

January 2003
Volume 36 No 5



www.stc-sd.org

E-mail:
stcsignature@yahoo.com

Newsletter Staff

Publication Information

Advertising Information

Chapter Council

STC Mission Statement

 [Click for newsletter PDF](#)

[Download Acrobat Reader](#)

San Diego Members:

To receive chapter e-mail,
contact Lance-Robert at
Lance.Robert@tarari.com.

Visit the Society Web site
at www.stc.org

Feature Article

"My Year of Teaching. . . Dangerously"

By Mike McGraw

Learn how this newbie college instructor with a fear of public speaking faced a room full of ravenous minds eager for instruction.

Sidebar: *SDSU Certificates and MA Degrees*



Editor's Desk
By Lana Walker-Helmuth
Starting the New Year
Right

President's Podium
By Walter Hanig
My New Year's
Resolutions

Press Releases
Call for Papers:
Writer in the Workplace
Conference

Region 8 Conference
Postponed

Chapter Meetings
*Jan Meeting Preview
*Dec Meeting Review
*Jan Time & Place

Advice
By Mark Hall
Tap Customers to Ease
Document Delivery Angst

Dear Muse
Anonymous
Real Advice for
Real People

Humor
By Karen Field
Dr. Phil Takes Up
Tech Writing

Introductions
By Michael Abrams
Chapter Librarian in
Deep Water

Visiting Author
Writing Technology
Advertising That
Gets Results
By Dorothy Morris

Designing the future of technical communication

Copyright 2002 San Diego STC



[Advertising Information](#)

January 2003

Feature Article

[Return Home](#)[Author bio](#)[Certificates and MA degrees from SDSU](#)

Colleagues and friends who helped by doing informational interviews with my Spring 2002 students:

David Blyth
 Judy Brown
 Laura Bujarski
 Pat Casey
 Gail Dana
 Judie Dresser
 Richard Gleaves
 Suzanne Hardy
 Jim Hill
 Chris Horton
 Scott Kenyon
 Aline McVicker
 Kris Oden
 Kathleen Pierce
 Jackie Samuelson
 Lorraine Stein
 Diane Streckert
 Paul Williamssen

"My Year of Teaching...Dangerously"

By [Mike McGraw](#)

Late again! Here I am, rushing across the pedestrian bridge to campus, arms loaded with papers, briefcase, and extra books. "Hey, you on the cell phone, watch out!"

I dodge past to East Commons for a Starbucks mocha, then grab my mail from the RWS office in Nasatir 227. Danger, Will Robinson, the stairs are covered with slick cards for tonight's "klub" events. If I can just fight my way through this herd of departing students, I'll be...ahhh, safe at last in my classroom, Storm Hall 243.

This past year, 2002, was my year of living on the edge—my "year of teaching dangerously." In mid-2001 fellow San Diego STC member Linn Bekins asked me to join her staff at San Diego State University to teach "Introduction to Technical Writing" (503W) in the Rhetoric & Writing Studies department's Scientific & Technical Writing (STW) certificate program. This program, directed in turn by Sherry Little, Cezar Ornatowski, and now Linn Bekins (STC-San Diego members all) is San Diego's principal source of newly-minted technical writers. In my year as an STW lecturer, I learned much about both teaching and technical communication.

Caught in the Revolving Door

Teaching and technical communication have close ties. Many technical writers are recovering K-12 teachers (I'll bet they're enrolled in a 7-step recovery program; we all know that 12 steps are way too many to remember). A few STC-San Diego members have returned to school to teach technical writing and editing. This list of gladiators includes Don Bush, Suzy Hosie, Sandra Chew, and Steve Margolin. Don and Suzy have both taught 503W at SDSU.

RWS 503W is a popular course at State. Because it satisfies the Upper Division Writing Requirement and is recommended by the Educational Technology and Public Admin/Urban Development programs, it's not unusual for 50-60 people to show up for the first night of a class that's limited to 25 students. However, a review of the syllabus and the administration of a writing competency test quickly winnow the class to a manageable 15-20 students. Four sections of 503W are available, so it's possible to have sections specially tailored for Ed Tech and professional/certificate students.

Preparing for Battle

So there I was, about to "do the teaching thing" in a 503W section for would-be professionals—a guy whose Achilles heel has always been public speaking. How was I going to face a room full of ravenous minds eager for instruction?

I planned as if for war. With the semester as my campaign and the classroom my battlefield, I prepared a Plan of Battle for each class. Then I donned plate armor made of handouts and in-class exercises, picked up a Chicago Manual broadaxe, and just waded in.

