architect and Web development resources. <http://builder.com.com>

HTML tag list is sponsored by the University of Salzburg's Scientific Computing Department. <http://www.cosy.sbg.ac.at/~lendi/tags.html>

Index DOT HTML, the advanced HTML reference, contains HTML language and historical information. <http://www.blooberry.com/indexdot/html/index.html>

Net Mechanic is a resource for Webmasters. <http://netmechanic.com>

Two 4 U color compose engine allows you to adjust and see how colors will appear on a Web page. <http://www.two4u.com/cgi-bin/color/compose>

Webmonkey, the Web Developer's Resource, contains how-to information about Web sites for beginners, builders, and masters. <http://hotwired.lycos.com/webmonkey>

Web Reference contains the Webmaster's Reference Library, which includes Web authoring tips and tutorials fro Web developers. <http://www.webreference.com>

Writing

Beehive contains a basic review of grammar rules and includes practice exercises. <http://www.thebeehive.org/school/middle/subjects.asp?subject=12>

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Grant-Writing Tutorial walks you through the process of writing a grant proposal. <http://www.epa.gov/seahome/grants/src/grant.htm>

Gary Conroy's technical writing site contains a comprehensive guide including articles, resources, and forums to all that's technical in writing. <http://www.gary-conroy.com/index.php>

Guide to Grammar and Style by Jack Lynch provides a discussion of various dogmas about grammar and explanations of accepted usages, as well as links to other resources and information. <http://newark.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing>

Guide to Grammar and Writing, sponsored by the Capital Community College Foundation, provides oodles of examples of proper grammar and usage. Use this site to refresh your memory about the basic grammar terminology and rules. <http://ccc.commnet.edu/grammar>

Information Mapping, Inc., is a professional services firm with 30 years' experience helping leading organizations to leverage knowledge and communications to improve performance. The method hinges on their approach to analyzing, organizing, presenting information so that it is easy for people to access, use, and remember. http://www.infomap.com/rc/rc_index.htm

Information Week's White Papers Directory, which contains free, timely, and technical information on hot IT issues. http://infoweb.bitpipe.com/data/web/iw/iw_index.jsp

Institute of Electrical Electronics Engineers (IEEE) Computer Society's site contains a style guide. <http://www.computer.org/author/style/index.htm>

IT Papers is the Web's largest library of technical white papers, Webcasts, and case studies. <http://www.itpapers.com/index.html>

New Mexico Tech Library's best picks for writing and technical communication resources. <http://www.nmt.edu/~nmtlib/subject/write.html>

Plain English Campaign is an independent pressure group fighting for public information to be written in plain English. <http://www.plainenglish.co.uk/index.html>

SMOG Readability Formula is a simple method you can use to determine the reading level of your written materials. <http://www.med.utah.edu/pated/authors/readability.html>

TechComm Plus, LLC, which is Linda Gallagher's company, contains resources for technical communicators and is of particular interest to independents. <http://www.techcomplus.com/reference.htm>

Technical Communication, Mike Markel's Web site that supports his Technical Communications textbook, contains information about the examples and concepts in the 7th edition. <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/techcomm>

Technical Publications, a site by Michael Bradley, contains the following resources for technical writers: search engines and portals, good reading, mailing lists, professional associations, software and technical support, and technical writing and design. http://www.techpubs.com/resources.html#Tech_Writing

TECHWR-L is an Internet-based community and resource for technical communicators worldwide. This site includes access to a discussion list that includes more than 5,000 direct subscribers. <http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl>

University of Minnesota's guide to writing university policy contains information about the ongoing process to create, distribute, and maintain a university-wide policies, procedures, instructions, and forms. Although it is geared for universities, this guide also contains good, practical information for all policy and procedures writers. http://www.fpd.finop.umn.edu/groups/ppd/documents/information/guide_to_writing.cfm.

User-Friendly Manuals' Website (Peter Ring Consultants, Denmark) contains information about producing user-friendly manuals. <http://www.prc.dk/user-friendly-manuals/ufm/home1.htm>

Contributors: Ron Arner, Kristy Lantz Astry, Rita Braun, Kit Brown, Lynn French, Linda Gallagher, Mary Headley, Laurie Lamar, John Martin, Carla Mead, Eileen S. Potter, Kathy Ramsey, Martha Sippel, Elizabeth W. Staton, Tammy VanBoening



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President's Corner

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

As we head into the heart of the chapter year, I want our members to be aware that we have a hardworking team of managers and officers working every day to make your experience a better one as a member of the 475-member-strong Rocky Mountain Chapter (RMC). Check the Website (stcrmc.org) for the names and titles of our officers.

