

December 2003

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The San Diego Signature



Award of Excellence 2003 Newsletter Competition

Feature Article

Documenting GUI Tasks

Problems With the "Structure-Oriented" Approach

By Susan Self

Engineers who have become technical writers--or writers experienced mainly in documenting hardware or command line interfaces--may not know how to proceed when faced with documenting software with a graphical user interface (GUI).

The weakness of this approach is that it puts a tremendous burden on the software user to figure out which command or set of commands should be used to perform a desired task.



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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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Publication Overview

Signature is a Web newsletter published by the San Diego Chapter, Society for Technical Communication (STC). It is issued ten times a year to more than 300 local technical communication professionals, managers, and educators. Other STC chapters, special interest groups, and related organizations also receive e-mail notification when each issue is posted. Because Signature is on the World Wide Web, readership is potentially unlimited.

Signature contains information produced by technical communicators for technical communicators. Advertising in Signature is the most direct way to reach the growing technical communications market in San Diego and the surrounding area.

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Signature is published every month except July and August. Each issue is posted on the Web within the first three days of the issue month. Closing date for advertising is the 10th of the prior month.

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Chapter President, Walter Hanig

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Walter is responsible for a project converting a large suite of internal and end-user documentation to structured FrameMaker 7 at NCR.

He has served the chapter as Finance Vice-President and Administrative Council jester for four years before last year's adventure as chapter president.

VP-Professional Development, Michelle Petersen

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Michelle is a senior technical writer at Alaris Medical Systems in Sorrento Mesa.

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Beth has a varied background in finance, accounting, and technical communications. She is a Senior Technical Writer at Intuit.

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

VP-Membership, Sue Heim

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Sue is a technical writing consultant in San Diego. She previously served in the San Diego Chapter as Vice President-Professional Development and as JobMail coordinator.

VP-Programs, Michael Cárdenas

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Michael is president of Multilingual Translations, Inc., a localization company headquartered in San Diego since 1985.

Newsletter Managing Editor, Catherine Robinson

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Catherine is a senior information engineer in the Teradata division at NCR. She has enjoyed contributing her time and efforts to STC in the capacity of judge of the technical writers' competition and proofreader of the monthly newsletter.

Newsletter Assistant Editor, Jennifer Mallory

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After Jennifer graduated with a degree in literature, she waited for the job offers to flood in. When the surprise and rejection wore off, she began a lengthy career in marketing and editing. Currently, Jennifer works as a Health Information Specialist II with the County of San Diego.

Chapter Web Site Manager, Kelley Wilson Mesterharm

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Kelley has an instructional and curriculum design background with experience in Web accessibility and usability.



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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.

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By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

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By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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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.

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The goals of STC include enhancing the professionalism of the members and the status of the profession; providing information through publications, reports, and conferences; and reporting new communication technologies, methods, and applications; among others.

In addition to the publications you will receive, you will have many opportunities to further your own education by attending dinner presentations, seminars, and conferences. You can submit your work in our annual competitions and receive recognition and awards from your peers. And you will have plenty of opportunity to network to meet fellow STC members.

Join After November 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 November 1, 2003.

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 2003 and for calendar year 2004. That's 14 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.

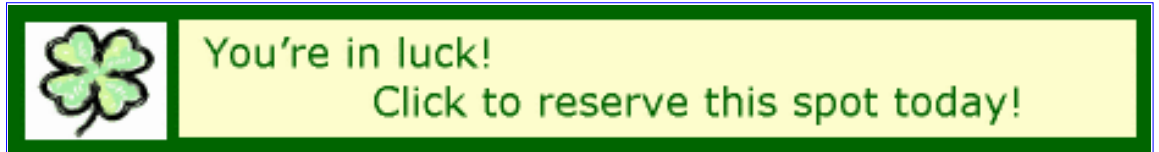
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Documenting GUI Tasks

Problems with the "Structure-Oriented" Approach

By [Susan Self](#)

Engineers who have become technical writers or writers experienced mainly in documenting hardware or command line interfaces may not know how to proceed when faced with documenting software with a graphical user interface (GUI). Their instinct is to produce parts lists or command descriptions. They proceed to dissect every menu in every window and describe the function of every command in neat little tables. This is the "structure-oriented" approach.

The weakness of this approach is that it puts a tremendous burden on the software user to figure out which command or set of commands should be used to perform a desired task. A user typically has a task in mind and turns to the documentation to scan a list of tasks to find the one that matches the pattern in mind. With "structure-oriented" documentation, the user has to scan through many tables of commands tables organized not by topic, but sequentially according to their occurrence in a menu or interface. Finding an appropriate command for a task this way is tedious, time consuming, and difficult. The experience is equivalent to going to a restaurant and being served all the ingredients of a meal, then having to assemble them and cook the meal oneself.

The structure-oriented approach becomes even more problematic for users when the software application is very large and configurable and entails many smaller tasks to achieve the larger goals of using the tool. In my career, I have twice inherited structure-oriented documents for complex software applications. One tool was for building GUIs, and the other was for planning and simulating cellular networks. In both cases, the product managers were complaining that customers found it hard to figure out how to use the tool. My job was to convert these documents into task-oriented descriptions of the tools and to help users find their way through a sequence of tasks to achieve their goals.

The Task-Oriented Approach

Define GUI tasks. How do you define GUI tasks? I start with the commands in the menus and generate task titles that begin with gerunds. For example, for the Load Configuration command in a File menu, I make a heading called "Loading a Configuration." Then I make higher-level headings under which I group lower-level tasks that are related. For example, for a Problem List Viewer, I have the heading "Managing Window Configurations," under which I have the task sections "Loading a Configuration," "Saving a Configuration," "Saving a Configuration under a New Name," and "Deleting a Configuration." These groupings are rather obvious.

Sometimes I need to play with a tool for a while to understand the function of a command and the tasks in which it is used so I can find an appropriate group for it.