My class took place in a well-equipped computer lab, which opened up many teaching possibilities. Writing exercises and quizzes were done in Microsoft Word. The Internet, useful for research and examples, was a click away. I could show slides or demonstrate tool use on the centrally-controlled PCs. And if all that high tech stuff failed—which it occasionally did—I also had a whiteboard and a magic lantern (overhead projector).

For the fall class I adopted Kristin Woolever's *Writing for the Technical Professions*—in itself a great example of technical writing principles. For supplementary texts I used Robin Williams' zany but practical *The PC Is Not a Typewriter* and *The Non-Designer's Design Book*, and Joseph Williams' *Style: Toward Clarity and Grace*. In the spring I assigned John Brogan's venerable *Clear Technical Writing*, but found it both expensive—\$80 for a thin paperback—and out of date.

Expanding the Option Set

Amazing tools are available to teachers. In the spring I built a small Web site to make class assignments and related materials available online. Over the summer I discovered State's Blackboard (Bb) system. Bb lets teachers build sites accessible only to enrolled students. It expands interaction by providing a structured environment with group discussion boards, areas where subgroups can exchange ideas and files, a "virtual classroom" (live chat) area, and access to writing-related resources and online quizzes. In the fall I used both a Bb site and a Web site: http://www.rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/drwswebb/classes/503w/sec3_Fall02/.

Many publishers now provide "course content modules" that can be installed in Bb or similar systems. These modules supplement textbooks and generally provide quizzes, extra readings, and access to related Web sites. Some publishers will host a teacher's course site on their own systems with preloaded content keyed to their textbooks.

Making It Up As You Go

No matter how much content is available, you still have to read the textbook and prepare lectures yourself. Everything else is basically making it up as you go. Need an in-class

exercise? Create one. Time for a test? Write it yourself. A homework assignment? Dream one up. Admittedly, all these tasks can be made easier by borrowing ideas from others (with appropriate changes and/or credit), but evaluating the results is all yours.

Grading and evaluation were the toughest jobs. I don't grade on a curve. I'd gladly give every student an A. The scholars in my classes paid good money to learn the rudiments of technical writing, but some worked harder or just did better work than the others. I encouraged everybody all of the time, suggested improvement whenever possible, and applied a gentle prod when needed. And in the end I had to assign grades. I tracked scores by various methods, but settled finally on a homemade Excel spreadsheet that let me track each student's attendance, work, and overall status.

Inside of a Small Circle of Friends

Family, friends, and colleagues—in STC and at Qualcomm—were generous with ideas and support. When I needed volunteers for informational interviews with my spring students, 18 professional technical writers responded [see sidebar]. This fall I went looking for speakers and found many folks eager to help: Mark Fogg described life as a technical editor (he seems to think that involves keeping the writers in line), and Jeff Freeman explained online help development and demonstrated an extensive help site that he had built.

In deciding to teach at State this past year, I wanted to pass along some of the writing tips and tool tricks that I've picked up as a technical writer. In the course of the year I learned as much about my own profession as any of my students did...and I learned a lot about what it takes to be a teacher.

[[Click here](#) to learn about SDSU programs.]

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Editor's Desk



Starting the New Year Right

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

[Return Home](#)

[Author Bio](#)

You're reading this column after I've toasted in 2003 with a flute of champagne. I'm excited about the new year and what it will hold. Walter has listed some of his goals in [his column](#)—out there for the whole world to see. That's good for accountability.

And because I believe that a dream becomes real when you write it down, I hereby write that this year I will buy property and build a house. My background in technical communication and managing projects are certain to help me navigate through the daunting process. Right? Stay tuned.

Welcome New Vice President-Programs

The San Diego chapter has a new Vice President of Programs, Michael Cardenas. Michael is president of Multilingual Translations, Inc., a localization company headquartered in San Diego. Karen Friend, who also works at Multilingual Translations, will assist him. We truly appreciate their willingness to support the chapter.

To keep updated on volunteer opportunities, visit http://www.stc-sd.org/about/about_volunteer.htm.

Reminder: The Region 8 conference needs volunteers. See details at http://www.stc-sd.org/region8_conf.htm.

Also, if you'd like to present at the Writers in the Workplace conference, be sure to read the [call for papers](#).

Happy New Year!

Here's to a happy, prosperous 2003! Start with a good laugh, courtesy of humor columnist Karen Field, and an inspiring, funny account from veteran member Mike McGraw. Continue with great advice from Mark Hall, Dorothy Morris, and the Muse. Get to know a fellow member, Lynn Sornson, from skilled *Introductions* writer Michael Abrams. [It's all here](#).

