

Stimulus

Volume 26 No. 3 June/July 2000

From the President

The year in review

by John Holgate

John Holgate is our chapter's President. He is currently working as a technical writer for data-analysis software at Cognos.

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The 1999-2000 year for our chapter is drawing to a close. The chapter extends a very big thank-you to everyone who helped out with events, *Stimulus*, the web site, the competitions, and in many other ways.

Many thanks go to Lynda Simons, our Past President. She provided valuable guidance to the Administrative Council and to the Executive over the past year. At the recent Annual General Meeting, we bade farewell to Lynda, who has since moved to Western Canada.

We had two Program Managers this year. Marnie Connolly and Doreen deMunnik organized many of our events and arranged for the catering and facility rental for our Competitions award event. A special thank-you goes to them for their hard work and dedication.

Visnja Beg, our Education Manager, put together two full-day seminars over the past year. She also very kindly agreed to become the Vice-President in the month of March. Many thanks to Visnja for her fine work.

The chapter's Online and Technical Communication competitions were under the leadership of Gordon Brown, the Technical Communications Competition Manager, and Tara Bourbeau, the Online Competition Manager. Their fine work led to very successful competitions, which culminated in a wonderful awards event. Its success was underscored at this year's STC International Conference, held in Orlando in May. At the Awards dinner, we were very pleased to accept a Chapter Pacesetter Award on behalf of the chapter. The inscription on the award reads: "In recognition of innovation in the development and successful implementation of

the chapter's competition awards." Our thanks and congratulations go to Tara and Gordon.

Scott Wahl was this year's Membership Manager and Volunteer Coordinator. Over the year, we saw our chapter grow to over 300 members. Scott maintained a database of members so that we could keep track of our membership. He also led a volunteer team that produced the chapter's annual Membership Directory. Scott arranged for volunteer support for many of our events throughout the year. Thanks very much to Scott for his efforts.

This year's Webmaster and Employment Manager was Robin Kelsey. Over the year, Robin implemented a new look to our website. He also added in some new features, including a discussion forum and online registration for some events. Robin also maintained our job bank, posting job offerings from prospective employers seemingly instantaneously. We have heard many compliments from employers about Robin's cooperation and commitment to his role. A special thank-you to him for his strong efforts in presenting the public face of our chapter.

The Newsletter Editor for the year was Tahira Shadforth. She arranged for the editorial content, production, and printing of *Stimulus*. Tahira also admirably chased down contributors who missed their deadlines. Thanks to Tahira for her role in publicly presenting the chapter's news and events in a fine way.

Theresa Peddle represented our chapter on the STC's Canadian Issues Committee. She worked with other Canadian chapters to examine educational opportunities for Canadians in the field of technical writing. Our thanks go to Theresa for her work.

This year's Treasurer, Rick Lorenz, kept watch over our finances. His dedication and accuracy are both to be commended. Rick provided monthly

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Editor's Desk

On brevity (or to all the creative writers who became technical writers and now feel like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde)

by Tahirah Shadforth

Tahirah Shadforth is a technical communications consultant working at the Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (CCRA).

"Clear writers, like fountains, do not seem as deep as they are; the turbid look the most profound."

—Walter Savage Landor

"To be or not to be."—William Shakespeare

"Adam / Had 'em."—Anonymous

Much have I travelled in the realms of gold and many goodly states and kingdoms seen. Round many western islands have I been, which bards in fealty to Apollo hold. And now ... now I'm a technical communications analyst.

It wasn't always this way.

My formative years were spent in reading books, all sorts of books, books where the imagination knew no bounds and where allegories danced with abandon alongside metaphors and similes. Then, as now, the many layers of Elizabethan poetry thrilled beyond measure, sounding a far deeper note in me than plain English ever could. I might as well wear a wooden sign around my neck that declaims: 'I (heart) turbidity'.

Yet, I can be plain too. As a technical communications analyst, I produce information that is clear, concise, and to the point. Minimalism is my professional motto. Standard English is my, well, standard. For English. Specifically.