Organize groups of tasks. After I have grouped all the tasks, I organize the groupings into the approximate sequence in which the user will perform the tasks. For example, an introductory section might describe starting and closing down the application and basic configuration tasks to make it fully usable. Often several sets of basic tasks must follow in sequence to complete a goal, so I put these together in a large chunk. In other chunks, I group the less essential or optional tasks, such as customizing the tool display or using special features.

Create the procedures. I find that it is easy to map structure-oriented command descriptions into tasks and then shift around the existing blocks of text into the new organization of the document. After that, I massage the old text and start creating the procedures for the GUI tasks by experimenting with the interface myself. If I'm lucky, I may have a functional specification to help me figure out the commands. A procedure typically has a numbered list of steps with screen shots of the interface being used to make the steps easy to follow. It helps to create a typical example for a feature and show sequential screenshots of what happens with that example.

Create other helpful features. When many tasks involve the same large window, it is useful to introduce the window and its parts at the beginning of the higher-level section that groups the tasks.

Sometimes concepts should be defined before introducing tasks based on those concepts. For example, before using the configuration commands in a configuration manager, the user needs to understand the difference between a "planned configuration" and an "active configuration."

For goals requiring many tasks, it is helpful to create roadmaps, flowcharts, or tutorials to guide the user through the series of tasks or iterations of tasks. The user needs the big picture as well as the detailed steps so as not to get lost.

A good index is another useful aid, enabling the user to identify tasks by topics and to go to them directly rather than through higher-level headings. I sometimes also index every window and command with a pointer to the page where the window or command is used in a procedure. I've found that it is safer to present commands in procedures than in simple command descriptions because in the procedures I spell out the preconditions and warnings related to using the command. This way the user is less apt to perform a destructive action unwittingly in the process of guessing and experimenting.

Finally, when documenting GUI tasks, we technical writers should let sympathy for the user guide us in making the software seem easy to use. Like good hosts, we should try to anticipate every need of the user and provide for it gracefully at the appropriate time and place. When we are successful, the documentation becomes transparent, immediately useful but not calling attention to itself, and the user has a direct and satisfying experience with the software.

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"I sat evaluating myself.
I decided to lie down."
Peter McWilliams

Your humor columnist was overrun by a herd of developers this week. The stampede trampled her funny bone and left her without mirth. However, we expect her to make a full recovery. In the meantime, please enjoy this article from our archives.

Review, or What Have You Done for Me Lately?

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

It's performance review time again you know, the time when you rate your performance over the last year, your boss rates your performance over the last year, you and your boss discuss your performance over the last year, and then three months later, you get a raise (which, of course, has nothing to do with your performance over the last year).

I hate performance reviews. It's not that I get bad reviews, though. Aside from the odd negative comment about my candor which, by the way, isn't going to change I've yet to receive a bad one. (And not everyone thinks candor is bad. Honest people like it.) I just don't like seeing opinions about my work in writing.

That said, I go through the motions. I fill out the forms, thinking about where I can improve, where I meet general expectations, and where I excel.

Writing about where I excel my accomplishments is the hardest part for me. I'm not good at self-promotion. (I'm a tech writer, after all, not Don King.) And part of me thinks, perhaps naively, that it should be obvious that I'm a hard worker. I meet all my deadlines, don't I? The development teams I work with like my work, don't they? I've survived four rounds of layoffs, haven't I? Doesn't that speak for itself?

Apparently not. I am still expected to list my accomplishments. So the other day, I began to ponder my worthiness, and I realized this: given that I am candid, my performance is reflected not in what I do but in the restraint I've shown over the last year. In other words, I excel in negative space; it's what I don't do that should make headlines.

For example:

- When a developer told me that her functional spec was probably "too complicated" for me to understand and that I would find it "a painful experience" to read, I did not reach over and slap her, even though I probably could have.
- When the marketing folks changed the name of the product suite I work on from its original name to another and then back again in the span of four months, I did not threaten to refer to the product line as Whatever in my documentation, even though I probably could have.

- When the people who manage our building (known as Facilities) began leaving citations on our cubes for things like messiness or displaying irreverent Dilbert cartoons on the outer wall, I did not rally my coworkers to TP the Facilities offices, even though I could have.

Yup, I've been pretty busy this year. Not only have I met deadlines, written special reports, and rescued a dying project when the tech writer on the project had to leave it, I've also kept my mouth shut a lot.

And people say I never do anything around here.

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If you want to improve your writing skills, contribute articles. You will have the opportunity to work with our great copyeditors who can give you pointers and help you improve your skills.

Contact us at:
stcsignature@yahoo.com.

Act Outside Your Comfort Zone

By [Catherine Robinson](#), Managing Editor

As I work my way through the first year of the Signature newsletter season in a role other than proofreader, I find myself challenged with new things that I previously did not have the initiative to tackle. For example, in the past I would renew my yearly STC membership, proofread the newsletter and submit my comments, and attend membership meetings to listen to the presentations. As the managing editor for the 2003-2004 Signature newsletter publishing season, I have forced myself to act outside my comfort zone.

My year as managing editor started with many new challenges. Because I have decided to face these challenges head on, I have encouraged myself to act outside my comfort zone.

My comfort zone included avoiding networking, doing things solo a lot of the time, and, frankly, not taking advantage of what my membership really had to offer other resources and experts in our field.

As I found myself having to keep up with the rigorous publishing schedule and trying to find ways to get good content for the newsletter, I stepped out of my comfort zone.

I began to network, contact people, hold others accountable to their commitments, take into consideration the risks involved if I lose commitments or resources, and learn what I had to do in order to grow in the role and let the newsletter flourish. It has been a process in which I have had to recondition myself.

The results after our first few publications of the newsletter have been astounding. I feel great about meeting all the wonderful people, including our great copyeditors who help me to understand more about writing and the wonderful technical experts who have helped me to solve a lot of the technical problems. I have also become comfortable when I've been faced with problems because I have learned about commitment and trust. I now focus on solutions rather than the looming problems.

