

Technically speaking ...

A publication of the STC@NC State

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Mission

To introduce and orient incoming students, both graduate and undergraduate, to the field of technical communication, the Society for Technical Communication, and the professional writing and technical communication programs at NC State, and to provide academic and professional networking opportunities.

Contact Information

Student chapter website:

http://www4.ncsu.edu/~brad_m/STC@NC-State/

Carolina chapter website:

<http://www.stc-carolina.org>

National STC website:

<http://www.stc-va.org>

Hello and welcome from the president!

Allow me to introduce myself: My name is Anna Weaver and I'm a master's candidate in Technical Communication on the home stretch to graduation in May '01. As the president of STC@NC State, I am tremendously excited about our chapter's potential to serve the needs of our members and support the graduate TC program, the professional writing program, and undergraduate TC minor at NC State.

Advantages of Restructuring

It's a terrific time to be involved in our chapter's history—we are poised to restructure, which means that we have the rare opportunity to tailor it to the needs of our members. Our current officers are very enthusiastic about this opportunity, and we are having a great time working with Dr. Mehlenbacher, our fearless advisor, to develop our vision and mission and sort out all the details of chapter activities.

We have some promising ideas on the table—watch for details in upcoming newsletters!—and I think this is going to be a great year for us.

Join us!

Included in this issue of *Technically Speaking* is a list of all the offices currently open. We are ready and waiting for volunteers to occupy these offices and help us build our chapter! Check out our chapter constitution at http://www4.ncsu.edu/~brad_m/STC@NC-State/ for a description of each office. If you see something that sounds like you, contact any of the current officers or Dr. Mehlenbacher and let us know that you have time and energy to offer. In return you'll get a rewarding, resume-building experience!

If you are not interested in taking on the duties of a chapter office right now, we're happy to welcome you as a member...but we still need your input! If you have ideas about what you'd like to see our chapter do or offer, please let us know.

Good luck this fall and I look forward to seeing you at Brueggers on August 23 or 24 at 5:00!

Anna Weaver
President, STC@NC State



STC@Brueggers

We will be at Brueggers on Wednesday, August 23, and Thursday, August 24 from 5:00 until 6:00pm. Come join us as we welcome our new and returning students to Fall 2000. Find the group of STC officers and receive a complimentary coffee or soda before heading to class.

S.L.U.R.P. your way to better looking documents: A summary of Kathleen Yoshida's typeface technique

Sarah Egan, Immediate Past President

In May, I had the privilege of attending the STC's 47th annual International Conference in Orlando, Florida. If you ever have the opportunity to attend one of the STC's international, regional, or local conferences, I highly encourage you to go. STC conferences are a great place to meet other technical communicators, network, get to know more about the STC, and learn about current issues in the field of technical communication.

No matter how good a writer you are, your message will not reach your audience if they cannot read the words!

Those who were unable to attend the conference can still benefit from the information shared during the daily sessions. Most of the notes, slides, and handouts from the sessions are available at <http://www.stc.org/47th/confinfo/postconf.htm>. These notes give you a basic idea of what the session covered.

One session that I felt was particularly relevant to members of our student chapter was "Avoiding Typeface Errors" presented by Kathleen Yoshida of FGM Inc. Both new and experienced students can benefit from following Yoshida's technique in their school and work documents.

Although typeface may not rank up on the list of the most exciting topics in the field of technical communication, making a poor typeface choice can seriously affect your document. We all want our documents, both academic and professional, to be the best they can be. We can improve the look of our documents by using Yoshida's humorous and helpful mnemonic device, the "S.L.U.R.P. Checklist." S.L.U.R.P. stands for **S**erif vs. **S**ans Serif, **L**egibility, **U**sability, **R**eadability, and **P**ersonality.

S Yoshida recommended that serif typefaces be used when you have continuous text lines because they tend to be easier to read and the serifs create a perceived line. The feet or serifs guide the reader's eye smoothly along the line of text. Sans serif typefaces should be reserved for headings or short pieces of text. Yoshida noted that the exception to this rule is that sans serif tends to be favored for projected text or online text.