In balancing minimalism and turbidity on an oftentimes daily basis, it's not surprising that some days I feel a little like Dr. Jekyll and Ms. Hyde. Especially after spending long hours writing parsimoniously crafted sentences and feeling that my creativity has been sacrificed upon the ink-soaked altar of Mammon. But once Reason returns to her throne, I realize that this

couldn't be further from the truth. After all, even Shakespeare, the master of the multi-syllabic word, wrote short, concise sentences when he wanted to make a point. One of the most effective (and blood-chilling) sentences in J.R.R. Tolkien's many-paged epic, *The Lord of the Rings*, comprises but three words: "They are coming." And the shortest poem in the English language, (the anonymous one shown above) effectively sums up, at least, to those in the know, what Adam had. (What exactly did Adam have, anyway? I'll present an STC ballpoint pen to the first person who gives me the correct answer.)

But back to my point (and I do have one): technical writing and the skills gained therein *can* enhance the creative writing process, while teaching one the gentle art of brevity. So take heart, my fellow Jekylls and Hydys!

For a thoughtful article on brevity, I recommend taking a gander at 'Writing with Style' by Kurt Vonnegut (<http://cojmc.unl.edu/coj/nmsd/writing/kurtvonnegut.html>). Good points are raised; and Vonnegut doesn't mince words in raising them, as evidenced in his opening sentence: "Newspaper reporters and technical writers are trained to reveal almost nothing about themselves in their writings. This makes them freaks in the world of writers because almost all of the other ink-stained wretches in that world reveal a lot about themselves to readers." Freaks. Well.

In this issue of *Stimulus*, our chapter's President, John Holgate, reviews the main

Stimulus

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events of the past year and credits the many hardworking volunteers who have made STCEO's 1999-2000 year such a success. Our Treasurer, Rick Lorenz, gamely takes on the role of roving reporter, providing us with an account of the Annual General Meeting. Vice-President Visnja Beg reflects over the past year. In a humorous article, Kevin McGowan dispenses some valuable tips on brainstorming. Finally, a new member of the chapter, Dave Whelan, writes about his adventures as a technical writer in the United Kingdom.

This issue also heralds the birth of a new column. I haven't quite decided on a name

for it yet (The Blatant Pilfering of Articles from Other Chapters Column?), but it will feature articles from STC chapters around the world. If you have a snappy title suggestion, send it in to me. I will be awarding an STC ballpoint pen to the person who comes up with a title in time for the September/October issue.

Be sure to enter the contest in *Whimsical Thinking*. The prize for the first correct entry is an STC coffee mug.

Have a safe and glorious summer. ☺

The year in review

(continued from page 1)

reports of our financial state and provided the Executive with guidance throughout the year. Special thanks go to Rick for his enthusiasm and cooperation throughout the year.

Jeannie Bacon, this year's Secretary, handled our correspondence and administrative tasks. She provided minutes of our Administrative Council and Executive meetings throughout the year and ensured that our correspondence was up to date. Thanks to Jeannie for her efforts.

I was honoured to serve as President of the chapter this year. Many of the members of the Executive were new this year, including myself. As I said in the July/August 1999 edition of *Stimulus*, it was a time of great transition. The health of our chapter was exemplified by the amount of new people who were willing to step forward and serve on the Executive. I am very proud to have worked with you all over the year. ☺

Humour

Grammar mishaps



(Taken from: Paustian, Shirley. *Writing with Style*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1986.)

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Brainstorming secrets revealed!

by Kevin McGowan

Kevin McGowan is a writer of many trades, but is only paid for technical writing.

A lot of things are called “arts.” There is the art of painting, the art of music, the art of creating the perfect pizza. People always throw that “art” word into something when they really know how to do something: “Oh yeah, I’m great at stapling, I’ve developed it into an art form.”

Art is communication. The ability to communicate well takes a lot of training and experience, regardless of the selected medium. Technical writers should consider themselves artists in this respect. As we work longer and experience more, the art of technical writing becomes more intense and interesting.

As a technical writer, I am often faced with communication challenges. My most recent was to completely reorganize the user guide for our network management software. After much hair pulling, I found a remarkably low-tech solution to my high-tech problem.

When I first arrived at this job, I knew precisely squat about networks, never mind network management. My steep learning curve led to what I would create: a mediocre, if not bad, user guide. The helpful document I wanted to create just wasn’t taking shape. It took a few months of studying the technology and the tools to fully understand what our product was doing.

With that knowledge secure, I had to completely retool this user guide. Its first iteration was feature-based. That means I described the features and how you could use them. That’s a bad user guide. It had to be task-based. The user may open the document looking for a feature description, but more likely the user wants to know how to actually *do* something.

I had to think outside the box. I had to develop a new perspective for the information. How do I do this? I had to brainstorm.

