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The San Diego Signature



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Thinking Outside the Box

By Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave

The phrase "think outside the box" is an allusion to a puzzle that was popular among management consultants during the 1970s and 1980s.

Considering that we've all heard this expression before..., how many of us understand what is actually required to think outside the box?

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Managing Editor
Catherine Robinson
stcsignature@yahoo.com

Assistant Editor
Jennifer Mallory
jmallory100@hotmail.com

Copy Editors
Pamela Fridie
spfridie@nethere.com

Beth Vollbach
bethvollbach@earthlink.net

Graphics Designer
Fabrizio Scippa
fs@fsdsgn.com

Proofreaders
Theresa Freese
taffyfreese@cox.net

Mark Hall
mark@hallmark-consulting.com

Karie Hebert
karebear18@cox.net

Suzanne A. Hosie
suzy@wote.com

Kitt Medrano
kitt.medrano@wote.com

Bonnie Nicholls
bnicholls@cox.net

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STC San Diego
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San Diego, CA 92150-1261

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Chapter President, Walter Hanig

wdhanig@alumni.rice.edu

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

mpetersen3@cox.net

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

VP-Employment, Beth Peisic

bethpeisic@san.rr.com

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

VP-Finance, Lance-Robert

lance.robert@tarari.com

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

VP-Membership, Sue Heim

sue_heim@msn.com

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

mcardenas@multitrans.com

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

Newsletter Managing Editor, Catherine Robinson

stcsignature@yahoo.com

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

jmallory100@hotmail.com

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

kellelyw@cox.net

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



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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

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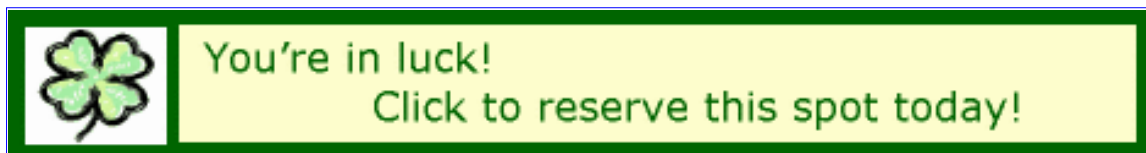
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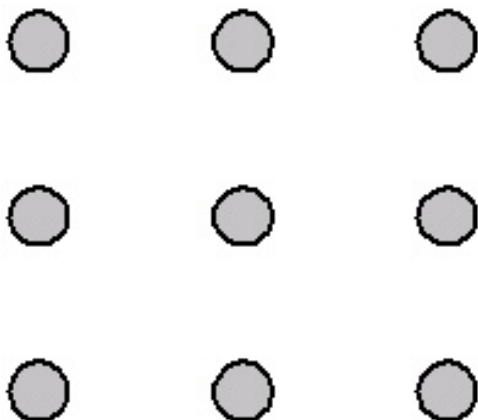
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Thinking Outside the Box

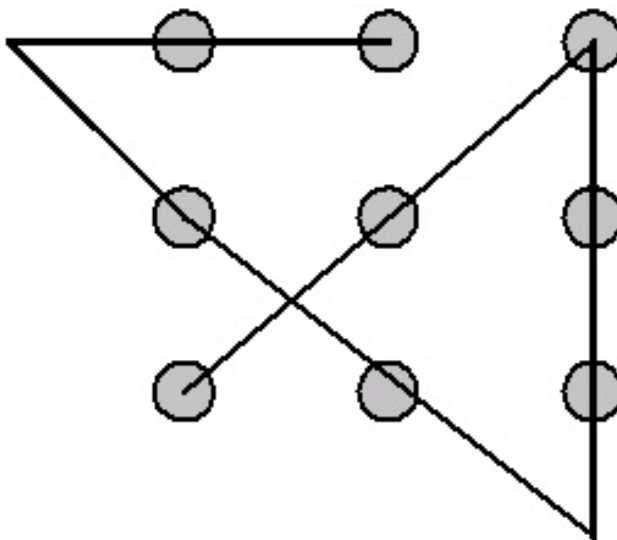
By [Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave](#)

The phrase think outside the box is an allusion to a puzzle that was popular among management consultants during the 1970s and 1980s.

To solve the puzzle, you must connect each of the nine dots shown here using only four lines and without lifting your pencil from the paper.



The only way to solve this puzzle in the prescribed manner is to extend the lines beyond the perceived edges of the "box" formed by the nine dots.



This exercise was used to demonstrate how unwarranted assumptions like the belief that the four lines must remain within the confines of the grid can result in your failing to see the best solution (or the only solution) to a problem.

As this phrase has become cliché, it has come to stand as an exhortation to

innovate, "Come on, team, let's think outside the box!"

Considering that we've all heard this expression before and have perhaps even used it ourselves to urge our teams to come up with something new, how many of us understand what is actually required to think outside the box?

Methods for Thinking Outside the Box (1)

Howard Eisner (2), a professor of engineering management at The George Washington University, developed 10 practices designed to release you from the constraints of your current thinking and to serve as springboards to help you expand your problem-solving skills.

1. Generalize and broaden your thinking. An example of this first practice is the story of the railroad company that, as part of their strategic planning, confirmed that they were in the "railroading" business. Some years later, they were almost bankrupt. Had they generalized and broadened their strategic view of their business by redefining themselves as being in the "transportation" business, they may have avoided their fate.

When you generalize and broaden your outlook, you expand your vistas. In the case of this "railroading" company, recasting themselves as a "transportation" company could have opened up their thinking to include new market opportunities (for example, marine or air transportation).

By generalizing and broadening your thinking you can begin to leave your current ways of thinking simply by expanding on them.