Jobsite Controversy

I'd like to review the recent controversy related to our job site (stcrmc.org/jobs_freelance/jobline.htm). Some of you have heard about this. My purpose is to give an overview of the facts and sequence of events.

A Colorado organization, Focus on the Family, recently sent some recruitment ads to our jobs page editor, Anne Halsey, that requested, in 'Duties and Responsibilities,' a series of Christian-oriented belief requirements for applicants. After posting the ads, Anne received a number of complaints about the tone and the possibly discriminatory intent of the ads. Most of the members of the chapter council (in fact, all that I know of) also agreed with the substance of the complaints. As a result, we contacted STC headquarters and received a letter back from Executive Director Peter Herbst referencing STC's anti-discrimination policies.

With this in hand, I wrote back to Focus on the Family, requesting as a courtesy their permission to remove or tone down the material in question, with the alternative being that we would remove the job postings, based on STC's policies. They did not respond by our requested deadline. We then removed the ads, indicating in another letter to them that we reserve the right to edit material being posting to our site. They then responded that, although the requirements admittedly were not directly related to the skills for the job, Focus on the Family is allowed to include those requirements because it is a non-profit religious organization, and they still wanted the language. This step occurred about October 5. There, the matter rests, and we hope that will be the end of it. However, just so you know, we have been in touch with the International office's legal counsel, Bill Stolgitis, on this matter and he is aware of the actions taken, along with Peter from STC headquarters. I'll keep you posted.

Speaking of legalities, I will be circulating an electronic ballot for approval of some changes to our chapter's bylaws. This is the result of an effort by a team headed by Nancy Walters, and included Jay Mead, Barb Miller, and myself over the past year. Then-president Frank Tagader charged the team with a number of responsibilities, including filling any governance holes and generally tightening up the language found in the existing bylaws. The team reviewed the existing text and that of several other STC chapters comparable to our own, plus, of course, the bylaws of STC as a whole. We did find some significant holes and did find language that could have been clearer. The result is a draft of the bylaws that has just been approved by your administrative council (on October 7, 2004). That text will be provided to you for approval in the next few weeks. When you do get the notification of this review/approval step, please devote a bit of time to reading the new text and give us your approval (or comments if you don't approve).

Year's Program Schedule

I previously announced that we would publish a year's worth of meeting program topics in October. In August, the program planning team met to review the results of this summer's program topic survey (about 100 of you responded...thanks!) and developed this annual program agenda:

Month	Date	Topic	Speaker
November 2004	18th	Web Site Design	TBD
December 2004		No meeting	
January 2005	20th	Alternative Markets for technical communicators (earth sciences, Sarbanes-Oxley, medical)	TBD
February 2005	17th	WinWriters/User Assistance	Joe Welinske
March 2005	17th	Senior Dinner	TBD
April 2005	21st	Instructional design/Creating training materials	TBD
May 2005	19th	Basics of User Interface design	TBD
June 2005	16th	Macromedia night (tools and specific applications for each)	TBD

Place these STC chapter meeting dates on your schedules now to be sure not to miss any of these exciting programs. Of course, you'll receive a post card with the meeting details before each meeting. Also, the programs are still being developed and might be subject to some tweaking.

Volunteer Opportunities

As always, the chapter has openings for volunteers to help with the work (and the challenges) of running the chapter. Such opportunities are a great way to enhance your resume and get experience working with others in your profession—plus have a lot of fun!

We currently need people to help with Program, Competitions, Website, Scholarships, SIGs and a number of other activities. Contact any of the officers through the Website if you have a few hours a week you would like to volunteer to help the chapter out. Also, see [elsewhere in this issue](#) the announcement from Cathy Barnes and Eileen Thornir that they are seeking candidates for officer positions for the 2005-2006 chapter year.

Membership and Renewal

It's getting to be membership renewal time, and this year the membership options are going to be a bit different. November will be our annual membership drive, and you are encouraged to invite friends to attend (and get in free). When renewal comes up at the end of the year, you'll find some changes. You can actually join as a 'limited' member for a savings of \$20 over the 'classic' membership, and not be a member of the Rocky Mountain Chapter (\$145 versus \$125). This is a good option mainly for people who are too remote to ever attend a meeting. You would save the \$20 of extra cost if you attended two chapter meetings. Also, there is a \$135 'e-membership,' which is the same as the classic but eliminates the hard copies of the periodicals. So, being a full member of the RMC is in reality only a \$10 up-charge over limited membership. It's our job as chapter officers to ensure that all our current members see the value of their chapter membership and are willing to pay the extra \$10 or \$20. Come to the membership drive meeting and learn more about the benefits of being a 'classic.'