What is brainstorming?

Brainstorming is another good example of a communication art form. You get a bunch of people in a room, decide on a topic, and let the creative juices flow. Everyone gets to suggest their own ideas, and react to the ideas of everyone else. It’s a free flowing session that typically gets

decent results in a short amount of time.

There are several methods of brainstorming. Some require groups of people, some you can do by yourself, and some, well, you don’t even need anyone.

Brainstorming in a group

This is the most common, most used, and indeed, most maligned form of brainstorming. Some folks love it, some hate it. If you really hate this stuff, skip down a paragraph or two, and don’t worry about reading this.

The structure of group brainstorming is key. Developed by A. F. Osborn in the 1930s, traditional brainstorming has a few standard elements: a moderator, a topic, and a bunch of people shouting out their ideas, no matter how serious or silly, until a chalkboard is full of concepts. You brainstorm the topic for a set amount of time, and then look at all the wonderful ideas to edit, combine, and delete until you have a workable solution to your problem.

This was not going to work with my user guide. My documentation department is two people. If one of us had to be moderator, chances are the other one would be lacking ideas after a few seconds. This wasn’t going to work for me.

Brainstorming alone

There are a few good methods for brainstorming alone, but I personally didn’t see a lot of benefit for my situation.

Key Word

This method only requires some paper and a pen. Not bad for the old budget. Just write your idea at the top of a page and let your mind go. This Zen method may work for those able to let their minds flow like a gentle stream, but I was on a serious deadline.

Mind Mapping, Sticky Notes, and Galaxy

These types of brainstorming are pretty much the same as Key Word. I found a few websites going on about how wonderful these methods all were (and they’d be glad to teach them to you for a fee, of course). I’ll save your money, and quickly describe them for free.

Mind Mapping is the same as Key Word brainstorming, only you use several pieces of paper for several topics.

The Sticky Note method is the same as Key Word brainstorming, except that you use up your precious stickies instead of writing all the ideas down on a single sheet. The benefit is that you can move the stickies around as necessary and organize them into nice little groups of like ideas.

The Galaxy method is the same as Key Word brainstorming, except that you write your original idea down in the *middle* of the page, and draw ideas out from the center. Again, very Zen and helpful. It's all a matter of personal preference.

Brainstorming with no one, not even yourself!

This sounds like a great idea, doesn't it? You can actually tell your boss that "Yes, in fact, I am working on that problem right now. By interfacing with a new paradigm, I have organized a high-tech brainstorming session that will revolutionize our methods, save money, and allow you to lay off half your staff!"

That's right, kids, there is actually software available that will do all this mind work for you.

If you work for a big company with lots of money to burn, you can get software to conduct group brainstorming. This requires a number of workstations and much effort for your network administrator. If you can swing that, your team can brainstorm in a meeting without even talking to each other. How's that for progress? The pros are many, as there are some organizations where open communication is frowned upon. This will give everyone a fair try to express their ideas without fear of the management coming down on them. And for those of you who are paranoid, remember that any electronic message can be traced. So, it's best not to be rude.

There is also software that will brainstorm all by itself. All you need to do is type in your topic words, and the software will search its enormous database and provide you with all the ideas you can handle. I am wary of these software packages, as the

context for your problem may be completely lost to the software.

For some more information, try these sites:

- ♦ <http://www.infinn.com/toolbox.html>
- ♦ <http://www.paramind.net>
- ♦ <http://www.ideafisher.com>

Mrs. Sterling's method of creating cool user guides

My choice was not typical. I have no idea where my brainstorming method came from; I have yet to locate its source in my research. From my perspective, which is most certainly not your perspective, I can attribute my method to Mrs. Sterling, my Grade 1 teacher at Mountain Gardens School in Burlington, Ontario.

She taught us to create art from words with a little primitive cut and paste. We would move words and phrases around to see the different ways of assembling sentences and stories. It was fun and effective. Surely, if this method could help me learn to read, it should help me write a user guide.

I am sure Mrs. Sterling would not mind getting the credit for this one. 22 years ago, armed with only kiddie scissors and edible white paste, she taught us about effective communication.

So, one fine day at work, I asked to borrow a co-worker's scissors. There were a few strange looks floating my way. After all, who needs scissors in a high-tech e-business buzzword company in the year 2000? Do we still use paper?

I printed a copy of my Table of Contents, and I started cutting.