2. Cross over to new applications. Here you look for solutions developed in one domain and apply them to another domain. An example is the push over the last decade by the Department of Defense (DoD) to accept commercial practices and off-the-shelf systems as part of their arsenals and infrastructure. By crossing over to solutions that work in other disciplines, the DoD now has a cost-effective model for doing business, even though it took a while for it to truly be accepted and embraced.

3. Question conventional wisdom. This approach often deals with simply challenging statements like "we can't do that" and "that's not the way we do it around here" with "why not?" These statements, bounded by cultural negativity, often echo up and down the halls of business and government.

The next time you hear statements like these ask, "Why?" and persist until you get a specific answer.

4. Think laterally. Edward de Bono is credited with identifying lateral thinking as a method that results in developing novel solutions to given problems. According to de Bono, there are four factors critical to lateral thinking:

- recognizing the dominant ideas that polarize the different perceptions of the problem
- searching for different ways to look at the situation
- relaxing the rigid control of thinking
- using chance to encourage other ideas

By applying the factors of lateral thinking to your own problem-solving situations, you can move your thinking well outside its current box to create new and unique solutions.

5. Think systematically. This approach is an integral part of systems engineering. Through this practice, you force yourself to expand the

dimensions of all possible solutions through the systematic consideration of alternatives.

Consider the power of employing the highly creative method of lateral thinking with a systematic model of evaluating the options you develop. By leveraging these right-brain/left-brain best practices, you will generate novel alternatives that you can then trace systematically to their roots.

This practice allows you to iterate on each possible answer and to test each solution systematically.

6. Remove constraints. When you're faced with a sticky problem, try identifying the constraints and then removing them one at a time. You might find that some constraints are unnecessary or artificial and are forcing the rejection of possible solutions.

7. Consider your opposite personality type. If you are a highly intuitive person, you will tend to come at an issue differently from your personality opposite someone who is a highly sensing type. This suggests that one way to break out of your current box is for you to explore solutions with someone with an opposite personality profile, whether that is an employee, your boss, or even your spouse.

8. Analyze backwards. This approach begins with your imagining a valid answer and then working backward to see what steps are needed to get you to that answer. This method helps to prevent you from diverging away from the goal, which can happen when you move from the known input towards an unarticulated output.

Instead, articulate the desired output, or solution, and reverse your way through the process to arrive at the problem statement. If you can get from the output to the input, you can generate a solution.

9. Use only the back of the envelope. This refers to sketching your thoughts and solutions in a limited space. This technique forces you to puzzle your way through very complicated problems while following the k.i.s.s. [keep it simple] principle.

This practice is an excellent method for helping you to develop a clearer understanding of the most significant factors related to the issues at hand.

10. Practice obversity. This peculiar word actually is the counterpart of an affirmative proposition. In an affirmative proposition, one states that "All A is B." For example: All spaniels are dogs. The obverse of that is, "No A is not B," or no spaniel is not a dog.

In his role at The George Washington University, Eisner has experimented with the technique of using obversity to initiate out-of-the-box thinking by distributing a list of "Two Dozen Ways to Move Inexorably in the Direction of Failure" and then exploring the various reactions of his audience.

He reports that people pay more attention to the "failure" list than they do to a complementary list that tells them how to succeed. By turning popular wisdom upside down and accepted conventions inside out, you are more likely to start thinking outside of the box.

Obstacles to Thinking Outside the Box

When you embark on the journey of moving your thinking outside the box, you need to be aware of how likely your team from your boss to your staff to your peers in other departments will take to your efforts at innovation.

Pareto's 80-20 Rule You'll Be on Your Own 20 Percent of the Time

When your boss is encouraging you to think outside the box, consider whether she is open to the results that might flow from such thinking.

If you are thinking outside the box, it's likely that at least the Pareto 80-20 rule is working. That is, it's probable that no more than about 20 percent of your colleagues (and probably considerably less than that) are able to think outside the box. On an 80-20 basis, 80 percent of your teammates, from senior management to the rank-and-file implementers, will likely not find your ideas interesting or workable. This means that most of the time you'll have more detractors than supporters.

If such is the case, then you'll have to learn how to be patient, explaining more than once how you got to your result and why it's the right answer. (This is where method 5, "Thinking systematically," comes in handy.) Even though this represents an additional burden for you to deal with, it's worth the effort if you value innovation and creativity.

When Mental Models Get in the Way

Other obstacles to being successful at thinking outside the box come from aspects of an arcane subject known as psychological decision theory. Two such features are fixed mental models and loss (or risk) avoidance.

The first says that many folks stick with prior mental models, even if current data suggests a different situation. If your boss holds tightly to her fixed mental models, your new facts may not be able to penetrate her established prejudice.

Similarly, if your boss perceives your solution to have even a minor amount of risk, even if the potential rewards are very substantial, she may be so wed to loss avoidance that, again, she won't be able to accept your solution as valid.

An early exercise to prepare you for the rigors of thinking outside the box is for you to explore your reactions to the following conventional wisdoms:

- More is better.
- Soon we'll have a paperless society.
- We can't do it faster, cheaper, and better.
- We must have 100-percent buy-in before we can proceed.
- The system absolutely must satisfy all of the stated requirements.

Once you have acknowledged that your thinking is inside the box and you have made the commitment to think outside it, you will be ready to challenge existing assumptions yours and your organization's. That's when you can begin to inspect alternatives from a variety of perspectives.

As you practice and gain success with some of the principles I've outlined here, you will begin to expand your box, and you will eventually cross the boundaries of the box just as you saw in the solution to the nine-dot puzzle.

Now come on, team, let's think outside the box! The benefit to you and to your organization will be increased creativity and innovation.