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

[Advertising Information](#)

January 2003

President's Podium



My New Year's Resolutions

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

No muse today. Every year about this time, I'm struck with creative writer's block. My family puts out a holiday newsletter with a theme. We've done tabloids, cookbooks, limericks, standardized tests, and other formats. As you can imagine, it gets harder and harder to think up new ideas. And so it goes with my newsletter article for January.

Lacking better ideas—more on that later—I offer some personal resolutions for the new year.

- Take chances. Apply for jobs that I may not be perfectly qualified for. Ask STC members to take on specific duties. What's the worst that can happen?
- Listen harder. Just because I disagree with an idea as it's being presented shouldn't stop me from encouraging the idea's presentation and presenter. Besides, the perspective offered may have value in other situations.
- Confront difficult situations. Whether it's a professional or a personal situation, avoiding the issue usually doesn't solve it.
- Have more fun. I need to cook more—just eat less!
- Allow more slack for everyone, including me.
- Spend more time with first-timers at meetings.
- Write minutes from council meetings!
- Submit newsletter articles on time!

Readers, is there a topic you'd like me to address in a future column? Just let me know: wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[New Members](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Professional Development](#) | [Dear Muse](#) | [Book Review](#)
[Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Press Release](#)

January 2003

Conference



Region 8 Conference Postponed

[Return Home](#)

The STC 2003 Region 8 Conference has been POSTPONED to a pending date in July 2003.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Press Release



Call for Papers: Writer in the Workplace Conference

[Return Home](#)

Submit your proposal by January 17

We're hard at work putting together the Writer in the Workplace conference, but there's one thing missing... your seminar presentation!

Enhance your professional development, augment your résumé, and get free access to the conference as a seminar presenter.

Our 2003 conference will offer 12 seminars, each 75 minutes long so you don't feel rushed and you can interact more with your audience.

See the [Call for Papers](#) that gives you all the information you need to present your idea. Please return your proposal by 5 p.m. on Friday, January 17. The deadline is quickly approaching, so send in your proposal to conference coordinator Eric Butow at ceo@butow.net today!

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[New Members](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Professional Development](#) | [Dear Muse](#) | [Book Review](#)
[Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Press Release](#)

January 2003

Chapter Meetings


[Return Home](#)

Presenter: Phil
Black

[Click here for
January 8 meeting
details](#)

Does Your Thinking Limit Your Success? By Walter Hanig

On January 8 join Phil Black from Productive Learning & Leisure as we learn about the correlation between our thoughts and attitudes and the results in our lives. Plan on participating in exercises that demonstrate how our perspectives are limited and why.

Here's what you'll learn:

- Ways to expand your pre-programmed notions about a particular situation.
- A clearer picture of the limited perspectives you currently have.
- Tools you can use to break out of these limitations.
- An experience that demonstrates that making money doesn't have to be difficult.
- Knowledge of what it takes to make better choices and thereby improve the quality of your life.
- Applications of the experience to your specific profession.

December Meeting Review

By [Eric Hurd](#)

Chapter President Walter Hanig kicked-off December's STC meeting by announcing the evening's speaker and by mentioning that the evening would end with a raffle for a full version of RoboHelp.

Announcements



Rick Bradshaw presents
plaque to Pam Fridie

- Rick Bradshaw announced the Nomination by Petition for Susanna Lawrence. She would like to be on the National Office ballot for the STC Spring elections. A petition, along with her "vision," was available on each table. Rick stated a disclaimer that our chapter leadership does not endorse any particular candidate.
- Rick Bradshaw, last year's *Signature* newsletter editor, presented newsletter copyeditor Pam Fridie with an Award of Excellence plaque (won in last year's newsletter competition).

More Announcements from Walter

- Walter thanked Lynn Sorenson for being the evening's librarian, and Lance Robert and Nadine Barter Bowlus for checking everyone into the meeting.
- Attendees may now pay by credit card, in advance only, through PayPal.
- 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.
- Walter announced the next telephone seminar.
- Suggestions for presentations or topics for future meetings are welcome. Please contact [Walter](#) with your ideas.
- We need volunteers for the Region 8 Conference in January. Visit <http://www.stcregion8conference.org> for details.
- The topic for next month's meeting January 8 is "Does your thinking limit your success?"
- Walter reminded everyone of the www.stc.org resume section.
- Tania Mayer, from UCSD Extension, announced the new Certificate Program in Technical Communication. She provided a newsletter and course catalog for the taking. See www.extension.ucsd.edu for more information.

After the general announcements, guests who are looking for work were invited to stand and mention their skills. Then, employers looking for writers were asked to announce positions. Walter then turned over the floor to the night's guest speaker.



