

December 2002

Volume 36 No 4



The San Diego
Signature

www.stc-sd.org

December Poll

As long as information such as chapter meeting details and announcements continues to appear on the chapter Web site, how often would you like the *Signature* online newsletter to be published?

- Monthly
 Bimonthly
 Quarterly

Submit

At the poll page, scroll down and use the message board to post your comments.

E-mail:
stcsignature@yahoo.com

Newsletter Staff

Publication Information

Advertising Information

Chapter Council

STC Mission Statement

San Diego Members:
To receive chapter e-mail, contact Lance-Robert at Lance.Robert@tarari.com.

 [Click for newsletter PDF](#)

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Visit the Society Web site at www.stc.org

Feature Article

The Art of Indexing: Establish Relationships and Then Divide

By Susan Self

Make indexing easier by creating Special Interest Groups, Small Towns, Neighborhoods, Orphans, Celebrities, and Commoners.

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Editor's Desk

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Great Reminders

By [Lana Walker-Helmuth](#), Managing Editor

As I look at my computer screen with a case of editor's block, I turn my attention to my inspirational wall calendar. "The greatest responsibility an individual assumes is to oneself," it states. The backdrop shows a rock climber in a precarious spread eagle between jutting rocks. His life clearly is in his own hands. Walter Hanig's article this month is a perfect example of this truth. [See [President's Podium](#).]

I appreciate reminders like that: I hold the key to my future. The new year, 2003, is only days away. Many will use this time to reflect on their lives and make resolutions. If you're like me, you may find it easy to set a goal but oh-so-hard to achieve it. I recommend a great book that explains from a brain development perspective why this happens and what to do about it—*The Pathfinder* by Nicholas Lore. It's the most informative book I've read in a long time on this subject.

Open Volunteer Positions

This announcement is in the [Meeting Review](#), but it bears repeating here. The San Diego chapter is looking for a member to volunteer as Vice President of Programs. This position requires you to arrange three chapter meeting programs (March, April, and May 2003). You'll also need to write a brief meeting announcement for the chapter newsletter (January through June) and the Web site, and prepare e-mails to chapter members announcing the meetings (January through June). If you're interested in this opportunity, contact Walter Hanig at wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu.

The chapter also needs someone to temporarily send chapter e-mail announcements. The volunteer needs to have access to an ISP that allows large mailings. If you can help, contact Lance-Robert at lance.robert@tarari.com. Also, if you aren't receiving chapter e-mails or have recently changed your e-mail address, let Lance know.

Happy Holidays!

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President's Podium



Score: Turk 1, Walter 0

By [Walter Hanig](#), President[Return Home](#)[Author Bio](#)[Administrative Council](#)

Good news: Walter didn't get laid off in October.

Bad news: Ericsson's entire R&D effort in San Diego is closing in phases, ending in June 2003.

So, my employment at Ericsson in San Diego ends April 30, 2003. Fortunately, I have a long time to plan and execute a job search, further cushioned by an excellent severance package. I thought I'd share my job search task list in the hope that it will provide others with some hints. Except for the first item, these are only roughly prioritized.

- **Keep doing the job that Ericsson's paying me to do.** From the perspective of technical communication, the San Diego area is a small town. Not everyone knows everyone, but the degree of separation is rarely more than one or two. So, if I'm applying for a job where you work, if you don't know me, you know someone who does. Because interviews take time and effort, you'll do an informal reference check first. And if I don't pass, I won't get an interview, regardless of my qualifications. The best thing I can do to ensure that I pass is continue to do my current job as well as I can. Attitude matters.
- **Tell everyone I can that I'm available.** This may seem obvious, but there used to be a tendency to view being laid off as some sort of personal failing. When an entire R&D group is toast, it's not personal.
- **Decide what sort of job I want.** Each of us has likely had multiple jobs, even if our job titles didn't show it. At various times, you've been a writer, information designer, desktop publisher, illustrator, editor, or project manager. Before I update my résumés, I have to decide which of these I want to include both in the résumé and my search process.
- **Update my résumé.** Although I customize my résumé for every position, I start with the same baseline. It includes every job, every task within each job, all the skills, and all the objectives. Using hidden text, I hide those that are least relevant or most distracting to a specific opening. Then, I save the result with a file name associated with the opening and company. Of course, if I'm sending a Word file, I need to delete the hidden text! When I update my resume, I need to treat

it as an audition, as a sample of my writing. So, besides checking grammar and spelling, I ensure that I add and use styles correctly. And I'll have someone whose opinion I value read it from a hiring perspective.