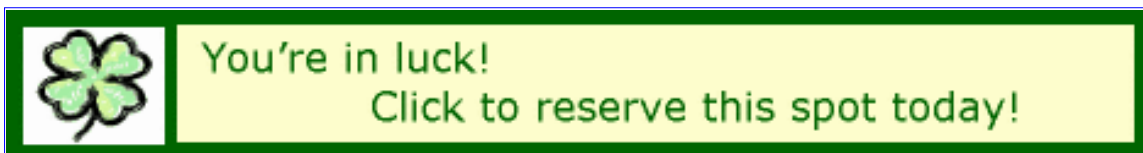
The next time you think you are faced with a challenge that is way over your head, try acting outside your comfort zone. I can assure you that you will be pleasantly surprised.

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President's Podium



Thanks To Be Given

By [Walter Hanig](#), President

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Though this will be published after Thanksgiving, I'm writing this before my favorite holiday. And I've more reasons to be thankful than usual.

Professional Thanks

- Colleagues at Ericsson who demonstrated professionalism day in, day out and from their first day of employment to the last.
- Colleagues at NCR who invited me to join them, listen patiently to my tales of how things got done (or not) at my many previous jobs, and teach me patiently how things get done (or not) at NCR.
- STC volunteers and other members for their support, encouragement, and patience (hmmm, sounds like a theme).

Personal Thanks

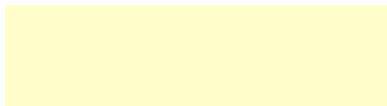
- Firefighters who did more than anyone had a right to expect, and will do it again. Those who evacuated and had homes to return to know how fortunate they were.
- My family, who put up with late dinners and bad humor.
- Doctors Israel and Epstein, who treated me as a patient and respected me as a student.
- Pam and Sam who discovered two just-born turtles (*Terrapene carolina carolina*) today.
- My extended "family," with whom I've spent the last 31 years of laugh- and calorie-filled extended Thanksgiving celebrations.

As this is, after all, an STC newsletter, I think it's important to thank the San Diego chapter leaders who've preceded us and set a standard of service:

Year(s)	President
1955	R.O. Shockney
1956	L.J. Solheid
1957	H.R. Kennedy
1958	C.M. Johnson
1959	G.R. Spitzer

1960	Sam Lipsett
1961	H.L. Clower
1962-63	Charles M. Hatcher
1963-64	Edward S. Bill
1966-67	Walter Brees
1969-70	Forrest D. Frame
1971-72	Robert J. Pritchard
1972-73	Frank Hunter
1973-74	Virginia H. Wallihan
1975-76	John E. Stevens
1976-77	Morton Stone
1977-79	Phyllis Minick
1979-80	John J. Smaldino
1980-82	Richard Meyers
1982-84	Margaret E. Cathcart
1984-86	Cathy Chaney
1986-88	Rex Casey
1988-90	Linda Oestreich
1990-93	Tom Hoyt
1993-94	Bonni Graham
1994-96	Anita Craig
1996-98	Jim Desmond
1998-2000	Suzy Hosie
2000-2002	Kris Oden
2002-2003	Walter Hanig

These folks have come from different backgrounds: large companies or small ones employees, contractors, or business owners hardware, software, policies & procedures, or manufacturing. Whatever their background, they've shared a common commitment to our profession and, more importantly I think, to our members.



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[Click here for December 10 meeting details.](#)

If you make a reservation but find you cannot attend, please cancel your reservation by sending an e-mail to Lance-Robert at treasurer@stc-sd.org. The chapter has to pay the hotel for all no-shows, which takes money away from various programs that could otherwise benefit the chapter members.

There is no financial penalty for cancelling your reservation. If you used PayPal to pay for your reservation in advance and need to cancel, the full amount will be refunded to your account within three working days.

December Chapter Meeting Preview: The Next Generation of Single-Source Tools for Adobe FrameMaker

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

FrameMaker users today are being tasked with creating full-featured and multimedia-rich online information systems from their existing print-based content. In many cases, they must re-purpose the same content for use in multiple online systems, each of which must be customized for a different audience, software edition, or platform. In the December meeting, you will learn how to achieve this kind of single-sourcing, without creating multiple projects or relying on macros.

Our speaker, RJ Jacquez, will unveil the highly-anticipated RoboHelp for FrameMaker software, and cover the following topics:

- Creating and publishing an unlimited number of online outputs from a single project.
- Controlling which FrameMaker chapters and content are included in each output.
- Customizing your online output further, using the same building blocks you use in FrameMaker.
- Including multiple FrameMaker books in a single project.
- Creating multimedia-rich online experiences for your end-users.
- Automating future projects by reusing templates.
- Creating online Help systems with full context-sensitive support.
- Batch generating multiple outputs with a single click.

Biography

RJ Jacquez is the product manager for FrameMaker Technologies at eHelp Corporation. RJ has twelve years of experience with Adobe FrameMaker, including eight years as a professional FrameMaker instructor. He has also lectured about FrameMaker on behalf of Adobe Systems at that company's "Beyond Word Processing" seminars. While formerly serving as Vice President of Technology at Quadralay Corporation, maker of WebWorks Publisher, Jacquez gained extensive experience in the areas of single-sourcing, ePublishing, and Help authoring. Most recently, Jacquez has led a team at eHelp Corporation to develop an entirely new single-sourcing tool specifically designed for use with FrameMaker. This tool, code named "Mustang" was showcased at the 2003 FrameUsers Conference in October.



November meeting attendance numbers:

60 attendees
1 cancellation
3 no-shows
18 used PayPal (a new record!)



Walter Hanig, President



Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs

November Chapter Meeting Review

By [Eric Hurd](#)

San Diego Chapter Meeting - Wednesday, November 12, 2003

Our chapter president, Walter Hanig, opened our monthly meeting at the Red Lion Hanalei in Mission Valley by inviting the members who were looking for work to stand and describe their skills and type of work they are looking for. Then members with job announcements were asked to stand and describe the positions that were available.

He next asked for a show of hands of first-time attendees and conducted an informal survey to find out what they hoped to get from the meeting. Most of the respondents cited meeting fellow writers, learning about the industry, and increasing their skill set.