I cut the chapters out as they existed in the old manual. Then, I cut more. I cut the subsections. I cut the topic headings, the H1s, H2s, and H3s. I cut the procedures. I cut the descriptive sections. I just cut them all. The software developers thought I had lost my mind, that I had cracked under the stress of deadlines.

My desk was covered in thin strips of white computer paper. I moved the pieces around; this was now a puzzle with no preset order. I put related topics together,

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A community member

by Visnja Beg

Visnja Beg is our chapter's Vice-President and 1999-2000 Education Manager.

This year, as a member of the STCEO Executive, has been an enriching and eye-opening experience for me. I have been a member of the STC since 1997, but had always felt like an outsider, especially at the STCEO events, until I volunteered for the position of Education Manager.

I don't know exactly why I decided to volunteer last year. I think it had to do with the fact that I wanted to feel less like an outsider and getting involved with the Executive seemed like a logical way to get "on the inside," so to speak. I also think a lot of it had to do with the e-mail Lynda Simons sent out last year asking for volunteers. I responded almost immediately and on a whim. She replied back and that is when I was hooked—it is hard to say "No" to Lynda.

I must confess I felt lost and alone at first, especially since there was no Education Manager last year so I had no one to "show me the ropes." But that uncertainty quickly disappeared as I realized that most of the other members of the Executive were as green as I was, but always more than willing to lend advice and a helping hand. Almost from the first Executive meeting, I felt a lot less like an outsider.

The year progressed, we came up with somewhat of a vision and held our first workshop in November. It was a very good experience after I finally found a venue where we could hold a hands-on workshop (computer-equipped classroom space is hard to come by in this city!)

During the workshop, I got to speak to and meet about 25 members that I had

put them in order, trashed it, put them in order again. This was art, this was the act of creating.

Before long, maybe 45 minutes, I had it. There were sensible sections, ideas flowing from one to another. Concepts and procedures complementing each other. It all actually made sense.

My challenge was met, and I taped the pieces together and proudly hung them on the wall of my cubicle. A proud trophy of my day, just like the paper I hung on my parent's fridge back in 1978.

I want to recommend this method to every writer out there who is having trouble

never met before. More so than learning about HTML Help, I felt that this opportunity to network made the workshop very memorable for me.

We had monthly Executive meetings throughout the year, in addition to the monthly member events. Each time I attended these meetings, I felt more at ease and more excited about our work. The year went by quickly and there was so much we just didn't have time to do.

A seminar on System Design for Technical Writers rounded out the year's educational activities and I was thrilled again to meet so many more people.

Before this year, I really felt that the technical communicators in the area were an insular group, many of whom worked as freelancers and were acquainted with each other in this way. Even though I have worked as a technical writer for over 10 years, I still did not feel a part of "them".

After this year, I realized I was wrong: the STCEO members I have met and worked with this year have made me realize how much of a family we are. We are all ready and willing to help each other whenever asked, we enjoy learning about each other and about our chosen profession and are quick to welcome new members.

I am very happy to have met many of you this year. I have enjoyed my first year on the Executive and feel that it has been a very positive and enriching experience, which I hope will continue for many more years. ☺

reorganizing a document. I'm sure it isn't for everyone, but it really did work for me. Sometimes, the best method really is the simplest.

Quick Bibliography

I found some helpful brainstorming-related sites and articles. If you're interested, have a look:

- ♦ http://www.lycos.com/business/ccb/guidebook.html?docNumber=P03_4017
- ♦ <http://www.keanten.com/vedemo/Brainstorming.html>
- ♦ <http://www.mindtools.com/brainstm.html>
- ♦ <http://www.smartbiz.com/sbs/arts/act4.htm>

Brainstorming

(continued from page 5)

Annual General Meeting

by Rick Lorenz

Rick Lorenz is our chapter's Treasurer.

On May 31 the chapter held its Annual General Meeting (AGM), concluding the year and acclaiming next year's Executive. We covered the following points:

1. Lynda Simons is moving to BC. Lynda served in a number of positions with the chapter, including President, Competition Manager, Program Manager and Newsletter Editor. In addition, she taught courses related to technical writing at Algonquin College. In recognition of her service, the chapter gave her a painting of an Ottawa scene.
2. Our chapter won the Chapter Pacesetter Award for Region 1, for our special efforts during the competition.
3. A summary of the financial report as of May 30 appears below. Rick Lorenz moved to accept the financial report, seconded by Teresa Peddle, approved unanimously.