Hope you're all enjoying a great fall and that work and business are good for you. Please let me know your comments and questions.




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Simplicity from Complexity

 by [Ron Arner](#), *Managing Editor*

I was more than a little surprised recently when my organizational communication textbook, *Organizational Communication in an Age of Globalization*, began praising bureaucracy as an organizational structure. Bureaucracy? I don't think I've ever heard bureaucracy referred to in a positive light. I know personally that if I feel I'm getting the red-tape-runaround from an organization, the last thing on my mind is that bureaucracy is a good thing. And I certainly didn't expect bureaucracy to be painted in such a positive light in a textbook about organizational communication.

It turns out the book is extolling the virtues of bureaucracy based on the historical conditions that created it. In addition, in its pure form (which the authors acknowledge doesn't really exist), bureaucracy is an organizational structure that provides a wide division of labor, a system of hiring based on skill, and a chance to be promoted based on seniority and/or achievement. The book went on to point out the many negative aspects of bureaucracy as well, and described the many post-bureaucratic business structures that have been designed to facilitate a more human and democratic business environment.

But too late! My curiosity was already aroused so I sat back and thought about the whole topic a little more. It seems to me that an organization's structure, whether it be primarily bureaucratic or not, must be one of the major influences over the way communication takes place within that organization and between that organization and the outside world. What a great indicator of how to deal with an organization! Whether you're applying for a job, trying to land a contract, or already working for a company, the structure of the organization is a guiding light that can lead you to success. It's an excellent indicator of what kind of communication (if any) is lacking from a company, and how successful you will be when trying to provide it.

When I think of bureaucracy, I think of the Federal Government. Have you ever tried to apply for a job with the government at USAJobs.com? Some jobs require a major pre-employment screening test that takes hours to complete, and if you don't complete the application within 24 hours, your profile is erased and you have to start all over! But look at what (technical) communication has done for the Internal Revenue Service. You're probably all

familiar with the IRS Restructuring and Reform Act of 1998, which resulted in user-friendly forms and a well-designed Website. Just imagine how many tech-comm jobs would be created if every other branch of the Federal Government, as well as State, County, and City governments followed the IRS' lead.

I decided to apply my theory on structure and communication to my current position as well. Surprisingly, I found the school system to be very bureaucratic in nature. We have a very top-down communication path; what the Superintendent and the Board of Education say, goes. I've rarely seen the Superintendent in person, and the Area Superintendent over my department has only appeared in person twice—once when an anonymous complaint was filed against the Director of my department, and last year when we went through our annual round of layoffs. It's something I never would have given much thought to if I hadn't been surprised by my textbook's unorthodox opinion on bureaucracy. I would have just coasted along, going with the flow, trying to play by the rules, but now I have a much better game plan for proving my worth and securing a different position, should one come along that appeals to me.

My venture into the land of bureaucracy reinforced my belief that keeping an open mind is an important thing. Had I dismissed the original statement in my textbook that bureaucracy is a good thing as ridiculous and dated, I wouldn't have explored the topic any further and enriched my understanding of how to deal with bureaucratic structure in organizations. In fact, I've been reminded that presenting an unpopular viewpoint is a great way to grab someone's attention, as long as you're ready to justify your position or qualify your statement to express what you truly believe.

Source Cited

Organizational Communication in an Age of Globalization: Issues, Reflections, Practices

Cheney, George, et. al. 2004. Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, Inc. [ISBN: 1-57766-271-7. 490 pages. \$47.95 (softcover).]

<http://www.organizationalcommunication.com>



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Letter to the Editor

We received the following email in regards to [Deb Lockwood's book review](#) in the last issue of *Technicalities*:

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.

I believe Lynne Truss would punctuate these sentences without the extra commas:

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

(Why do people put a comma between a compound subject, predicate, or object? "Stopped you cold" and "made you angry" are the compound object and should not be separated by a punctuation mark.)

The same is true of the comma between the compound subject "is published exactly..." and "there are few..." The comma after punctuation is correct. 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.

It is a great book and should be required reading every year or so. We do agree on that!

[Carol Clayton](#)



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Run for Office

by [Cathy Barnes](#) and [Eileen Thournir](#), STCRMC Nominating Committee

It's almost that time of year again! The Rocky Mountain Chapter will soon be seeking new officers for 2005-2006. Volunteering for office provides an excellent opportunity to network with peers, grow professionally and personally, and serve your profession. And, given today's dynamic environment, it's an exciting time to get involved in the chapter.

