Welcome, everyone!
by John Martin

Welcome to the 2006-2007 academic school year! Those of you returning are probably ready to “get on with it,” and those of you just starting in your respective programs might be excited, but perhaps a little anxious, in your new endeavor.

One of the best ways to reduce that anxiety and enhance your education is to experience it with other people. The NC State Community of the Society of Technical Communication, henceforth to be known in this newsletter as STC@NCSU, is just the organization to help you do that. In fact, part of the purpose of our organization as stated in its constitution is, "...to provide social, academic and professional networking opportunities."

This year's newly elected officers (p. 4) have already used their strategic planning skills to draft a tentative activity calendar (p. 2) for the coming year. They are committed to sponsoring a diverse set of activities – some social, some academic, and some professional. And they are going to be asking for your input on what you would like to do that they haven't yet thought of.

According to 5-Star Education, over 80% of jobs are found through networking. Let STC@NCSU keep you out of the 20% who depend only on cover letters, resumes, and interviews to get jobs.

To join us, see Will Flowers or Garrett Sparks today, and let the fun begin! (See newsletter back – an application for your convenience!) ♠

The President’s pen
by Kim Rothwell

This year the STC changed what it calls its local groups from "chapters" to "communities" to help focus on providing value to its members. As your student community, we are committed to creating value to you through academic, professional and social events each month of the school year.

Events will include discussions with faculty at Brueggers before class, learning about tools of the trade, community service with Service Raleigh, attending the ENG 675 defenses and social meetings at Mitch’s Tavern.

Additionally, we will be building ties with the professional STC Carolina Community by working together on local conferences, implementing a student-professional mentoring program, and hosting a panel discussion about the state of our field.

For more information about our events, check out our website at www.ncsu.edu/studorgs/stc/.

Welcome to your NC State STC Community! ♦

Feature Articles

Activity calendar.....................2
A w00t book review...................3
Making it easy to use, easy to understand, and easy to find..............6
Why you should attend an STC conference..................8
Crossword puzzle......................9
## 2006 — 2007 Activity Calendar‡

### June/July
- **06/13/2006**: 2006 New Officers Strategic Planning Meeting at 6:00 PM, Tompkins 281.
- **07/20/2006**: Bylaws Update Committee Meeting at 7:00 PM, Helios Coffee Shop.

### August
- **08/01/2006**: 2006 Officers Strategic Planning Meeting at 7:00 PM, Helios Coffee Shop.
- **08/08/2006**: Bylaws Update Committee Meeting at 6:00 PM, Tompkins 123.
- **08/08/2006**: STC Welcome Back to School Social & Fundraiser at TBA, Wherever Milton’s Band is Playing.

### September
- **09/05/2006**: 675 Survivors Meeting at 7:30 PM, ENG 675 Tompkins G117.
- **09/07/2006**: STC Meeting & Social at 7:30 PM, Mitch’s Tavern.
- **09/13/2006**: Student Org. Fair Membership Drive at 11:00–3:00, The Brickyard.

### October
- **10/05/2006**: Pre-Advising Info Session at 5:30 PM, ENG 518 Winston 002.
- **11/09/2006**: STC Meeting & Social - Faculty Greet at 5:00 PM, Brueggers on Hillsborough.

### November
- **11/04/2006**: The NEW Web: An Unconference at 8:00—6:00, NCSU Student Center.
- **11/09/2006**: Carolina Community Professional Panel at 6:00 PM, ENG 518 Winston 002.
- **11/15/2006**: PhD Panel Discussion at TBA, TBA.

### December
- **12/08/2006**: ENG 675 Project Defenses at TBA, Tompkins TBA.

### January (2007)
- **01/08/2007**: Meet & Greet (Members, Faculty, and New Students) at 6:00 PM, Tompkins TBA.
- **01/17/2007**: STC Meeting & Social - Faculty Greet at 5:00 PM, Sammy’s Tap & Grill.
- **01/18/2007**: STC Meeting & Social - Faculty Greet at 5:00 PM, Sammy’s Tap & Grill.

### February
- **02/04/2007**: 2nd Annual Superbowl Party at TBA, TBA.
- **02/21/2007**: RoboHelp Seminar at TBA, TBA.

### March
- **03/2007**: Member’s Choice Activity/Program at TBA, TBA.

### April
- **04/2007**: Tri-Doc Conference Participation at TBA, TBA.
- **04/2007**: Meeting, Social, & Trivia at TBA, Sammy’s Tap & Grill.
- **04/2007**: Service Raleigh at TBA, Meet at the Brickyard.
- **04/2007**: Election of Officers for 2007-2008 Academic Year at TBA, TBA.