Guest speaker Silke Fleischer prepares to present

Guest Speaker: Silke Fleischer

Silke Fleischer presented "Get that Job! Creative Résumés that make you Stand Out." Silke is a Product Manager at eHelp Corporation, and a RoboHelp and RoboDemo expert. Silke is an STC member and has demonstrated products at several industry events. She has also been a featured speaker at other national and international conferences, regional STC events, and chapter meetings.

Why Standard Résumés Fail

Traditional paper résumé tend to all look the same. Make your résumé stand out from all the others by creating an online résumé for an online job.

Dos and Don'ts for Interactive Résumés

An interactive résumé, also known as an online résumé, is a great tool for presenting yourself. Use it to show off your skills.

Some of the dos:

- Develop for 800x600 screen resolution.
- Add hyperlinks and relative paths.
- Add real examples of your work.
- Customize your online résumé for the job you are applying for (e.g., use corporate colors).
- Keep it short.
- Use sans serif fonts and relative font size.
- Include a printable one-page version of your résumé.

Some of the don'ts:

- Do not add clip art, animation, or graphics with complex features.
- Take advantage of white space. Avoid cluttering the screen.
- Do not include your photo.
- Avoid CC and mass mailings of your résumé.

What to Include

When creating an online résumé, include the following components:

- Introduction to your online résumé
- Cover letter
- Resume and certificates
- Sample files and screen shots of previous work
- Multimedia examples
- Letters of recommendation
- Navigation and hyperlinks (e.g., where you received your certification, for example www.sdsu.edu)

How to Distribute Your Resume

- Internet. The Internet is a great way to distribute your résumé information. The pages are easy to publish and free Web space is available. Always test your pages before you distribute your URL.
- E-mail. E-mail is a great way to send information directly to the persons interested in hiring you. Compose your e-mail as your cover letter. Send only one file, making sure it will run on Windows. Generate a PDF version of your résumé. Compress or zip your file before sending.

- CD. Burn your résumé on a quality CD, and then test it. Create and print a custom label. Mail the CD along with a printed version of your résumé.
- Mail. When sending information via snail mail, assemble a package with the following items:
 - * Document/media holder
 - * Printed paper version of your résumé
 - * Printer paper version of your cover letter
 - * CD-ROM
 - * Business card
 - * Stamped addressed reply postcard

Tips and Tricks

While answering questions from the audience during the presentation, Silke added some helpful tips. Of special interest were the following:

- Convert files to HTML so that people can view them without specific applications.
- Don't block e-mail accounts and keep your files sizes manageable.
- Print highlights of your résumé on the back of your business card.



Silke presents RoboDemo to drawing winner Tani Barbour

At the end of the presentation, Silke announced that eHelp will be conducting usability testing in January. For details, visit: www.ehelp.com.

Wrap Up

Walter Hanig thanked Silke for a wonderful presentation. Silke then conducted a drawing for a full copy of RoboDemo (\$899 value), which was won by Tani Barbour.

This month's Wally Buck winner was Melanie Jennings.

See you at our next meeting!



Wally Buck winner Melanie Jennings

January 2003

Next Meeting Details


[Return Home](#)
[See Meeting Preview](#)

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

Want to pay in advance? The chapter accepts credit cards for payment of advance reservations using PayPal. See details at [chapter Web site](#).

January Meeting Time and Place

By Nadine Barter Bowlus

Date: Wednesday, January 8, 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
- Tuscany Vegetable Pasta
- Chicken Picatta
- Penne and Roasted Seasonal Vegetable Salad
- 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, January 5.

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

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

Cost (Presentation Only—no reservation required):

- Members \$10
- Nonmembers \$15

RSVP: Make your reservation online (preferred) by 5 p.m. Sunday, January 5. To register, visit http://www.stc-sd.org/forms/meeting_reservation.htm. Note that you may

pay in advance using PayPal. You may also 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.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Advice

[Return Home](#)[Author Bio](#)

"Never trust a dog to watch your food."

—Patrick, age 10

Tap Customers to Ease Document Delivery Angst

By [Mark Hall](#)

You've worked like a dog authoring a document, only to find out later that it's been edited beyond recognition, or that the feedback you're hearing from your customer is far from glowing. You can still hear the criticism ringing in your ears: comments like "This isn't the information I expected," or "It isn't in the right format for the client." These comments leave you with glazed-over eyes and that sinking "how did this happen to me?" feeling.

If the above scenario sounds familiar to you, by seeking to connect with your customers, both internal and external, you may be able to avoid (or at least minimize) such anguish in the future.

Connect With Internal Customers

Internal customers for writers typically include project (or product) managers, subject matter experts, publication managers, and production staff. External customers include the end-users (i.e., readers of the documentation), their management, and any outside consultants hired to assess the suitability of the documents.