The following describes the elected chapter offices:

President

Note: The vice president automatically moves to the position of president for the year following the election.

The president's responsibilities include the following:

- Conduct meetings of the chapter administrative council
- Assign duties to officers and appoint assistants or committees as needed
- Help form chapter policy, goals, and objectives
- Supply guidelines for budgets, expenditures, and other fiscal activities
- Speak at chapter meetings and write articles for Technicalities
- Share ideas with other chapter leaders and submit reports to the Region 7 director-sponsor

Typical commitment: 6 hours/week

Vice President

Because this position leads to the chapter presidency, the vice president needs all the qualities of the president: enthusiasm, energy, responsibility, and good problem-solving skills.

The vice president's responsibilities include the following:

- Help form chapter policy, goals, and objectives
- Assume the duties of chapter president when needed
- Act as liaison with local universities and student chapters
- Attend the chapter leaders workshop at the Region 7 conference
- Identify possible overall committee managers and develop overall plans for the next term

Typical commitment: 2-4 hours/week

Treasurer

The treasurer's responsibilities include the following:

- Establish and monitor a chapter budget for the fiscal year
- Establish and maintain a checking account, savings account, CD account, and scholarship fund
- Deposit chapter funds and pay invoices
- Prepare monthly reports of chapter income and expenditures and a detailed year-end report
- Maintain all chapter contracts

Typical commitment: 3-5 hours/week

Secretary

The secretary's responsibilities include the following:

- Take minutes at administrative council and other chapter meetings (or arrange for a substitute)
- Prepare and distribute copies of the minutes
- Write brief descriptions of chapter meetings for Technicalities
- Prepare correspondence related to chapter business

Typical commitment: 2-4 hours/week

Nominating Committee

The nominating committee performs the following duties:

- Invite members to run for office
- Evaluate qualifications of possible candidates and announce the slate of candidates
- Prepare the ballot, hold the election, and report the results

Typical commitment: 2 hours/week

Remember that Committee Chairs are appointed by the Council, not elected.

To become a candidate or to recommend someone else for office, please contact Cathy Barnes (catherine_barnes@peoplesoft.com 303.841.0386) or

Eileen Thournir (ethournir@p2es.com 720.962.4518).



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September Chapter Meeting Review: Controlling Your Content: Value-based Content Management

by [Ruth Gaulke](#)

Are you trying to develop a strategy to get control of your data, find the high-value content your customers want, and deliver it so that customers can use and reuse it?

Ben Martin and Greg Laugero, two of three partners at Industrial Wisdom, LLC, opened the new season of STC RMC member programs on Sept. 16 with a discussion of that very problem—implementing value-based content management.

Technical communicators often face the daunting challenge of producing valuable content at low cost for a variety of audiences. Martin lived through such an experience and shared the problems he faced and the solutions.

A few years ago, his company produced content with multiple outputs in multiple languages, and of course it had to be delivered under strict deadlines and with limited resources. One change could cause havoc because it had to be made manually in all outputs and translated for each language. It became impossible to keep the content up to date. The problem had to be solved.

Limited tools and time made this challenge more difficult. Initially the solution included purchasing a high-end authoring system, optimizing the cost of producing the content, and streamlining the content with a single set of templates. This effort drove down cost and optimized staff time and quality. However, no one looked at the content value and discovered that, after all that work, customers did not consistently use or value the content created.

Back to square one: staff talked with the customers and determined their needs and desires for the content. The company then replaced the expensive high-end authoring tool with an in-house tool that resulted in a solution that could be adapted to other business-critical content applications and allowed the customer to be a hub for content, not just a destination.

The message here is clear: focus your content on the value it brings to the customer, both internal and external, and you may be able to drive revenue. Solutions need not be as elaborate as the case study presented by Martin and

Laugero. Study your customers and find out what they do with the content you produce. This will determine what needs to be done to meet their need—and you may find that the solution need not be complex, high-tech, or impossible to implement.



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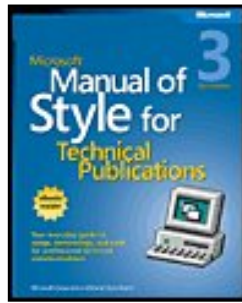
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Book Review: *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, Third Edition*

by [Deb Lockwood](#)



Believe it or not, the long promised and anticipated update to the *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications* is now available! The intent of this manual is to offer standards for content developers, writers, and editors who work with Microsoft applications.

Microsoft Press describes this version as "something of a departure from earlier editions." It is a departure, indeed. In the previous edition, technical terms were listed alphabetically. In this third edition, however, the first half of the book contains general usage information, and the second half contains a usage dictionary.

