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FEATURE: Doug Dow Attends the Ninth STC India Conference



The STC India Chapter 9th Annual Conference presented a departure from the previous eight in that:

1. It took place in a resort locale (Goa) without a significant IT presence, and
2. No luminary from STC officialdom appeared to speak or give a keynote address. (As a matter of fact, as a new Associate Fellow, I was the “ranking member,” as some put it.)

Both developments point to a new confidence and a willingness to experiment that marks the STC India Chapter [more](#)

December 13: Pictures and Profits with Patrick Hofmann



“A picture is worth a thousand words.” People have been saying that for years, long before the advent of computers and digital graphics. Does this statement hold true for the

technical communications profession? Patrick Hofmann, a visual interaction designer for Google in Sydney, Australia, believes strongly so and has built a career on it.

Mr. Hofmann will share his insights as the featured speaker at the LSC’s December 13th meeting. His talk is entitled “Pictures and Profits: The ROI of Visual Information Design.” [more](#)

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Editor Corner

by [Jackie Damrau](#), Managing Editor



The holiday season is here and we are all planning our shopping trips, family get-togethers, and possibly holiday travels. We all enjoy the many images of the holiday season, the decorations, and the songs we hear as we are out.

What better way to end our 2007 program year by getting to listen to Patrick Hofmann talk about pictures, profits, and intuitive images. If you haven't experienced Patrick, you're in for a treat. He is a fantastic, energetic speaker that will keep you involved in his presentation. We're also ultimately blessed to have him present a workshop the day after our

Thursday night meeting, so you can get a double shot of Patrick.

Our world traveler, Doug Dow, reports on the fun times he had attending the Ninth STC India Conference in Goa. He was even presented with a gift. Read about the activities at this conference and see Doug's photos.

Louellen Coker is out there exploring the Internet for us. She has googled, igoogled, and now she reviews several of the more popular Web browsers. In her column, you'll learn about IE7, Firefox™, Safari™, Opera, and AOL®/Netscape®. So make sure you visit her column if you've wondered which browser you should use.

You'll also read three essays about Mars robots. These essays are courtesy of the Dallas BEST (Boosting Engineering, Science, and Technology) Robotics competition winners: Thomas Jefferson High School, Ovilla Christian School, and Hockaday School. The essays are only one part of the students' process notebooks that many of your LSC members helped judge. Susie Fox, our illustrious president, presented the winners with certificates and checks that helps them in their fundraising efforts and also helps them learn about the technical communication profession.

So much more is packed into this issue that I'll just let you get into this meaty issue. Of course, as you celebrate this holiday season, take a moment to remember those that are dear to you whether near or far. Blessings to all!



[Home](#) > [Fox Tales](#)**Fox Tales: Are You a Student, Teacher, Mentor, or Coach?**by [Susie Lynn Fox](#), President

Because school is still in session for a few more days before the holiday break, I'd like to toss a FUN POP QUIZ at you! I know that fun and pop quiz don't necessarily go together, but I got the idea for creating an unscientific, fun pop quiz when contemplating some recent STC Lone Star Community (LSC) events. These events reminded me of the importance of being students, teachers, mentors, and coaches each day.

Arranging Job Site Tours for Texas Tech Students

STC Texas Tech University (TTU) student chapter members and faculty made a road trip to the LSC community meeting on October 4. They wanted to hear Jack Molisani present "Portfolios and Interview Strategies." Thanks to Elisa Miller, First Vice President of Programs, for scheduling the informative 2007-2008 programs!

Before the dinner meeting and presentation, Jeanne Foster, Membership Manager, and other LSC members kicked off the evening by welcoming TTU students to the pre-game Newcomer special interest group (SIG) meeting. The air was electric with expectations, excitement, and interest as students and professionals shared stories and information.

The next day, Heather Steele, Second Vice President and Registration Manager, and Jackie Damrau, LSC Technically Write Newsletter Editor, arranged and provided job site tours at local companies for the students. This is a great example of how students and professionals can work together to enrich the future of the profession. Thanks, Jeanne, Heather, and Jackie, for pulling this off!

Judging Robot Design Notebooks for High School Students

LSC has long been a proud sponsor of the Dallas Boosting Engineering Science & Technology (BEST) competition. In October, LSC volunteers once again judged the robot design notebooks for teams of high school students. Before building a working robot, students must document how their teams design, build, and test the robot design. Robots must be able to roll across the floor, change directions, tackle inclines, pick up and carry multiple objects, and deliver objects.

On BEST game day, the gym at The University of Texas at Dallas reverberated with non-stop, ear-splitting cheers as teenage teams pitted their robots against each other in fiercely competitive games. In this pep rally style atmosphere, I was once again reminded of the importance of teaching, mentoring, and coaching students of all ages.

As LSC President, I was lucky enough to be asked to present the first, second, and third-place notebook awards to: (1) Thomas Jefferson High School, (2) Ovilla Christian School, and (3) The Hockaday School. Other winners are this year's LSC volunteers, including: Kathlyn Auten, Ann Balaban, Georgina Cantoni, Jackie Damrau, Kelly Burch, Rhonda Harris, and Mary McWilliams Johnson.

Providing Web Site Redesign Class Projects for UNT Students

This fall, Mel Houghton, Immediate Past President and Volunteer Wrangler, and Alan Oak, Webmaster, worked with other LSC volunteers to define LSC Web site redesign criteria. Mel then met with the faculty at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton to discuss possible class projects for this fall's technical communication students.

The faculty agreed to Web site redesign projects, and the result is that UNT students get to work on real-world projects and add to their portfolios. This collaborative effort among LSC volunteers, UNT faculty, and students is a great learning experience for everyone. Thanks, Mel, for working with UNT faculty and students this year and last year, too!

Back to the Pop Quiz ... Are You Ready?

OK, it's time to learn something new about you by answering the following multiple-choice questions:

1. What kind of student are you?
 - A. I like to learn something new about any subject.
 - B. I like to learn something new so that I can help others.
 - C. I like to learn something new so that I teach others.
 - D. I like to learn something new to accomplish goals and make changes.

2. What kind of teacher are you?
 - A. I like to answer students' questions about the course work.
 - B. I like to see the light bulb of understanding go off in students' heads.
 - C. I like to unpack a subject so that students can learn something new.
 - D. I like to see students meet their educational goals and enrich their lives.

3. What kind of mentor are you?
 - A. I like to listen to people who want to learn how to advance their careers.
 - B. I like to share with people how they can launch and refine their careers.
 - C. I like to review someone's resume and offer helpful suggestions.
 - D. I like to provide job contacts to people who are looking for a new job.

4. What kind of coach are you?
 - A. I like to listen to people who want to learn how to improve their lives.
 - B. I like to share with others lessons I've learned in life.
 - C. I like to work with people who want to improve their interpersonal skills.
 - D. I like to help people plan and reach their life's goals.

Answers to the Pop Quiz

- A – If you chose three or more, you are a great listener.
- B – If you chose three or more, you care about others.
- C – If you chose three or more, you give of yourself to others.
- D – If you chose three or more, you contribute toward others' successes.

If you are a great listener, care about others, give of yourself to others, and/or contribute toward others' successes, you are already a well-rounded student, teacher, mentor, and/or coach. You can continue to benefit yourself and others by trying out and expanding your skills at LSC in the following ways:

LSC Area of Interest	Expand your skills by...
Competitions	Entering and judging
LSC Help Desk	Asking questions and providing answers
Mentoring	Mentoring others and being mentored
Networking	Meeting other professionals and help each other succeed
Newcomers SIG	Meeting and greeting newcomers
Newsletter	Writing articles and teach by sharing information
Presentations	Learning something new and inviting colleagues to attend meetings
Scholarships	Applying for scholarships and supporting scholarship activities
Volunteering	Learning new skills and building your portfolio
Workshops	Learning more about a specific topic or volunteer to teach a topic

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Meetings

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- [November Meeting Review: Software Change Management Veteran Lorretta Morgan warns LSC: "Stuff will happen ... be prepared"](#)

December Meeting: Pictures and Profits – The ROI of Visual Information Design with Patrick Hofmann

by [Jim Korth](#), PR Committee member



"A picture is worth a thousand words." People have been saying that for years, long before the advent of computers and digital graphics. Does this statement hold true for the technical communications profession? Patrick Hofmann, a visual interaction designer for Google in Sydney, Australia, believes strongly so and has built a career on it.

Mr. Hofmann will share his insights as the featured speaker at the LSC's December 13th meeting. His talk is entitled "Pictures and Profits: The ROI of Visual Information Design." As a trained technical writer and now designer, Mr. Hofmann travels internationally to share his passion for "visual language", the use of fewer words and more images to save costs and generate revenue by improving product documentation, training and, most importantly, usability for the customer.

Mr. Hofmann plans to present a series of cases to demonstrate how visual interaction can readily replace text in customer and user applications.

- Patrick will first show how visuals can reduce training time and user error by creating a visual online help poster for users of a laser-guided tool to cut leather.
- Second, he will show how sales can be increased by creating a series of graphical instructions to educate phone subscribers about new pay-per-use features.
- Finally, Patrick will describe how Hewlett-Packard saved millions by creating wordless manuals for computer assembly and set-up procedures.

Details

Thursday, Dec. 13, 2007, 6:15 to 8:00 p.m.

Crowne Plaza Hotel North Dallas-Addison
14315 Midway Road
Addison, Texas

Directions: http://www.stc-dfw.org/pages/meet_monthly.htm#locations

Reservations (Reservations made after 5pm on Dec. 10 are subject to a \$5 penalty)
[Click to register for the meeting now!](#)

Dinner (with reservations):

- \$20 STC and UPA members / Students with student ID
- \$25 non-members

Program Only Attendance (with reservations):

- \$5 for STC
- \$10 for non-members
- **FREE** for students with valid student ID

Patrick touts the affordability of customer insight-gathering and usability testing. He cites the proven practices of recruiting and rewarding usability test participants for next to nothing, gathering customer feedback virtually for free, and conducting usability assessments using everyday tools and technology. Patrick is a proponent of the cost-effectiveness and simplicity of using visuals to test and improve usability.

"In the end, I'm merely sharing some simple success stories," Mr. Hofmann said. "In them, I want to inspire technical communicators and managers alike that a little common sense, a lot of courage, (and plenty of mistakes) can go a long way to building successful changes in your work." He is passionate about giving ideas a chance with the user and carefully observing the feedback generated.

As he does for most of his presentations, Mr. Hofmann established learning objectives for his talk at the LSC meeting. This is what he hopes people will walk away with:

- 1) Strategies for visualizing and testing information that will reduce translation, printing, and development costs.
- 2) Real success stories and dramatic return-on-investment values to share with your company's financial decision-makers.
- 3) Tactics for obtaining customer feedback and conducting usability assessments using everyday tools and little budget.
- 4) Methodologies for iterative design and evaluation—to build and test products and documentation for international audiences.