Announcements

- Walter pointed out our new Adopt-a-Book Table. Those wishing to take or leave a book are invited to do so at our monthly meetings.
- Write on the Edge's Suzy Hosie is featured in this week's edition of the San Diego Business Journal. You can read the article at www.wote.com.
- Bryna Block from UCSD needs technical writing examples to use in technical writing classes. If you have examples that do not have proprietary restrictions, please contact Bryna at UCSD.
- The fires that devastated our region touched many of us. Our chapter donated \$500 to the Red Cross fund for local fire victims.
- Walter thanked Sue Heim and Lance-Robert for making the new-member dinner one of the best in living memory.
- Kelley Wilson and Sue Heim migrated our chapter site to a new ISP. The Web team is in the process of redesigning the site.
- Michael Cárdenas has graciously volunteered office space in his company for professional development events.
- The annual Region 8 conference in Davis, California (July 25-27, 2004) still needs volunteers. Volunteers can attend the conference, which features many of the same speakers as the international conference, at a discounted rate. Please contact Sue Heim if you are interested.

Walter added that the presentations are great, the conference is cheaper than the international conference, and traveling to Davis is a lot easier than traveling to Baltimore.

For more information on the Region 8 conference, visit:

<http://www.stcregion.org/region8>.

- Walter announced that a salary survey will be coming up in the near future.
- Our newsletter will be featuring a new "gossip" column that will feature news of a more personal nature including job changes, life events, and promotions. If you have news you would like to share or an idea for a column name, please contact Kitt Medrano at kitt.medrano@wote.com.
- On Thursday, March 25, 2004, we will host a special event featuring Char James-Tanny who will be talking about the product "AuthorIT," the bleeding edge of object-oriented help generation. The presentation will cost \$10 and will include appetizers only.

Featured Speaker: Sharon Burton-Hardin on "How to get Good PDF"



Sharon Burton-Hardin

Sharon Burton-Hardin is the president of the Inland Empire Chapter of STC. Sharon is the owner of Anthrobytes Consulting in Riverside and assured us that there are, in fact, technical writing jobs there. Sharon's wit and fast pace came in handy while tackling the bane of our existence.

After a quick plug for the technical writing certificate program at UCR where she teaches (visit www.iestc.org for more information), Sharon began her presentation by asking how many of us know exactly which version of Acrobat Reader all of our users have, how many of us can install newer versions of Acrobat on our users' workstations, and how many of us can control the graphics that go into our documentation. After only one of us answered yes to all three questions, Sharon announced that the rest of us would encounter problems making PDFs.

Specifics

Sharon presented a lot of helpful information and many anecdotes that illustrated what she has learned while wrestling with the beast. To access her detailed notes from the presentation, visit <http://www.anthrobytes.com/portfolio.html> and click Getting Good PDF near the bottom.

Following are some of the highlights from her presentation.

- Use the correct printer driver settings. You must use the Adobe Distiller and the Adobe PPD. Do not use any other printer driver.
- Make sure you have enough space on your hard drive and partition. You should have 2.5 times the size of your largest Postscript file.
- Use Postscript fonts. TrueType is not supported fully in earlier versions of Acrobat. Also Reader turns TrueType fonts into graphics, which increase the file size significantly. Since most worldwide users still use dial-up connections, and most users have very old versions of Reader, downloading a file takes an unacceptably long time.

- Use the best graphics. Always use BMP format for screen captures. GIF format is small in size, but lacks color depth. JPG discards information during compression. TIF may have issues with embedded fonts. PNG supports 64 billion colors and creates small files. For vector-based graphics, stay away from EPS unless exact color is very important. If you do use EPS, make sure the fonts are embedded correctly.
- Use the right settings. In a nutshell, the standard Distiller settings give bad results. Make sure you set them to disable downsampling and compression, set the backwards compatibility to Acrobat 3, use the highest DPI possible (2400 press), and embed all fonts. Sharon has a document that you can view at her Web site:
<http://www.anthrobytes.com/portfolio.html>.

Tips

- Optimize for fast Web view.
- In the Advanced tab save the originals as JPEG as a backup in case you lose the source files.
- In Acrobat 5, you can export all images (if updating a PDF with limited source files).
- Give your job options a name that will stand out from the others to ensure they are used (e.g., "You MUST use these options").
- In the PDF setup window, use tags to allow for page resize when viewed on a PDA. This is also helpful when the source files are lost because page re-sizing preserves the ends of lines during copy/paste.
- Usability studies suggest that users prefer the PDF to open with the entire page displayed, even if it is not legible. You can set the default zoom size, or set password protection, by opening the PDF and selecting File, then Document Properties.

Find out more at www.pdfzone.com and www.planetpdf.com.

November Meeting Wrapup

Michael and Walter thanked Sharon for her great presentation. I was impressed with the quantity of useful information she was able to fit into the allotted time.

Our monthly giveaway winners were:

- Alana Krider won an authentic STC bag.
- Diane Streckert won this month's Wally Buck (good for dinner and a presentation).

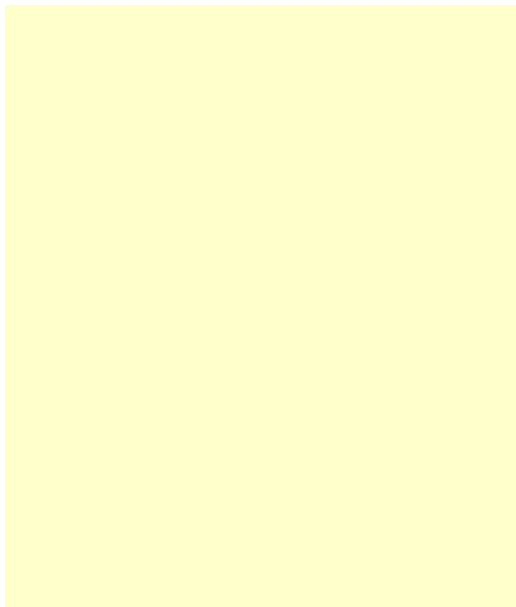
Thank you all for coming. See you in December!