- **Line up references.** Get current addresses, including e-mail, phone numbers, and job titles. I'll tell them what sort of jobs I'm looking for and ask them to let me know if they hear of any.
- **Identify nonspecific job Web sites, and see what's available, both in my field(s) and related ones.** Companies that are looking for programmers to develop a product now will need writers soon. Why wait until they realize they have the need and post an opening? I'll post my résumé or résumés (for examples, one as a writer, another as a project manager) online. By doing so, companies that are reluctant to post openings can still find me.
- **Identify companies I'd like to work for.** Not every company uses monster.com or similar sites. Once I've identified these companies, I'll see if they have openings posted. Even if they don't, they may accept résumés for future openings. If it's a company where I already know someone, I'll ask them if they can see that my résumé gets to the hiring manager. There are few better references than a person already inside the target company.
- **Keep doing my job!** (See first bullet.)

I'm sure that I'll think of other things between now and next March or April when I expect to send that initial résumé. And I hope that you'll provide the tips that you've found to help your job searches.

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Conference



Region 8 Conference: Call for Volunteers

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Help make the conference a success! Contact Kathryn Munn at president@stc-berkeley.org.

The Region 8 Conference, "Around the World in T.C. Ways," will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada, January 12-14, 2003. Make the conference a great success by volunteering your talent and time.

Even if you don't plan to attend the conference you can make a contribution. Volunteer jobs look great on your résumé and give you an opportunity to meet and work with leaders in the profession and stretch your skills. Volunteers are needed for big and little jobs including:

- Publications and Publicity Committee Managers
- Conference Stem Managers
- Newsletter and Advertising Coordinators
- Webmaster and Web Committee members
- Conference Shopper
- Forms Designer and Database Coordinator
- Room Monitors and Table Hosts

For a complete list and description of each job, contact Volunteer Committee Chair Kathryn Munn at president@stc-berkeley.org.

Sign up to help today!

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New Members



Welcome to the San Diego Chapter!

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By [Simrita Dhir](#), VP-Membership

Interested in joining the STC? [Click here](#) for Society information.

Please welcome new members:

Miles Beauchamp
Steve P. Becker
Lee Bounds
Stephen Cheng

A big welcome also to the following members who have transferred from other chapters into the San Diego chapter.

Theresa M. Key
Gail F. Armstrong
Christine M. Abbot
John S.F. Graham
Nancy Shea
Donald S. Manweller

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Chapter Meetings

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December 11
meeting details](#)

Get That Job! Creative Résumés That Make You Stand Out

By Elaine Tsang and Silke Fleischer

Gain an edge over your competition by developing a résumé that attracts attention. In December, Silke Fleischer of eHelp Corporation will provide you with ideas, tips, and tools to help you get your résumé noticed immediately. Learn how you can convince your future employer of your great writing skills, technical knowledge, and creativity.

The following topics will be included:

- why standard resumes fail
- dos and don'ts for interactive resumes
- what to include
- how to distribute
- tips and tricks

The following tools will be covered:

- RoboHelp
- Word
- FrameMaker
- Photoshop
- RoboDemo

As a Product Manager at eHelp Corporation, Fleischer is a RoboHelp and RoboDemo expert who conducts product demonstrations and presentations at numerous industry events. Fleischer is a member of the STC and has demonstrated products at several industry events, including STC's 49th Annual Conference in 2002 and Digitext 2002.

She has also been a featured speaker at other national and international conferences, regional STC events, and chapter meetings.

A full copy of RoboDemo (value of \$899) will be given away, so mark your calendars for December 11.

Attendees: 48

November Meeting Review

By [Eric Hurd](#)

After yet another scrumptious dinner, chapter President Walter Hanig opened November's meeting by greeting all guests and members.