Mr. Hofmann hopes attendees can have a few laughs and get a taste for this workshop the following day. He also hopes that attendees can see the value of "visual language" and the promise it holds for improving usability and enhancing the customer experience.

December Workshop: "Intuitive Images: Creating and Evaluating Usable Graphics" with Patrick Hofmann, Google's Visual Interaction Designer

by [Mike Hiatt](#), PR Committee member

Details

Friday, Dec. 14, 2007, 8:30 to 5:00 p.m.

Reservations:

- **By Dec. 10 before 5pm:**
 - \$115 Members (STC and UPA)
 - \$145 Guests
- **Between Dec. 10 after 5pm and Dec. 13:**
 - \$135 Members
 - \$175 Guests
- **On Dec. 14: \$200 (cash/check at the door)**

Register for the workshop by visiting the LSC Web site at www.stc-dfw.org

In our user manuals, Web pages, portable digital devices, and interface designs, our pictures always seem to play a subordinate role to our words. We find them too hard to illustrate, we encounter too many resolution and incompatibility issues, and we can never seem to make them attractive enough, meaningful enough, and usable enough.

Sound familiar? Then come to the one-day workshop "Intuitive Images: Creating and Evaluating Usable Graphics" conducted by internationally known visual interaction designer for Google, Patrick Hofmann, on Friday, December 14, at the Crowne Plaza North Dallas/Addison Hotel.

Patrick promises, in this workshop that you will get graphic with these challenges by spending a fun-filled session sharing common problems, evaluating existing design challenges, visualizing different types of information, and working on some innovative hands-on exercises. The workshop's goal is to help both information developers and usability professionals evaluate and boost the visual appeal and usability of the information that they produce, and to empower them with simple tips and tricks to become visually and graphically savvy.

According to Hofmann, this workshop has previously attracted more managers and information specialists than illustrators and graphic designers because it reveals that the former group is clearly vital to the development of usable visual information and offers solutions that benefit both "textual" and "visual" designers alike.

"I think everyone has an eye for design, though some people have better eyesight than others! In this workshop, I hope to be the optometrist and the prescriptive lenses: I want to help technical communicators think more visually and graphically, and in the end, improve the information that they produce," Hoffman said.

As a trained technical writer and now a visual interaction designer, Patrick Hofmann has turned into "a man of few words." For over 12 years, this vibrant Canadian has helped clients like Nokia, Motorola, Philips, FedEx, HP, BASF, and AGFA improve the usability of their products—often by visualizing their online, hardcopy, and interface information. His award-winning work and undying passion for visual language have sent him around the world as he teaches workshops on using pictures to improve communication. He now is working at Google in Sydney, Australia, helping design the user experience for Google's popular mapping applications.

Workshop Outline

Part 1: Surveying the problems with pictures. To begin the workshop, let's:

- Share and address our specific problems with the visuals, pictures, images, and graphics files that we place in our information.
- Identify what problems are common, what has led to them, and how we can solve them.
- Highlight the elements of design theory that can address such problems, by improving contrast, repetition, alignment, and proximity.

Part 2: Template-ing Your Pictures. Just like building style sheets and standards for our textual information, we should build standard sizes and standard attributes for our visuals. Whether our images include screenshots, flowcharts, maps, illustrations, or conceptual diagrams, we can create templates that standardize and professionalize our images to make them consistent throughout our information. In this section, we will discuss several scenarios and types of pictures, and perform a "template-ing" exercise that addresses the attributes of graphic design that affect usability, including typography, layout, and line weights.

Part 3: Showing What You Mean. Even with the most effectively applied picture templates, our pictures are not effective if we don't convey the real message of the picture. We will discuss:

- What is the picture trying to say?
- How can we “visualise” it to better address the needs of our audience?
- What strategies can we use to best apply "a focus of attention" in our picture?
- Just like the words in our information, we must craft ways of amplifying the meaning in our pictures while keeping the message brief and succinct.

In this section, we will go through a series of visual improvement exercises, to identify usability problems with different visuals and how we can solve them.

Part 4: Improving the Usability of Screenshots. How can we take the principles learned earlier and apply them to our screenshots? As the most frequently used visual in our documents, what strategies can we use to improve the scan-ability and read-ability of screenshots and make them as easy to understand as possible? What tools can we use to generate and modify them? In this section, we will work through several different scenarios in a screenshot usability exercise, which we will evaluate together.

Part 5: Improving the Usability of Flowcharts. Often considered more daunting than screenshots, flowcharts can often contain too many elements, too many messages, and too many reading directions. In this section, we will discuss:

- What can we do to improve our flowcharts or diagrammatic maps?
- How do we best create "a focus of attention"?
- How do we de-construct a flowchart before re-constructing it?
- How can we make it as unidirectional and symmetrical as possible? What tools can we use to create flowcharts most effectively?

Learning Objectives (What You Will Walk Away With)

You will walk away with having learned:

1. How to visualise instructions and information with the same concern for usability as we have with writing them—through symbols, pictographs, conceptual diagrams, and illustrations.
2. How to use visual strategies to decrease the word count and increase the usability of your information—be it for hardcopy information, Web-based applications, or portable digital devices.
3. How to identify ways to visualize for different cultures, languages, and ages, and accommodate international audiences who have various reading directions, alphabets, and visual conventions.
4. How to apply memorable rules and techniques to improve the consistency and simplicity of your visual information.
5. How to evaluate the usability of visual information.

November Meeting Review: Lorretta Morgan warns LSC: “Stuff will happen ... be prepared”

by [Jim Korth](#), PR Committee member



Fifty million electric customers in the Northeast U.S. are without power for many hours with authorities initially clueless about the cause. In a separate incident, Bank of America's automated teller machines crash and remain down for three days. In yet a third major snafu, backup generators fail to activate at the large 365 Main data center in San Francisco, bringing down Craigslist and other major Internet sites. In each case, poor software change management played a central role in the incident.

In her career, Lorretta Morgan has seen many such disasters caused by failures of process discipline and poor implementation. Her presentation, "IT Application Lifecycle from a Change Management Perspective," dealt with the need for organizational rigor and methodology when planning for, testing, and rolling application changes into production in an enterprise setting.

"Change affects every aspect of the software development lifecycle including documentation," Ms. Morgan said before the meeting. "Managing change in the application lifecycle reduces documentation failure and is critical to successful IT Service Delivery." She defined Application Lifecycle Management as "the process of delivering software as a continuously repeating cycle of inter-related steps."

Ms. Morgan is a proponent of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), a set of concepts and techniques for managing technology infrastructure, development, and operations. ITIL has evolved partly in response to the need for large organizations to eliminate the risks that lead to the types of disasters she described. These kinds of cascade failures are common in complex, tightly coupled systems and are often identified and then promptly dismissed as being "nearly impossible." Unfortunately, the impossible can become reality.

Ms. Morgan and ITIL advocate setting up specific test environments that are managed to ensure that applications and their component changes are properly validated and tested before release. The goal is to avoid installing software into an organization's production environment before it has been fully stress tested in a lab setting that closely mimics the production environment. The basic idea is to avoid surprises and the resulting down time and business embarrassment. No software is rolled into production before it has been subject to well-defined change management procedures. Back out plans must be part of the process to roll the environment back in the event a change has unintended consequences.

ITIL has now earned international recognition by the business process community and is widely accepted by most large enterprises. Microsoft used ITIL during preparations for the year 2000 and the Microsoft Operations Framework was the result of that effort. ITIL has evolved into a cohesive set of best practices drawn from the public and private sectors internationally. ITIL's goal for change management is that any change to a production environment has been tested, approved, communicated, validated, assessed for potential risks, and finally, documented at every step. Ms. Morgan compared the application and documentation lifecycles and found them similar. Each requires identification, preparation, validation, revision, and publication.

A major objective for all professionals in corporate IT is to prepare for the big failure that everyone says could never happen. The Y2K situation and its potential for disaster was understood and planned for well. Nothing happened. It is the unforeseen combination of events and risks that we must be ready for. Companies must be prepared for rapid recovery around whatever unfathomable event may occur. But as Ms. Morgan cautioned, even with the best possible management of application lifecycle, stuff will happen.

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FEATURE: STC India Chapter 9th Annual Conference – A Westerner’s Perspective

by [Doug Dow](#), STC Associate Fellow

The STC India Chapter 9th Annual Conference presented a departure from the previous eight in that:

3. It took place in a resort locale (Goa) without a significant IT presence, and
4. No luminary from STC officialdom appeared to speak or give a keynote address. (As a matter of fact, as a new Associate Fellow, I was the “ranking member,” as some put it.)

Both developments point to a new confidence and a willingness to experiment that marks the STC India Chapter—already a “Chapter of Distinction”—as it closes its first decade.

Planners anticipated a drop in attendance due to the lack of a local core constituency, such as is found in Bangalore, Hyderabad, or Pune. And, at 275, the figure was a little low. But the explosion of late registrations two days before the

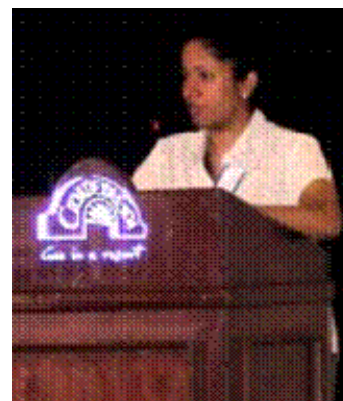


event left organizers scrambling for resources, leaving the Bangalore corps with their colorful backpack “gift bags” on order. In this respect, the final attendance figure represented a wildly successful event.

And a wildly successful event it was. Pre-conference workshops on DITA, English grammar traps, and my own on “Simplified Technical English” played to crowds of nearly 100, which lessened the workshop aspects, but increased the spread of knowledge.



The traditional opening ceremony, featuring the lighting of the Lamp of Wisdom, carried candlelight all the way to the rear of the convention hall. Anupama A., chapter president (Indian family names can be quite lengthy, and single-letter abbreviations are quite common.), outlined the chapter's progress through the year, and recalled the text messages she received on consecutive nights, telling her first the news from Minneapolis on becoming a Chapter of Excellence, and then a Chapter of Distinction. Makarand Pandit (who sent the messages) and I smiled deeply inside, having been on the Minneapolis side of these events.



The ensuing two days included sessions on tools and techniques, new software previews, techniques for creating e-learning, and so on. Two debates—a format I've yet to see in the West—discussed pay rates in India and the status of the profession in India. Both led to conclusions that the profession in India is surely climbing the maturity model. The other India-only format, the annual quiz, pitted teams of three to answer grammatical and historical trivia of the sort that have long deserted my synapses.



Gururaj asked the audience pointedly, "Who among you thinks that Indian tech writers are overpaid?" Immediately, my hand shot up....

Dinner on Friday night, provided by the conference, took place on a riverboat called Noah's Ark, which I briefly mistook for the original, but which held up nicely under the pounding of hundreds of dancing feet. Hindi pop tunes evoke particular dance moves, so I was lost at first. But I held my own among the cheering, howling, whistling crowd that cruised the Mondavi River that night.