Acknowledgements

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(2) Howard Eisner, professor of Engineering Management and Systems Engineering at The George Washington University, has served as president of two high-tech companies. His column appears in each technology special report.

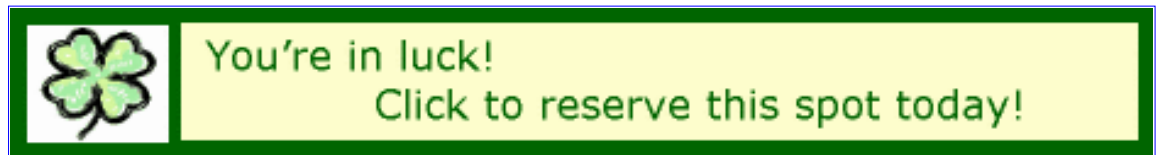
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Word Workaround Doesn't Work

By [Karen Field Carroll](#)

Memo to Microsoft: Before you release a product you know, like an operating system you might want to test it.

Maybe that's harsh. Maybe Microsoft is an easy target, especially for a humor columnist. Why not? Using Word all day like I do, I see a lot of reasons to poke fun at the Jolly Green Software Company. Here's an example.

You've no doubt noticed that Word's Styles list, with its WISYWIG options, requires bifocals and patience to navigate. I tried to find a workaround for that one day by typing `rev` in the Styles list to locate a style I had created called `ReviewerQuestions`. I was hoping Word might bring me to my style more quickly this way.

But, instead of choosing an existing style, Word created a new style called `rev`, which is odd, given that most developers abhor ad hoc database entries created by users who are stumbling around the interface.

But there it was, this style I had not intended to create. `Rev` had no formatting, except the default: Times New Roman font, 12-point size, left alignment. An orphan child.

Thinking that if you could create a style in the Styles list, you might be able to delete one, I selected `rev` in the list and pressed Delete. The field went blank, but when I pressed Enter again, my unwanted child reappeared. I had to go to the Styles Organizer, where I found the style looking happy among its new brothers and sisters, to delete it. And so I did.

And then I felt like a bad human being.

Still, the ordeal made me realize that the occasional random entry in the database via dropdown lists is an issue that doesn't register on Microsoft's radar these days.

It got me thinking about the development process at Microsoft and the conversations that might take place.

"Hey, Joe," calls the QA guy over the cube wall, "Did you know users can create a paragraph style by typing something in the dropdown list?"

"Users can type in the dropdown list? I'll be damned."

"Yeah. So do you want users to be able to do that?"

"Do what? Type in the dropdown list or create a style that way?"

"Either."

"Why not?"

"Because they'll be updating the database ad hoc."

"Hell, users can hack into a system and install software through that chasm in the OS security. Why would we worry about this?"

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Directed to a Different Path

By [Catherine Robinson](#), Managing Editor

This past week has imprinted some unforgettable memories on all of us and continues to do so every day in one way or another. The wild fires have taken a toll on all of us. My heartfelt condolences go out to all those who were affected by personal loss of homes, loved ones, and friends. The list is too precious and long for me to continue.

It's times like these that we find ourselves stopping to reflect and take inventory of why we are here and what we are doing to contribute to others while we are here.

I recently began to read a book by Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*. As Warren put it, "Knowing your purpose simplifies your life. It defines what you do and what you don't do. Your purpose becomes the standard you use to evaluate which activities are essential and which aren't (page 32)."

I was already on a personal odyssey to try to figure out why I am here and what I can do to bring a higher quality of life to my family and others. The verse in the Bible that I cling to right now is, "I am your Creator. You were in my care even before you were born (Isaiah 44:2)."

Just knowing that somebody cares gives me the courage and strength I need to move forward in my life. I hope and pray that all those who were affected by the tragic events of this past week can begin anew and find hope in each new day.

I have learned to love life and those who I let into my life. I hope that we can continue to cultivate our relationships and grow together in our life's journey.

As one of our forefathers once said, "Surely God would not have created such a being as man to exist only for a day! No, no, man was made for immortality (Abraham Lincoln)."

I hope the best for each of you. Be sure to take care of yourselves, and focus on the things in life that will help you to have the greatest impact on your relationships and the other things that you hold sacred.

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Recipe for Technical Communications Career Longevity

By [Walter Hanig](#), President

I've formally been a technical communicator a little over 10 years. That alone does not qualify me to offer advice on staying employed. However, in that 10-year span, I've had to find a new job four times, not counting mergers and acquisitions and sales. So, I think I can at least speak from personal experience.

Ingredients

- 1 part attitude, positive
- 1 part support
- 2 parts networking
- 2 parts initiative
- 1 part professionalism
- 1 part luck

Preparation

Attitude: you cannot affect that you were laid off, if you were. You do own your attitude. Positive helps. Who wants to hire someone with a negative attitude?

Support: your family and friends will tell you that everything will work out OK. Don't come up with reasons that they're wrong. Just believe them.

Networking: stay in touch with former colleagues, even if they're not technical communicators. Participate in one or more professional associations like STC or San Diego Professional Editors Network.

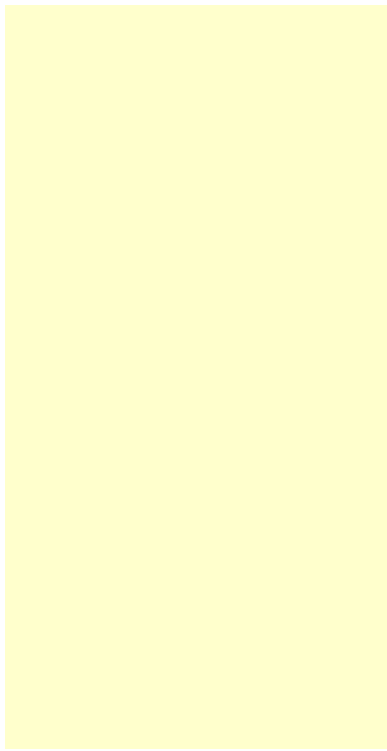
Initiative: volunteer for new tasks at work, such as testing software or hardware, writing or editing marketing literature, helping with the intranet, and working with your professional organization. Demonstrated initiative makes a great story in interviews.

