



Forward

SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

The Newsletter of the UK Chapter of the STC

Volume V, No. 6

November, 2002

The Technical Writing Rule I Learned From Nursery School

About 15 years ago, an American clergyman published a book of thoughts and reflections which became an instant best-seller and is still in print.

In *All I Really Need To Know I Learned In Kindergarten*, Robert Fulghum reminded readers that some of things we are told when we are very small can be useful in later life as well.

The world would be a better place, thought Fulghum, if we always remembered rules like: “don’t hit people”, “don’t take things that aren’t yours”, and “say you’re sorry when you’ve hurt someone”.

Wouldn’t it be wonderful for the future of the planet if governments adopted environmental policies based on principles such as “put things back where you found them” and “clean up your own mess”?

When my own children were smaller, they too attended nursery schools, and I believe that their early experience of playing, learning and sharing with other children was very important for them. When I would collect them at the end of the nursery day, I picked up one or two things from their teachers that were important for me too. One of the phrases I heard then has stuck in my mind, and sounds like it could well have come from Fulghum’s

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Forward is the official newsletter of the UK Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

It is published six times each year: January, March, May, July, September and November.

Please send articles, letters, comments, and other items for inclusion in the newsletter to the editors by the beginning of a publication month.

Chapter Officers 2002-2003

Chapter President

Mark Clifford
markhclifford@hotmail.com

First Vice President

Liz Hale
liz35.hale@virgin.net

Second Vice President

Tina Hoffman
thoffman@pathtrace.com

Secretary

Vacancy

Treasurer

Brian Keith
Brian.Keith@compassmc.com

Membership

Mick Robinson
mick@mickrobinson.org.uk

Job Bank, Education, & Academic

Briana Wherry
briana.wherry@hamptonctc.co.uk

Competitions

Cynthia Thompson
cynthiat@nortelnetworks.com

Program and meetings

Tina Hoffman
thoffman@pathtrace.com

Legal advisor

Paul Bakker
paul@petecom.co.uk

Web site

Birgit Bolata
birgit@bolata.co.uk

Newsletter and PR

Birgit Bolata
birgit@bolata.co.uk

and

David Farbey
david@farbey.co.uk

UK Chapter Web site

<http://www.stc-europe.org/uk/>

UK Chapter Discussion List

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/stc_uk_discuss/

List Owner

David Farbey
david@farbey.co.uk

STC Web site

<http://www.stc.org>

The Technical Writing Rule I Learned From Nursery School (cont)

book. It has become something of a touchstone for me in my recent work as a technical writer for a software development team, as it can guide me in deciding what to put in to the documentation, and what to leave out. Occasionally, the software developers where I work are rushing to push their latest and greatest feature out to an unsuspecting user community. Their enthusiasm has a price - there are always dozens of warnings and caveats to go with anything that hasn't been thoroughly tested.

"If the users do *A*, then they mustn't do *B*, or if they do *C* they shouldn't do *D*, unless they increase their RAM and upgrade their processor. And if they try it on Linux it will probably crash. And it all needs to be in the Release Notes. By yesterday."

"But why?" I ask plaintively. "If this feature's not ready, why put it in? And if you need to put it in so you can test it, why tell the users about all these problems that just make our product look bad?"

Sometimes I convince them, and sometimes I don't. I only wish they could have heard what I heard the nursery teacher say that day:

"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all".

*David Farbey,
Senior Member, UK Chapter*

Chapter meetings in 2003

The new year is just a few weeks away and we are planning a varied program of events for 2003, ranging from seminars with experienced speakers to social events with opportunities for networking and fun. There will be meetings on weekday evenings as well as weekends to make them accessible to more members. Full details of the meetings will be in the January newsletter and will be mailed to the Chapter discussion list and posted on the Web site.

We are aiming to put together a program that we hope you will enjoy. If you have ideas to share or would like to propose a particular topic for one of our meetings, please email Tina at thoffman@pathtrace.com.

Adding Value for Members - changes to the STC Web site

by Bonnie Graham, Region 8 Director-Sponsor
with additional information by Chris Benz, Region 2
Director-Sponsor

Changes on the STC Web site

By now, you have probably noticed that the STC Web site (<http://www.stc.org>) has a members-only section. STC has moved certain site content behind a secure login based on your membership number and a password assigned by the main STC office. (If you have not noticed these changes yet, I encourage you to do so-the site contains a lot of useful information, no matter what your involvement with STC.)

In January 2001, the STC Board of Directors voted to change Society policy to allow chapters to restrict certain information to members only. The board evaluated the variety of information available on chapter sites, and decided that some of that information could legitimately be placed behind a login. After further discussion, the board decided to extend that change in policy to the main STC Web site as well.