Saturday saw another tradition, the annual group photo. Although the photo seems to be bigger each year, I get harder to find: a perfect "Where's Waldo" puzzle. But it's another conference amenity, and available the same day!

An illusionist capped off the conference, and as quickly as objects disappeared and reappeared, the conference was over. Sunday was another day to play, however, and I had a special invitation to join Mak Pandit and his Pune-based team from TechnoWrites on a day-long excursion, first to historic churches and temples in the area, and finally for an afternoon by the sea at one of Goa's world-famous beaches. It was a privilege and an honor to join Mak's team for a day of unforgettable memories.

Planning has started for the STC India Chapter 10th Annual Conference next year. I suggested that they choose Delhi as the site, to lure Western visitors, with Agra (Taj Mahal) nearby. Perhaps a rare dawn-viewing excursion could be arranged. STC India gatherings offer experiences that cannot be had elsewhere. If you're in the mood for convivial adventure, consider an STC India Conference.



Travel Notes

The Chicago to Delhi flight (American Airlines) handily avoids Europe, eliminating at least one security check. This 14-hour polar route takes you over Greenland, northern Russia, and down through Central Asia. The return flight goes even further north, over the top of Greenland and down Hudson Bay at 40,000 feet.

Domestic flights within India have improved dramatically over the past 15 years. Kingfisher Airlines in particular is going above and beyond to provide exceptional service, tasty meals, and other extras. I was impressed especially by the on-the-ground service, however. Red-coated personnel escort patrons through India's perplexing terminals, through ticketing, baggage drop-off, security, and boarding. One young man even rescued me from my wrong turn to the outside of the domestic terminal. (India separates their domestic and international terminals. On a city map, they show up as separate airports, where in reality, the terminals are at opposite ends of the runway.)

Having left the terminal and become a potential victim to expensive taxi drivers, I'd been seeking the free shuttle bus that signs had misled me to. The young Kingfisher employee, on a mission to collect baggage carts, saw my red baggage tags and deduced my predicament. "Show me the stubs from your last flight," he said. I found them. "Now, come with me." Abandoning his train of carts, he led me back past two security guards to the area where passengers wait for the free shuttle bus. Grateful kudos to him and to Kingfisher!

The Delhi to Chicago leg has extra security checks at the Delhi airport. Not surprising when you think about it, so be prepared with plenty of patience. The situation is compounded by the arrangement of Delhi's inadequate terminal building, creating crossing queues of arriving and departing passengers. Even before Pakistan's current turmoil, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) determined that the Delhi-to-Chicago route bore considerable risk, so be prepared for repeated and thorough security checks.

Should Technical Writers Write System Requirements?

by David Dick, STC Associate Fellow

What do you do when the user guides and help files have been written: sit on the bench and wait to be told to find billable work? If you want a challenging opportunity to put your skills to good use, I encourage you to volunteer to help the project team document their system requirements (also referred to as "software requirements").

Many project teams do not have enough staff to write and manage all documentation required by the Systems Development Life Cycle such as software requirements, functional requirements, design specifications, and test reports. Short development cycles force software project teams to quickly design, test, and release the product. The solution is to hire a technical writer to help in the area of development documentation.

In May 2006, I was hired by a technology services company to support a project team come into compliance with a client's software development life cycle, teaching developers the principles of documenting product design and documentation management. In my spare time, I documented the design of several legacy systems. Six months later, I was asked if I would like to write system requirements: I eagerly accepted this new challenge. This article details what I learned about writing system requirements.

Do You Have the Right Skills?

When asked if I was willing to write system requirements, my first thought was, “I don’t have the right skills to write system requirements.” But soon became obvious to me that I did possess the essential skills and experience to write system requirements. It’s quite possible that you do too, according to Donn Le Vie, Jr. in “Writing Software Requirements Specifications.”

Le Vie lists three essential skills that make technical writers ideally suited for the task:

1. Technical writers know how to determine the questions that are of concern to users regarding ease of use and usability.
2. Technical writers can then take that knowledge and apply it not only to the specification and documentation development, but also to user interface development, to help ensure that the user interface models the customer requirements.
3. Technical writers involved early and often in the process can become an information resource throughout the process, rather than an information gatherer at the end of the process.

Most organizations have templates for writing system requirements, and completing them is straightforward. Good structure and layout is the first step of well-written system requirements and an important contribution of the technical writer.

Asking the Right Questions

A common mistake of collecting requirements is to ask the client, “What do you want the system to do?” The client replies with a litany of features and functions. This is not an ideal way to capture requirements, and certainly not an ideal method to understand the characteristics of the intended system. The correct method to collect requirements is to understand the behavior of the system in order to identify a sequence of actions between the system and the user.

Many organizations have their preference for performing systems analysis. I can only tell you about Use Cases. A systems analyst is teaching me how to create Use Cases and how to translate them into system requirements. Use cases provide scenarios that convey how the system should interact with the users, called “actors”, to enable them to achieve a specific business goal or function. Creating Use Cases help developers to understand operational scenarios; inputs, outputs, interfaces with other systems; and user roles and user classes.

The Importance of Good Structure and Layout

Getting started in writing system requirements may begin by reviewing requirements for grammar and format. That’s how I got started, and it afforded me an opportunity to ask questions of an experienced systems analyst. Fortunately, the client has a template for system requirements. However, if neither the client nor the development team has a template, I have learned that it’s easy to create. The IEEE Standard 830-1993, “Recommended Practice for Software Requirements Specifications,” is an ideal source for understanding good structure and layout, and includes templates for structuring the content.

The Writing Style

The writing style and language of a system requirements specification merits a study all its own. The writing style system requirements specifications must be exact, without ambiguity, and precise because other project documents depend on it. A well-formed requirement identifies a system functionality (a capability) that can be validated, solves a customer problem or achieves a customer objective, and qualified by measurable conditions and bounded by constraints.

Most organizations have a style guide for writing system requirements specifications. Donn Le Vie's article "Writing Software Requirements Specifications" provides helpful suggestions on language, tone, and how to phrase statements. By learning the techniques to write system requirements, I can provide developers with the details they need to understand fundamental requirements, measurable qualitative and quantitative attributes and characteristics, and boundaries and limitations.

The Importance of including Usability in System Requirements

The common concerns of technical writers are the problems caused by complicated products and user guides and help files that serve as a suboptimal solution to poor product design. If usability is a criterion for product success and successful user adoption, then system requirements should address usability issues.

Because usability tends to be in the eye of the beholder, specifying usability can be a formidable challenge. Everybody wants a product that is easy to use. However, a system requirement such as, "The system shall be easy to use" is of no value to a developer because it's not specific, not measurable and not traceable. That's why it's important to consider usability as all the characteristics that make a product easy to use, easy to learn, and easy to maintain.

Identifying the context of use helps to establish measurable requirements that can be evaluated during usability testing. Identifying external interfaces (i.e. all inputs into the system and outputs from the system). Identifying measurable performance goals. These are just a few examples to consider when including usability in system requirements.

Treating the Systems Requirements Specification as a Document

The systems requirements specification is a document that must be reviewed, approved, updated and accessible.

Sometimes the systems analyst will organize meetings to review the software requirements specification; otherwise, I must organize them. These meetings are no different than reviewing a user guide. For example, I distribute the document for review, I organize meetings with reviewers to capture the recommended changes, and I organize meetings to discuss the changes with subject matter experts and project stakeholders.

The system requirements specification is a contractual agreement between a customer and vendor. For this reason, it must be approved by the person requesting the system, the project manager, the budget holder and the system owner. Some options for capturing the approval are e-mail and retaining a copy of the signed signature page.

When the systems requirement specification is approved, I archive it in a documentation repository that is accessible to the project team. Previous versions (drafts) can either be archived or deleted. I retain copies of documentation reviews.

Managing Changes

The systems requirement specification is an ever-changing document and that is why managing changes is an absolute necessity. The scope of my effort is to collect requirements, not update them. Maintaining requirements is a challenge in any environment that does not adhere to a waterfall development approach. When I am asked to assist with updating requirements, I follow the organization's policies and procedures to gather changes from users and system owners, and communicate changes to stakeholders.

Conclusion

Since my transition from writing user guides to documenting system requirements, I am learning how to create use cases and how to translate them into software requirements, and how to facilitate development meetings. In the meantime, I educate system developers on the principles of documentation management, and they teach me the principles of software design. I enjoy the new challenges, my new role, and the opportunity to apply my skills to help ensure successful product development.

Learning how to write system requirements have given me greater understanding of the system development process. I am putting my understanding of task analysis to good use to assure well-defined and well-written requirements. My first performance appraisal indicates that I am making very good progress, and the developers consider me an asset to the team. Taking on this new opportunity and doing well, is proof that I can do more than write great user guides. Are you ready to challenge your knowledge and experience?

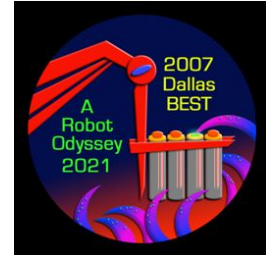
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Dallas BEST Robotics Competition: Three Winning Essays

The following three essays were the winning essays for the Dallas BEST competition which several LSC members judged and Susie Fox congratulated the winners with a small monetary gift for their start into the technical communication profession. Space limitations preclude us from publishing the entire notebooks. – Editor



Essay #1: A Story of Robot Research

by [Thomas Jefferson High School, BEST Robotics team](#)



A robot lands on Mars and unloads its cargo onto the surface. It slowly moves around, exploring its surroundings. WAIT! A ROBOT? Why not human? The reason: Mars has a surface temperature of -80 degrees and that's at its hottest. Any human that sets foot on it can automatically freeze! The robot is sent as a substitute for the human because it can withstand the cold temperatures. Also, the cost of sending humans on a trip to Mars would be many times the cost of sending a robot.

Spirit is a Mars exploration rover that was sent to Mars to research about surface temperature, dust storms, and other interesting facts. This rover uses solar power to recharge its batteries and radio waves to transfer all its information to and from Earth. Spirit also takes various instruments that help it collect data. Not only do robots substitute for human on Mars, they do the same on Earth.

Robots are being built to do research in Antarctica. The "Cool Robot" was built to check the surface for bacteria. This robot provides its own power from solar power, so humans can let it run under its own power. The Cool Robot also checks the surface temperature to see if it's safe enough for humans. If the thermometer reads -70 degrees, then the human skin starts freezing after five minutes of exposure to this temperature! Now, NASA has a big project for this robot. If the robot endures the obstacles in Antarctica and withstands the harsh temperatures, NASA will also send the Cool Robot to Mars! On Mars the robot will explore the surface, checking temperatures and gaining other scientific knowledge with the Mars Exploration Rover.