Alana Krider



Diane Streckert



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December 2003

Professional Development



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San Diego Community College District Offers Free Computer Classes

By [Michelle Petersen, VP Professional Development](#)

Are you interested in an inexpensive way to expand your computer and technology skill set? The San Diego Community College district offers a wide variety of free, hands-on classes through their Centers for Education and Technology (CET) in several areas around the city.

Upcoming Topics--December 2003/January 2004

In the North City (Kearny Mesa) area, upcoming classes include many topics that may be of interest to technical communicators. The CET offers classes aimed at various skill levels for most topics:

Microsoft Applications

- Access
- Excel
- Word
- PowerPoint
- Project

Multimedia Applications

- 3D Studio Max
- Final Cut Pro
- Fireworks
- InDesign
- Photoshop and Photoshop Elements

Web Page Design and Development

- Dreamweaver
- Flash
- HTML
- Web Page Design (several topics)
- XML

Web Technology

- ASP .NET programming
- C# programming
- Java programming
- PHP and MySQL
- UNIX

- VB Macros
- VB .NET programming

For a complete listing of classes and start dates at the Kearny Mesa location, go to:

<http://www.sandiegocet.net/bit/north-cc/f-classes.php>

Class Locations

All free North City classes are held at one of the two Kearny Mesa campuses:

- 8401 Aero Drive, San Diego, CA 92123
- 5636 Ruffin Road (Datel), San Diego, CA 92123

Registering for Classes

To sign up for a class, check the schedule on the CET Web site to see if the class is being held at the Aero Drive or Ruffin Road (Datel) location:

- If your class is offered at the Aero Drive location, simply show up and get in line on the day that the class is scheduled to begin. Space is offered on a first-come, first-serve basis.
- If your class is in great demand, it is advisable to arrive an hour or so early to get into the class.
- If your class is offered at the Datel location, call the CET at 858-627-2545 to sign up in advance. Pre-registration is required for all Datel classes.

For classes offered in other locations in San Diego, see the CET Web site:

<http://www.sandiegocet.net/>

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Ann M. Throckmorton

How to submit an ad

Ads are limited to STC members and should not exceed 125 words. Send your ad to the editor at stcsignature@yahoo.com.

To ensure publication, we'll need your ad by the 5th of the month prior to publication. Ads received after the 5th will be inserted if possible.

You'll need to renew your ad for each month you want it published.

Members Looking for Work

Richard Garner
rgarner_1998@hotmail.com
(619) 425-5279

I am a recent graduate, (03/03), of the Certificate Program in Technical and Scientific Writing at San Diego State University. I did an internship with Consistent Image of San Diego, California, a small consulting company that produces the manuals for Sprint Wireless Communications. At Consistent Image I was responsible for transferring two large documents from Quark Express 5.0 to Framemaker 6.0 in precise template form. I also assisted the company with several other print and online documents. My supervisor's comments about me and my work include the following: "A skilled writer," "a very good technical writer," "nice to work with," and "excellent work habits."

I also did much of the formatting and visual design work on a volunteer student team that produced a revision of the Substitute Teacher Handbook for the La Mesa-Spring Valley School District.

Seeking: A permanent or temporary position as a technical writer

Education: Certificate in Technical and Scientific Writing, San Diego State University; B.A. in history, University of California, San Diego

Tools: FrameMaker 6.0, Acrobat 5.0, Word, Excel, HTML 4.0

Samples: I have writing samples available in FrameMaker 6.0 and Word.

Aptitudes: I am a quick learner and am able to grasp the essential features of things and processes and describe them in a logical and thorough manner.

Personal interests: I am eager to help companies and organizations effectively communicate what they are about to their customers and clients. I would also enjoy helping them make their products and services more useful and understandable through clear, concise, well thought-out verbal and visual communications.



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December 2003

FAQs



General Meeting and STC FAQs

By [Lance-Robert](#), VP Finance

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Q: How is parking at the Red Lion Hanalei handled? Do we need validation stickers or stamps?

A: No. When you leave the lot after the meeting, just hand your parking stub back to the attendant. Tell the attendant you're with the STC, and they will open the gate for you. (Our contract with the hotel waives the parking fee.) To avoid misplacing your parking stub, I recommend leaving it in your vehicle when you park. You do not need to bring the parking stub with you to the meeting.

Q: Why are the meetings not held in the same room every month?

A: The hotel has other events that come up from time to time, and they sometimes need to move us to a larger or smaller room, depending upon the number of reservations we or the other events get for that night.

Q: Is there a map of the hotel's conference rooms available online?

A: Yes. Just click here: <http://www.hanaleihotel.com/conference.htm>.

Q: Why are meetings always held on the second Wednesday of the month? Why not another day during the week or the month?

A: The hotel conference rooms are booked a year in advance to ensure that we have confirmed reservations and that we get the best possible rate from the hotel. We will have to negotiate another contract at the end of the chapter year in June. If you have strong feelings about holding the meetings on another night during the week or month or about the meeting location, please let any council member know at that time, and we will consider your request. Also, meeting on a regular day allows members to plan for the meetings. Note that most, if not all, other professional groups use this scheduling method.

Q: Why are meetings held at the Red Lion Hanalei instead of the Wyndham?

A: The Wyndham hotel found that it could book larger groups for the same rooms and increased the rate for those rooms. Rather than raise the member attendance fees, we did an extensive search around the central areas of Sorrento Valley, Mira Mesa, and Mission Valley for viable alternatives. The Red Lion Hanalei was the best that we could find, and it offers us superior food and service without our having to raise the attendance fees.

Q: How much does the chapter pay the Red Lion Hanalei to hold its meetings there?

A: The chapter pays the hotel \$19 per person plus a small fee for the projector screen and, if needed, extra coffee. This fee includes the room, the dinner buffet, the dessert buffet, the podium and microphone, the setup, and the parking.

Q: What happens if I make a reservation but don't show up? Do I pay a penalty?