Professionalism: meet or exceed your commitments every day at work and in volunteer situations. Your reputation has as much influence on future employment as your documented skills.

Luck is sometimes no more that communicating your availability and skills and interest to everyone you know. Many times you'll be told about openings at companies you didn't even know existed!

Add other ingredients to your taste.

Serves 1



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FrameMaker: Chapter Template Numbering, Part 2

By [Matt Sullivan](#)

Last month I talked about the prep work I do when I set up the numbering for a chapter template. For a look at that material, see http://www.stc-sd.org/newsletter/october_2003/techissues.htm .

In that article, the screen capture is a little tough to read. I've posted a PDF of that information at the following site to make it easier to understand:

<http://www.grafixtraining.com/stc/numbering.htm>.

The PDF includes:

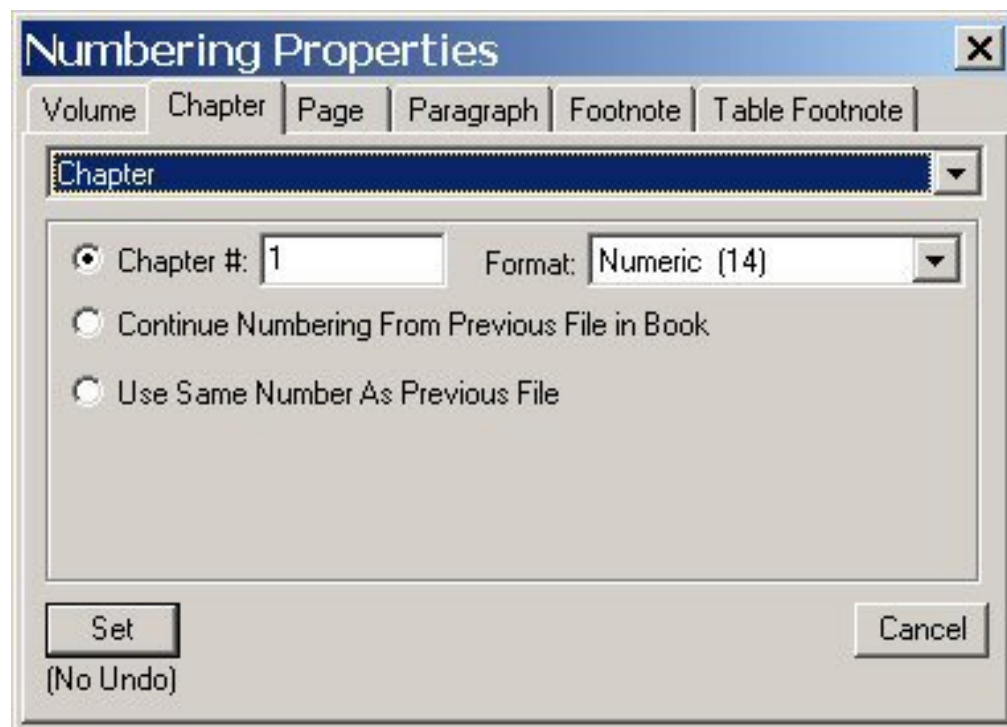
- a legend for the building blocks used in the process.
- a series of questions designed to help you figure out what codes are needed to get the desired result.
- a chapter organization sheet that I find helpful to understand the values Frame will track on the basis of my Autonumbering codes.

Working out the Codes

Now, on with the process: using the same Paragraph Format names as my sample files.

ChapterTitle

Chapter numbering is one of the easiest codes to use, as it is explicitly defined as the system variable <\$chapnum>. This variable is controlled by the Numbering dialog box available from both chapter and book files.



Heading1

The first portion of the heading uses the chapter number variable, so we start with `<$chapnum>`, which returns the current value of our chapter.

Following that with a period (just plain text) and the code for incrementing our section numbers and, finally, the code for a tab gives us

```
<$chapnum>.<n+>, \t.
```

Note: The first time Frame runs into a numbering code, Frame will give it a default value of 0 if not otherwise specified. The `<n+>`, code says, "add a unit to the previous value of the variable, and display it as a numeric." Because Frame has no previous value for this code in Section 1.1, Frame assigns 0, giving us $0+1$, or a value of 1. In subsequent sections, we pick up the previous value, increment, and display the incremented number.

When we got to the Heading1 paragraph, we needed to start establishing a routine for working out the codes in subsequent numbers. Here is where my four questions come in.

After the chapter number and period, ask yourself:

- "Does the next code display?"

In this case, it does, so we then ask:

- "Does it increment?"

Because it does, we use an increment code of `<n+>`, which not only increments but displays the value as a numeric.

Note: We could also have displayed the resulting value as Roman

numerals (R or r) as alphas (A or a) in the place of the n.