So we're on Mars, now what? The robot sets the platform for the humans to land on. It starts to unload the cargo cases filled with food, fuel, medical supplies, and equipment. The robot places the cargo in specific places to organize them so that humans can find everything. Without the robot, humans would have to unload everything on their own, not to mention they may have limited oxygen supply. It would be a great timesaver for a robot that could help humans on Mars, especially with difficult or dangerous tasks.

With the supplies neatly stacked and organized, humans can begin building and setting up their station. With everything organized and ready to build, the humans can have more comfortable settings. The robot can transfer all its temperature readings to the stations database, thus making it easier for humans to calculate outside temperatures. The robot can retrieve specific materials needed for Mars's surface, such as rocks and bacteria samples. These samples can be added into the system for humans to discover more about Mars.

Without robots many obstacles exist that will block human advancement and slow our achievements. They make exploration possible in difficult or even deadly environments. Who knows, maybe one day robots might make our everyday life not only easier, but safer.

Essay #2: Robots in Space

by Sarah Sassaman (7th Grade), [Ovilla Christian School](#)

Where does the future of space exploration lie? In the movie "2001: A Space Odyssey," producer and director Stanley Kubrick causes us to ask this question. The movie released in 1968 around the same time as the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Apollo Project and one year before orbiting and landing on the moon. The launch of this program caused us to contemplate the role of man and machine in space exploration.



In 2007, we contemplate the questions that viewers in 1968 were asking themselves: What is the role of man and machine in space exploration? Also, can man and machine work together towards a common goal? In this year's BEST robotics competition, our assignment was to find the answer to these questions.

Sojourner was the first intelligent robot sent by humans to operate on another planet. However, Sojourner is certainly not the last intelligent robot that NASA will deploy. It has been alleged that robotics "will respond well to the challenges of space construction, assembly, and communications." (1)

In early June 2007, NASA's Mars Science Laboratory (MSL), which is a robotic long-term effort of Mars exploration, completed its critical design review (CDR). Being less than one year from the assembly, test, and launch operations phase, MSL is scheduled to launch in fall 2009. This rover will determine whether Mars is or ever was able to support microbial life. It will carry the largest amount of instruments for scientific studies ever sent to Mars. While roving the Martian soil, this rover will analyze its composition for clues to its past and possible forms of life. Doug McCustion (2) stated, "The MSL project, Mars Program, JPL, and NASA Headquarters worked together to ... keep MSL on schedule for launch in 2009, and we all feel we succeeded.

On June 19, 2007, at JPL, NASA unveiled a new Mars Yard to test the mobility and autonomy of future Mars rovers. The Mars Yard is a 21,000-square-foot facility which includes a new building that will house rover operations. NASA will use this facility to test new capabilities, as well as test and validate flight rover capabilities developed under the Mars Technology Program.

At the same ceremony, NASA unveiled Scarecrow, a prototype rover. Scarecrow, so named because it is still without a brain, will carry large science payloads and travel over much rockier ground than the Mars Exploration Rover (MER). It is already being tested in the Mars Yard and is scheduled for a 2009 launch date. This vehicle will "follow the evidence of water that has already been found on the surface of Mars." It has also been equipped with a "laser that can pulverize rock from 20 feet away." (3)

To assemble, inspect, and maintain permanent facilities in space, Scarecrow is required that robots be designed with relatively flexible mass and volume. This design will require robots to be agile and have the ability to process and sense. These robots must also be easy to reconfigure.

Limbed Excursion Mechanical Utility Robots (LEMURs) are six-limbed robots which, due to their small 26–pound frame, can be easily placed aboard the space shuttle or NASA’s planned crew exploration vehicle. Outfitted with attachable tools on each of the LEMUR’s six limbs, these robots are capable of performing a variety of functions. The LEMUR can even work upside down, as long as one limb is anchored, which is beneficial because gravity does not exist in space. The LEMUR is also equipped with eyes that are mounted on circular tracks on top of its head. This lets the robot “see” without rotating the base, which saves time because the camera eyes can be turned in any desired direction that the robots want to move and then go without rotating the robot. These features let the LEMUR fix a spacecraft, either inside or outside, eliminating the need for a human spacewalk. Further, because of the LEMUR’s ability to fit into nooks and crannies, it can perform tasks otherwise too small for astronauts to do.

The LEMUR IIb is a four-limbed robot that is being designed to investigate several aspects of climbing-system design. The technologies designed for the LEMUR IIb will include advanced systems that will enable it to climb various slopes, including vertical faces and overhangs, “while reacting to forces to maintain stability and do useful work.” (4) One of the most advanced of these technologies is a new class of Ultrasonic/Sonic Driller/Corer end-effectors which will let the robot travel across rock and soil as well as sample substrates.

In the future, robots traveling in space, and specifically to Mars, will need to make decisions and avoid dangers and obstacles on their own. They will also have to be tough enough to manage severe conditions on other planets, such as Mars. Further, these robots will be able to collect and return rock, soil, and atmospheric samples from these planets back to Earth for further laboratory research. They can also be used to clean and sterilize aboard the spacecrafts.

Both man and machine must be able to work together to accomplish the space exploration goals in the 21st century. Each will have their own unique roles to play in accomplishing these goals. In 1969, when Neil Armstrong (5) landed on the moon, he said, “That’s one small step for man; one giant leap for mankind.” Will the year 2021 be defined by the statement (6), “One small advance for a robot; one giant advancement for robotics?”

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Essay #3: Mars: A Pathway to Discovery

by [Hockaday School's BEST Robotics Team](#)

The shroud of mystery that has historically cloaked Mars—the fiery planet that neighbors our own—is slowly being lifted. Recently, scientists have created more efficient, complex robots to examine Mars' diverse terrain, including the well-known Mars Rovers, specialized space robots. With valleys, craters, mountains, volcanoes, deserts, and ice-caps, Mars' landscape resembles a battlefield. The Romans, though they knew very little about the planets, named this planet fittingly after their god of war.

With land the color of blood, Mars' distinctive hue comes from the iron(III) oxide that forms on its surface. Mars has a gravitational attraction 0.375 times that of Earth, while its diameter of 4,220 miles is only slightly larger than half of Earth's diameter (7,926 miles). However despite its small size, Mars shines radiantly as the fourth brightest celestial object in our night sky, trailing behind the moon, Venus, and the sun.

Mars, with its low atmospheric pressure, bars the formation of liquid H₂O. However, immense ice caps have formed at Mars' poles due to their extreme location. Such a lack of liquid water makes Mars' dry landscape prone to dust storms that engulf the planet for months at a time. Amazingly, scientists have determined that in the distant past, liquid water, in the formation of lakes and rivers, eroded the planet's surface and carved valleys, mountains, and hilltops.

The variety of landscapes found on Mars is simply astonishing. The southern hemisphere of Mars appears similar to the moon, with many craters that resemble the holes in Swiss cheese. On the other hand, the northern hemisphere is characterized by highlands and plains. Even though Mars's thin atmosphere protects it from smaller meteors, a whopping 43,000 craters roughen the planet's surface. The planet's largest crater, the Hellas impact basin, is even visible from Earth. The largest mountain on Mars is named Mount Olympus: the volcano, which is three times the height of Mount Everest, stands as the largest mountain in the solar system. Besides these craters and mountains, Mars has canyons and caves, just like Earth. Its largest canyon is Valles Marineris, which is 7 km deep and 4000 km long. Its length spans the entire continent of Europe!

Human fascination with the Red Planet can be traced back to early Babylon. The Babylonians named the planet after the god of war and fire, possibly due to the planet's fiery color. Later in history, the Greeks named the planet after their god of war, Ares, yet over time the title was translated to Martis in Latin, which was eventually shortened to Mars. Observations of Mars itself date back to Aristotle. With the telescope, further information was gathered by the Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli. Eventually, observatories allowed scientists to identify the polar caps, but the greatest discoveries followed the launch of the Vikings, Mars space probes, which captured color pictures of Mars.

Various countries ranging from the United States to Russia have made numerous advances in exploring Mars. Specifically, these countries have launched various instruments into space, including orbiters and landers which have been able to collect valuable information. Mariner 4 was the first spacecraft to reach Mars which photographed the planet's surface in 1965. The Mariner 3 was scheduled to arrive at Mars a year earlier, but was delayed due to a malfunction in its solar panels. However, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA's) Mars Exploration Rovers were the most impressive. Spirit and Opportunity, which the US launched in 2003, featured a freon-powered cooling system that kept the electronics from overheating throughout the long journey to Mars. Sophisticated computer equipment, such as

the star scanner and sun sensor, let the rovers to navigate efficiently. With cleats that enabled their wheels to scale sand and rocks, the rovers traversed the planet with ease upon landing. In addition, the front wheel, which was controlled by its own motor, could stabilize the robot by digging into the terrain in circles. The rover's maximum speed was 5 cm/s, yet because it often stopped to examine its surroundings, the rover traveled at an average speed of 1 cm/s.

The rovers' solar panels generated electricity, but the robot used two lithium batteries when solar power was unavailable. Each rover gathered data on craters and other landscape features through eighteen cameras and two antennas. The rovers have also recently found evidence suggesting the existence of water on the planet. NASA was concerned in 2007 that a massive dust storm would destroy the rovers, but both survived and are continuing to collect priceless data.

As we discover more about Mars, that titillating enigma which has puzzled humanity for hundreds of years, we come to a closer understanding of our solar system. Advances in technology have let scientists make discoveries that Aristotle could never have imagined when he first observed the planet glittering a peculiar red in the night sky. The Mars Rovers represent a monumental leap in our struggle to understand our universe that can only lead to further knowledge. From here on, the possibilities of scientific findings are endless and may one day lead to a new colony for humanity. One day, we may very well watch our own children frolicking on the Martian surface as their space shoes kick up clouds of red dust.

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October 2007 Job Site Excursion

by Kyle Johnson, Texas Tech University student

The “Job Site Excursion” (JSE) this year was an absolute joy to attend, the Lone Star Community’s boundless hospitality really set the stage for a wonderful and informative evening. Portfolios are tricky things, and we make them for almost every class, but discussing the real world application of them, and how to sell ourselves as individuals, really brought to light how important they are. Meeting the members of the LSC also provided great networking opportunities. We gleaned some first-hand information from people who had recently graduated with our same specialty and are now in the business world. There was a wide range of personalities for every member from our student chapter to gravitate toward. Every student had a favorite LSC moment to talk about on the way home.



Our visit to ADX the next day was incredibly interesting. They are a small firm and made us feel right at home and were very approachable. The company has a very special niche market and is constantly expanding. At ADX we got to see first hand how a lone technical writer works at a company, and the truth is rather daunting. Luckily the company is looking at expanding its employment of technical writers into each of the smaller internal departments to further expand and compete.

Later we visited T-Mobile and were slightly shocked at what we saw. We began with a discussion with a knowledge management architect and an engineering manager. Soon after, we toured the Network Operations Center where technicians maintain network service for the wireless telephone customers (across the central United States) and worldwide for the T-Mobile HotSpot (wireless Internet) customers. Though fascinating, it was beyond the scope of many of our ideas about technical writing professions.