A: No. The chapter does not charge a cancellation fee. However, if you find that your plans change and you cannot attend, please notify the treasurer by sending an e-mail to treasurer@stc-sd.org. If you do not show up for your reservation but do not cancel, the chapter still has to pay the hotel for your reservation. This is money that would be better spent serving the chapter membership through library books, programs, seminars, and the like.

Q: If I pay online by PayPal but end up canceling my reservation, do I forfeit the money I paid?

A: No. If you need to cancel, the treasurer will refund the full amount to your account. There is no penalty, but it might take two to three working days for PayPal to process your refund.

Q: Where can I find more information about using PayPal to pay for my meeting reservation?

A: You can find a detailed list of PayPal FAQs, written by yours truly, by clicking here: http://www.stc-sd.org/meetings/paypal_faq.htm.

Q: How do council members get their positions? Are they elected or appointed?

A: Council members typically volunteer for their positions for the entire chapter year (September through June). If more than one person wants a position, we hold an election. Otherwise, the person who volunteers for the position is appointed to the position if approved by the council.

Q: How do I volunteer to become a council member or to assist an existing council member?

A: If you would like to volunteer, please contact any council member, or e-mail Tiffany Gerstmar at volunteernow@stc-sd.org.

Q: My name, employer, address, or e-mail has changed recently. How do I change my member contact information?

A: Please contact MaryRose Velasquez or Rebecca Casto at the STC head office in Arlington, Virginia, with your updates. You can find their contact information by clicking: <http://www.stc.org/contacts.asp>.

Q: Where can I find copies of **Intercom** or **Technical Communication** online?

A: You can find Intercom articles from 1996 to the present here: <http://stc.org/scripts/index/printIntercom2.asp>.

You can find Technical Communication articles from 1995 to the present at this one: <http://www.techcomm-online.org/>.

Q: What if I have more questions about the STC, the San Diego Chapter, the monthly meetings, or the council?

A: Please contact any council member, or e-mail the treasurer at treasurer@stc-sd.org.



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December 2003

Chapter Membership



Welcome to Our New Members

By [Sue Heim, VP Membership](#)

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Welcome to our new members--whether new to STC or to our San Diego Chapter.

New Members

Michael Zsolszai
Michael Kreca
Michael McCabe

Members Who Have Transferred Into Our Chapter

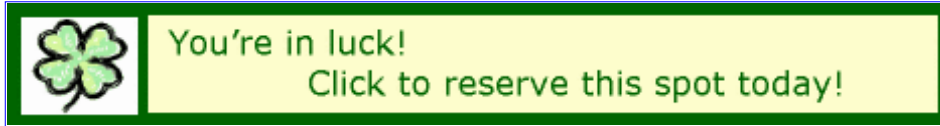
James Cline
Julie Countryman

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December 2003

Helpful Tips

Quick Access to Microsoft® Word Templates

By Gail Van Landingham

Did you know that Microsoft Word includes a feature called "Workgroup templates?" This is a rarely-used but powerful feature that allows everyone at a company to plug into a single source for templates. By setting up Workgroup templates for your company, you can help make access to documents easier and more efficient.

What are the benefits of Workgroup templates?

You can update the templates in one location on your network, and everyone will have instant access. You just set up the file location one time for each employee.

Templates keep employees happy because they don't have to invent a document format over and over again. They no longer have to create a title page, a table of contents, headers and footers, and so forth.

Should I start small or tackle the whole company?

Depending on how many templates have been created, and how far you want to reach, you can set up Workgroup templates for just your technical publications group or for all employees at your company.

What kind of templates are there? And who can use them?

At our company, we have general templates for the entire company as well as templates that are specific to departments. Here are some sample folders and templates:

- General Folder: Memo, Letterhead, Fax Cover

- Forms Folder: Review Tracker, Change Order, Training Record

- Service/Support Folder: Site Visit Report, Site Upgrade Report

- Engineering Folder: Project Plan, Requirements Specification, Test Verification

How do you set up Workgroup templates?

1. Create a set of templates. (See your favorite Word book for details.)

2. Copy the templates to a network location where your target users have access.

Tip: An ideal location is on a network drive that is automatically mapped for your target users.

3. Tell Word where the templates are located. You need to do this for every employee who needs access.
 - Click Tools > Options > Click the File Locations tab. (See Figure 1)



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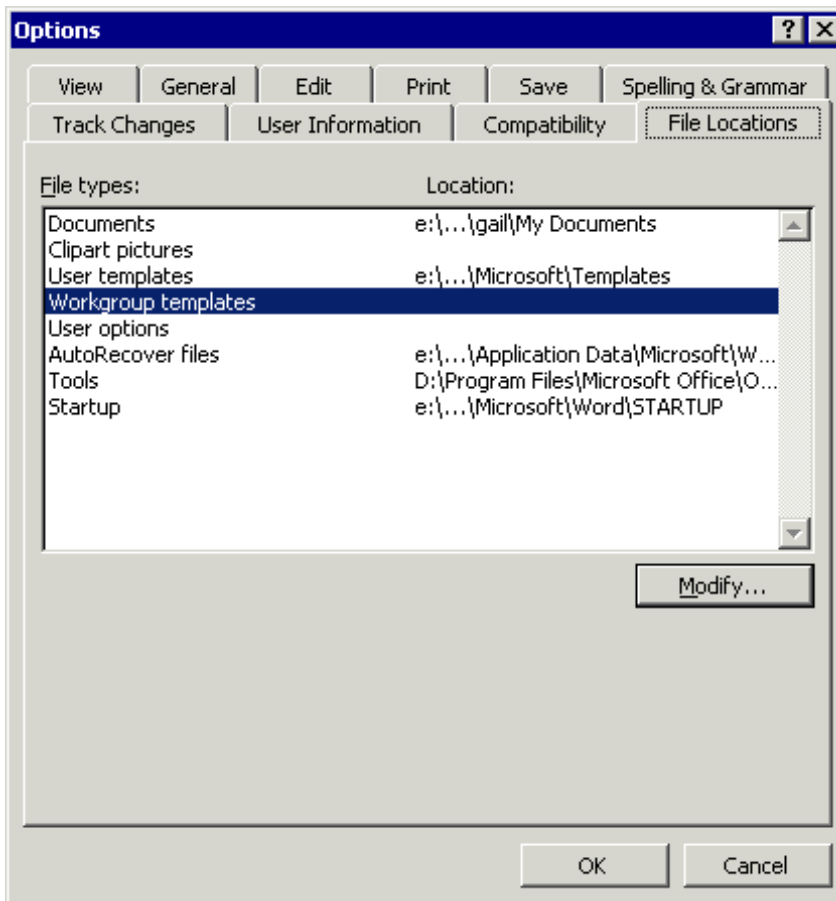