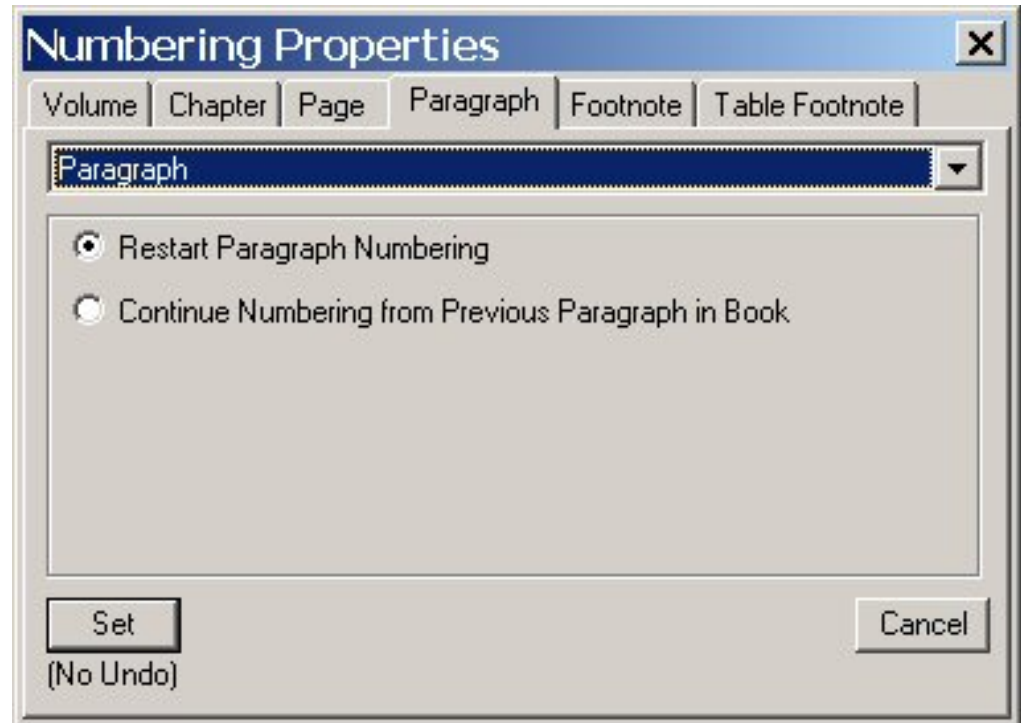
The next question then requires analysis:

- "Does the value reset?"

Because our value does reset, we'll need to answer the final question:

- "Where?"

Because our Heading1s reset at the beginning of the chapter, we can use our book-numbering dialog box to reset paragraph numbers, ensuring that each chapter will have an x.1 as its first section (where x is the current chapter number).



Heading2

In my Heading2 example, 1.2.3\t Sample Text, we first need the chapter number, again, <\$chapnum>, followed by a period.

Going through our questions again, we need to display our second-level autonumber, but we don't need to increment or reset it. This brings up our display code, followed by a period.

For the Heading2 code, our questions lead us to the <n+> building block, again, resulting in

```
<$chapnum> . <n> . <n+> \t
```

Note: There are three bracketed codes to get us out to the third-level autonumber, which is our Heading2.

We know that, because the Heading2 resets, we need a reset code, < =0>. We also know that the Heading2s reset every time we encounter a Heading1 in our document. This leads us to change the Heading1 code to

<\$chapnum> .<n+><n=0>\t

Wrapping Up for Now

Sorry for the long-winded article (Parts 1 and 2). I thought two months would give me enough space to tackle this subject, but I started running long halfway through the "Heading2" section. I'll do my best to finish up with Part 3 next month.

Which leads me to an old joke:

Question: How do you keep 200 tech writers in suspense?

Answer: Tell you next month!

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[Click here for November 12 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.

November Chapter Meeting Preview: Get Even Better PDF

By [Michael Cárdenas, VP Programs](#)

Our November meeting will feature a presentation by Sharon Burton-Hardin. Her fast and energetic talk will show anyone who needs to create or manage PDF files how to get good PDFs every time with any Acrobat Versions 3 through 6.

Brief Description

This presentation will include tips that novices and experts alike can use. Burton-Hardin will show you the settings you need to get consistently good results regardless of the tool.

Burton-Hardin will explain and demonstrate each step of the process, for example:

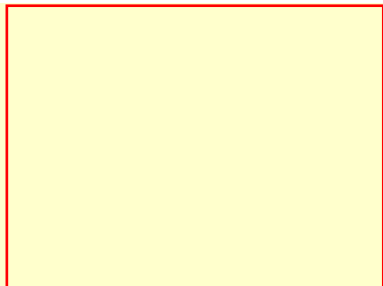
- installing the drivers
- getting color in your PDF
- determining which graphics work best and why
- getting clear graphics
- putting your PDF file on the Web

If you are tired of not getting the results you need, this is the talk for you.

Biography

Burton-Hardin owns an award-winning technical writing outsource company, Anthrobytes Consulting. She started the Technical Writing Certificate Program at the University of California, Riverside, actively teaches and recommends other teachers for the program, started and is currently president of the Inland Empire STC Chapter, and is writing and publishing nonfiction essays in other markets.

In her spare time, Burton-Hardin reads lots of fiction, rides her bike, roller blades, traces her family history, grows a collection of cacti, plays with her animals, hangs out with her "very patient husband," and throws really great parties.



October meeting attendance numbers:

47 attendees
1 cancellation
4 no-shows



Walter Hanig, President

October Chapter Meeting Review

By [Eric Hurd](#)

San Diego Chapter Meeting - Wednesday, October 8, 2003

After we partook of a delicious helping of beans, rice, enchiladas, and the like, President Walter Hanig invited those looking for work or those with job leads to stand and talk a little about themselves or their positions. He then asked the first-time attendees to stand and tell us a little about themselves.

Announcements

Walter graciously thanked our many volunteers. He singled out:

- Lance-Robert for finding a new bank that offers better service and higher interest
- Kelley Wilson for finding a faster and cheaper ISP for the chapter Web site
- Michelle Petersen for her work with Professional Development
- Beth Peisic for running our recently revived resumé review program
- Sue Heim for organizing the new-member dinner

Volunteers are needed to help Michelle with setting up local seminars for professional development and to participate in the resumé review program.