Our final stop on our JSE trip was at CA, formerly Computer Associates. This was certainly the most impressive of the three companies in terms of the size and scope of their technical writing department. Our discussions there provided many insights into technical writing as a profession, job description, job security, introductory pay, advancement in the work place, and much more. If one wanted to live in the Dallas area and work as a technical writer, it seemed from this job site excursion that CA would be a good, albeit less personable, fit.

All Those Web Browsers, Which One Do I Pick?

by [Louellen S. Coker](#), Senior Member



If you read my article about iGoogle last month, you already know that I bounce around in different Web browsers throughout the day. A few weeks ago, my husband looked over my shoulder as I was working, and seeing that I was using Mozilla's Firefox (Firefox), he asked me why I was using that browser and if he should switch.

I must admit, I was surprised to learn that my husband, who is usually up on all things techie, had never even heard of Firefox. He had never heard of it, because his laptop came with Microsoft's Internet Explorer (IE7) and Netscape Navigator (Netscape) installed when he purchased it and, as it worked the way he thought it should, he never looked for alternatives.

I'm sure many others are the same way. A company issues a computer with a browser already installed, usually IE7, and the user is either unable or doesn't find a need to install a different browser. With, according to Wikipedia's [comparison of browsers](#), at least 31 different browsers to choose from, life can be simpler to use what is handy.

While I didn't tell my husband whether he should switch browsers, I did go over the highs and lows of the standard and most popular browsers as described in Wikipedia's breakdown of the market share as of October 2007 (Figure 1). Shortly thereafter, he absconded with my laptop to test drive the most popular browsers.

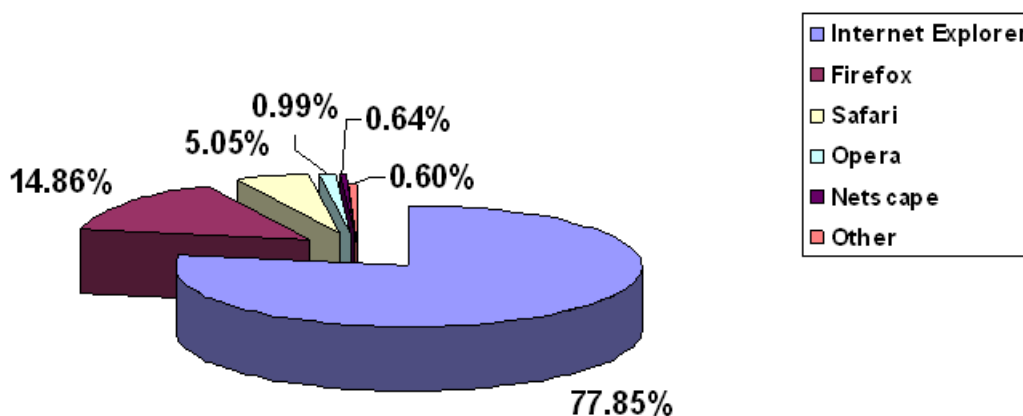


Figure 1. Market share of Web browsers, October 2007.

By far, the most common browser is Internet Explorer with 77.85% of the market share. I had used that browser for so long and regularly used some options, such as tabbed windows, I was a hesitant convert. However, because of many incompatibilities with several of my favorite Web sites (www.clipart.com, www.lynda.com, and the Blackboard functions at www.nctc.edu), Firefox has become my browser of choice. And with Microsoft trying to make the world walk to the beat of its drum, many others have made the leap to Firefox or other browsers.

Which one should you choose? You'll want to carefully look at what each has to offer and how you will use it. Here is a discussion of the high points of the different browsers as supplied by their marketing departments. You'll want to test drive to see what is best for you.

Internet Explorer



When developing Internet Explorer 7 (IE7), Microsoft reportedly listened to customer feedback to make changes to its browser. They focused on three key areas to make it the browser of choice for consumers at home, IT professionals, or developers.

They focused on:

- **Making everyday tasks easier**
Users experience improved navigation through tabbed browsing, Web search right from the toolbar, advanced printing, easy discovery, reading and subscription to RSS feeds, and much more.
- **Providing dynamic security protection**
Through a robust new architecture, IE7 integrates security features that help defend against malicious software (also known as malware) and offers new ways to better protect against the theft of personal data from fraudulent Web sites, a practice known as phishing.
- **Creating an improved platform for Web development and manageability**
Microsoft's new platform offers improved support for cascading style sheets (CSS), a rich really simple syndication (RSS) feeds platform, and robust tools for deploying and managing IE7 in large enterprise environments.

Visit the [Windows Internet Explorer Web site](#) for more information about IE7 or the download.

While many sites have adapted to the vast changes to IE7, they lost much of their luster in the early days of release. Many large sites lost functionality, forcing their users to download Firefox or other browsers to access their favorite sites. For example, it took a whole semester for North Central Texas College (NCTC) to rework their Web site to let students access their Blackboard accounts. The issue was so severe in fact that NCTC sent global text and e-mail messages to its students and staff warning them not to upgrade to IE7 or to access their NCTC accounts via a different browser.

Firefox™



Firefox™ has increased its market share because it took a while for companies to adapt their sites to conform to the beat of IE7's drum. It has also increased because Firefox™ has a deep seated philosophy that a group of smart, creative people can take on the big guys and win. In a nutshell, Firefox™ lets its users:

- **Enjoy a better Web experience**
With the use of tabbed browsing, spell checking, search suggestions, session restore, and more, the browsers let users a better Web experience.
- **Personalize their browsers**
Firefox™ offers a wide range of plug-ins and search engine managers that lets users create their own browsing experience.
- **Stay secure on the Web**
Security is at the top of everyone's list. Firefox™ keeps you safe from spyware, hackers, scammers and spammers using the power of a vigilant and passionate community to protect you 24/7.

Visit www.mozilla.com for more information or to download Firefox™.

Safari™



If you use an Apple Macintosh® (Mac), then you're probably familiar with Safari™ as it is designed to work with Leopard™, the Mac operating system. Not wanting to discriminate, Apple has complete information and a version suitable for Windows users to [download](#).

Besides saying it has faster downloads, Safari™ users enjoy a slick interface that lets them:

- Surf securely
- Find terms in a page quickly
- Use tabbed browsing
- Resize text at will

Opera



Opera, along with all the others, touts itself as the best browser for its users. New in the current version are two very interesting usability options—widgets and thumbnail previews. Visit the [Opera Web site](#) for a complete listing of Opera's features and to download the free browser.

Opera widgets come in a growing variety as there are developers out there who live to create different downloadable widgets for you. Whether you're looking for games, Web development assistance, calendaring, or music, you can find something that is intriguing. Just as a word of warning, some of the widgets are worth the price you pay for them and include some bugs that create snags in your browsing experience.

Perhaps my favorite feature is the browser's thumbnail previews shown in Figure 2, Opera Screenshot. (Firefox™ will have this feature in its next version that is currently in Beta testing.) Sometimes it is not enough to have a URL pop up at you. The visual cue is extremely helpful to those who find themselves with multiple tabs open at any given time.



Figure 2. Opera screenshot.

AOL®/Netscape®



AOL®/Netscape® falls at the bottom of the top browsers. And yes, they are listed together as they are both now interlinked. This interlinking is so prevalent that when you browse to www.netscape.com, you are redirected to www.netscape.aol.com and have to wade through the AOL® entry page to find the link to the Netscape Navigator® [download](#).

Once there, the browser touts that it has all the key security features and highlights that version 9 is much improved because of its stand-alone installation for Windows, Mac, and Linux as well as URL correction, and a link pad that lets you save interesting links without cluttering up your Favorites folder.

If you're comfortable with AOL®, then you'll probably feel comfortable in this browser. Just be aware, that AOL® does infuse its marketing into this browser and you'll have to take the time to turn all that off.

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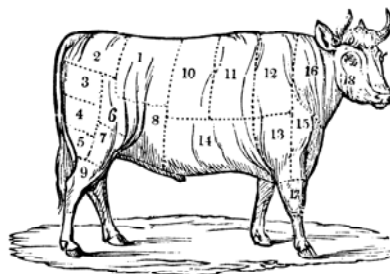
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LSC Notes and Committee Reports

LSC Competitions Are On the Mooove!

by [Kathryn Poe](#), Competitions Manager

Judging is over!



Cow design used with permission of the STC Phoenix Chapter

**Awards Banquet (January 10)
Stay tuned!**

Mentor Committee

by [Ann Balaban](#), Associate Fellow and Manager, Mentoring Committee

Early in their careers, technical communicators in corporate environments often find that technical writing is perhaps the easiest and quickest of the many tasks they perform.

Probably the most difficult, time-consuming chore they face is locating the information needed to perform the writing task. First, the writer needs to find the person with the required knowledge and then find the right way to interact successfully with this individual while navigating within corporate cultures and politics.

How do new technical communicators find the best mentors to help them solve these problems? One way is to take advantage of the Mentoring program from the STC Lone Star community. As a new technical communicator or as a student in technical communication, you have valuable resources available to you through STC.

Research literature shows that mentors provide vocational and psychosocial support to protégés. One researcher found a link between these functions and the career mobility of protégés. Research also shows that technical communicators have relatively high job satisfaction, but that their corporate mobility and career development is relatively low. Mentors can help technical communicators become aware of additional avenues for career advancement because they often know what is required for other positions and how to prepare for assuming them.

Having a mentor can improve your skills in organizational communication and management, as well as increase your overall productivity and job satisfaction.

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Why Mentoring Matters

STC is always looking for new leaders. One way to locate and retain our next generation of leaders is by mentoring.

Mentoring can help STC develop new leaders while enhancing your career development and improving your technical knowledge. Besides all these great benefits, it really improves your self-esteem! The mentor's growth occurs right along with the protégé's.

The purpose for mentoring is to encourage growth of a less experienced person in their profession and within STC. Your experiences learning about and working with others qualifies you to be a mentor. If you had a mentor when you were starting out, imagine what a difference it would have made—if only I knew then what I know now! This is your chance to share your experiences, your enthusiasm for your work, and your interests with someone just starting out in technical communication.

In a mentoring relationship, the mentor and protégé:

- Identify objectives, goals, and development needs
- Define and establish a plan to accomplish goals
- Meet regularly in person, by phone, or through e-mail to review and evaluate progress

Mentoring is all-inclusive—no one is excluded who wants to participate. You do not have to be a student to be a protégé. Whether you are new to technical communication—just starting out or making a career change—or you have been a technical communicator for awhile and need guidance to jump-start your career, you can be a part of the mentoring program. Success is based on what you want to do. A mentor can suggest methods for advancement, recommend books and other resources, and offer résumé assistance and career guidance. As a protégé, you have requirements to fulfill, too. You should ask questions, listen and be open to suggestions, and keep the lines of communication open.