To connect with internal customers, schedule one-on-one meetings where you can get to know them on a personal level (don't wait too long for that next team-building exercise to come along!); and ask them specific, deliverable-related questions like:

- What were your thoughts on the [*your doc type*] document [*I/my team*] delivered for your previous projects?
- Did you hear any first-hand comments on the document relative to its organization, content, format or style?
- How would you personally change the document in the future to make it more effective, and why?

The answers to these questions will serve to solidify your understanding of your internal customers' needs and expectations. And along the way you'll be building personal connections and gaining allies that you can call on to corroborate your assertions during those sometimes trying project meetings. One can, after all, never have too many empathetic partners when the deadline is looming.

Connect With External Customers

Gleaning feedback from external customers—i.e., actual document readers—can be more problematic. Since in many organizations technical writers are (for various reasons) not given direct access to customers, you will often need to work with their proxies: customer service representatives, account executives, and outside consultants.

Customer service representatives often provide the frankest, most unbiased feedback. Account executives, especially those with a sales mentality, might tend to put a positive spin on comments they've heard from customers. Outside consultants can be hard to access, too, unless you know someone that knows them.

But whenever you have an opportunity, and preferably early in the document creation cycle, seek to ask these persons the following types of questions:

- What customer comments have you heard relative to the [*your doc type*] on your past projects?
- What suggestions for improvement have you heard relative to the document?
- What aspects of the document would you personally change to make it more effective, and why?

As you speak to internal and external customers of previous projects, continually ask if you can contact the actual readers of the publication. Do it under the auspices of the customer support or sales department if you must, but keep on asking. As the saying goes, the worst they can say is "no." And the payoff for a "yes" is certainly great. You will no longer have to base your document content and style decisions solely on second-hand feedback.

You have undoubtedly delivered some good, even great documents in the past, even without speaking to colleagues outside the construct of the project team. But you may be in store for more success if you can connect more fully with your key internal and external customers. And perhaps your new-found success will have you singing Handel's Hallelujah Chorus rather than that woefully dreadful document death march.

Comments or questions? Write Mark Hall at mark@hallmarkconsulting.com.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Mail for the Muse



[Return Home](#)

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,
My SME won't talk to me. I've asked her to review my installation guide three times in the last two weeks. She always says she will, but that's the last I hear of it. The other day in the hall I saw her duck into the men's bathroom just to avoid running into me. Her feedback determines whether a useful book goes out the door. What can I do?

Snubbed

Dear Snubbed,
You know that your SME's feedback is important to your users, but does she know that? The Muse recommends a direct approach.

Explain to the SME that without her feedback, there's no way to tell if the installation guide is accurate. If it's wrong, users will call with questions. Customer support costs will skyrocket. The company's reputation will be damaged and you all might lose your jobs, and then you'll both be homeless and competing for hand-outs on the same street corner in town....

Okay, maybe that's a bit dramatic. Still, candor is called for. If she doesn't listen the next time you ask her to review your book, follow her into the men's room. Then she'll know you mean business.

Muse

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Humor

[Return Home](#)[Author Bio](#)

Dr. Phil Takes Up Tech Writing

By [Karen Field](#)

I have a confession: the reason I became a tech writer is that I love telling people what to do. Think about it. Tech writers are the Dr. Phils of the business world. Do this, we write, and then do that. But don't do the other because your life will be ruined. So enthralled with my role as technical advisor am I that I'm thinking about creating an error message using Dr. Phil's favorite phrase: *What were you thinking?*

You could say that I have a sick need for power, but I say that this mindset is necessary for technical communicators. Civility has no place in product documentation. Imagine a user manual that reads, "Perhaps if you click the File menu right now, you can choose Open from the pretty little options in the list and then you can navigate to the document you want." I mean, are we technical writers or cruise ship activity directors?

Such wishy-washy manuals exist, you know. I just finished reading one that came with my new database software. The writer had a penchant for the word "please," as in, "Please record your password in the Installation Worksheet." If I had edited this book, I would have whipped those niceties out faster than Martha Stewart dumped her Imclone shares at the end of '01. I say, if you're squeamish, don't be a tech writer. Save the real work for people like me, people who love giving orders.

My passion for the imperative mood calls to mind another favorite: absolutes. I love absolutes. In technical writing the world is black and white. It's simple. Adverbs need not apply. "Very" is unnecessary, and so is "quickly." "Click OK" means Click OK, not Click OK *softly* or *quietly* or *later* or *when you've finished meditating*.