Walter brought more books for the "Adopt-a-Book" table. Members were invited to stop by the table and provide a home for one of his old books.

He also mentioned that, if we are cleaning house and find a stack of books that might be of use to our fellow members, we should feel free to bring them to the next meeting and leave them on the table.

Or, if there is a specific book that we would like to read, and the chapter library does not carry it, the chapter will buy the book if we write a review for the newsletter.

Sue Heim reminded us that the new-member dinner will be held October 14, poolside at the Red Lion Hanalei. If any new members did not attend last year's dinner and did not receive an invitation, they were asked to please contact Sue as soon as possible.

Sue also announced that next year's Region 8 conference will be held July 25 through 27 in Davis, California. There are many volunteer positions available. The price of the conference is significantly lower for volunteers.

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>.

Then Sue planted the idea that we might consider hosting the 2005 Region 8 conference here in San Diego. Hosting a conference would require a lot of participation on our part.

If you have questions or concerns about the 2005 Region 8 conference, please contact Sue.

21st Century Technical Communication Trends

Michael Cárdenas introduced the evening's guest speaker, Marie Highby, who hails from San Jose State University.

Marie is in charge of San Jose State Professional Development's Technical Writing and Communications Certificate Program. In addition to her teaching, Marie's varied career has included stints as a forecasting analyst and marketing writer in the investment management and banking industries. She is currently active in Silicon Valley as a corporate trainer. Marie holds an MA in literature from Duke University as well as an MBA from the University of Virginia.

Marie introduced her topic by citing the cliché, "Those who do not learn the lessons of history are doomed to repeat it." She emphasized the importance of stepping back from our day-to-day activities and taking a look at the past in order to get an idea of where our profession is going and position ourselves to survive the inevitable changes.

In order to forecast where we might be going, she focused on past, present, and future trends in the areas of:

- teaching
- writing and media
- typesetting and computer hardware
- communications technology

Past and Present Trends

Marie began with past and present trends.

- **Teaching** In the 1950s and '60s, writing teachers taught grammar and how to write a thesis and outline but not how to think and compose. At that time, employers assumed that a person with a degree was automatically a good writer.

During the '70s, self-expression began to replace exposition in the classroom. Teachers began teaching how to think with techniques such as mind mapping and clustering. At the same time, employers began to realize that good writing was a specialized skill.

- **Writing and media** The drive to make the office more efficient brought new technologies that changed the way we work. Carbon paper and xerography allowed us to make multiple copies of documents without retyping.

This, in turn, increased the use of paper, which led to the paperless dream, where technologies, such as Acrobat and online documentation, were introduced as ways to reduce costs.

- **Typesetting and computer hardware** The move from typewriters to CRT-based word processors has placed more



Marie Highby

responsibility for document creation in the hands of writers. In the '50s and '60s, technical writers may not have typed their own documents, and they were not responsible for the layout or design.

- **Communications technology** With the introduction of desktop publishing, powerful word processing, and graphics programs, writers are now expected to do it all. We are expected to be able to create a multitude of output types, such as Acrobat, printed, and online materials. Our jobs have become more technical with the need to understand single-sourcing technologies, HTML, even coding to integrate our help with software.

Implications

With the advances in technology and need to compete, technical writers have taken on more roles. However, as creating and distributing technology becomes more complex, it is becoming difficult to stay on top of it all.

Subsequently, the profession will probably splinter into more specialized areas. Additionally, the increase in technology increases the need for writers in a broader range of areas.

Marie identified three main categories that we might expect to see in the coming years: writer/craftsman, designer/information architect, and documentation manager.

- **Writer/craftsman** The writer/craftsman would be responsible for copyediting, language specialty, graphics, animation, and SME interviews. Employers would require a BA and some type of certification.
- **Designer/information architect** The designer/information architect would be responsible for organizing content, single sourcing, production, and multimedia artisans. Employers would require specialized knowledge, a BA, certification in specialty technology, and possibly an MA.

Marie mentioned that many masters programs are not taught by professors who are up on the latest technologies. Certification might be a better bet for preparing for this type of work.

- **Management** With the specialization of the field and increase in demand, professionals are needed who can coordinate a project and/or group of writers.

A different set of skills is required of a manager than of a writer or designer. Employers are looking for people with project, product, or senior management experience.

Future Trends

Marie ended the discussion by asking us to think about where we fit into the evolution of the technical writing profession. She opened the floor to us, and some good points were brought up by both her and the audience.

- **Writer/craftsman jobs are the most easily offshored.** Think about ways to justify keeping your type of work onshore. Expose hidden costs.

- Embrace new technologies. Be willing to learn and adapt. Be flexible.
- Understand the changing needs of your audience. Users are becoming more technically savvy and perhaps less patient with traditional help. Consider approaching from a problem-solving point of view.
- Promote ourselves as usability experts.
- Follow job listings to identify trends. Stay on top of them. Keep in mind that many of the buzzwords are simply new ways of describing what we've always done.
- Stay equipped in order to be available to employers who are looking to reduce office space.

October Meeting Wrapup

Michael and Walter thanked all for attending and thanked Marie for a great presentation. Walter concluded the meeting with a drawing for several prizes.

- Rex Casey won a classic STC emblazoned coffee mug, courtesy of Walter.
- Faye Rivkin won a Magic Cube filled with small office supplies.
- Heather Naegele and Richard Garner both won very nice metallic business card holders.
- Tania Meyer won this month's Wally Buck.

Thank you all for coming. See you in November!