Figure 1: Selecting the file location for Workgroup templates

- Double-click Workgroup templates.
 - Navigate to the location where you've saved the templates.
 - Click OK.
 - In the Options dialog box, confirm that the correct location is listed next to Workgroup templates. Click OK again.
4. Now put on your marketing hat, and tell the staff about the new, easy access to Word templates. Tell them to:
- Click File > New. (See Figure 2)

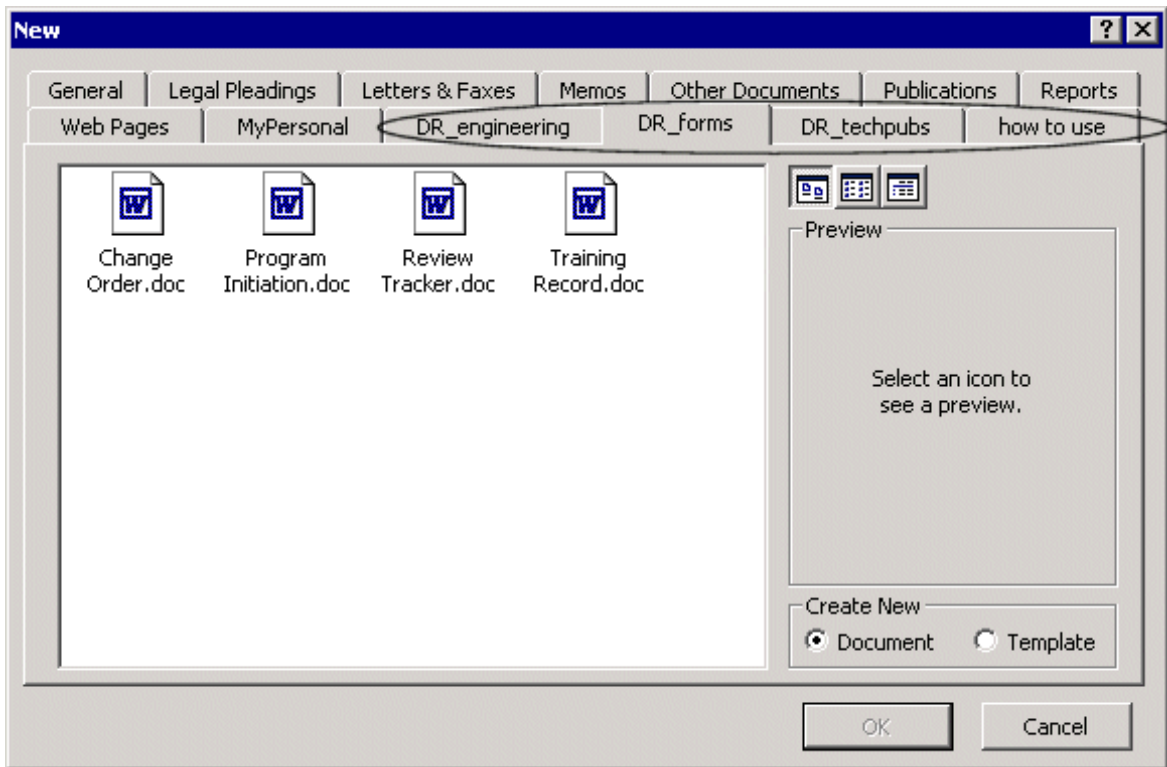


Figure 2. Creating a new document based on one of the templates. The circled tabs correspond to subfolders in the Workgroup templates location.

- If you have Word 2000 or earlier: Select a template from the General tab, or from any specific tab.
- If you have Word XP: In the New Document panel, click General Templates. Select a template from the General tab, or from any specific tab.

What about personal templates?

Word allows you to specify one directory for personal templates and one directory for Workgroup templates. They are both on the File Locations tab when you select Options from the Tools menu.

Where do personal templates display?

Both personal templates and Workgroup templates display when you select New from the File menu. If they are in the main directory selected, they will be under the General tab; if they are in subdirectories, they will be under specific tabs.

How do the tabs correspond to file folders?

Each time you create a subfolder in the Workgroup templates location, Word creates a tab by the same name. If the subfolder doesn't contain a Word document or Word template, there will be no tab.

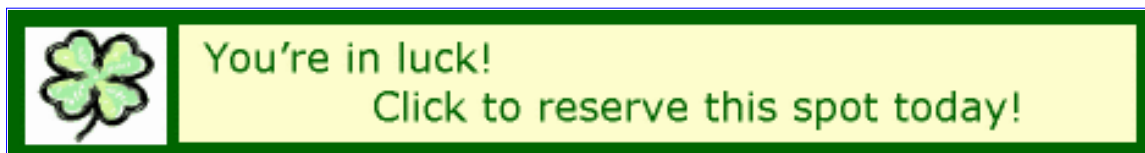
Is network connection required to set up Workgroup templates?

No. You can select any folder on your PC as the location for your Workgroup templates. This could work for offsite staff with laptops. The drawback is that employees must update their own set of templates. When you add or change a template, you may need a method to notify offsite employees.