	This year	Comparison to last year
Assets	\$15,295.25	\$1,430.42 higher (+10.3%)
Income	\$24,116.16	\$8,176.22 higher (+51.3%)
Expenses	\$21,870.21	\$9,576.90 higher (+77.9%)
Net Income	\$2,245.95	\$1,650.68 lower (-42.4%)
4. The Administrative Council for 2000-2001 appears below. Gordon Brown moved to nominate the Council, seconded by Tara Bourbeau.
 - ♦ President - John Holgate
 - ♦ Vice President - Visnja Beg
 - ♦ Treasurer - Rick Lorenz
 - ♦ Secretary - Scott Wahl
5. Theresa Peddle moved to cease nominations and acclaim the Executive, seconded by Mindy Sichel, approved unanimously.
6. The Executive is similar to last year, with the following differences:
 - ♦ Director - Tara Bourbeau
 - ♦ Education - Jeannie Bacon
 - ♦ PR - Mindy Sichel
 - ♦ Membership - Andrew Panciuk
7. The chapter has a continuing need for volunteers; those interested should contact Andrew Panciuk. More specifically,

Gordon Brown requires volunteers for a Technical Illustration competition.

8. The theme for this year, proposed by STC President Mark Hanigan, is "Adding Value". Our chapter is doing well through contributions by our members, evidenced by our Chapter Pacesetter Award.
9. Forthcoming events include a Pan-Pacific (Region 7 and 8) conference on October 19-22 in Hawaii, and a Region 1 conference in the fall of 2001 in New Jersey.
10. A number of program ideas were proposed for next year:
 - ♦ Writing documentation from scratch
 - ♦ Managing documentation projects
 - ♦ Getting writers involved from the beginning of a project
 - ♦ Presentations by industry reps from aerospace, biotech, and telecom
 - ♦ The future of technology and the Internet
 - ♦ The impact of growth in the high-tech industry in Ottawa
 - ♦ The truth behind the TN Visa process
 - ♦ Opportunities and information about writing overseas
 - ♦ Workshops on writing and illustrating tools
 - ♦ Humanities in high-tech
11. Scott Wahl, Visnja Beg and John Holgate described their experiences at the STC International Conference and what they learned. Scott talked about single-sourcing. Visnja talked about "Crossing the Chasm": focussing documentation on the "late majority" instead of the "early adapters". She also pointed out that you should feel free to switch streams if you want. John talked about writing for the audience, and said you should personalize the reader as much as possible. Each found the sense of community invigorating, and the information very useful. 🐼

The worst thing about working in London ...

by Dave Whelan

Dave Whelan is a consultant with over twenty-five years experience as a development engineer, technical writer, programmer and technical manager. He is the principal of his company, Whelan Technical Services.

Traveling to work in London on the first day of a contract for Compaq, I found myself wondering why I had traded the pleasantries of a Winnipeg winter for the claustrophobic hell of a London Tube train. Jammed in, with my arms pinned beside me, I stifled an almost uncontrollable urge to break out into hysterical laughter and took my mind off the situation by asking myself questions about my fellow passengers. It was a technique I had learned years ago to get me over the interminable silences in tube trains when the train stopped in the tunnels. I had almost forgotten it but it came back to me now. I knew, for instance, that the guy I was nose to nose with liked garlic, that the lady breathing into my ear had stomach trouble; and that the person of uncertain gender and surprisingly sharp elbows behind me had a nervous affliction that resulted in erratic motor control. All this without a word being passed between us.

I didn't want to know much more about the lives within the compressed flesh around me; even if I had, I would have been reluctant to open up a dialogue. Having been born and bred in England, I fully subscribe to the notion that attempting any kind of oral communication with strangers in the rush hour is the ultimate in suspicious behaviour. It is only foreign tourists who can be forgiven for thinking that this is an acceptable way of carrying on, and, although now a Canadian, I still have a British accent and therefore could not expect to be given the usual indulgent and tolerant treatment accorded to such visitors. No, normally, the only human voice you hear on the Tube, apart from the acceptable "sorry old chap" or "excuse me madam" as you bludgeon, kick, and claw your way on or off, is the disembodied, cultured British accent telling you to "mind the gap" as you pull into a station.