‡Dates and events are subject to change. We will communicate changes in a timely manner.
* See “Networking Opportunities” (p. 3) for legend.
Finally, a textbook that's a joy to read, and one you're not embarrassed to be seen reading at Cup O' Joe, on an airplane, or even in The Brickyard on campus. Introducing *The Design of Everyday Things* by Donald A. Norman.

As the class textbook, I was introduced to *Everyday Things*, while taking ENG 508 with Dr. Stan Dicks. This fast-paced, easy-reading, anecdotal book is pretty much a "page turner." You look forward to reading about the next thing that people all over the world find as aggravating about products and documentation as you do. And better still, you learn how the design of something contributes to that frustration and detracts from its usability.

The book is full of examples, which easily explain terms and concepts. For example: "There already exists the start of a psychology of materials and of things, the study of *affordances* of objects. Affordances provide strong clues to the operations of things. Plates are for pushing. Knobs are for turning. Slots are for inserting things into. Balls are for throwing or bouncing. When affordances are taken advantage of, the user knows what to do just by looking: no picture, label, or instruction is required." (p. 9)

Thinking about this, it becomes obvious why a door that's meant to be pushed open, but has been designed with a handle, causes "confusion" to "the user." Handles are meant to be pulled for the most part, though they can be used to push things. But why not just use a plate on a "push door" to eliminate all ambiguity?

This is the kind of book that you'll be crying, "Yes!" out loud throughout your reading, and one which you will think about often and for a long time after you've finished it.

E-Ching Lee, a 2006 MS graduate, says she doesn’t see things the same way after reading this book: “I find myself looking at the handles, hinges and other elements on a door — rather than reading the Push/Pull ‘instructions’ — to figure out how to open it.”

E-Ching Lee

---

**Employment News**

One of the advantages of joining STC is to become a part of the STC Listserv, through which news of employment opportunities is often disseminated.

You'll hear about hiring positions at the likes of IBM and SAS, as well as those at NCSU and other smaller companies in the Triangle area. ❖

---

**Networking Opportunities**

Many of our events offer:
- (S) social,
- (A) academic, and
- (P) professional networking opportunities.

We have assessed our events as to their networking potential, and have indicated such on the calendar of events (p. 2).

For example, the (S)(A)* STC Meeting & Social - Faculty Greet event means that it's a good vehicle for both social and academic networking.

The (P)* Tech Comm Professional Panel event suggests that it's a good professional networking opportunity. ❖

---

_A August 2006_
Meet the 2006—2007 board!

**Kim Rothwell**  
President  
kim_rothwell@gmail.com

**Jennifer Cianchetta-Riordan**  
Vice President/Webmaster  
jmcianchetta@yahoo.com

**Milton Hawes**  
Secretary  
mehawes@ncsu.edu

**Jennifer Fritz**  
Treasurer  
jlmfritz@yahoo.com

**Will Flowers**  
Membership Coordinator  
will.flowers@gmail.com

**Garrett Sparks**  
Assistant, Membership Coordinator  
gsparks74@aol.com

**John Martin**  
Newsletter Editor  
nematome@nc.rr.com

**Myra Moses**  
Newsletter Advisor  
myra_moses@ncsu.edu

**Sarah Egan Warren**  
Faculty Advisor  
sarah@warrenswebl.com

Not pictured:  
**Dr. Stan Dicks**  
Faculty Advisor  
sdicks@ncsu.edu

Photos by:  
**Mark Lee**  
Technician, Photographer  
mark@rockleephotography.com
On Saturday, May 20, several 2005-2006 community members enjoyed a cookout, some beautiful weather, and a brisk game of *Catch Phrase*. Members attending included E-Ching Lee (President), Will Flowers (Membership Coordinator), John Martin, Myra Moses (Newsletter Advisor), Kelly Lucey, Peg Lawler, Lee Ann Gillen, and Allan Kosiner.

Some of these people were bold enough to bring people in their lives along with them. E-Ching brought her new husband, David, who’s a new husband because they’re newly married, not because she traded him in on an old one.

