

Technically speaking ...

STC

A publication of the STC@NC State

Vol. II, No. 2

November 2001

Local 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.



STC Mission

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.

Contact Information

Student chapter website:

http://www.ncsu.edu/stud_orgs/stc

Carolina chapter website:

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

International STC website:

<http://www.stc.org>

Portfolios: Hints from Jillian Kemper

by: *Loanna Overcash*

On November 7, 2001, Jillian Kemper spoke to Dr. Susan Katz's English 512 class and members of STC@NCState about the technical writing profession. The main focus of her talk was building a professional portfolio. She also stressed a solid academic foundation is the best way to start a Technical Communication career. She believes it is the individual's responsibility to build personal skills and offered some suggestions to do so.

- Talk to friends/experts in the industry to stay current
- Read technical/trade magazines and books on current topics
- Read want ads to see what skills employers require
- Learn how to interview people quickly and efficiently to extract information
- Learn to read some code such as C, C++, and Visual Basic.

Portfolio Strategies

- Buy a nice leather-bound zippered portfolio with a three-ring binder
- Purchase sheet protectors and pockets to protect documents
- Tailor the portfolio according to the job
- Carry a stack of resumes to keep in the front pocket of the portfolio
- Never leave samples of work
- Obtain permission to show documents
- Use numbered tabs to separate sections
- Include a Table of Contents.

Ms. Kemper emphasized that a portfolio is also a way to show versatility by including documents that may demonstrate other skills, such as graphic talents. To present website work, she suggested carrying a CD with your work, providing a URL, or carrying a laptop to demonstrate your work.

Overall, Ms. Kemper emphasized flexibility and openness as two important characteristics of a technical communicator since there are opportunities in practically every field of business.



STC @ Brueggers

We are meeting from 5:00-6:00 on Thursday, November 29, 2001. Please join us as we plan the STC@NCState activities for the Spring semester.

December meeting:

Join us, too, for the end of year party to be held after the last defense given by the graduating students. The date is December 11, the time and place is to be announced.

Feature Articles

Portfolios: Hints from Jillian Kemper

Where Do Your Dues Go?

Technical Writing Co-ops in RTP

Fireworks – A Great Graphics Editor With a Steep Learning Curve

President's Corner

Last May, I was honored to accept a scholarship from the STC Carolina Chapter so that I could attend the annual international STC conference held in Chicago. It was a great conference and I highly recommend that you attend the next one in Nashville in May, 2002. One of the requirements of the scholarship is to tell folks about one of the conference sessions. There were so many interesting and informative sessions to choose from, it was difficult to narrow it down to one.

The opening session of the conference was given by a photographer, Dewitt Jones. He was very upbeat, positive, and enthusiastic without being obnoxious. He used photography as a metaphor for the creative process and explained how we can "frame problems into opportunities." The closing session speaker was Richard Lederer, a well-known author of more than 2,000 books and articles about language and humor. His technical session "Conan the Grammarian" was informative and very entertaining. He explained the intricacies of grammar in an understandable and enjoyable way.

But even with those excellent presentations, I chose to tell you about the session entitled "Strategies for Condensing Online Text" by Alysson Troffer from Sun Microsystems, Inc. Her presentation format alone made her presentation worth mentioning as it was one of the most organized and professional at the conference. Her slides and handouts were precise, clear, and to the point. The strategies she gave for condensing text went beyond the usual advice for clear, concise writing.

She discussed two strategies for condensing text online—reducing word count and making online text seem shorter. To reduce word count use more heads, tables, and lists online, keep overviews brief, eliminate unnecessary material, become a usability expert and edit your text online. To make online text seem shorter divide text into short, self-contained topics, link to details for readers who want more, write scannable text, and use ample white space.

She covered each of the strategies above in greater detail during her presentation. Unfortunately, space is limited, so I can't go into more detail in this article. I will put copies of her slides and handouts in my box in Tompkins, or I would be happy to discuss her presentation and suggestions in more depth with you.

Ann Roy
President. STC@NC.State

Excerpts from "Where Do Your Dues Go?"

by Chris Benz, Region 2 Director-Sponsor

Some of the money from dues serves as operating capital for the Society office. Other money supports the publishing STC's member publications, including *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*.

STC gives much of the money away. One of STC's biggest money giveaways is a "dues rebate." The STC office sends this rebate each year to your local chapter, with the exact amount determined by the number of chapter members. Each chapter then uses this money—along with any other money it might generate from other sources—to provide local educational and networking programs; maintain chapter communication devices such as listservs, Web pages, and newsletters; and support all the other chapter activities.

STC also makes a very targeted portion of the giveaway money to chapters and individuals. This money takes the form of grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships. All STC grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships must be approved by the board of directors.

To learn more about STC grants, loans, scholarships, and fellowships go to http://stc.org/admin_docs.html and scroll to "Guidelines for STC Programs, Grants, and Loans."

Note: For complete Director-Sponsor articles by Chris, please visit <http://www.stcregion.org/region2/chair.shtml>.

Editor's Column

by: Myra Day

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to and reviewed this newsletter. We would like to start a "Letters to the Editor" section in the newsletter next semester. The letters could ask questions about topics relating to technical communication, or express an opinion about some aspect of technical writing. If you have a comment or question about technical communication that you would like to see addressed in the newsletter, please email me your letter <dmdiimgd@hotmail.com>.

We invite members to write articles especially for the "From the Trenches," "Review," and "Webspeak" sections. If you would like to submit an article, or other information you think should be published in the newsletter, please send it to me as a Word attachment. The deadline for the next newsletter is December 30.