By the way, I'm also pretty happy when I'm giving out driving directions. Why? I just love telling people where to go.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Introductions

[Return Home](#)[Author Bio](#)

Chapter Librarian in Deep Water

By [Michael Abrams](#)

Proposal Specialist Lynn T. Sornson is good to have around when the team roams into rough seas. I mean that literally because three times a week she finds herself helping propel an outrigger canoe.

Lynn is the volunteer who has been staffing the library at our chapter's last three monthly meetings. If you've taken out a book, you're already impressed by her pleasant, easy-going conversation. So I did a double take when she let on to being a member of Mission Bay's Ikuna Koa Outrigger Canoe Club.

Ikuna Koa sort of means "Strength and Victory," Lynn says. As for outrigger canoes, she notes, you've seen one if you've watched an old "Hawaii Five-0" episode. An outrigger canoe appears during the song and opening credits. Grass skirts stick in my mind for some reason, but the outriggers are the boats with the pontoony things—"ama" (float on an outrigger canoe) connected by two "iakos," if you must know—hanging off the side.

In her professional life, Lynn started out in IT as a programmer, working for a company that sold medical billing software. While she wrote her share of bug fixes, she also found that many of the "problems" could be solved when customers had a better idea about how to use the software. She started writing training materials and other documentation, and found that though she loved computers (almost as much as outriggers), she prefers communicating on a regular basis with people. She became a technical communicator.

Since then, some 20 years all told, all of Lynn's jobs have required lots of writing. But she didn't fully succumb to her destiny until 2001, when she applied for and won an officially designated technical writing position with San Diego's Widcomm, a developer of products built around the BlueTooth wireless communications specification.

The same year, she switched over to Anteon Corporation, an information technology and engineering solutions company, headquartered in Fairfax, Virginia. Much of Anteon's revenues come from contracts with the government, big companies, or the military, so proposals are critical to the bottom line. As a result, Lynn has become familiar with the many regulations that entangle federal contracts—a good skill to have these days.

Lynn says the best part of her job is working on long-term projects, contract awards that are known to be in the offing far in advance. It's not because there's less stress, but

because there's enough time to really polish things. Very often, though, Lynn says she finds herself scrambling to put together proposals quickly, working on tight deadlines. But she is unflappable, so that's okay. And for real adventure she turns to her water-bound hobby.

Tuesday and Thursday evenings she and her teammates practice on Mission Bay. Saturday afternoons they venture past the Mission Bay Jetty. This takes them into the ocean, which—may I remind you—is not always so pacific this time of the year! But Lynn is almost a San Diego native (her dad was in the Navy) so she can take it!

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Visiting Author

[Return Home](#)

Dorothy Morris, principal of Creative Marketing Communications, is a marketing writer and consultant based in Irvine, California.

She can be reached at 949-786-0030 or morriscm@ix.netcom.com.

Writing Technology Advertising That Gets Results

Ten winning ways to make sure your copy hits the mark

By [Dorothy Morris](#)

1. Target a dual audience. For starters, technology advertising must talk to two audiences. The engineer who will be using the product wants technical information. The nontechnical audience—mostly administrative and purchasing people—looks for user advantages instead of facts and figures. Any of these people could have a say in the buy decision.

Solution: A benefit-oriented product overview followed by technical facts and figures kills both birds with one stone.

2. Hit the nail on the head. It's not always easy to boil complex technical concepts down to their essence and express those concepts in plain English. But the more you can do that, the more your technical copy will appeal to both the educated layman and the engineer. Both audiences need to understand why they should buy the product.

So everything you write must contribute to the main point. If there's anything that doesn't, get rid of it. Your final copy will communicate more clearly if nonessential words, phrases and sentences end up where they belong—in the round file.

3. Do your homework. A fair amount of research is needed to write advertising that appeals to technical audiences. The Internet takes much of the work out of it. Even if your client has supplied you with a stack of notes and existing literature, the Web is a useful resource for boning up on the technology behind the product. The more research you can do, the more productive the client interview and the more effective the resulting literature.

4. Talk to the "horse's mouth." Once the initial research is done, a one-to-one interview with the person closest to marketing the product is the next step. A product marketing manager with an engineering background makes an excellent "horse's mouth." Another good bet is a sales rep who knows the product inside out and can tell you the sales points he makes to customers. Both you and the rep can then be sure the sales literature you write will reinforce those sales points.

5. Record your interview. When you use a tape recorder, you can replay complex technical parts to make sure you haven't missed anything. That way you spend less of your client's time—and your own time—calling back later with questions.

An in-person meeting is best, but if you conduct an interview over the telephone you can still record the conversation. Recorder/telephone connection devices are readily available, inexpensive and simple to use. If you ask your interview questions in logical order, you can generate a draft directly from the transcript.