Announcements

After acknowledging some of the many STC-San Diego Chapter volunteers, Walter announced the need to fill the following roles.

- **Vice President-Programs.** Please contact [Walter Hanig](#) if you are interested in serving as VP-Programs. This position requires you to arrange chapter meeting programs for March through May 2003, to prepare meeting announcements for the chapter newsletter (January through June) and Web site, and prepare e-mails to the chapter announcing the meetings (January through June).
- **Temporary Master/Mistress of E-Mail.** This position involves distributing e-mail reminders just before our meetings. The volunteer must have access to an ISP that allows large mailings. Contact [Lance-Robert](#) if interested.
- **Resume Reviewers.** Volunteers with hiring experience are needed to review résumé of writers who are looking for jobs. If you are interested, contact Ken Wilson.

Walter also announced the following.

- Contact [Lance-Robert](#) if you would like to be included in the STC San Diego e-mail list. The list is used to distribute news of upcoming events.
- STC International is conducting a series of mid-day phone conferences. There is a flat fee per phone connection. Please contact [Audrey Johns](#) if you are interested in hosting a call or attending. [See [Professional Development](#) article.]
- A headhunter is seeking a medical writer. Please contact [Walter](#) if you are interested or know a medical writer who is looking for work.

After Walter's announcements, members seeking work announced their credentials and types of jobs desired, after which those seeking new employees announced positions. On a hopeful note, it was nice to see more employers seeking talent than employees seeking jobs. Let's hope this trend continues.

Signature Copy Editor Receives Plaque

Rick Bradshaw, last year's *Signature* editor, presented a plaque to newsletter Copy Editor Beth Vollbach. The newsletter won an award in the 2001-2002 STC International Newsletter Competition and received one plaque. The chapter ordered additional plaques to present to the copy editors. (Copy Editor Pam Fridie was unable to attend the presentation.)

Competition Exhibit

The STC International Competition winning entries exhibit made a stop at Wednesday's meeting. Attendees were treated to many fine examples of technical communication.

Guest Speaker: Identity Crisis

The key speaker for the evening was Bonni Graham, our STC Region 8 director-sponsor and owner of Manual Labour, a technical documentation outsource provider. Her topic, "Identity Crisis—The Persona as a Tool for Formulating and Evaluating Information Designs," was delivered with an animated speaking style and great sense of humor to an eager crowd.

What is a persona?

A persona is a character biography that is used as a tool for understanding and writing for your target audience. It is as if the writer took an individual from the target demographic and set him or her down on paper.

A persona is:

- a carefully defined character biography, including details about an entire person
- created in part from marketing demographics; observations of friends, family, and co-workers; and an anthropological/sociological understanding of the adult learner
- given a name
- precise rather than accurate, typically a stereotype of the target audience

How is a persona useful?

Persona creation is useful for the following reasons.

- Although only a percentage of the users may actually read your documentation, a positive user experience with a manual not only affects the user as a potential repeat buyer but affects the advice they give their friends and family.
- It is easier to write for a single person than for an entire group.
- Persona creation fills the "black hole" at the beginning of a project when lack of information about the product makes it difficult to write help.

- A persona will answer questions about scope and end feature debates.

How is a persona created?

This is how to create a persona.

1. Collect information from three demographics: those that Marketing provides; those from primary and secondary resources; and those created when there is a lack of information.
2. Gather information about the users. Look at existing documentation that was written for the group; gather information from magazine articles and people around you; then note all characteristics, and rate how common they are.
3. Extrapolate from the demographics. If the demographic is composed of males aged 25 to 35, choose a specific age such as 32. If the typical user is a college graduate, choose a school and specific degree and major.
4. Include information that describes their personality, learning style, and background.
5. Add fiction to flesh out the character. A single page is a good length. Use clip art to zero in on the character.

How is a persona used?

A persona helps you defend decisions when you design documentation. The following are types of decisions that can be made using a persona:

- depth of information that won't make them feel dumb
- organization of information
- format of the deliverable (poster, quick start, manual, reference guide)
- layout and font choice
- terminology use in headings and index entries

Tips

During the course of the presentation, Bonni fielded several questions from the audience, the points of which are summarized here.

