

Technically speaking ...

STC

A publication of the STC@NC State

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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

Web site:

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

Carolina chapter

Web site:

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

International STC

Web site:

<http://www.stc.org>

Certification for Science Editors: For Whom (the) BELS Tolls

by: Anna Weaver

Board certification is commonplace in a number of scientific and technical fields: professional engineering, veterinary medicine, pharmacy, law, and many others. In an effort to provide similar credentialing for scientific editors, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (BELS) has managed a certification program since 1991. Successful candidates are entitled to use the letters ELS after their name.

STC has debated the question of certification for years and, according to a speaker at the 2003 conference, has so far come out against it because of the difficulty in quantifying the subjective. However, recent traffic on the ETC alumni listserv described the BELS certification as a better indicator of skills than the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) program, which awards certification based only on attendance at certain classes under pass/fail conditions.

Is it Right for You?

Despite the organization's name, the BELS exam is not specific to life sciences specialties. BELS defines a manuscript editor as one who is concerned "with the intellectual content of a manuscript ... not only such questions as grammar, punctuation, and syntax but also logic, organization, consistency, and persuasiveness of the message."

Furthermore, BELS encourages anyone to pursue certification who has experience editing journal materials, newsletters, textbooks, or reference books in any scientific or related field.

However, the work experience requirement implies that ELS certification may be less useful as a strategy for breaking into the field of scientific editing and better suited, perhaps, as a goal for your short- or long-term development plan at work or as personal career goal. (*continued on page 3*)

Welcome New MS Students!

STC @ NC State would like to welcome the following new students to the MS program: Tammy Caudill, Heidi Collins, Landra Cunningham, Jennifer Higley, Lindsey Hite, Angel Huang, Rachel Kight, Kelly Lucey, Patricia Rivera, and James Rosich.

STC @ Brueggers



The next meeting of STC@NC State will be held on August 20 & 21 from 5-6p.m. at Brueggers Bagel Bakery on Hillsborough Street. Please join us!

Featured Articles

Certification for Science Editors: For Whom the (BELS) Tolls (*page 1*)

Book Review:
SciencTeaching / Science Learning: Constructivist Learning in Urban Class rooms (*page2*)

President's Corner

by: Maggie VanNorman

After becoming the new chapter president of STC@NC State last spring, I attended the 50th annual STC conference in Dallas, Texas. The conference was simply outstanding! It offered technical and educational sessions as well as the opportunity to meet technical communicators from all over the world.

The conference also honored the winning entries from the Society's international online communication competition (IOCC). NC State alum Anna Weaver (01') received a Distinguished Award for the RTI International external Web site. Congratulations, Anna! Stuart Somer and Henry Rogers of RTI shared the honor with her.

One particularly interesting session I attended was called "Golden Rules of Writing," given by Leah Guren from the Israel chapter of STC. Guren is a well-known speaker and there was standing room only in her session. Her talk reached even the most experienced technical communicators in the room, reminding us all that some rules should never be ignored.

Her abbreviated rules for good technical writing are as follows:

Audience analysis is essential. Use customer contact and internal sources to prepare for a mixed audience.

Chunk. Tables, list, bullets, and flow charts are great ways to convey information.

Consistency is a good thing. Using various terms to refer to one object can be confusing to people. Also use consistency in fonts and layouts.

Follow conventions. Flaunting convention can sometimes be innovative, but placing an index in the front can just frustrate people.

Use illustrations wisely. Graphics and illustration can be powerful tools in conveying information, but overuse can be detrimental. Consider if the illustration is needed and what role it will play in the text.

Use specific language. Avoid words like please, might, could, or can. (continued on page 3)

Book Review

by: Alicia Adams

Science Teaching/Science Learning: Constructivist Learning in Urban Classrooms

Elnora Harcombe, 2001. Teachers College Press, NY, NY

Elnora Harcombe adds her contribution to the *Ways of Knowing in Science and Mathematics Series* with her book *Science Teaching/Science Learning: Constructivist Learning in Urban Classrooms*. Her 200 pages read as an ethnography that proves given the correct skills and professional development, teachers can adjust their lesson plans to incorporate constructivist learning styles and influence true learning in the classroom. Harcombe's book adds to the growing movement for student-based learning, focusing on the learning styles of the individual student rather than the traditionally structured teacher-centered lecture.

Harcombe prefaces her 10 chapters with a brief overview of how her project came to be. A seven year study sponsored by the Rice University Center for Education, the program allowed eight teachers to fully immerse themselves in learning the practical and theoretical skills required to implement constructivism in their classrooms. For one year, each teacher left their "home school" for a Model Lab/Classroom constructed in an urban Houston middle school. Once there, the teachers divided their time between science content and pedagogy training, and paired-teaching of one class of 24 students.

(continued on page 3)

Editor's Column

by: Kathleen Angione

Welcome back to another exciting year of STC@ NC State! We are proud to celebrate our fourth year as a STC chapter, and our theme this year is "Four More Years."