6. Never underestimate the power of credibility. Credibility means everything to the technical people who make or influence buying decisions. That's why it's critical to support claims with specifications, how-to information, charts, and photographs. All are worth their weight in gold when it comes to persuading an engineer to buy.

Testimonial quotes are equally impressive credibility tools because the reader can relate instantly to a satisfied user.

7. Show and tell. A word about the product photo: it's unlikely your concepts and copy can stand alone without one. If you don't show the product, a skeptical reader may wonder if it has even been designed yet. A photo lets that reader know the product has indeed been designed and is currently available. Besides, most engineers will want to know exactly what the product looks like.

In a highly conceptual ad, the photo can be shown in such a way that it won't interfere with the visual effect of the concept.

8. Throw out the alphabet soup. Abbreviations have their place in technical manuals, but they are best avoided in advertising and marketing literature. Even the most familiar abbreviations and acronyms will make your copy harder to read. If you must use an abbreviation, make sure you identify it by writing it out the first time it's used, then abbreviating afterwards.

While you're at it, consider replacing old saws like "state-of-the-art," "cutting edge," "optimum," and "user friendly" with more explicit, less overworked terms.

9. Look for the hot button. Somewhere in your stack of interview notes and research materials is the hot button that will lead to a buy decision. Your job is to find it and hit it hard without being too cute and clever. What problems does the product solve for the reader? How does it solve those problems? What will it do for this individual—will it give the buyer prestige within the company, make the buyer's job easier, allow the buyer to save the company money?

Zero in on what the product will mean to the potential buyer personally.

10. Say the magic word. Finally, after you've hooked your dual audience with product benefits and technical information, try to include a free offer in the final call to action. The most

popular "freebie" is a booklet that gives the reader some helpful guidelines for using the product. In direct mail, of course, the free offer can be the whole purpose of the piece. And just the word "free" is a major hot button. It invokes the universal desire to get something for nothing, but—even more important—this magical mantra appeals to the engineer's cost-effective nature.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Newsletter Staff



Signature Staff

[Return Home](#)

[More about the
San Diego Signature](#)

Managing Editor
Lana Walker-Helmuth
lane@pe.net

Associate Editor
Sharon Bradshaw
sbradsh2@san.rr.com

Copy Editors
Pamela Fridie
spfridie@nethere.com

Beth Vollbach
bethvollbach@earthlink.net

Proofreaders
Mark Hall
mark@hallmark-consulting.com

Catherine Robinson
croby2@yahoo.com

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Newsletter Information



About the San Diego *Signature*

[Return Home](#)

Reach hundreds of technical communicators for little cost!

[Advertising Rates](#)

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:

SD-STC
P.O. Box 910577
San Diego, CA 92191-0577

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.

By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors. The design and layout of this newsletter are © San Diego STC, 2002.

Permission to Republish

Material published in *Signature* may be republished if *Signature* and the author are credited. After publication, send a printed copy to the editor at the above address. If the publication is electronic, e-mail the newsletter URL or PDF to stcsignature@yahoo.com.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

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-Employment, Ken Wilson

kwilson@lqtechnology.com

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

VP-Finance, Lance -Robert

lance.robert@tarari.com

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

VP-Programs, Michael Cardenas

mcardenas@multitrans.com

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

Newsletter Managing Editor, Lana Walker-Helmuth

lwalker@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 Bradshaw

sbradsh2@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 Hosie

suzy@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-Professional Development, Open Position

VP-Membership, Open Position

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)

January 2003

Mission Statement



STC Mission Statement

[Return Home](#)

Society for Technical
Communication
901 N. Stuart Street
Suite 904
Arlington, Virginia
22203-1822

703.522.4114 (voice)
703.522.2075 (fax)

E-mail: stc@stc.org
Web site: www.stc.org

Our mission statement is: Designing the future of technical communication

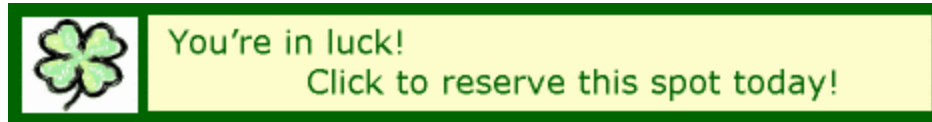
The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. STC is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, 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)

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)



January 2003

Advertising

[Return Home](#)

Got questions?
Comments? Want to
place an ad? Contact
the editor at
stcsignature@yahoo.com

Signature Advertising Information

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.

Publication Schedule

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.

Advertising Rates

Rates are based on type of ad (banner, rectangle, button, or text link), which newsletter page it is on (home page, feature article, or other), and where it is on the page (top, bottom, or side).