L In terms of legibility, Yoshida stresses the importance of letter recognition. Does the "a" really look like an "a" in the typeface that you choose? No matter how good a writer you are, your message will not reach your audience if they cannot read the words! To improve legibility, avoid decorative or overly ornate typefaces. One way to check for legibility is to cover the top half of the word to see if you can still read it. If you are unable to fill in the missing half of the letters, then find another typeface.

U Yoshida only briefly touched on the usability aspect of typeface choice. She suggested that writers must use easily recognizable headings and plenty of white space. Both techniques improve the reader's ability to locate information in the document.

R Readability of your documents can be improved by using appropriate typeface point size, adequate leading, and left justified, right ragged text alignment. Yoshida also urges writers to limit their variations in typefaces. By applying these concepts to your writing, you can reduce the amount of eyestrain and fatigue for your readers and assist them in locating information.

P You may have never thought about typefaces having a personality, but even typefaces convey a feeling or mood. Yoshida divided the personality of typefaces into four categories: conventional, contemporary, dignified, and friendly. Determine which personality fits your document's purpose, intended audience, and overall tone.

You may have never thought about typefaces having a personality, but even typefaces convey a feeling or mood.

Using the "S.L.U.R.P. Checklist" will not guarantee a successful document, but it can help make typeface decisions a little easier. Try one of Yoshida's recommended combinations of Times New Roman and Arial, or Palatino and Avant Garde, or Book Antiqua and Futura on your next document and see what a difference it can make!

As a recipient of a student leader scholarship from the STC Carolina Chapter, Sarah Egan was able to attend the international STC conference in Orlando, Florida this past May. She participated in Leadership Day, a pre-conference session about improving STC chapters, and shared what she learned with the officers of STC@NC State. This article summarizes one of the many technical sessions she attended.

Our advisor speaks

Dr. Mehlenbacher usually has more to say than this. However, he has been extremely busy this summer with a new addition to his family. Congratulations on your new baby girl, Dr. Mehlenbacher! Look for his comments to us to appear in the November issue of *Technically Speaking*.

Web talk

Each issue, we would like to bring you some of the most important web links for our profession. One of the most important is the national STC site: <http://www.stc-va.org> Be sure to check it out. You can download membership forms and other important information from this site.

At this summer's STC Carolina Chapter conference, the Keynote speaker, Mary Wise, cited Fast Company as one of the most important journals for technical communicators to read. Check out their website: <http://www.fastcompany.com>

Submission guidelines

If you would like to practice submitting an article for publication, send your article of 500 words, or less to Hope Chandler at hechandl@unity.ncsu.edu.

Articles must be in Microsoft Word format and must be received by Friday, October 13, 2000 in order to be included in the November newsletter. This is a great resume and portfolio builder.

If you don't want to submit an article but have ideas or suggestions about what you would like to see in this newsletter, contact Hope.



Call for articles

In our November issue, we plan to focus on Co-op. If you completed a co-op as a technical communicator, we want to hear from you about your experience. We are interested in the good, the bad, and the ugly—so please share your stories with us.

Constitution humor

“We the students of the STC@NC State, in order to form a more perfect link to our profession, establish a network, insure professional tranquility, provide for the common education, promote the general awareness of technical communication, and secure the blessings of a decent salary to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution for the Student Chapter of the Society of Technical Communication.” [humor intended, with obvious apologies to our forefathers]

Check out our REAL constitution on our website
http://www4.ncsu.edu/~brad_m/STC@NC-State/

You can find descriptions of officer responsibilities and duties in the constitution, as well as the guiding principles of our student chapter.

Email updates

If you would like to receive updates about chapter activities before the next newsletter, please send your email address to sarah_egan@hotmail.com. Send a blank message with the subject line reading “STC@NC State email updates.”

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