Rex Casey



Faye Rivkin



Heather Naegele



Richard Garner



Tania Meyer

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Professional Development

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Upcoming STC Telephone Seminars

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

STC headquarters is offering 1.5-hour telephone seminars over the next several months. Our San Diego Chapter is offering local STC members the chance to attend a group session of these seminars at a reduced cost per member. The cost of attending is \$10 per member. Seminar attendees are requested to volunteer the locations.

Title	Presenter	Date
We Are What We Measure: Metrics for Technical Communication Departments	Saul Carliner	November 5, 2003
Adding Panache to Your Procedures	Leah Guhren	December 10, 2003
Effective Web Sites: Structure, Navigation, and Graphics	Jean-luc Doumont	January 14, 2004
Demonstrating the Value and Effectiveness of Communication Products and Services	Saul Carliner	January 28, 2004
Don't Make Me Do That! Making Learning Fun and Engaging	Lance Gelein	February 11, 2004
Designing Web Applications	Whitney Quesenbery	February 26, 2004
Keywords for Indexing and Search	Seth Maislin	March 10, 2004
Winning New Business: Preparing and Submitting Proposals 101B	Judith Herr	March 24, 2004

See the [Telephone Seminar Web page](#) on our local STC chapter Web site for details about chapter-subsidized seminar sessions.

Free Attendance

You can attend the telephone seminar of your choice for free if you help us by volunteering a couple of hours of your time to help coordinate it.

We're looking for a few volunteers to coordinate the chapter-subsidized telephone seminars. As a telephone seminar coordinator, you would act as a point person for the seminar(s) of your choice to help with the publicity and logistics of the seminar. As a volunteer, you would be able to attend your seminar for free.

Your duties would involve the following.

- Send announcement e-mail to members on the chapter email list.
- Create and maintain the list of attendees. (If we don't get at least five paying people signed up, your commitment ends with this step.)
- Identify a location for the seminar.

- A couple of days before the seminar, send a reminder email to all attendees.

- Attend your seminar for free.

The total time commitment will be up to four hours per seminar. You can volunteer for as many or as few seminars as you like. Check the [Telephone Seminar page](#) on our local STC chapter Web site, and contact Michelle Petersen to sign up to volunteer.

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Ann M. Throckmorton

How to submit an ad

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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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Book

The Truth About Managing People and Nothing But the Truth

by Stephen P. Robbins

Prentice Hall, 2002
ISBN 0-13-146095-1

[Author Bio](#)

[Contact Lana](#)

Nothing But the Truth About Change

by [Lana Walker-Helmuth](#)

While perusing a book table at Barnes & Noble, my attention was drawn to a pretty green book whose title promised the truth and nothing but the truth about managing people. As a newly appointed supervisor, I was intrigued. And, because of a sea of change at work, including the layoff of my boss, I eagerly read the short chapter, "The Truth About Coping With Change."

Here, I share author Stephen P. Robbins' insights, which are based on thousands of research studies. I also throw in a few of my own comments.

Four Truths About Change

Robbins describes the four truths about change.

1. Most people resist any change that doesn't jingle in their pockets

We know that people resist change and do so overtly and covertly. We resist for a number of reasons – we're creatures of habit, we like security, we fear the unknown.

As a technical communicator, I've been involved in several software implementations. I've witnessed tremendous resistance to new processes and different ways of doing things. In my experience, usually managers deal with their employees' resistance by trying to broker compromises, lending a sympathetic ear, or simply ordering people to deal with it. I've seen all these methods fail.

According to Robbins, the best way for a manager to deal with resistance is to undermine the resistance by:

- providing rewards for accepting change
- communicating reasons for the change
- including the people who will be affected in the process

2. You **can** teach an old dog new tricks

Some believe that people over 50 just don't cut the mustard when it comes to adapting to new methods and techniques. Older people are perceived as being relatively inflexible, resistant to change, and not as trainable as younger people. This perception is especially prevalent regarding information technology skills.

The evidence shows, however, that older workers want to learn and are just as capable of learning as any other employee group. As technical communicators, we need to keep that in mind when we do audience analysis.

For technical communicators who themselves are targets of this misperception, it's good to know there is plenty of research to prove otherwise.

3. Use participation to reduce resistance to change

I've been around long enough to know that often managers merely announce a change and implement it. Although it's a common practice, it's not a good one.

Let's say you are enlightened and want to involve people in a change decision. Before doing a team huddle, though, Robbins says, consider whether the conditions are right for using participation.

- Is there adequate time for people to participate?
- Are the issues relevant to the employees' interests?
- Do the employees possess the ability (e.g., the appropriate technical knowledge or communication skills) to participate?
- Will the organization's culture support employee involvement?

When these conditions are met, you can reap the rewards of participation—reduced resistance, commitment to the change, and increased quality of the change decision.

4. Layoffs are as tough on survivors as those who get laid off

Like many others in our field, I've been there a few times. Layoffs can severely affect those who remain. If the survivors' feelings of frustration, anxiety, and loss are ignored, the organization's performance will suffer.

Robbins offers a four-step approach for dealing with "survivor sickness."

Step 1: Get the process right. This includes:

- making the cuts clear and quick
- providing abundant information
- giving layoff victims adequate prior notification
- being emotionally honest
- explaining decisions openly

Step 2: Let people grieve to deal with repressed feelings and emotions. People need to release feelings before they can go on. Use of groups is one of the most effective ways of bringing emotions out.

Step 3: Break the chain of organizational dependence. This step offers a way to prevent survivor sickness in the first place. People need to move to having self-directed careers. Breaking dependency relationships is essentially up to the individual.