Primarily, the items now restricted to STC members only are the Society-level job listings and the membership directory.

Why restrict any information on the site?

The simple answer is that if STC provides all services for free, then there's no real reason to join STC. Without members, STC cannot provide any services, including those intended to benefit the general public. Also, by moving the membership directory behind a secure login, STC helps protect your privacy from non-members.

Why not restrict all information on the site?

Part of the answer lies in recruiting. If potential members can't learn anything about STC, it reduces the chance that they will join. Another part of the answer lies in the STC's status as a charitable organization, as defined by the United States Internal Revenue Service (IRS).

STC Executive Director Bill Stolgitis has provided the following background and insight regarding the STC's charitable status in the US, and the implications for restricting services to members:

Background

Since 1968, when STC was reorganized as a 501(c)(3) charity (in the US), STC has devoted the substantial part of its efforts to activities within the scope of its charitable purposes. These activities (for example, publications, conferences, research, scholarships) can be found in STC's Articles of Incorporation and its bylaws.

In keeping with its charitable status, STC has made these services available to members and non-members alike. The IRS, however, recognizes that while conducting the daily business of a charity, there will be some activities essential to the charity's well-being that are not, strictly speaking, charitable in nature. The IRS allows these activities so long as they do not constitute a substantial part of the organization's activities.

For STC, such activities have included selling advertising (magazine and journal), renting the mailing list, and providing employment information (clearly not within the scope of STC's charitable purposes). These activities have always constituted an insubstantial part of STC's total activities.

Restricting Services to Members Only

STC is fully engaged in many activities that are within the scope of its charitable purposes. And these services must be made available to members and non-members alike. As mentioned above, STC is also allowed to engage in activities that are not within the scope of its charitable purposes so long as these activities are "insubstantial" (a minor financial burden). These non-charitable services may be restricted to members only.

Thus, STC has rearranged the site at <http://www.stc.org> to better expose the value of being an STC member. Each STC chapter may also choose to limit access to various services it provides, as long as doing so does not create an undue burden on the chapter's finances. However, actions that contribute directly to STC's charitable purpose (such as seminars or chapter meetings) may not be restricted to members only, although members may be given preferential pricing.

If you have any questions on this subject please contact the Region 2 Director-Sponsor, Chris Benz, by email at: cjbenz@unforgettable.com

Chapter New Year Dinner

Fed up with turkey and mince pies? Can't bear to listen to another rendition of Jingle Bells?

Then why not join us for the New Year's Dinner of the UK chapter of the Society for Technical Communication in January? The dinner will be held in central London (venue to be confirmed) on Saturday, 25 January 2003.

The event will provide an opportunity to meet other STC members (and their partners) in a relaxed atmosphere. Get together with old friends and meet new colleagues to share your ideas and experiences. Enjoy a glass of wine and a good meal and find out about STC events and meetings planned for 2003.

To assist us with the booking of a suitable location, please email Tina Hoffman at thoffman@pathtrace.com if you are interested in attending this event.

Have a good Festive Season, and see you in the New Year.

Membership News



Mick Robinson, Chapter Membership Officer, reports:

Our membership numbers are recovering nicely and we're comfortably over 100 members as of the end of October.

I'd like to welcome to our new members:

Sheryl Burdess of Foulsham, Norfolk

Beth Dixon of Aylesbury

Sara Dunn of London

Brian Langley of Coventry

Viv Matthew of London

Sandy Vaughan also of Aylesbury (same company as Beth)

Steve Warren of Southampton

Also welcome to two members transferring into our chapter: **Paul Hessian** of Manchester (an STC member since 1993, which makes him among our longest serving members) and **Flora Graham** of Birmingham.

For any membership questions, please email me at: mick@mickrobinson.org.uk

STC's 50th Annual Conference

STC's 50th Annual Conference will be held at the Wyndham Anatole Hotel in Dallas, Texas, May 18-21, 2003. Members can register for the conference using the form provided in the Preliminary Program, which will be mailed with the February issue of Intercom, or online at <http://www.stc.org>. Online registration will open in mid-February.

Full-conference and one-day registration rates appear below. The last day to register for the conference at the *Advance* rate is May 2.

Registration type	Advance	On-site
Member	\$420	\$495
Non-Member	\$560	\$635
Student/Retired	\$100	\$155
Member 1-day	\$220	\$295
Non-Member 1-day	\$290	\$365
Student/Retired 1-day	\$100	\$155

Cherryleaf created by former staff of Digitext

To the surprise of many people in the UK technical writing industry, Digitext ceased trading in October of this year. Some people who had booked places at Digitext seminars were unaware of this development, and only found out about the closure from correspondence on the ISTC discussion list.