I would also like to extend a special welcome to the new students in the MS program. To make your transition easier, STC@NC State has included a "Survival Guide" section to our Web site (www.ncsu.edu/stud_orgs/stc/). The guide provides a range of useful information, from establishing residency to parking permits.

Also, students can now purchase textbooks through our Web site, and a portion of the cost will go to the STC@NC State treasury.

Once again, welcome back and best of luck this academic year!

BELS (continued from page 1)

Is it Worth Doing?

If you pass the exam, does that really mean you "know your stuff," as was touted at the 2003 STC conference? Can an objective test truly assess and quantify one's skill at the often subjective job of editing?

To answer these questions for myself, I conducted a decidedly unscientific survey of coworkers and scientists in chemistry and life sciences at my workplace (a research institute). My inquiries revealed that no one had ever heard of the certification. Thus, adding ELS to my e-mail signature would offer little cachet around the office. However, my supervisor did offer to reimburse the registration costs (if I pass, of course) from our training budget. The pursuit of certification seems to be perceived as dedication to professional development and therefore valuable to our department.

Obviously, the decision to pursue certification is an individual one. But other than a little time and money, you have nothing to lose.

Getting Started

Obtaining certification involves submitting a resume and three letters of reference, and taking a 3-hour multiple-choice exam. The cost of certification is \$125 (not including cost of travel to the exam site). Candidates must have a bachelor's degree and two years' experience as a manuscript editor in a scientific field, or an equivalent combination of education and experience (a master's in technical communication counts for one year of experience).

Anna Weaver is a 2001 graduate of the MS program. For more information, visit www.bels.org or e-mail Anna at alweaver@rti.org.

President's Corner (continued from page 2)

For more information, you can visit Guren's Web site at www.wordsisrael.com

You can also find information from the 2003 sessions at www.stc.org/50thConf/sesMaterials.asp

Next year's conference is being held in Baltimore, Maryland, and I encourage all technical communication students to attend.

Review (continued from page 2)

Harcombe illustrates the mindset of the "average" teacher; those who are comfortable in their teaching methods and are satisfied that their students are "learning the material." Many teachers are unnerved to discover that their methods teach students how to memorize content rather than understand it. Holcombe's program encourages the resident teachers to appeal to alternative learning styles that promote authentic learning.

In order to engage students in learning scientific concepts, the teachers themselves must have a strong grasp of those concepts. When questioned about content in their science course, many teachers became uncomfortable when they did not know all the answers — it appeared that they too lacked a true understanding of curriculum concepts.

The book continues to emphasize student-centered learning by exploring the history of the traditional classroom. Harcombe acknowledges that it is much simpler to teach from the textbook than to spend hours establishing engaging lesson plans. But she insists it is wiser to emphasize a few basic concepts that students are likely to remember rather than force them to memorize dozens of details they will forget later.

Although Harcombe's research shows positive results, I fear her methods are unrealistic. The research program yields results from the most optimum set-up possible. Holcombe admits there are difficulties involved with introducing her constructivist ideas to her resident subjects, but she seems to ignore the difficulties of implementing these ideas in the working educational system.

Harcombe has uncovered a great deal in her seven year study about the true knowledge absorbed by American students, and her work provides a convincing argument for educators to practice constructivist learning styles. This book is an important read for both new and experienced teachers because it will compel them to examine the effectiveness of their own methods.

However, if we wish constructivist learning styles to truly influence the American classroom, Harcombe's model must be heavily promoted to school administrators, university education programs, and government education officials.

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Upcoming Events

Online Communication SIG Meetings For complete details, visit <http://www.stc-carolina.org/calendar/index.shtml>

- **Indexing Essentials**

Sat. August 16, 10:00 a.m. – 4.00 p.m.
PPI, 2950 Gateway Centre Blvd., Morrisville
Presenter: Dick Evans **Cost:** \$55 for full day
(All proceeds to benefit the Janine Sutphen Memorial Fund)
To register, contact Cheri Taylor, (919) 380-3788
techwords@pobox.com

- **Winning New Business: Preparing the Proposal 101**

Wed. August 20, 1–2:30 p.m.
TekSystems, 1201 Edwards Mill Rd Ste 201, Raleigh
Presenter: Judith Herr **Cost:** \$15
To register, contact Cheri Taylor,
(919) 380-3788 techwords@pobox.com

- **Creating & Managing FrameMaker Templates**

Sat. September 20, 9:00 a.m – 4.30 p.m.
PPI, 2950 Gateway Centre Blvd., Morrisville
Presenter: Kay Either **Cost:** \$95 for a full day
To register, contact Jim Reid, 919-557-3887
jreid2@nc.rr.com

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Reprint Policy

You may reprint original material from this newsletter as long as you acknowledge the author and the source.

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New Officers for 2003-2004

Congratulations to our new officers! Please support them throughout their endeavors this academic year. Feel free to contact them with your ideas about how to improve our program.

President - Maggie VanNorman

Vice President - Carl Nuckols

Secretary - Jennifer Bridgers

Treasurer - Casey LoFrese

WebMaster - Carl Nuckols

Newsletter Editor - Kathleen Angione

Membership Manager - Chip Hartzog