The STC Lone Star community is continually looking for mentors and people who need mentors. This is a wonderful program that benefits all involved.

Resources:

1. About.com: www.about.com
2. The Mentoring Leadership & Resource Network: www.mentors.com
3. The Resources Agency Mentor Program
4. Catheryn Mason and Elizabeth Bailey, "Benefits and Pitfalls of Mentoring," STC 2005 Annual Conference Proceedings.

Scholarship Committee – Lucky Prize Winners for November Meeting

by Robert Carr Harris, Manager, Scholarship committee



LSC's November meeting was successful as many attendees contributed to the scholarship for the monthly raffle. Our sponsors for this past meeting included Starbucks Coffee Company, The Body Shop, and Barnes & Noble booksellers. The following were the lucky door prize winners from the raffle:

The lucky door prize winners last month included:

- **Arroxane Ullman**, an LSC member, won The Body Shop Spa Wisdom gift set and 2008 Zen Calendar from Barnes & Noble
- **Heather Steele**, LSC Second Vice President, received an STC classic canvas tote stuffed full of goodies, including a 2008 pocket calendar and Tiffany's calendar from Barnes & Noble, TechSmith long-sleeved shirt, and "Successful Project Management" textbook by Gido and Clements.
- **Doug Dow**, STC Associate Fellow, was the lucky winner of a Starbucks gift set, which included a serving platter, set of coasters, pound of Anniversary Blend, and peanut butter toffee

All the proceeds from the door prize raffle go to the LSC scholarship fund, which benefits students and professionals seeking scholarship awards for furthering their educational development.

For more information, visit the Scholarship page (www.stc-dfw.org/pages/schol_main.htm) on the community Web site.

We appreciate the donations from members, guests, and our prize sponsors. Thank you so much; we couldn't do it without your support!

Member Recognition Committee

by [Mel Haughton](#), LSC immediate past president

Celebrate our newest BALA LSC Star!

**Attend the Awards Banquet (January 10)
to see if you are the next BALA recipient!**



Are you a Superstar?



Do you like making a difference and stepping up to help? Do you need a few more samples for your portfolio? Do you want to work on your networking skills? How about get your head around a new piece of software?

If you answered **yes** to any of these questions, then dive in and start volunteering today. You'll be on your way to becoming a Superstar!

You automatically receive points each time you participate in LSC activities. Points are based upon the activity and its point values and are listed in the table below.

LSC Activity	Points
Attend a monthly meeting	1
Attend a council meeting	1
Volunteer at an event	2
Contribute to a community service effort	1
Judge competitions	3
Contribute an article to newsletter	1
Bring a guest to meeting	1
Be a mentor	5
Present at an STC event (Local, regional, or international)	2
Speak to a student group about Technical Communication and STC	2
Convince a guest to join	5

Our Volunteer Wrangler will keep score from August 1, 2007 to June 1, 2008. Collect a total of 20 points to become an LSC Superstar. All Superstars will be recognized at the September 2008 meeting.

So, start volunteering today and become a Superstar and become part of the Superstar team. Winners receive a unique LSC Superstar shirt. The only way to get this shirt is to get involved and earn those points.

Send an e-mail to volunteers@stc-dfw.org to learn more about volunteer opportunities.

Volunteer Committee: Want to help a little?

by [Mel Haughton](#), LSC Volunteer Wrangler

Have you thought about the difference you can make in someone's life just by offering a bit of your time? How does it make you feel when you need help and someone actually comes through? Does it bring you happiness? Does it feel good to get something done as a team?

Where I come from we have a saying: "One hand helps the other." If you give a bit of your time to help someone, one day someone will help you out as well. That's how we like to work here at the LSC. We're a big happy family, and we're always looking for talented individuals to help us out!

We currently have the following opportunities that would take a limited amount of your time:

- Edit our Web site (a two- to three-hour job)
- Be a greeter or help at the Registration desk (a 30-minute job) during our monthly meeting
- Write, edit, and print programs for our monthly meetings (a two-hour job)
- Write articles for our online newsletter, *Technically Write*. (The time commitment depends on how much you write!)

So it doesn't take that much time! And if you think you can spare more time than this, think about organizing half-day workshops or serving as an assistant to a committee manager.

E-mail me at volunteers@stc-dfw.org if you want to make a difference in LSC.

What's in it for you, you ask? Think about how you will increase your network! Think about the additions you can make to your résumé and your portfolio! Think about how many people will appreciate you for your efforts.

Send your e-mail to me right away, and let me know where you can help. I look forward to hearing from you!

LSC Membership Minute

by [Jeanne Foster](#), Manager, Membership and SIN SIG

Senior Members. STC grants senior member status upon those who have held membership in STC for five years. We are pleased to announce that the following LSC members have attained the rank of senior member:

- Clare Bernier
- Daryl S. Bowdoin
- Marilyn Gatti
- Richard L. Hightower
- Ronald H. McKee
- Luther Pritchett
- Sarah L. Publicover
- Marty A. Vick

Congratulations, senior members!

Shy? Inactive? New? Looking for new people? Join us! The Shy, Inactive, and New Special Interest Group (SIN SIG) meeting is open to all our members. It is a great way to network before the meeting and learn more about our community. Please consider dropping in before the next meeting begins. Our numbers and make-up fluctuate wildly. Some months we have only newcomers. Other months, we have a mix of old-timers and newcomers. All are welcome!

What Happens at SIN SIG? During the November meeting, we had a nice-sized group of nine. Ann Balaban joined us to talk about the benefits and opportunities available through mentoring. We were also joined by two LSC council members, our new secretary, Kristin Kirkham, and our president, Susie Fox.

Plan Ahead. Before the **December 13th** LSC meeting, we will once again meet at **5:45 p.m.** at the Crowne Plaza Hotel Dallas-Addison. This month, our guest of honor is Jackie Damrau, STC associate fellow. Jackie will share information about our award-winning newsletter "Technically Write."

Welcome. Brenda Morton is one of our newest members. She has a degree in technical writing from Texas Tech University. She has been out of the technical communications field for several years, but she is re-entering the workforce. Brenda is excited at the prospect of meeting new people in the technical communications field.

It's Renewal Time! Have you received your renewal notice? Act today and turn in your expense voucher to your employer, or if you pay your own way, claim your membership as a business expense or charitable contribution for 2007.

All **new** members pay an enrollment fee of \$30. Renewing members do not pay this fee, unless they fail to send their renewal payments by the renewal deadline of March 31, 2008. At that point, their membership is lapsed and they must pay a reinstatement fee of \$15. If they still have not sent their renewal payments by June 30, 2008, they must rejoin and pay the full enrollment fee of \$30.

Change or Upgrade Your Membership. Upgrade your STC membership (from "Limited" or "E-membership" to "Classic") or add communities or SIGs to your existing membership.

- Mail or fax a completed STC Membership Change/Upgrade Form to the STC office.
- Download and print the form: http://www.stc.org/PDF_Files/memberApp2006.pdf

Human Factors

by [Kathryn Poe](#), Associate Fellow



Welcome to the Human Factors column. My intent is to talk to some of our senior members and officer so you can get to know them and they can share with you. LSC has a plethora of folks who have been in technical communications for some time. We have seen major changes in technology, expectations, and direction since we started, and here is our chance to communicate some of that to you. As I like to tell the newbies I meet, if I can keep you from stepping in a few of the potholes I have found, it is worth the effort.

By way of exposition, I will ask a person the same questions each month and their answers will appear right here. Feel free to send your ideas and comments to me at kpoe@ursaminorservices.com to make this information more useful to you.

+++++

Name:

Ann Balaban

Job Title:

Technical Communicator

What do you actually do?

Everything! I write, I plan, I design. I also work on requirements and use cases, and I do some usability. Could probably do more, but I don't have time. I spend a lot of time cultivating good sources.

What hard skills have you found most useful and how do you continue to cultivate those skills?

Writing—I buy books with exercises and I rewrite almost everything I read. I also ask people that I think are better writers than me to read my stuff and give me their feedback.

Interviewing—watching others, reading articles.

Being adaptable to using new tools—this is very important. Don't be limited by only being able to use a certain tool. Understand the concepts and apply them to all tools.

Tool expertise—I try out new things, I beta test when possible, I download trial copies and try them out, I talk with other STCers about what they are using and any problems they are having.

Do you consider yourself a guru at any particular subject?

Cats (felines)! I guess I would be considered a good mentor. I enjoy helping young people develop and find the right track for them.

What is the greatest benefit of being an STC member?

The people you meet and the contacts you make. These are the main resources of STC and they can help you throughout your career.

Why have you stuck around so long? What's kept you here?

I really do enjoy the high-tech environment. I think STC members have been one of the biggest helps in developing my skills. It's amazing how much you can learn if you get to know people, and then ask for their help. When I read an article in the journal or Intercom and I like it or I have questions, I contact the author (after all, they are STC members just like you and me), and I send my compliments on their article, what I liked, and then I ask them my questions or tell them what I am in doubt about and ask for more explanation.

What positions in LSC and STC have you held?

Lone Star President, Membership Manager, Publications Competition Manager, Competitions Manager, and worked on various committees

How can I get involved and if I do, what's in it for me?

I have said, since I was president, you only get as much out of an organization as you put in. If you really want to get involved, then step up and volunteer. Talk to the people who are committee heads and tell them you want to help. STC is a volunteer organization, and everyone has a career besides what they do for STC and other organizations they belong to, so you can't expect a senior member to step up and recruit you specifically. You have to show the initiative and then follow up. That's how we all got started. Bite the bullet and push that shyness away. Step up and introduce yourself, and say I want to get involved. Believe me, they are going to love you!

How have you benefited from volunteering?

I have learned skills that I have used in other organizations, including a 501(c)3 I founded. I have met some really great people. I have developed great resources. All of this applies both locally and internationally.

How do I meet/recognize senior members?

I don't know how to do that, I guess when you introduce yourself, just ask. Titles have never meant much to me, so I never really paid any attention. That's why I always know everyone, from the president on down. If you don't set limits on yourself, then your circle of friends and resources expands exponentially.

Do senior members/council members really want to talk to me?