Changes reflect the simplification of language usage due to ease of translation for global audiences. For example, what used to be CD-ROM is now simply CD.

When writing this book, the authors focused their efforts on four audiences: home users, information workers, information technology professionals, and software developers. In many cases, the explanations of guideline usage are dependent on the audience. For example, in the discussion about *dialog box* on page 7, the audience determines what the objects and screen elements should be called.

General usage information in the first half of the book includes the following chapters:

- Chapter 1, Documenting the User Interface
- Chapter 2, Content Formatting and Layout
- Chapter 3, Global Content
- Chapter 4, Content for Software Developers
- Chapter 5, Web Content
- Chapter 6, Indexing and Attributing
- Chapter 7, Tone and Rhetoric
- Chapter 8, Accessible Content

- Chapter 9, Common Style Problems
- Chapter 10, Grammatical Elements
- Chapter 11, Punctuation
- Chapter 12, List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

The usage dictionary, which begins on page 197, will be familiar to anyone who has used the second edition of the manual. This section contains technical terms, listed alphabetically, with explanations and examples of how to "correctly" use those terms. Frequently, the authors have included examples, both correct and incorrect.

Microsoft Press has included a CD inside the back cover of this book. On the CD you will find the following e-books in fully searchable PDF format:

- *Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications*, Third Edition
- *Microsoft Computer Dictionary*, Fifth Edition
- *Microsoft Encyclopedia of Networking*, Second Edition

If you are looking for THE definitive standard book that also contains best practices for content developers and editors who work with Microsoft applications, you need to look no further than this manual of style. In fact, my employer has chosen this manual as the primary style guide we use to create our company's client documentation.

Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, Third Edition

Microsoft Corporate Editorial Style Board. 2004. 3rd ed. Redmond: Microsoft Press. [ISBN: 0-7356-1746-5. 398 pages. \$29.99 (softcover).]

<http://www.microsoft.com/mspress/books/6074.asp>



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When Duck and Cover Won't Do: How to Get Ready for Your Future In Light Of Hurricane-Force Changes

by [Rahel Bailie](#), Region 7 Director-Sponsor

In a recent conversation with an STC community leader, we discussed the changing face of technical communication and the implication for STC members in his chapter. His particular geographic area has been especially hard hit, with a number of community members working survival jobs until they can re-enter the technical communication field, or holding onto jobs they'd otherwise have outgrown. Technical writers, he worries, are hunkering down in their cubicles, and he fears that by the time they come up for air, they will no longer have a skill set that has sufficient velocity in the marketplace.

To say that the changes in the field of technical communication are of hurricane proportions is not an exaggeration. Our workplaces, our careers, our peers in the STC network—if we haven't personally been affected, we have been affected indirectly. Some of us have seen our jobs swept away, others have had work debris dumped on them, and still others face huge clean-ups from projects gone awry because of ill-implemented changes.

What concerns me is that the response to this flurry of change is to sit tight and keep working. Watching Hurricanes Frances and Ivan sweep through the Caribbean and across Florida, we saw the CNN reports of people jumping to action: boarding up the windows to protect their homes and then getting out of the storm's projected path. It involves a lot of hard work, and a fast response, but the pay-off is to get to safety to be in a position to bounce back. When we see the eye of a storm moving toward us, is it in our best interests to sit tight and wait it out? Or should we be hustling to move our skill sets into a safer zone—one where we'll be able to bounce back once the worst of the economic storm has passed?

Economists talk about how, as the jobs we know move around the globe, we must be prepared to "move up the value chain." This means that we need to look at adding more value as strategic contributors. How we can do this is to look up the technical communication profession chain and see what more we can do. For example: Writers can look at other content development skills that bring more value to the workplace or expand their skill set to usability practices. Editors can look at the localization and internationalization field to

see where they could add skills. Marcom writing could expand to a broader set of communication products. Departments can learn how to use content management systems to add value to their work. Usability folks can apply their principles to interactive design. Help writers can expand their horizons to interactive design. In other words, we can look for the logical expansion of our skill sets, and for each of us that will be a unique path.

How we come out on top of the professional hurricane isn't by staying in our cubicles with our noses to the grindstone. We can protect our careers and our futures through continual professional development, networking, and life-long learning. We can learn a lot about what we want to do—or even about what we may want to eliminate as a career enhancement—by staying informed about developments in related fields, by attending STC meetings to network with our peers (and the peers with whom we'd like to keep company), and by continually gaining and honing new skills. It's the surest way to survive the storms that regularly sweep through the umbrella profession that we call technical communication.



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