The tube trip came at the end of a two-hour commute to work from Cuckfield, a village about 45 miles from London, where I had taken a furnished flat on a six-month lease. At \$1,320 per month, the rent was a bit cheaper than London rates, but the main reason I had moved deep into the heart of the Sussex countryside was to be

near the client site where I was supposed to work; an unexpected project delay made London my destination and commuting my main activity.

I was not too bothered when they told me. It was 23 years since I had commuted to London and the thought of it claimed a certain nostalgic novelty. The car ride from Cuckfield to the railway station promised a pleasant start to the commute on quiet country roads but as soon as I pulled out of the private estate, I knew the promise was out of date. Yesterday's half-remembered bucolic serenity became a hair-raising drive on the wrong side of the road, slamming through the gears, sandwiched between pubescent fashion models in Beemers trying to shave one tenth of a second off their record while putting on their lipstick and talking on their cell phones. The women drivers are just as bad. To my well-jangled nerves, the parking lot at Haywards Heath, the nearest main-line station, looked like an inviting safe haven, cheap at \$7 a day. A ticket collector told me that this line, linking London and Brighton, is one of the busiest commuter rail links in Europe. Judging by the comments from the long suffering commuters who have to shell out \$55 just for the privilege of getting to work, it must also be one of the worst.

The rail trip to London Bridge or Victoria takes about 55 minutes and, initially at least, you get a seat with plenty of leg room and a view of pleasant rolling countryside. It changes the closer you get into London. The train gradually gets packed with pasty-faced commuters not looking forward to the day; the green countryside gives way to old row houses showing their private, back view, many in need of maintenance and a coat of paint. The soft grimy rain doesn't help. By the end of the trip, the depressive proximity of humanity and the sodden view of old London town's backside presses down upon an adopted Prairie boy used to space and light.

As you may have gathered, I don't much care for commuting: it is about the worst thing about working in London.

But if you have made it this far and my hyperbole hasn't dulled your eagerness to give it a try, you will find that working in London has many advantages that far outweigh even the horrors of commuting. There is plenty of work and the money is great, there is all that history everywhere, the throbbing excitement of a truly world-class city, magnificent architecture, and endless high-class entertainment. And if that is not enough, you are never far away from the coast and the grass is green even in January. It's like being in Victoria, except that everything is real. I could go on and on about the delights of a working holiday in London, but finding out about a new place is one of the best things about working abroad, so I'll leave it to you to discover for yourself.

If you want to investigate the possibilities of working in England, you can get a lot of good information from the Internet.

The Canadian High Commission in London has a lot of good information at <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/london/menu.htm>.

The UK's Inland Revenue web site has a non-residents page for taxation info at <http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/menus/non-residents.htm>.

For information on UK driving licenses, go to <http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/london/html/English/CanAssitDrv.htm>.

In this article, I used an exchange rate conversion factor of 2.3:1 (\$2.30 = £1.00), but this varies constantly; for an up-to-date currency converter try <http://www.xe.net/ucc>.

There are plenty of good contract agencies in the UK. Here are three:

- ♦ <http://www.digitext.co.uk>

- ♦ <http://www.kudos-jobs.com>
- ♦ <http://www.techaid-intl.com/default.htm>

The UK chapter of the STC has a web site with information about the job market, including a section on work permits and visas at <http://www.stc.org/region1/ukc/employ.htm>.

TECHCOMM is an e-mail list based in the UK; it is similar to TECHWR-L but a lot smaller and a lot more tolerant of tangential topics. Their web site at <http://www.bairrydog.clara.net/tclnkjobuk.html> gives information about working in the UK.

A really good way to find out about UK jobs is notification by e-mail; these are two free services:

- ♦ <http://www.jobserve.com>
- ♦ <http://www.jobsite.co.uk/index.html>

The Canada Customs and Revenue Agency (Revenue Canada) has a non-residents page at <http://www.ccr-a-adrc.gc.ca/tax/nonresidents/menu-e.html> which gives you some tax information if you decide to become a non-resident of Canada for tax purposes.

There are several free e-mail services in the UK, but remember you have to pay for all telephone calls including local calls, so it's only free up to a point. The service I used was at <http://www.uku.co.uk/>.

For all sorts of information on public transportation in London including a complete pdf map of the underground system, and bus and tube fares, go to http://www.londontransport.co.uk/info/lul_index.htm. 🏠

Volunteering

If you have always wanted to get more involved in the STC Eastern Ontario chapter, now is the time!