John and Kelly brought their partners, Robert and Amber respectively, adding some diversity to the group. *That would mean that Robert was with John, and Amber was with Kelly.*

Will invited Courtney Mauney, because she was our favorite non-member last year, even helping us with our bake sale. Courtney brought her boyfriend, Wilkes, because he was in town from Boone, where he lives, and it would have been rude to have left him at her apartment. Peg brought her dog, Honey, because she could.

Lee Ann brought "award-winning" deviled eggs, with whom we all got along famously. The *devil* was one of the most popular guests there – enjoying frequent, and repeated, interactions with just about every guest in attendance.

Myra and Allen had equally brief visits – Myra's on the front end, and Allen’s on the tail end – but their attendance was no less appreciated. Allen was thrown to the wolves in the midst of ongoing *Catch Phrase* games. *Let's just say that a bunch of technical communicators playing a fast-paced word game can get vicious quickly.*

I think it’s safe to say that everyone had a good time.

---

*From l-r: Courtney Mauney, E-Ching Lee, Andy Griffith (in bronze, looking down), John Martin, Ron Howard (looking up), Will Flowers, Peg Lawler, Honey (sitting), and Lee Ann Gillen*
According to Gretchen Hargis, et. al., there are nine quality characteristics that make technical information easy to use, easy to understand, and easy to find. In their book, "Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors" (DQTI), they identify and discuss how to apply these characteristics.

**Accuracy** is freedom from mistake or error; adherence to fact or truth.

*How to apply the accuracy characteristic:* write information only when you understand it, and then verify it; keep up with technical changes; maintain consistency of all information about a subject; use tools that automate checking for accuracy; and check the accuracy of references to related information.

**Clarity** is freedom from ambiguity or obscurity; the presentation of information in such a way that users understand it the first time.

*How to apply the clarity characteristic:* focus on the meaning, avoid ambiguity, keep elements short, write cohesively, present similar information in a similar way, use technical terms only if they are necessary and appropriate, and define each term that is new to the intended audience.

**Completeness** is the inclusion of all necessary parts – and only those parts.

*How to apply the completeness characteristic:* cover all topics that support users' tasks, and only those topics; cover each topic in just as much detail as users need; use patterns of information to ensure proper coverage; and repeat information only when users will benefit from it.

**Concreteness** is the inclusion of appropriate examples, scenarios, similes analogies, specific language, and graphics.

*How to apply the concreteness characteristic:* choose examples that are appropriate for the audience and subject; use focused, realistic, accurate, up-to-date examples; make examples easy to find; make code examples easy to adapt; use scenarios to illustrate tasks and to provide overviews; set the context for examples and scenarios; relate unfamiliar information to familiar information; and use general language appropriately.

**Organization** is a coherent arrangement of parts that makes sense to the user.

*How to apply the organization characteristic:* organize information into discrete topics by type; organize tasks by order of use; organize topics for quick retrieval; separate contextual information from other types of information; organize information consistently; provide an appropriate number of subentries for each branch; emphasize main points, subordinate points; and reveal how the pieces fit together.

**Retrievability** is the presentation of information in a way that enables users to find specific items quickly and easily.

*How to apply the retrievability characteristic:* facilitate navigation and search; provide a complete and consistent index; use appropriate level of detail in the table of contents; provide helpful entry points; link appropriately; design helpful links; and make linked-to information easy to find in the target topic.

**Style** is the correctness and appropriateness of writing conventions and of words and phrases.

*How to apply the style characteristic:* use correct grammar, use correct and consistent spelling, use consistent and appropriate punctuation, write with the appropriate tone, use an active style, use the appropriate mood, follow template designs and use boilerplate text, and create and follow style guidelines.

**Task orientation** is a focus on helping users do tasks that are associated with a product or
How to apply the task orientation characteristic: write for the intended audience; present information from the user’s point of view; indicate a practical reason for information; focus on real tasks, not product functions; use headings that reveal the tasks; divide tasks into discrete subtasks; and provide clear step-by-step instructions.

Visual effectiveness is the attractiveness and enhanced meaning of information through the use of layout, illustrations, color, typography, icons, and other graphical devices.

How to apply the visual effectiveness characteristic: use graphics that are appropriate; choose graphics that complement the text; use visual elements for emphasis; use visual elements logically and consistently; balance the number and placement of visual elements; use visual cues to help users find what they need; ensure that textual elements are legible; use color and shading discreetly and appropriately; and ensure that all users can access the information.