- Marketing people will be more than happy to provide you with demographic information.
- If you recognize that different deliverables for the same project may be useful to specific groups, create a persona (e.g., posters with big graphics for a user with little technical experience or reference guides for a

savvy user with a short attention span) for each.

- If there will be more than one audience for the document, create a persona for each and prioritize them. But don't go overboard. If a persona can represent the majority of your users, stick with one. It will be easier to write documentation for one persona.
- When considering marketing information, keep in mind that the purchaser of the system may not be the user. Also keep in mind that the majority of the users of the system may not be the majority of the users of your help. Create personas that represent the people who will be using your help the most.
- Don't worry if reviewers pick at your details. It means they read it.
- If you are not sure, just write it incorrectly. This will catch the reviewers' attention and get them more involved.
- Personas are a hybrid of a biographical sketch and a resume, personality plus expertise.

Additional Information

For a list of related books and other technical writing information, visit

www.manuallabour.com/symposia.htm.

For a site that will help you understand the adult learner, visit

www.vark.com.

Wrap Up

Walter thanked Bonni for a terrific speech and conducted the monthly raffle drawing for a Wally Buck. This month's winner was Nadine Barter Bowlus.

Also, special thanks to all who helped rebag the competition winning entries.

Hope to see you all next month!

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Next Meeting Details


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Our presenter:
Silke Fleischer of
eHelp, "Get That Job!"
[See Meeting Preview.](#)

RSVP: Make your
dinner reservation by
5 p.m. Sunday,
December 8. See
details below.

December Meeting Time and Place

By Nadine Barter Bowlus

Date: Wednesday, December 11, 2002**Time:**

5:30—Networking

6:15—Dinner

6:45—Opening Remarks and Announcements

7:00—Presentation

Place: Wyndham Garden Hotel, 5975 Lusk Blvd., Sorrento Mesa. Located east of I-805, at the corner of Lusk Blvd. and Mira Mesa Blvd. (behind Chili's Restaurant). Hotel Phone: 858-558-1818

Menu: Buffet

- Tossed Caesar Salad
- Fresh Fruit and Berries
- Chicken Sesame
- Chicken Stir Fry
- Fussilli Pasta with Fresh Herbs and Vegetables
- Sauteed Italian Vegetables
- Warm Dinner Rolls and Butter
- Dessert Table (Chef's Choice)
- Coffee, Tea, and Iced Tea

Cost (Dinner and Presentation):

- Members \$20*
- Nonmembers \$25*
- Students \$15*

*Add \$5 if you do not make a reservation by 5 p.m., Sunday, December 9.

- Unemployed members \$15**
- Unemployed nonmembers \$20**

**To receive this special rate, you need to make a reservation by 5 p.m., Sunday, December 9.

Cost (Presentation Only—no reservation required):

- Members \$10
- Nonmembers \$15

RSVP: Make your reservation online (preferred) by 5 p.m. Sunday, Sunday, December 9. Visit <http://www.stc-sd.org> and click on **Reservations**. Or phone your reservation to

(619) 525-7716.

Reservations are required if you choose the dinner option to ensure enough food is provided.

Cancellation:

If you need to cancel a reservation, please send your notice to Christopher Bates at christopherbates@earthlink.net.

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Advice

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Getting Effective Document Reviews

By [Suzanne Hardy](#)

If you've ever had trouble getting the document reviews you need, you are not alone. Most writers really do want feedback—the kind that prevents inaccuracies, catches embarrassing errors, and helps clarify content. We're not perfect by any means, and we rely on our peers and subject-matter experts to catch changes we didn't hear about, information gaps, and misinterpretations.

Many times the reviewers we rely on are already backed against the wall with deadlines and their own workloads. Documents reviews are viewed as extra work that get only a quick scan or, even worse, are put off entirely. To avoid this scenario, here are a few tips.