Apart from training, consulting, recruitment, and documentation design, Digitext had been involved in organising the annual European On-Line Help Conference for several years.

A new company, Cherryleaf, has been set up by former staff of Digitext's training and document design groups. The company's Web site is at: <http://www.cherryleaf.com>.

Ellis Pratt, Sales Director for Cherryleaf, said they hoped their Web site could be a useful resource for

specialist information aimed at those involved in online help development. As an example, Ellis explained that the site had information about Microsoft security alerts relating to its online help program.

Cherryleaf announced that it had signed an agreement with eHelp Corporation, to provide training courses in the use of RoboHelp. It has also announced a partnership with RepubliCorp to promote the RePublico suite. RePublico enables an organisation to capture its knowledge assets and deliver them effectively through an intranet or on paper.

Cherryleaf has locations in or near Brighton, Heathrow and Oxford. The company is focusing on the UK market, but will also offer services throughout Europe.

Christine's Letter from America

Christine Woskett, formerly a member of the UK Chapter and Editor of Forward, moved to the far north-western corner of the USA a year ago to work at Microsoft. We are delighted to publish Christine's "Letter from America".

Well, I've been here a year already and, as reported in the last issue of Forward, I've got engaged and bought a house. May was a busy month: after those two major events we escaped to California to see the sights of San Francisco and then relax on the beach in Santa Cruz. Our wedding will be here next July then we're planning to spend our honeymoon in Alaska.

I'm working in the Developer Division at Microsoft as a Programmer/Writer. This is my first experience of working for such a large company with so many writers and editors. Although I'm part of the overall Visual Studio team, I'm also part of a feature team, which feels much friendlier and more familiar.

In recent months I've experienced two of the major annual events at Microsoft: the company meeting and Halloween. The annual meeting was held at the baseball stadium in Seattle and attended by around 19,000 employees. Halloween is another huge event because many employees bring their children to work to trick-or-treat around the offices. It's warm and dry so

the children don't have to cover their costumes with a winter coat, and office doors are much closer together than house doors so they collect a lot more candy in a short distance.

I'm still active in the STC, attending chapter meetings and judging some competition entries. The Puget Sound chapter is one of the largest and the monthly meetings usually attract 100+. One difference that I've noticed compared with the UK chapter is the number of jobseekers who attend chapter meetings, both current technical communicators who are looking for work and people in other careers who want to move into technical communication. If you're ever in the Puget Sound area on the third Tuesday of the month, do come along: you'll be very welcome.

Happy Holidays!



Milano 2003 Roundtable - a special conference for teachers of technical writing

The Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) and the Association for Teachers of Technical Writing (ATTW) International Committee has planned a roundtable conference for Monday, 30 June 2003, Milan, Italy, in conjunction with FORUM 2003 (<http://www.intecom.org/>).

Call for proposals

The Roundtable's purpose is to exchange ideas about methods for teaching and perspectives on constructing academic degree programs in technical and scientific communication.

The roundtable will feature a series of sessions. Each session will focus on a distinct issue involving the content and delivery of academic programs in technical and scientific communication. International differences in these programs are a particular focus. The sessions will address programs that prepare either professional technical writers or of technical professionals who write as a major part of their job.

We especially welcome proposals from a partnership of presenters representing two or more countries. Your proposal should be no more than 250 words. It should state the question you would raise in a 20-minute session and the approaches you would take to leading a discussion of that question. As with all CPTSC meetings, sessions will consist primarily of discussion by participants; no formal papers will be read. Instead, each of a session's presenters will be given 5 minutes to expand or reiterate points from the written proposal. After all of a session's presenters have had 5 minutes, the remainder of the session will be devoted to discussion. (Examples of CPTSC proposals and papers can be found at <http://www.cptsc.org>. Click on "Conferences.")

Proposers should keep in mind that technical communication programs in Europe and North America differ in interesting but complementary ways. While programs at some North American universities have a history of several decades, programs at European universities have often been submerged in business

schools and are only now emerging as clearcut programs, with varying levels of autonomy. Conversely, while European programs have long dealt with translation issues and international communication in their instruction, most programs in North America are only now becoming aware of the importance of including such matters in their program design and teaching.

Of course, many topics concerning instruction and program direction affect programs everywhere. Milano2003 presents a timely opportunity for trading know-how and arranging further contacts. In preparing your proposals, please consider that your audience will include persons from outside your continent and your native language and culture, as well persons from your own language and culture.