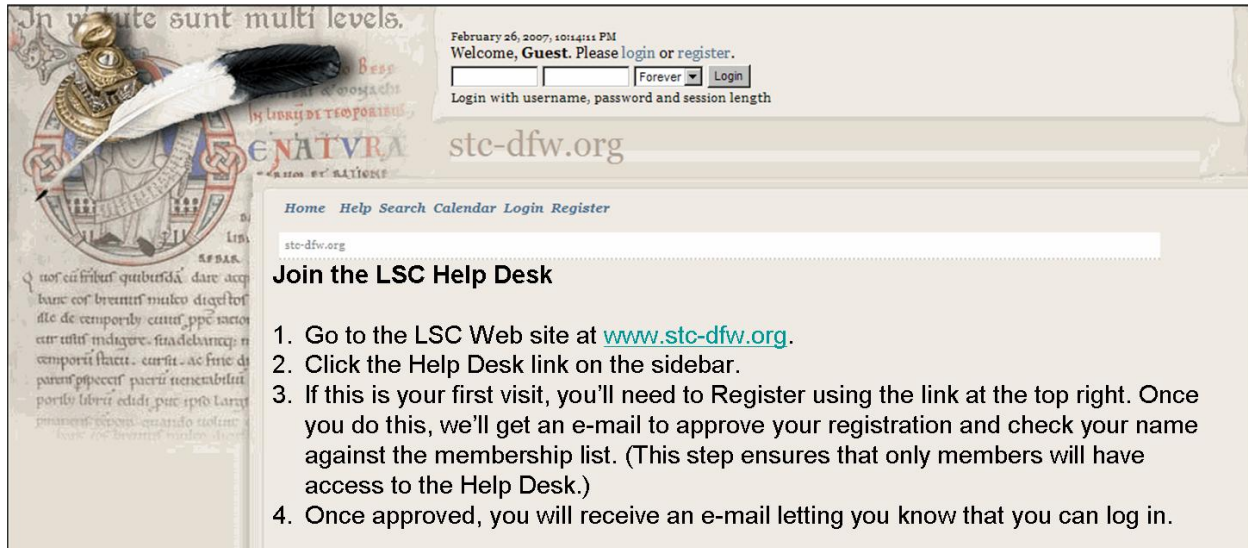
Yes, we are always looking for new talent, and like I said before, I and most of my colleagues enjoy helping young people develop. But we get tired of trying to do it for you. You have to make the effort on your own and follow up. This includes staying involved and letting us know what needs to be changed or what you think might work better. That's how this organization grows and improves.

Can STC really help me find a job?

Yes! I got my second job in technical writing because I knew two people at the company. They were both people I met when I first joined STC, and I approached them when I was a new member and they were president and a region director. We worked on many committees together, and they were (and still are) valuable friends and resources.

LSC Help Desk

by [Kathryn Poe](#), Associate Fellow



February 26, 2007, 10:14:11 PM
Welcome, **Guest**. Please [login](#) or [register](#).
Login with username, password and session length

stc-dfw.org

[Home](#) [Help](#) [Search](#) [Calendar](#) [Login](#) [Register](#)

stc-dfw.org

Join the LSC Help Desk

1. Go to the LSC Web site at www.stc-dfw.org.
2. Click the Help Desk link on the sidebar.
3. If this is your first visit, you'll need to Register using the link at the top right. Once you do this, we'll get an e-mail to approve your registration and check your name against the membership list. (This step ensures that only members will have access to the Help Desk.)
4. Once approved, you will receive an e-mail letting you know that you can log in.

LSC SIG News

Independents and Networking

by [Jo Byrd](#), CIC SIG Manager

Working in the consulting/contracting arena requires an extensive network if we're to be successful or if we want to enjoy more or less continuous employment. Sadly, we all need to expand our network.

Send e-mail to jbyrd@byrdwrites.com for more information.

Lone Star Job Bank



Lone Star's [Job Bank](#) is online at the LSC Web site, listing local employment opportunities. The Job Bank is updated as jobs are submitted.

If you're looking for work, or wish to post a position, visit the Web site and follow the instructions.

The international [STC Web site](#) maintains nationwide job listings, along with some international opportunities.

STC Texas Communities

Links to Texas STC resources:

STC Communities in Texas

[Alamo](#)

[Austin](#)

[Houston](#)

[Alamo Tech Line](#)

[Austin Newsletter/Blog](#)

[Dateline Houston](#)

STC Student Communities in Texas

[College Station \(TAMU\)](#)

[Texas Tech University \(TTU\)](#)

[Events](#)

Educational and Networking Opportunities

Organization	Day	Place
North Texas PC Users Group (NTPCUG)	Third Saturday	King of Glory Lutheran Church
DFW Usability Professionals' Association (UPA) E-mail: dfwupa@yahoo.com	Third Tuesday	varies
Dallas Association of Women in Computing	First Thursday	Crowne Plaza, Addison
North Texas Adobe Captivate User Group E-mail: Walt Stewart	Third Tuesday	varies

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STC News

Read about:

- [STC News](#)
- [STC Community Events](#)
- [Upcoming STC Webinars](#)

STC News

STC Academic Database

STC provides a database of academic programs worldwide to assist those interested in pursuing a career in technical communication: <http://stc.org/edu/academicDatabase01.asp>

All SIG Membership Package Offered in 2008

STC is offering a one-year pilot program letting you have the option of joining all twenty-one special interest groups (SIGs) at a reduced rate of \$300. Besides having twenty-one SIGs, you will receive membership in one chapter and printed versions of Intercom and Technical Communication. This rate includes overseas postage for international members.

Details can be found when you renew your STC membership.

Referendum Approves New Bylaws for STC

The STC 2007 Bylaws Referendum ended at noon EST on November 1, 2007. In total 802 votes were cast with 775 votes (96.63%) For and 27 votes (3.37%) Against.

These votes were cast using Votenet Solution's SAS70 certified system, eBallot. The certification and accompanying examination was done in accordance with the standards established by the American Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

For more information, visit <http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/bylaws01.asp>

Other STC Community Events

March 14, 2008

France Chapter STC will host its annual conference in Paris. The theme is "Communicating Europe" celebrating the diversity of technical communication.

For more information, e-mail conference@stcfrance.org or visit www.stcfrance.org.

March 14 – 15, 2008

Atlanta Chapter STC will host its conference, "Current 2008," at the Southern Polytechnic State University campus in Marietta, Georgia.

For more information, visit www.stcatlanta.org/

March 28, 2008

Rochester Chapter STC will hold "Spectrum 2008" at the R.I.T. Inn and Conference Center in Rochester, New York. Ginny Redish, a usability consultant for Redish & Associates, Inc., is the keynote speaker.

For more information, watch www.stcrochester.org.

April 14 – 15, 2008

Manitoba Chapter STC and Red River College will hold their fifth annual conference at the Red River College Princess Street campus.

For more information, contact Brad Friesen at Brad.L.Friesen@gmail.com or visit www.stcmanitoba.org.

April 16 – 18, 2008

TransAlpine Chapter STC—representing Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, and Switzerland—will hold its 2008 conference in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

For more information, visit stc-on.org/transalpine/.

June 1 – 4, 2008

Technical Communication Summit — STC's 55th Annual Conference will be held at the Pennsylvania Convention Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

For more information, visit www.stc.org/55thConf/index.asp.



Feb. 14-15, '08
Raleigh, N.C.

McKimmon
Conference
Center



Content:

- New/Noteworthy
- Best Practices
- Case Studies
- Structure
- DocBook
- Tools
- DITA
- XML
- XSL

Speaker Topics:

- Frame vs. Flare
- FDK Development
- Frame vs. InDesign
- Moving to Structure
- Publishing Advances
- Frame and RoboHelp
- Frame and Translation
- Developing with Mif2Go
- Content Management Systems
- Technical Communication Suite

Registration:

<http://www.brightpathsolutions.com/reg.html>

Contact: 1.919.244.8559

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Upcoming STC Webinars

Stay tuned for the 2007-2008 schedule.

Non-STC Events

Call for Proposals: IEEE International Professional Communication Conference 2008 (IPCC 2008)

Theme:

Opening the Information Economy

Location:

Concordia University Montréal, Canada

Website:

ewh.ieee.org/soc/pcs/?q=node/2

Contact:

IPCC2008@gmail.com

The information economy is based on the collection and the exchange of data and ideas. We all either contribute to or use materials from the information economy in most aspects of our everyday lives. Thus, the information economy exists as an environment in which we are all contributors and consumers. Within this system, effective communication is essential to success and means individuals can contribute ideas and information effectively and can make efficient use of the goods and services. Few of us, however, understand all of the nuances of the information economy or the communication factors that affect its operations.


This conference seeks to “open” this economic model by examining the connections between communication practices and the products, practices, and services that constitute the information economy. The objective of such an examination will be to help attendees better understand and participate in the information economy as both contributors and consumers.

Possible Topic Areas:

- Establishing and assessing the value of knowledge work and knowledge products
- Information design, usability, and accessibility
- Virtual teams, online collaboration, and distributed models of work
- Cross-cultural communication, globalization, outsourcing, translation, and localization
- Legal policies and social issues related to the information economy
- Media selection and multimodality
- The role of and perspectives on teaching and training within the information economy
- Content management, open source software, single sourcing, and XML

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December 2007

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
						1 Time: Event
2 Time: Event	3 Time: Event	4 Time: Event	5 Time: Event	6 6:15pm LSC Council	7 Time: Event	8 Time: Event
9 Time: Event	10 Time: Event	11 Newsletter Articles due	12 BALA Apps Due	13 5:45pm LSC Mtg.	14 All Day LSC Workshops.	15 Time: Event
16 Time: Event	17 Time: Event	18 Time: Event	19 Time: Event	20 Time: Event	21 Time: Event	22 Time: Event
23 Time: Event	24 Time: Event	25 	26 Time: Event	27 Time: Event	28 Time: Event	29 Time: Event
30 Time: Event						

January 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 A HAPPY NEW YEAR	2 Time: Event	3 6:15pm LSC Council	4 Time: Event	5 Time: Event
6 Time: Event	7 Time: Event	8 Time: Event	9 Time: Event	10 5:45pm Awards Banquet	11 Time: Event	12 Time: Event
13 Time: Event	14 Time: Event	15 Time: Event	16 BALA Apps Due	17 Time: Event	18 Time: Event	19 Time: Event
20 Time: Event	21 Time: Event	22 Newsletter Articles due	23 Time: Event	24 Time: Event	25 Time: Event	26 Time: Event
27 Time: Event	28 Time: Event	29 Time: Event	30 Time: Event	31 Time: Event		

February 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1 Time: Event	2 Time: Event
3 Time: Event	4 Time: Event	5 Time: Event	6 Time: Event	7 6:15pm LSC Council	8 Time: Event	9 Time: Event
10 Time: Event	11 Time: Event	12 Time: Event	13 BALA Apps Due	14 5:45pm LSC Meeting	15 Time: Event	16 Time: Event
17 Time: Event	18 Time: Event	19 Time: Event	20 Time: Event	21 Time: Event	22 Newsletter Articles due	23 Time: Event
24 Time: Event	25 Time: Event	26 Time: Event	27 Time: Event	28 Time: Event	29 Time: Event	

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About TW

Read about:

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- [Submit to *Technically Write*](#)
- [2007-2008 Deadlines](#)
- [LSC Officers](#)
- [Technically Write Staff](#)
- [Staff Bios](#)
- [STC Mission Statement](#)

About *Technically Write*

Published monthly from September through May, “Technically Write” is the official newsletter of the STC Lone Star community. It is produced by, for, and about the members, associates, and friends of the STC Lone Star Community.