- **Kick off a successful review by explaining to your reviewers what you want them to look for.**

A document (or stack of documents) can look pretty intimidating if a reviewer has no idea what to look for. Is this a completely new document? If not, specifically what changed? Should they walk through all the steps or simply verify syntax and terminology?

Include a brief form that lists the parts to review (such as screen shots and procedures). Don't forget to provide a place for the reviewer to sign off—this lets people know you are serious about the quality of your reviews.

- **Don't take reviewers for granted.**

You probably already know that having a good working relationship with your reviewers is essential. If you respect their time and are gracious about feedback, reviewers will be more willing to help you. But it doesn't hurt to reiterate this point—don't take reviewers for granted.

- **Consider time for review.**

A major hurdle to reviews is often the reviewer's lack of time. Ideally, document reviews should be part of the reviewer's project schedule so that the task is expected (and the reviewer can be held accountable if he or she doesn't complete it).

If your R&D Department would rather wing it, comprehensive reviews become more challenging. One approach is setting a reasonable deadline for the review and checking in with the reviewer halfway through the time period. Do they have any questions or need more

time? Empathize with their schedule, but let them know you are on a deadline too.

If all else fails, schedule a meeting, and walk through the documents together. This approach can be time consuming, so you'll have to stay focused and try to avoid getting off topic.

- **Finally, if a reviewer simply can't or won't give you his or her time, you may have to talk to your manager.**

Ask if there is someone else who can do the review or if your deadline can be extended. Writers need the support of their managers to make document reviews a priority.

Sometimes, reviews aren't as easy as dropping off documents on an engineer's desk and getting great feedback by the due date. It can take a little more work and even some creativity. We can't do our jobs without our reviewers, so it's worth it to find effective ways to work together.

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Professional Development


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Remember: You need to reserve your spot seven days in advance.

Conference rooms needed: Anyone volunteering a conference room and speakerphone participates for free. Please contact Audrey.

Take Advantage of STC Telephone Seminars

By [Audrey Johns](#), VP-Professional Development

Here are great opportunities for professional development. STC is sponsoring telephone seminars for \$145 per site. For details, see <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>.

The San Diego chapter is arranging conference rooms (with speakerphones) for those who would like to get together with others to listen (and save money!). The cost is only \$10 per member.

Registration is required at least seven days in advance. E-mail Audrey Johns at audrey.1031@att.net or call her at (858) 481-8596 to confirm your attendance.

***Time:** All seminars are from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m., PST

Seminar	Speaker	Date/Time*	Location
Finding Work in Troubled Times	Douglas Florzak	12/13, Fri	Ericcson (subject to change)
A Brief, Comprehensive Indexing Primer	Seth Maislin	12/17, Tue	TBD
Organizing and Leading a Software User Interface Design Team	Diane Feldman and Carla Merrill	01/8, Wed	TBD
Using Personas to Bring Your Users Into the Development Process	Whitney Quesenbery	01/15, Wed	TBD
Creating Persuasive Executive Summaries	Stacia D. Kelly	02/5, Wed	TBD
Fast and Easy Time Management	John Hedtke	02/13, Thu	TBD
Making the Complex Clear and Pretty	Phylise Banner	03/12	TBD
Evaluating an Index (even if you only have 5 minutes)	Seth Maislin	03/19	TBD

***Time:** All seminars are from 10:00 to 11:30 a.m., PST

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Mail for the Muse

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Send your letters to Dear Muse at stcsignature@yahoo.com. We guarantee your confidentiality!

Muse, the inspiration that motivates a poet, artist, or thinker.

Dear Muse: Real Advice for Real People (Sorta)

Dear Muse,

A developer I work with says that we writers don't represent her work accurately. She asked to have the source files to my docs so she could "fix" them. The idea galls me. Not only do I work hard to represent the product accurately to the user, I also think she believes anyone can write these books. I thought of letting her have the books because I know she'd mess up and learn a lesson from it, but I'm not sure. What should I do?

Bugged

Dear Bugged,

Writing is a profession that takes a lifetime to learn. We writers practice our craft every day. Those who don't write, such as your developer, only see that we make writing look easy. It would be tempting to hand off your source files to this person just so she can see how "easy" our work really is, but I don't recommend that. In the end, you would spend more time cleaning up the damage than you would feeling vindicated.