While these characteristics may appear to be clear-cut, in some cases these quality characteristics interact. In that case, especially if you are working on a team, it might be helpful, indeed critical, to establish some guidelines in applying these characteristics to errors.

For example, take the case of an error that affects both a characteristic and an element, such as an "incorrect heading," where "incorrect" is the characteristic and "heading" is the element. The inaccurate aspect of the error begs to be classified as an accuracy error. However, the inaccurate heading hindering retrieval of information begs to be classified as a retrievability error.

While one is not necessarily "better" or "correct," if the team plans to keep error type statistics, presumably to measure quality improvement trends, what you don't want is one person on the team counting it as an accuracy error, while someone else is counting it as a retrievability error.

To avoid that, you might want to create a guideline, such as, "Classify defects by the characteristic rather than the element," which in this example means the error would be classified as an accuracy error.

For a more detailed look at DQTI, purchase the book at your favorite bookstore, or borrow it from your favorite library.

Use it to read about a particular quality characteristic or guideline that interest you, use the checklists at the end of each chapter, use the “Quality Checklist” appendix to evaluate a piece of technical information against the quality characteristics, or use the “Who Checks Which Quality Characteristics” appendix to see what areas a reviewer needs to check.

This book has made its own technical information easy to use, easy to understand, and easy to find!

Dr. Katz bids a fond farewell
by Dr. Steve Katz

To all of my colleagues, and to all of my former M.S. students and to all present and future M.S. students who will not be my students, I wish you the very best of health, happiness, and success. It is the students as well as the faculty that make a program great, and I will remember well what you taught me. Thanks for the memories – but do keep in touch!

Dr. Steve Katz, Roy Pearce Professor of Professional Communication, Clemson University.
Why you should attend an STC conference
by Kim Rothwell

The 53rd Annual STC Conference in Las Vegas was the ideal place to view the field of technical communication from an industry perspective and to gain knowledge and skills to expand one’s professional scope. It was also an excellent place to network with professionals from across the globe and learn about the variety of ways that STC works to promote the work technical communicators do, through fundraising, media campaigns, and creating professional ties.

As a student, an STC conference is a unique opportunity to talk with people who work in the jobs you want, learn how to squeeze information out of a reluctant subject matter expert, and run into a member of your STC region who works in Vienna (Austria, not Virginia) all in the same day.

This year the conference provided three days of seminars and workshops in six subject areas: Management, Professional Development, Research and Training, Tools and Technology, Usability and Information Design, and Writing and Editing. Each workshop provided notes, tips, and contacts to the attendees. Presenters were excited to share their knowledge and often were willing to discuss their topic in depth after their presentation. The exhibitors at the conference distributed information about jobs, services, and the newest tools for documentation. Each aspect of the conference was focused on helping technical communicators do what we do best: shape information into an available form that empowers users to create their own knowledge.

An STC conference is a unique type of education that supplements the formal theory and ideology one can learn in school. It is a place to interact with, and learn from, people with a range of professions, viewpoints, and expertise and a place to experience passion and vision for the field as a part of an international community.

But most of all, an STC conference is a place filled with resources just waiting to be used by the next eager technical communicator. This year, one of those eager technical communicators was me. Next year, may it be all of you.

Kim Rothwell attended the 53rd STC Conference in Las Vegas on a scholarship she received for winning the STC Carolina Community’s essay writing contest.

Editor’s corner
by John Martin

I’m excited to be this year’s newsletter editor. Thank you for the opportunity to hone my editing skills, and to exercise my creative skills.

By trade, I’m a technical editor at IBM. I’ll complete my MS in Tech Comm in Spring of ’07, and plan to apply to the new PhD program in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media, to begin in the Fall of ’07.

Do you know what makes a newsletter dull? Rules, requirements, and guidelines, oh my! I didn’t know this until becoming editor, but we have to include certain “elements” in our newsletter if we want to enter it into the STC Newsletter Competition. And we do.

I see my challenge as one of including the stodgy stuff in the most interesting way I can, while introducing fun stuff, which is what I’ve attempted to do with my crossword puzzle.

I need your help to make this a publication that you want to read. Please send a “Letter to the Editor” if you’ve made it this far in this first issue, and tell me what you think so far!