Opinions expressed are those of the authors, and are not necessarily those of the STC nor the STC Lone Star community. Neither the STC nor the STC Lone Star community endorses products or services, but may, as part of our educational activities, allow their mention in articles and notices.

Reprint/Linking Policy

STC communities and organizations worldwide are welcome to link to or reproduce original material in *Technically Write* with proper attribution (source, issue date, and author's name) in the link text, or in the byline.

For specific file path information, contact the Managing Editor at e-mail: newsletter@stc-dfw.org. Kindly notify the Managing Editor through e-mail when electronic reprints are published, or send a copy of publications containing reprinted versions to the Managing Editor at the address below.

Mailing Address:

Technically Write
P.O. Box 515065
Dallas, TX 75251-5065

Advertising

Advertising is available in Technically Write in an advertising section. If you have Web-ready (the 21st century equivalent of "camera-ready") content in the form of a GIF or JPG file, we can include it, if it is 432 pixels (6 inches) wide or less. (Anything larger will be resampled.) It will be placed in an advertising section on its own page. It will NOT be a "banner" ad. The rate for one issue is US \$125. Discounts apply as follows:

	Single Issue	Five Issue Package	Nine Issue Package (Full Volume)
Price	\$125	\$600 (\$120/issue)	\$900 (\$100/issue)
Discount	\$0	\$25	\$225

We do not support animated GIFs or other animation technologies at this time.

Payment

Payment can be made by check, money order, or purchase order made payable to Lone Star STC. PayPal® is also available. Full payment arrangements are due before the ad runs. The payment address is:

Lone Star STC
PO Box 515065
Dallas, TX 75251-5065
Attn: Treasurer, Newsletter Ad

Terms of Service

STC Lone Star community reserves the right to refuse ads.

Inquiries and Requests

Contact the Managing Editor at e-mail: newsletter@stc-dfw.org for more information.

Copyright and Trademark

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles they wish to be considered for publication. Note: 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.

Some articles might refer to companies or products whose names are covered by trademark or registered trademark. All trademarks are the property of their respective owners. Reference to a specific product does not constitute an endorsement of the product by the LSC or STC.

Newsletter Design and Layout:

Courtesy of University of North Texas, Spring 2007 English 4180 class
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Submit to *Technically Write*

Technically Write is pleased to accept contributions from community members and student members on a wide variety of topics, including (but not limited to):

- Evaluations of tools, software, trade publications, and the like
- Lessons learned, tips, advice for the newbie
- Testimonials regarding the value of STC to the member
- Sharing STC Conference insights
- Bios of STC members
- News of charitable undertakings by members, whether or not they involve trade skills.

Technically Write is published on the first Thursday of each month (September through May).

The editorial team retains and exercises the right to edit submitted and requested material for clarity, length, and appropriateness.

Contributions to *Technically Write*

- Must be submitted no later than the deadlines listed below.
E-mail: newsletter@stc-dfw.org.
- Are best submitted in Word format, or in the text of an e-mail message.
- Have no length limit, but need to be written with online presentation in mind.
- May have accompanying graphics in GIF or JPG format. Editors reserve the right to resample, crop, or exclude images if necessary.
- Should also include a short (25-word) biography of the author.

Author Guidelines

In case you haven't noticed, *Technically Write* is an online magazine, or e-zine. From Kurt Ament to Strunk and White, e-zine savvy people have this advice:

- Write short sentences.
- Make short paragraphs, 3 to 5 sentences at the most.
- Do not use semicolons (;). They are an excuse to lengthen sentences.
- Aim for no more than 500 to 700 words of content. If you desire to write a longer piece, please subdivide it with subheads, so that it can be serialized.
- Use our Style Guide when writing your articles.

2007-2008 Submission Deadlines

Deadlines for article submissions for this year are:

Issue	Deadline
September	August 21
October	September 18
November	October 23
December	November 20
January	December 18
February	January 22
March	February 19
April	March 19
May	April 16

Technically Write Staff

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Editor: **OPEN**

Contributing Editor: **OPEN**

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Photo Editor: [Douglas Dow](#)

Graphics: [Mary McWilliams Johnson](#)

Ex-Officio: [Chapter Officers](#)

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President: [Susie Lynn Fox](#)

1st Vice President: [Elisa Miller](#)

2nd Vice President: [Heather Steele](#)

Newsletter Editor: [Jackie Damrau](#)

Visit the [LSC Web site](#) for a complete list of community contacts.

Staff Bios

Ann Balaban, a former LSC president (1996-97), has produced award-winning documentation at Texas Instruments (TI) for many years. Recently, high-quality documentation was cited as a significant factor in obtaining new business at TI.

Jo Byrd survived through two degrees and a job from hell before she discovered she didn't want to be a librarian and after several additional missteps to find technical writing. A member of STC since 1992 and CIC SIG Manager since 1995, Jo helps others as she was helped early on.

Louellen S. Coker, owner of Content Solutions, a certified Women's Business Enterprise (WBE), is a past president of the Lone Star Community and is also a member of the CIC, Lone Writers and Marketing SIGs. When not at her computer, you can find her training for that next marathon or sailing with her husband.

Jackie Damrau works at T-Mobile USA. She has more than 26 years of combined experience in technical writing and instructional design. Besides supporting STC activities through LSC and two national SIGs, Jackie enjoys going to the movies and reading classic literature, Irish/Scottish/English historical romance novels, or time-travel romance novels.

Doug Dow has been a member of the Lone Star Chapter since 1990, when he transferred from the Boston chapter. He has served in various capacities, including competition judge, chair of the Community Service Committee, and five years as newsletter Managing Editor. His interests outside of the cubicle include T'ai Chi, swing dancing, and honking on one of his many saxophones.

Dale Erickson serves the Lone Star Community as a Technically Write photographer and manager of the IPIC mailing list. He has been an STC member since 1982 and holds the rank of Fellow. Dale is senior technical writer at One Network Enterprises in Dallas.

Jeanne Foster is a lone writer for Jasper Design Automation, a privately-held electronic design automation (EDA) company headquartered in Mountain View, California. Besides technical communications, her varied career includes everything from government service to early childhood and elementary education. Jeanne is a recipient of the LSC 2007 Distinguished Community Service Award. She has volunteered as Region 5 Conference Registration manager and LSC Hospitality manager, and she is currently the Membership chair and SIN SIG manager. Beyond LSC volunteer opportunities, Jeanne enjoys beach vacations, dining at fine restaurants, and light-hearted banter with her colleagues.

Susie Lynn Fox, a Lone Star member since 2003, is serving as the 2007-2008 President of LSC. She enjoys the great learning opportunities and fun at the local meetings and national conferences. Susie is a senior technical writer at American Airlines, Inc.

Melissa (Mel) Haughton is an Instructional Designer and Project Coordinator for MLink Technologies in Lewisville, TX. She has a Master's degree in Technical Writing from the University of North Texas. Mel is the immediate past president and volunteer wrangler of the Lone Star Community.

Mike Hiatt is a former journalist who owned his own newspaper at one time before realizing surviving in Dallas required a bigger paycheck. Mike's father, a technical writer for 30 years, prompted his move into technical communications. He started as a proposal writer (responding to customer requests for proposals, not grant writing) before moving into the technical publications department at a small Dallas telecommunications company. Mike has primarily documented software writing user guides and help files

Mary McWilliams Johnson is a retired technical writer and Web designer. Check out her Web site: GraphicsByMary.com: <http://www.graphicsbymary.com>. (The SuperConnect site no longer exists.)

Jim Korth has worked in technical communications and support for twelve years with Microsoft, Compaq, and IBM. He holds technical certifications from Microsoft, Novell, and ITIL. Jim previously worked in banking at Citigroup and holds a B.S. Degree in Accounting from Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania.

Elisa Kaplan Miller took a checkered path to her current position as User Experience Architect at Perot Systems. She's been a journalist, trainer, college professor, editor, analyst, and usability lab manager. She spends her free time as LSC membership manager, trying to expand the view of what STC thinks of as technical communication professionals.

Karl J. Morris is a native of the San Francisco Bay Area. He has a background in sales, marketing, and technical writing within the telecommunications industry. Karl holds a BS degree in Information Systems from Golden Gate University in San Francisco and a Graduate Marketing Certificate from Southern Methodist University in Dallas. He worked five years as an information/course developer for Nortel Networks. In addition, he spent three years as a marketing communications consultant for Efore USA. He has spent the last two years working in event marketing, currently working at the AT&T Experience store at Northpark Mall.

Alan Oak is majoring in English–Professional Writing at Ellis College of the New York Institute of Technology to train for a new career in technical communication. His prior career experience is in information technology. Alan is looking forward to paying work as a technical communicator after his 2008 graduation. Currently, he is serving as Web master of the Lone Star Community's Web site.

Kathryn Poe, Associate Fellow and past chapter president, is a self-proclaimed Knowledge Wrangler. She is currently enlightening minds in the financial sector.

Paula Robertson's Technical Communication career comprises twelve years as writer and editor of software and hardware documentation for domestic and international clients in transportation, telecommunications, and other industries. A previous career in computer graphics rounds out her skills as a "full-service" editor. As a Senior Member of STC, Paula has learned the value of the term and the practice of "networking."

Arroxane T. Ullman is a Senior Technical Writer at Sundance Digital. She has an MA in Technical Writing and a BS in Liberal Arts. Arroxane has an eclectic background and is a former US Marine. She is grateful to be an active member of LSC and a Big Sister with Big Brothers Big Sisters of North Texas.

Monica Winkelman is the lone technical writer at Hyphen Solutions in Addison, which produces scheduling software for construction home builders. She has a B.A. in Journalism and an M.A. in Technical Writing from the University of North Texas in Denton.

Lauren Womack is the owner of Algonquin Consulting and the functioning Lone Writer Information Designer for HySecurity in Washington State. She is working on creating a single-source information solution for their customer-facing documentation. A Senior Member of STC, and the grateful recipient of a 2006 Distinguished Community Service Award, Lauren is the PR Manager of the Lone Star Community (3rd year!) and can be reached at PublicRelations@stc-dfw.org. With this position on the community council, she hopes to expand her skills and network while she serves the Lone Star Community. Lauren looks forward to meeting YOU at any community function in the near future, and is always looking to help members find leads and jobs.

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A proof-of-concept experiment in 1996, Technically Wired took the content of Technically Write and combined it with the graphical potential of the Web. Three issues were produced until the Internet Professional Interest Committee (IPIC)—as SIGs were known then—decided it was too intensive an effort for one person.

Links and e-mail addresses in these issues have been disabled, since they're likely to be extinct.

[September 1996](#)[October 1996](#)[November 1996](#)**STC Mission Statement**

“STC advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and all media.”

STC is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. Its 18,000 members include technical writers and editors, content developers, documentation specialists, technical illustrators, instructional designers, academics, information architects, usability and human factors professionals, visual designers, Web designers and developers, and translators - anyone whose work makes technical information available to those who need it.

For more information, contact the STC headquarters:

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