The following discounts apply:

- Prepayment for five issues: 10 percent discount
- Prepayment for ten issues: 20 percent discount

Horizontal Banner (see samples at top and bottom of this page)

Home page at bottom: \$50
(Top not available.)

Feature article at top: \$40
Feature article at bottom: \$30

All other articles at top: \$30
All other articles at bottom: \$20

Medium or Vertical Rectangle ([click to see samples](#))

Editor's Desk at right: \$50

▼ advertisement

Button 120 x 90



[Save BIG on book](#)

[XML Revealed at](#)



Vertical Banner 120 x 90

"This is hands down the best screen capture software I've ever used in my 10 years as a tech writer."

"Bravo! Finally something that truly saved me time AND gave superb results"

[more>>](#)

Presidential Podium at right: \$50

Vertical Banner (see sample at right side of this page)

Feature article at right: \$40

All other articles at right: \$30

Button (see samples at right side of this page)

Home page at bottom: \$40

(Space at the top is not available.)

Feature article at right: \$30

All other articles at right: \$20

Text link (see samples at right side of this page)

Home page at bottom: \$30

Feature article at right: \$20

All other articles at right: \$10

Specifications

File format: gif (non-animated only) or jpeg

Maximum file size: 18K

Horizontal Banner: 468 x 60 pixels

Medium Rectangle: 300 x 250 pixels

Vertical Rectangle: 240 x 400

Vertical Banner: 120 x 240 pixels

Button sizes: 120 x 90 or 125 x 125 pixels

Text link: No more than 2 lines per ad; no more than 21 characters (including spaces) per line

(Sizes based on Internet Advertising Bureau Standards)

Submission Requirements

Submit advertisement by e-mail to stcsignature@yahoo.com.

Include contact name and phone number.

If the ad is to link to a Web page, provide the complete URL.

(Linked pages open in a new browser window.)

Payment Information

Payment must be received before the publication date.

After receiving e-mail confirmation from the editor, make check payable to: STC

Mail check to:

SD-STC

P.O. Box 910557

San Diego, CA 92191-0577

Advertising Policy

The publisher reserves the right to request revisions or to reject advertising. The advertiser and the advertising agency assume liability for all content of the advertisement published and for any claims arising thereof against the publisher. The publisher is not liable for delays in the scheduled publication dates beyond a refund of prepaid advertising space costs.

Liability

The advertiser shall indemnify and protect the publisher from claims or expenses which may arise from the unauthorized use of any name, photograph, drawing, or work protected by copyright, registration, or label printed as a result of material supplied by the advertiser.

[Return Home](#)

[Feature](#) | [Editor's Desk](#) | [President's Podium](#) | [Region 8 Conference](#)
[Press Release](#) | [Chapter Meetings](#) | [Advice](#)
[Dear Muse](#) | [Humor](#) | [Introductions](#) | [Visiting Author](#)



Advertising Sample

January 2003

Editor Sees Two Eventful Years

By [Rick Bradshaw](#), Editor[Return Home](#)

As many have said before and others will say in the future, this is my last column for and my last issue of *Signature*. It has been an eventful two years since I took over as editor. We've gone from a print publication with a dated appearance and largely borrowed articles to an electronic publication with a more updated appearance and articles largely written by local people. Along the way, we've managed to win a couple of awards.

We have a new team of editors coming in next year. Hopefully, they will be able to continue to improve the publication. To them I say, never let it stand on laurels of the past. Go forth and conquer new issues in new and better ways.

Many of you, our membership of more than 300, don't regularly attend meetings. Many of you may not have an idea of what is required to fill the various council positions and of the staff of volunteers behind them that is required to do the job. The newsletter staff is the largest in the chapter in some regards. Some are core staff while others are more of an adjunct staff since they may only contribute one article or service per year. While not everyone can contribute each month because of time constraints, many do; others have contributed multiple times both monthly and throughout the chapter year. Every one of these people has risen to the challenge and performed admirably.

For those of you who may download this issue and read it but not come to the June meeting, I'd like to introduce to you and thank those people who have helped to make *Signature* what it has become in chapter year 2001/2002. There are many. This is not a one-person show by any means. They are listed in no particular order. They will be individually recognized at the June meeting.

Copy Editors:
Elizabeth Vollbach
Pamela Fridle

Illustrator:
Ann M. Throckmorton

<<article snipped>>

Medium Rectangle 300 x 250

Online FrameMaker Classes!

STC
Discount!**C**onvenient**A**ffordable**R**eal-world**E**ngagingwww.caretraininginc.com

Vertical Rectangle 240 x 400

**We're giving away a
copy of FrameMaker
every day for the next
30 days!**

**Really.**

<<Click here>>