Instead, try a diplomatic approach. Explain that writers use a writing style that is not easy to replicate. Tell her that you are trained to write books just like she is trained to write code. Finally, ask her to make a list of the things she'd like to see in the books, and then do your best to add them.

If all of this placating and humoring doesn't work, say something like this:

"You want to fix the docs? Great. While you're at it, I'll fix some things I don't like about the product itself. You wouldn't mind if I tweaked your source code, would you?"

Muse

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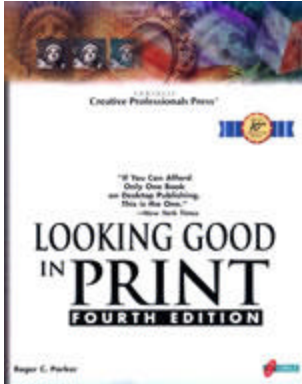
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Book/Software Review

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Looking Good in Print

Review by [Patricia Ray](#)

Looking Good in Print isn't your average desktop publishing manual. Yes, it covers the usual topics: type, graphic design, illustrations, and color. However, Parker extends far beyond those basic ideas.

Throughout the book, he gives general information, design guidelines, and specific information for different types of documents. The book contains many pictures and examples that are extremely helpful.

At the end of the book is an entire chapter on design pitfalls and another chapter with *before* and *after* examples demonstrating the principles he covers in the book.

By
Roger C. Parker

Parker starts with general information such as typeface selection, leading, and white space. The more technical aspects of type such as compression, reversal, and setting type along a path are also covered.

Paraglyph Press
 432 pages,
 paperback, approx.
 \$25

Then he goes into the graphic design of a page. He covers forms of white space, sinks rules, borders, boxes, screens, and bleeds. He provides extensive information on photographs, illustrations, clip art, information charts, and diagrams. He gives guidelines for selecting artwork, editing it, and placing it on the page. In addition, he gives some details on choosing and editing photographs.

He covers picking a color scheme for your document, how to work with spot color, and color caveats. He refers both to using color in your software and how it interacts with the commercial printing process.

He then provides detailed design information for different types of printed materials, including newsletters, catalogs, business cards, menus, and order forms. Here are some highlights:

- Use a consistent design for your newsletter nameplate to produce immediate recognition.
- Plan for ads. He demonstrates several layouts that place ads in publications while ensuring that your readers see everything without becoming frustrated.
- Use a grid to lay out your ad, even if it's a small one. He shows several different methods of layout.
- Use borders to separate the ad from the text. They can be rules, white space, or background.

- Brochures usually have a long shelf life so place material that changes frequently into product sheets.
- Make the size of the logo proportional to the rest of the information.
- Use rules, screens, etc., to effectively set off the message area of the letterhead.

Again, I find the extensive use of graphic examples to be especially useful. I consider this book a very worthwhile addition to your reference bookshelf.

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Humor

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Letter to Young Technical Writer Comments on Profession

By [Karen Field](#)

I received a letter recently from someone just starting out as a technical communicator. She was clearly exuberant with enthusiasm for her new profession. In my return letter, I answered her questions as honestly as I could without extinguishing the flames of the fire in her belly. Here is a copy of my letter to her, with translations for the more seasoned tech writers among us.

My Dear Friend,

It was so nice to receive your letter upon your graduation. I will try to answer some of your questions about your new profession here.

You correctly stated that a technical communications degree will give you an edge as you begin your job search. *(Translation: In this job market, your degree and a quarter will get you a cup of coffee.)*

Indeed, technical writing is a noble profession with ample recognition. We technical communicators transform the complex into the simple, the obscure into the relevant. Even though technical writers don't receive the acclaim that subject-matter experts do, our work is work that all members of the product development team value. *(Translation: Recognition? For tech writers? When was the last time you heard of a tech writer receiving the Nobel prize or even a byline?)*

It is true that as a tech writer, you will be producing documents that reflect your style. In the books and online help you write, readers will hear and appreciate your individual writing voice. *(Translation: Make sure your voice is one of an eighth-grade reader. And remember those big words you learned in college composition? Forget 'em.)*