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December 2003

Helpful Tips

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One Way to PDF

By [Catherine Robinson](#)

I had a difficult time trying to create a PDF of our online HTML version of the Signature newsletter. As I experimented and ran into difficulties, Lana Walker-Helmuth and Mark Hall came to my rescue and gave me the ideas I needed to get this task done.

Rather than choose to print to "Acrobat PDFMaker" or "Acrobat Distiller," I chose to open the Web page as PDF. I liked the navigation links that resulted from choosing this method and felt that it was a better option for our readers.

Let me take you through the steps I took to create PDF from HTML for the Signature newsletter.

1. In Acrobat (not Acrobat Reader), go to File > Open Web Page as PDF and open your home page.

I browsed the Web and found the exact location of the first page of the newsletter. I then pasted that URL into the URL field in the Open Web Page dialog box (Figure 1).

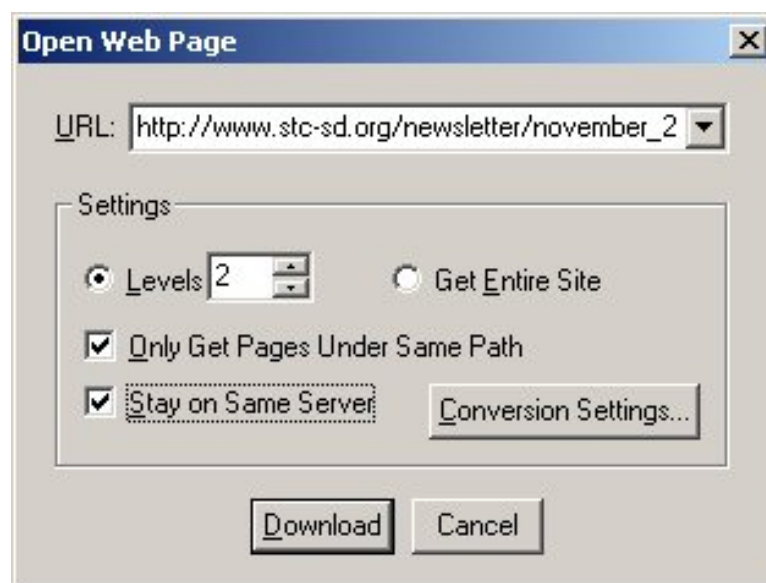


Figure 1. Selecting options to open Web pages in PDF

2. Select Level 2 in Levels and check the boxes, Only Get Pages Under Same Path and Stay on Same Server (see Figure 1). (I did not change any of the settings in Conversion Settings.)

When I selected Level 1 in Levels, only the first two pages of the

newsletter were pulled into the PDF. I changed Level 1 to Level 2, and then all the newsletter pages were pulled into the PDF.

Note: When I selected Level 2, a second set of newsletter pages was created in the middle of the PDF. This was a result of the existing PDF on the Web site being downloaded with the rest of the files. I was able to delete these duplicate pages later in the process.

3. Click Download. After the pages have finished downloading, the file opens up in Acrobat.
4. Delete the unnecessary set of pages by going into the PDF and selecting the linked pages. Find the link with the plus sign (+), highlight this link, and right-click. Select Delete to delete the duplicated pages. This will dramatically reduce your PDF newsletter size.
5. Save your file. You can rename the navigation links within your PDF document as you see fit.
6. When you are done, save your file again.

I want to mention one technical difficulty I ran into after the conversion: the em-dashes in the articles did not convert properly. They appeared as little square boxes in the PDF. I do not know if this is a problem with fonts missing or my version of Acrobat 4.

I hope that one day this helpful tip comes in handy for you.

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December 2003

Region 8 Board Report



Report of the Board of Directors Meeting

By Bonni Graham, Region 8 Director/Sponsor

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The Board met September 11-13, 2003, in Portland, Oregon. We discussed a variety of problems and improvements regarding Society governance. Some of those issues are being explored in the Transformation Committee blog (<http://trans4mation.typepad.com>). We welcome your input!

A great many changes in STC are necessary, and these are challenging times for our Society. We are committed to preserving what works for us as a Society and fostering the wonderful support and community we have created over the past 50 years. We are exploring new financial models and better ways of supporting chapters, SIGs, and members-at-large. Many of these programs are still in the formative stages and thus necessarily abstract, but the following concrete issues were addressed.

Chapter Achievement Awards (CAA)

Dale Erickson was appointed manager of the Chapter Achievement Awards Judging Committee. As you may remember, the judging for the CAA has changed. The Board decided to appoint a committee to examine submitted materials and determine awards. Each submitting chapter will now have its materials reviewed by three judges, who will determine the award. This impartial judging method has been used successfully for other STC competitions (such as Newsletter), and we think it will improve the CAA competition.

Chapter Business

The following chapters were dissolved:

- Mid-Hudson Chapter
- North Central Florida Chapter
- University of Wisconsin--Eau Claire Student chapter

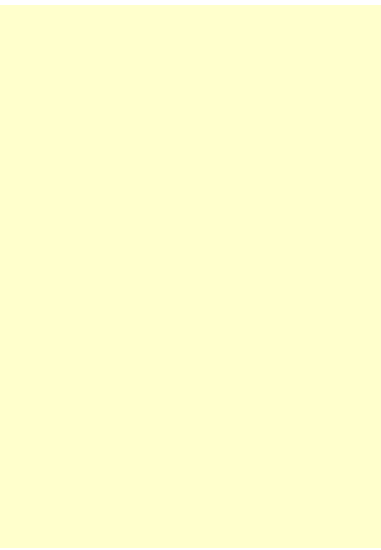
STC Expands Our Network

Sandra Harner, STC's Assistant to the President for Academics, will represent STC at the Council for Programs in Technical and Scientific Communication (CPTSC) Conference in Potsdam, NY (at Clarkson University). This improves our exposure to the teachers of the next generation of technical communications professionals--and potential chapter members!

Annual Conferences

Pam Ecker has been appointed Program Manager for the 2006 conference, to be held in Las Vegas, NV.

The Board has set the conference registration fee for the 2004 conference in Baltimore, MD. Watch for the conference issue of Intercom for more information.



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