From the Trenches...

Technical Writing Co-ops in RTP

by: Christina A. Reynolds

My first technical writing assignment was a mishap. When I started as a co-op at one of the local companies in RTP, the group that I was originally supposed to work with reassigned me to an engineering group as their technical writer because my group disbanded and I had just changed my major to English.

My assignment for the summer was to produce procedures for the manufacturing personnel to use as a training tool or a reference tool while they built circuit packs. Being new to the technical communications field, the only way I could think of to obtain reliable information on manufacturing equipment was to find an engineer or go directly to the source - the operators. I chose the direct source method. The manufacturing personnel were not excited about a college sophomore running around a manufacturing floor, interviewing people about the machines. In fact, my manager had to reassure them that I was merely trying to find out about how their machine worked rather than what their job description was.

Once the level of trust was established, I was able to write eight different working procedures on the equipment that this company used that summer. To make my summer even more beneficial, the company decided to bring me back for a second summer as a technical writing co-op.

Web speak

The following site offers information about technical communication for teachers and practitioners. The site includes advice on how to become a consultant and bibliographies various topics relating to technical and professional communication. It also has materials for instructors such as style exercises, syllabi, and sample assignments.

<http://www.nmsu.edu/techprof/>

Review

Fireworks – A Great Graphics Editor With a Steep Learning Curve

by: Caroline Brooks

Fireworks is a must for anyone working with web graphics design and web development. New users beware, because the learning curve is steep.

Fireworks is an excellent choice as a graphics editor, especially when used in unison with Dreamweaver. The two are seamlessly integrated so it's easy to forget you are using two separate macromedia products.

The NC State bookstore offers Fireworks & Dreamweaver together in a package that costs less than \$200 (very economical compared to the \$400 price tag for non-students).

What does Fireworks offer?

- creating and optimizing bitmap and vector graphics (the optimization feature is fantastic for making graphics small and fast enough for downloading on the web)
- building interactive elements such as pop-up/dropdown menus, rollovers and navigation bars
- creating special effects such as bevel and emboss, blur, glow and shadow (these can be used for text, images, buttons, etc.)

If you use Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator, Fireworks offers import/export options that are exceptional.

- For intermediate and advanced users of Fireworks, Macromedia offers free Dreamweaver and Fireworks extensions that are real time savers (www.macromedia.com/exchange).

Employment News

The IBM Developer Works University Day 2001 Conference will be held from 11:00 - 4:00 on Friday, November 30, 2001 at IBM's offices in RTP. The conference will feature panel discussions, demos of IBM products, and demos of developer resource web sites. Attendees will be able to interact with manager from IBM teams and learn about opportunities at IBM and skills IBM managers seek in new hires.

Register at: <http://www6.software.ibm.com/reg/devworks/dwunivtrp01-i>

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Ann Roy
cordaroy115@mindspring.com

Vice President

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brooks_caroline@yahoo.com

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smagee2@nc.rr.com

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froschkoenig56@mindspring.com

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lovercash@isa.org

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dmdiiimgd@hotmail.com

Program Committee Manager

Erica Bruce
ebruce@nc.rr.com

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at_williams@hotmail.com

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John Wilson
wilsonjohnr@hotmail.com

Membership Committee Manager

Rebecca Bessinger
rkbessin@unity.ncsu.edu

Alumni/Industry Liaison

Anna Weaver
alweaver96@earthlink.net

Faculty Chapter Coordinator

Sarah Egan
sarah_egan@hotmail.com

Faculty Advisor

Dr. Brad Mehlenbacher
brad_m@unity.ncsu.edu

Upcoming Events

Online Communication SIG Meetings - For complete details visit www.stc-carolina.org/www/PICs/online/OnEvent.shtml

- Wed. Nov. 28, 6:00 - 8:00 "Best of Show Judging Session"
- Wed. Jan. 16, 6:00 - 8:00 "Online Learning"
- Wed. Feb 20, 6:00 - 8:00 "Tech Writers and Usability Design"

For more information about these and other events, visit the Carolina Chapter calendar at <http://www.stc-carolina.org/calendar/index.shtml>

TRIDOC 2002

In April of 2002, an STC chapter conference will be held in RTP. The conference is currently being planned and a Call for Proposals will be published soon. For details, visit <http://www.stc-carolina.org/conference/> and watch for updates in future newsletters.

Judging - Online Competition

On April 6, 2002, the International Online Communications Competition (IOCC) will be held in Houston, Texas. Anyone interested in serving as a judge should contact Myra Day <dmdiiimgd@hotmail.com> for qualifications and application. The applications are due December 7, 2001.

Chapter Meeting Report

September Meeting

On September 19 & 20 the STC@NCState met at Bruegger's to discuss ways the chapter can raise money for the September 11 Relief Fund. We also discussed future programs the chapter will offer based on survey results.

October Meeting

On October 18, Dr. Marie Sumerel, Associate Director of the NC State University Career Center met with the STC@NCState. She covered the basics of an effective resume and offered specific suggestions for improvement to the attendees. She also offered her services on an individual basis by appointment. She can be contacted at the University Career Center, 515-2396 or at marie_sumerel@ncsu.edu.

Note: The complete minutes are posted to the STC listserv after each meeting. Contact Rebecca Bessinger if you need information about the listserv.

Technically Speaking..
is the newsletter of STC@NC State, which is published four times yearly.

Editor
Myra Day
dmdiiimgd@hotmail.com

Publication Policy
All submissions are welcome and should be sent to the editor as a Microsoft Word document.

Reprint Policy
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