You are, of course, correct in thinking that technical documents are necessary reading. Most people open the product, find the manual, and sit down to read it cover to cover right there. *(Translation: One user told me that my installation manual made excellent lining for her cat's litter box.)*

Technical writing is one of the few writing professions that pays the bills, it's true. Unlike poets, essayists, or fiction writers, technical writers make a nice living. It is work that is high in nonmonetary ways as well. *(Translation: That's why*

Barbara Kingsolver still writes technical manuals, despite her success as a fiction writer and essayist, right? And why she once referred to her first profession as "toiling away in my cube.")

Well, dear friend, I hope you enjoy the career path set before you. It is certainly one that will last a lifetime. *(Translation: Despite its flaws, I do love this profession. Why else would I poke fun at it in a humor column every month?)*

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Introductions

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To reach global markets means going beyond translation, says San Diego expert

By [Michael Abrams](#)

This lesson from the annals of international misunderstanding comes silently from **Claudia J. Kellersch**. With an impish smile breaking out, she curls her index finger till it meets the thumb, while she raises the remaining digits in a three-fingered fan.

When a cabbie flashes that at you on a crowded street in Berlin or Freiburg, it doesn't mean you're A-OK. Instead, it means that the cabbie is certain that you are an opening in the rump unmentionable in polite conversation, Claudia says.

That's funny. But the joke was on the United States company that peppered the product documentation of a software package it was newly exporting to Germany with the unfortunate hand sign. Worse yet, the symbol was embedded in the graphical user interface of the software itself. It appeared in popup menus and toolbars, guaranteeing that clients in Germany would regularly be reminded of who really is a you know what. The fix meant rewriting the source code and recompiling, and that ran into money.

Claudia is a high-tech translator, conference interpreter, and consultant on product internationalization and localization. She moved to San Diego last February to be with her husband, Blair, a scientist who designs oceanographic equipment.

Claudia first arrived in the United States in 1993, after graduating from the University of Heidelberg with masters degrees in Simultaneous Conference Interpretation and Technical Translation. Microsoft moved her to the Seattle area to join in the German localization effort for Excel version 5.

A year later, Claudia set up her own business, German™, which she now runs out of an office in her home in La Jolla. She has counted among her clients companies from Adobe to Iomega.

Business remains great, she says, despite the tech downturn, as American companies look to bolster revenues by focusing on Germany, the biggest single national market in Europe.

Claudia's skill set goes far beyond translating documentation, which is itself an art, to the more complex task of helping United States companies avoid the pitfalls of ignoring German national, regional, and local sensibilities. She also assists vendors in meeting medical software testing requirements.

It's not just United States companies that get tripped up.

Most Germans speak pretty good English; but that advantage blew up in the face of a manufacturer of staubsaugers, or vacuum cleaners (literally "dust suckers"). The German marketing team, overconfident of its English knowhow, cleared ad copy that ran in United States magazines and proudly boasted about one of the new machines: "It really sucks!"

Claudia is new to San Diego but not to STC. She joined the Puget Sound Chapter of STC shortly after setting up her company, when STC held its annual conference in Seattle in 1996. So Seattle's loss is our gain, and that's A-OK with me!

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Press Release



Worst Manual Contest

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Submit your entry by January 31, 2003.

For contest rules, visit the Technical Standards Web site at

www.tecstandards.com.

See previous winners:

[.../2002winner.htm](#)

[.../2001winner.htm](#)

Just a reminder for the holiday season, when all else fails, read the manual.

Have you ever been so frustrated with a manual or set of instructions that you cursed the author and wished you had never bought the product in the first place?

Does this sound familiar? How about \$100 for your frustration?

Technical Standards, Inc. (TSI), a Southern California documentation services company, is offering \$100 for the winning entry in their third annual Worst Manual Contest.

Send a manual or set of instructions that is hard to understand, poorly written, or just plain wrong. Send it if it has bad grammar, too much legalese, is poorly translated, or has missing steps. If it is the worst entry, you will win \$100.