Also, the 2006-2007 STC Officers want to know what kinds of events you want to attend. Include that in your Letter to the Editor, too!

(Access on back page.)
A Mad Editor’s Cross Words by John Martin

Across

1. 1 of 3 rhetorical situation considerations
8. Work, a set of musical compositions
12. Churchill (or Elton’s) title
13. Ages
14. Rival school, noted for Journalism
15. Thomas Paine’s epic work: ___ of Reason
16. Conjunction with pomp, circumstance
17. Neither nor; either ___
18. In the same place (footnotes & bibliographies)
19. Frontmatter element
21. Golf hole goal
22. Undergrad Eng requirement
23. Female pronoun
25. In on the ground floor of a company (stock market lexicon)
26. “Now ___ me down to sleep.”
27. Word used with “Only” on a door, Dr. Dicks would say that, together, they constitute a document for the door
28. Explorer or Navigator, for example
30. Be unwell, ill
31. Ctl-___-Del
32. Direction
33. Hallucinogenic shakes, but just one of them (abrev)
34. Prefix meaning one, single
35. This organization
37. Filler word, à la “like” and “um”
38. Announcement word with “Hear” and said twice
40. An adjective used as a subject complement, as in, “I am ___ happy.”
41. Helpful rehearsal aid for your ENG 675 PowerPoint presentation
44. Famous Andy partner
46. A fair-minded corporation has one of these policies

Down

2. Focus of ENG 508
3. Part of the CRDM PhD program
4. Angered
5. Public education organization
6. 1 of 3 rhetorical situation considerations
7. Inside; within (combining form)
9. 1 of 3 rhetorical situation considerations
10. Prefix meaning not
11. With 48 across, big name in ENG 517, particularly if you took it with Dr. Dicks
18. Homer’s masterpiece
20. An APA concern
24. Glenwood Avenue coffee shop at which I devised this puzzle
29. Often your relatives, for ENG 508 “tests”
31. An “Affiliated” faculty member to the MS in Tech Comm program
35. Editor’s marking
36. SAS Institute Distinguished Professor, MS Tech Comm faculty (initials)
39. Item borrowed from a friend, a Roman, or a countryman
42. With “al” meaning “and others”
43. Country of least concern for American document translation
45. Pronoun of whom it’s all about

Did you enjoy this crossword puzzle?

Would you like to see another one in the next edition?

What about a word jumble?

Please take a moment, right now, and send a letter to the editor and share your answers to these questions, and anything else that’s on your mind about the newsletter.

– JM –
(nematome@nc.rr.com)
Regional & International STC News

CAROLINA COMMUNITY EVENTS

STC Carolina Monthly Meetings & SIGs The monthly meetings are on the second Thursday of the month from 6-8PM – making them September 14th, October 12th, and November 9th. For more details, see their website: www.stc-carolina.org/calendar/monthlymeeting.shtml

Their Technical Editing SIG meets on September 19th, October 17th, and November 21st. Their Framemaker SIG is scheduled to meet on Tuesday, September 26th from 3:30 to 6 PM. For more details, see their calendar at: www.stc-carolina.org/webcalendar/

The NEW Web: An Unconference is an event for geeks and laymen alike. Join us as we explore the fun, exciting, easy, cool new things you can do on the web without being a programmer or even just a bit geeky. Saturday, November 4th, from 8AM to 6PM at the NC State Student Center. Contact the STC Carolina Community for more information.

STC INTERNATIONAL

Visible: The New Valuable Austin Skaggs and Christine Granger will present this STC Web-telephone seminar on 09/13/06 from 1 –2:30 PM EDT. The seminar will focus on how documentation departments can show their value by becoming more visible within their organizations. For more information or to register, please visit: stc.webex.com.

Creating Interactive CBTs with Captivate® in Half the Time An STC Web-telephone seminar from -2:30 EDT on 09/27/06. For more information or to register, please visit: stc.webex.com.

Designing Business Forms: A No Nonsense Approach An STC Web-telephone seminar from 1:2:30 EDT on 10/11/06. For more information or to register, please visit: stc.webex.com.

Community Meeting Report

Meeting minutes are posted to the STC listserv after each meeting. Contact Sarah Egan Warren if you need information about the listserv.

Technically Speaking...

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

Editor
John Martin
nematome@nc.rr.com

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

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

©2006 STC@NC State. All Rights Reserved. Printed in the USA.