Step 4: Reshape the organization's systems to lessen processes that create dependency. Organizations historically have created codependence through:

- seniority systems
- loyalty expectations
- socialization processes to shape people
- long-term career planning
- nontransferable corporate pension plans

Robbins says organizations have to detach themselves from these paternalistic practices.



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November 2003

The 2003 STC Region 8 Conference



The 2003 STC Region 8 Conference

114 Degrees of Hot

By [Kelley Wilson Mesterharm](#), Web Site Manager

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The STC Region 8 Conference in July was, well, hot! It was hot outside, yes, but the meetings were held indoors. In addition to the topics of interest, attendees at the Imperial Palace Hotel were provided with covered parking, air conditioning, and ice-cold water to make the experience worthwhile. All in all, you would have never known it was 114 degrees in Las Vegas.

Aside from the weather, the hot topics provided an opportunity to learn information along the following six stems or content areas:

- "Knowledge and Content Management"
- "Localization and Usability"
- "Technology and Applications"
- "Writing and Editing"
- "Your Career"
- "For New Communicators"

In addition, the conference involved participants in one-on-one networking, classroom attention at the sessions, and hands-on workshops. They could ask popular presenters (e.g., Bonni Graham, Karl Mathews from RoboHelp, Deborah Gill-Hesselgrave, and Teri Noonan) burning hot questions such as "How can I distill files for optimum output?" In addition to those who presented from our chapter, Michael Cardenas and Beth Peisic were in attendance.

The theme of the conference, "Around the World in T.C. Ways," referred to international technical communication. (The international conference will be held in Baltimore in 2004.)

Those who wished to gain their fortunes in the "city that never sleeps," gained knowledge from the keynote speaker, Julie Winger, who presented the power of "Why Not!"

Another featured speaker, Raymond Urgo, warmed us up with his message of taking care of your professional future and dazzled us with his coaching and mentoring presentation.

As the volunteer webmaster for the STC Region 8 Conference, I found it

gratifying to see the virtual reality of the conference come to life. Volunteers are also needed for the 2004 Region 8 Conference. If you have some time to spare, check out www.stcregion8conference.org/.

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November 2003

A Different View



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Balancing Quality and Speed

By Gail Van Landingham

"How do you balance quality and speed?" I asked one of my favorite engineers a few years back. I know, it sounds like the old software development mantra: "good, fast, cheap pick two." But I really wanted to know if this wise colleague thought it was possible to create a good product and do it fast without a magic spell.

He smiled, shook his head, and asked me not to share his comments with anyone else in the company. This is what he said.

The goal is progress, not perfection

- Accept the fact you'll never be able to do a project as well as you'd like to and that your project will never be finished because there's always another release right behind it.
- Find a balance between taking forever (because it is never good enough) and releasing a project regardless of its condition.
- Remember that perfection is the enemy of completion.

You are working for a company, not yourself plan accordingly

- A company's idea of quality may not be the same as yours. So carefully measure every feature, every bug fix, every documentation change you propose against these "golden rules":
 - Will it increase company sales?
 - Does its value outweigh the cost to the company?
 - Will it help keep customers satisfied enough to buy again? (I didn't say "happy.")
- You were hired to help make sales, keep customers, and minimize costs. Time spent on anything other than these activities is probably something only you will appreciate. It may not be in the best interest of the company.

In other words, striving to make a perfect or "best in class" product is often not the best business choice. However, distinguish this from providing features or solutions nobody else has, which could substantially increase sales.

A company always has more work than you can do prioritize and work accordingly.

- When you have a good work ethic and you want high quality, you can only do so much. And when you find yourself stretched too thin, and you don't think you can get it all done, talk to your manager. Ask her to prioritize your assignments, then do just what is required if you can't get to it all.
- In the face of huge workloads, the answer is not to work harder and harder and harder. You'll burn out, and then we all lose.
- Don't take the time-versus-quality question too seriously. You have a life outside of work put some time and quality into it.

My engineer colleague shared these words with me two years ago. The company where we worked has since gone out of business. And he has moved out of town. So I thought he shouldn't mind if I shared his comments with you now.

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New-Member Dinner



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New-Member Dinner Held at Red Lion Hanalei

By [Julie Kinyoun](#)

The STC-San Diego New-Member Dinner was held at the Red Lion Hanalei Hotel in Mission Valley on October 14.

Festivities began at the welcoming and signup table. After finding the proper name tag, each person was checked on the guest list, and then they slowly migrated toward the eating area. For about half an hour, people introduced themselves to each other, mingled, and waited for the meal to begin.

The Red Lion Hanalei Hotel swimming pool, palm trees, and flowers provided a breathtaking backdrop for the beautifully garnished buffet table. Participants chose their seats among several white-clothed tables, brought their plates to the buffet table, and chose from several types of garlic bread, antipasti, pastas, different sauces, and chocolate fudge brownies.

The meal was an opportunity for networking, fun, and fellowship with other writers.

After the meal, Sue Heim, vice president of Membership, introduced each council member. Council members, in turn, gave a brief talk about their responsibilities and needs for volunteers.

There was a brief question-and-answer session, and the evening concluded with the usual raffle drawing and warm goodnight by chapter President Walter Hanig.

Below are some of the pictures taken by Kitt Medrano who captured some great moments as we all shared a great evening.



Some of our new members having a great time meeting the council members and other new members.

Far left: Neala Covell

Right: Lucy Silva



**Front: Nate Cheshier and Don Petersen
Left and middle: Cynthia Kratz and Jean-Jacques Surbeck**



**Left to right: Julie Kinyoun, Kelley Wilson Mesterharm, Michelle Petersen
Far right: Linda Eskin**



**Left to right: Sue Heim, Veronica Schnizler, Carl Snow, Lin Laurie, Catherine
Robinson, and Jeff Sheets**



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