"We thought we would have fun with this contest. Everyone has had trouble with a manual," says Michelle Wier, Director of Operations of Technical Standards, Inc. "That's why we started our company. People like products they understand how to use, and good technical documentation reduces the need for technical support. That's why good manuals are so important."

You don't have to send the whole manual; excerpts of the worst parts are okay. The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2003, so check those holiday gifts for potential entries.

Entries must be in English. For complete contest rules, see the Technical Standards Web site at www.tecstandards.com. The winner will be announced on the TSI Web site on February 28, 2003.

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About the San Diego *Signature*

Signature is the newsletter of the San Diego Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit professional organization dedicated to educating and advancing the careers of technical communicators. Newsletters are published monthly during the chapter year (September through June).

STC has more than 25,000 members and 150 chapters nationwide. For more information about the San Diego Chapter visit our Web site at www.stc-sd.org or call our hotline at (619) 525-7716. Write to us at:

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Article Submission

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles to be considered for publication. Send your query and request for writer's guidelines to stcsignature@yahoo.com. Submission deadlines are the 1st of the month prior to the publication month. Publication is dependent on space availability.

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2002-2003 Council Members[Return Home](#)**Chapter President, Walter Hanig**wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu

Walter is a technical writing manager at Ericsson Wireless Communications and has been a council member since 1998, serving as VP-Finance.

VP-Finance, Lance -Robertlance.robert@tarari.com

Lance-Robert is a senior technical publications engineer at Tarari, Inc. in Rancho Bernardo.

VP-Membership, Simrita DhirSDhir@gers.com

Simrita is a technical writer at GERS, a leading supplier of software systems and e-business solutions for retailers.

VP-Professional Development, Audrey Johnsaudrey.1031@att.net

Audrey is a technical communications consultant in San Diego.

VP-Employment, Ken Wilsonkwilson@lgtechnology.com

Ken is a technical communications consultant in Carlsbad. He served in the East Bay Chapter as Employment Manager.

Newsletter Managing Editor, Lana Walker-Helmuthlwalker@designpro-inc.com

Lana is a proposal writer at MuniFinancial in Temecula. She wrote a monthly column and feature articles before becoming managing editor.

Newsletter Associate Editor, Sharon Bradshawsbradsh2@san.rr.com

Sharon is a senior technical writer at Dot Hill in Carlsbad. She wrote the monthly meeting review and other articles for the past two years.

Chapter Web Site Manager, Suzy Hosiesuzy@wote.com

Suzy is President/CEO of a technical communications business in Vista, Write on the Edge, Inc. She has also served as our chapter President and VP-Professional Development.

VP-Programs, Open Position[Return Home](#)

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Mission Statement

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Fall membership drive: Join now and save! [See details below.](#)

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STC Mission Statement

Our mission statement is: **Designing the future of technical communication**

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. STC is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Society membership provides opportunities for ongoing learning and professional networking. Through the efforts of a small, full-time staff and a large network of volunteers, STC promotes the public welfare by educating its members and industry about issues concerning technical communication.

- **Member:** \$125 per year (plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee)
- **Student Member:** \$50 per year (enrollment fee not required)

Join After October 1 and Save on Dues

As part of its annual fall membership drive, STC offers a special discount to new members who join the Society on or after October 1, 2002.

For the regular member rate of \$140 (\$125 for dues plus a one-time \$15 enrollment fee), new members will be credited with dues paid for the remainder of 2002 and for calendar year 2003. That's 15 months of Society membership for the price of 12.

Among the benefits of Society membership are subscriptions to *Intercom*, the Society's monthly magazine, published 10 times a year, and to *Technical Communication*, the Society's quarterly journal. These periodicals contain essential articles on the theory and practice of technical communication.

Other membership benefits include discounts on STC's annual conference, the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world; eligibility for association group rate insurance; and access to STC's special interest groups. For more information on these and other benefits, visit the STC Web

site at www.stc.org.

Please pass this article to a prospective member. To join STC, prospective members can fill out an electronic form or download a membership application at www.stc.org. Those who prefer to have a membership application mailed to them can request one from the STC office at the following address:

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