This event is scheduled for the day before general sessions begin at FORUM 2003, the every-three-year international meeting of technical communicators, to be held this time in Milan. We thus encourage attendees at FORUM 2003 to arrive in Milan early and join us for a discussion devoted specifically to academic programs.

Proposal deadline: 1 February 2003
Send your proposal via e-mail to
Bruce Maylath
CPTSC president
University of Wisconsin-Stout, USA
maylathb@uwstout.edu

For more information contact:
Bruce Maylath
Director, Program in Technical Communication
Department of English & Philosophy
P.O. Box 790
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI 54751-0790 USA
Tel.: (715) 232-1358
Fax: (715) 232-2093
E-mail: maylathb@uwstout.edu

STC Board Meeting September 2002

by Rob Houser, Region 3 Director-Sponsor
with additions by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

Membership, budget, and member services were the focus of the STC board of directors meeting in Boston, Massachusetts on September 26-28 2002. (The board meets three times each year-September, January, and May-in varying locations. The next January meeting will be in Austin, Texas.)

As with many organizations, STC is feeling the effects of a weak economy. Membership, the value of our investments, and conference attendance are all lower this year. To help face the challenges of this economy, the board spent a significant amount of time addressing ways to increase membership and improve the quality of member services.

Before the official meeting, the board held a workshop facilitated by John Nardone. John is a world-renowned expert in marketing. John led the board through brainstorming and discussions about the future of the Society. The board was very grateful to John for donating his time and talents to help the board think more creatively about the future of STC, and you will be hearing more about the results of that workshop in the near future.

The board took the following actions at the official meeting:

- Approved the budget for fiscal year 2003.
- Revised the way that the Society pro-rates dues. Dues will now be pro-rated by month rather than only at the end of the year. The effect on new members is that they can join at any time during the year and receive 12 months of membership.
- Changed the way that dues rebates will be paid to chapters for 2004 onwards. In the future, half of the rebate will be paid upon receipt and approval of a chapter's financial report and 990EZ (if applicable) and the remaining half will be paid the following January. The main reason this action was taken is to reduce the drain on the cash flow for the Society during the year. The Society office expects that the resulting effect on chapter finances will be minimal.
- Approved the new strategic plan. You can see the plan at http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/StrategicPlan.pdf.
- Approved previously committed support for INTECOM (The International Council for Technical Communication), an umbrella organization of 15 international societies focusing on technical communication, of which STC is the largest member.
- Increased support for Society representation at the standards organizations related to our profession: the National Information Standards Organization (NISO), the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C), and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO).
- Updated the Chapter Achievement Award to increase the profile of membership activities in chapters of all sizes. The revisions apply to chapters submitting this year (2002-2003), so chapter leaders should make sure to get a copy of the revised guidelines from the STC Web site or their Director-Sponsor.

In addition, the board discussed the following items:

- The Society Web site initiated the "members only" area starting 1 October 2002. The purpose of this move is to increase the value of membership in STC. STC will be monitoring the success of this effort closely over the next six months.
- Ways to increase the role of the Special Interest Groups (SIGs) in the Society. The SIGs represent the diversity of our membership and are important communities for technical communicators.
- Membership. You will likely see more of a focus on recruiting new members in the months to come. In preparation, start thinking about ways that you can help STC reach the many technical communicators who have not yet joined our community.

Candidates for STC Officers 2003

The STC Nominating Committee has published the list of Candidates for the 2003 Elections. They are as follows:

President* Thea Teich

First Vice President* Andrea L. Ames

Second Vice President* Sandra W. Harner, Deborah F. Sauer

Treasurer Mary Jo Stark (unopposed)

Director-Sponsors (one to be elected from each region listed, each for a three-year term):

Region 2 Victoria Koster-Lenhardt, Doreen A. Mannion

Region 3 Hary-Janos Bottka, Beth Tanner
Nominating Committee** (two to be elected, each for a two-year term):

Kathleen B. Aughey, Rita B. Johnson, Christopher Juillet, John O. Shipman

* The STC Bylaws specify that the second vice president automatically becomes first vice president the following year and president the year after that. Thus, second vice president is the highest office to which a member is routinely elected.

** Members of this year's nominating committee are Michelle Ratcliffe (manager), Sun coast chapter; M. Katherine Brown, Snake River chapter; Nan J. Fritz, Boston chapter; John V. Hedtke, Hoosier chapter; and Deirdre A. Murr, San Fernando Valley chapter.



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1/2 page	£25
Full page	£40

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