We need volunteers to assist us with chapter meetings, the newsletter, workshops, and other events and services that make up a robust chapter.

By volunteering you can help the chapter grow, while at the same time networking and developing your skills. Volunteering takes just a few hours a month, benefits everyone, and looks excellent on a résumé.

If you would like to volunteer, please contact STC Volunteer Co-ordinator, Andrew Panciuk. 🏠

Interactive media: a valuable communication tool if used properly

by Perry Shulak

Perry Shulak is a member of the STC Alberta chapter.

In developing for interactive media for the use of training or any other media, it is essential to develop a solid plan to ensure proper execution. This begins with a script.

Scripts are defined by objectives, which are the key points that you intend to deliver to the prospective viewer. These points become the foundation or guideline that the script follows. As in any writing, structure plays a major role in ensuring success.

In scripting interactive media, the writer must keep in mind all elements that make up an interactive program. This usually includes photos, graphics, text, audio and video. All these elements must seamlessly come together to deliver the intended message.

Since this is very much a visual and auditory experience, it is crucial that these elements become part of the scripting process. Information should flow along quickly to ensure boredom doesn't take control, especially when developing for younger age groups. It is helpful to keep on-screen text to a minimum, relying more on audio and images to tell your story. Text is desirable for reinforcing key points users must remember.

As scripting proceeds, style and audience will further define the approach. The variables are diverse as the audience, and defining the delivery style will ensure you are not speaking below or leaving behind your audience.

When exploring delivery keep an open mind, because a unique approach or personality will give your product far more mileage than traditional corporate lingo. In all cases, a casual speaking tone works best. Once a style is identified, the components can follow.

During the scripting phase, an image of the final result begins to evolve. A

presentation style evolves out of the content, the audience, and the written style of the script. Once you have gone this far, how the components come together can enhance or destroy a good script. This includes video, photos, audio and graphics.

With a sound navigation structure, these elements unfold to provide a vivid image of the condition with an intention to gain results from the user. This includes active participation with the content, and an emotional attachment to the message delivered. To ensure users remember the information, they have to own it, so by creating pathos, and having users participate through interactivity, there is far greater chance they will remember. If done successfully, the potential retention can be far greater than traditional methods of delivery.

In all phases of development, it is important that quality is a priority. There is nothing like bad audio or poorly rendered graphics to turn off a user. If you want the user to take you seriously, you have to be serious about the standards you set for your delivery. In the age of information, perhaps interactive media represents the pinnacle of delivery that communications has to offer, but in many cases it must be applicable to whatever you are attempting to convey. If done right, you have succeeded in enlightening a new generation of information consumers. If done wrong, well, at least you end up with a nice collection of drink coasters.

If you have any questions on interactive media or this article, you can e-mail me at psbulak@criticalfusion.com. ☺

(This article originally appeared in *Superscript*, official newsletter of the STC Alberta chapter.)

Bridging the Gap: Research Grants

The Society for Technical Communication offers research grants to talented individuals with a desire to help bridge the gap between those who create ideas and those who use them. STC is interested in practical basic and applied research on topics that are of concern and interest to the Society's mainstream membership. To date nearly \$300,000 has been awarded for research grants.

For more information or to apply for a research grant, go to <http://www.stc-va.org/fgrantsloans.htm>.

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Whimsical Thinking

Contest!

Longing to be the proud owner of a classic 11-oz. white ceramic mug with the Society's name and logo imprinted in black on both sides for a modern, stylized effect? Then be sure to enter the STC Eastern Ontario contest so exciting that it is known simply by one name: Contest!

To participate, merely answer the Contest! questions below and send in your entry, either by e-mail or more traditional means, to the Editor by July 31, 2000. The first person to send in an entry with all five questions correctly answered will receive, as previously stated, the astonishing prize of

an STC coffee mug (11 ounces! Classic, yet modern!).

The questions:

1. Who is Mrs Sterling?
2. How long does it take to travel by rail from Haywards Heath to London Bridge?
3. What are four common elements that make up an interactive program?
4. Which of the following is not an anagram of a vegetable? TATOOP, BAGCABE, OUTSPRS, GENORA, RORCAT.
5. What is a 'dandiprat'? ☺

STC Eastern Ontario Chapter

Mission Statement (2000/2001)

Our chapter's mission is to work together in a spirit of community to promote and develop professional technical communication.

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