

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter



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President's column: A toast to NEO STC, Community of Distinction

By Amy Vogt (avogt11@yahoo.com)

NEO STC to receive Community of Distinction and Pacesetter Award in Atlanta

Stand and raise your glasses. We have so many reasons to be proud in Northeast Ohio! NEO STC has been named a Community of Distinction and will be awarded the Pacesetter award at the STC's 56th Annual Conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The Pacesetter Award is awarded at the International level of the Society for Technical Communication to chapters with innovative activities.

NEO STC submitted an application for the Community Achievement Award (CAA) in March. This award recognizes a chapter's outstanding accomplishments in achieving STC's goals through programs and activities. Distinction is the highest award we could receive for our community.

We found strength through teamwork in this challenging economy; we pulled together and supported each other. This is a toast to every member of NEO STC for your creativity, time, and dedication to our community. I'm proud of what we've accomplished together. Thank you!

Another Toast: Toastmasters

I had not heard of Toastmasters until two weeks before the Technical Communication Summit in Philadelphia last year. Shannon Siwicki, a friend from NEO STC, suggested that I come with her as a guest to the next Swagelok Impact Toastmasters meeting.

I was confused about the name at first. Toast ... masters?

This is not "Toast" as in the golden-brown bread that comes out of a heating device. It's the "raise your glass and say a few words" kind of toast. (Please be advised that there are typically no glasses of champagne at Toastmasters; the only beverage I've seen at our meetings has been bottled water.) Toastmasters describes itself as a "Non-profit organization developing public speaking and leadership skills through practice and feedback in local clubs since 1924."

I went to that first meeting and was surprised by the format and structure. There are multiple speaking roles available at each meeting that focus on different aspects of public speaking. Some roles involve prepared speeches and others work on impromptu speaking.

Speaking opportunities range from 1 to 8 minutes. The goal is for every member to participate at each one-hour meeting.

Toastmasters meetings build skills that help support our careers as technical communicators. The obvious skill one can gain is to become more comfortable and polished during public speaking opportunities. Members also learn to give constructive, positive criticism as they evaluate each other during the meetings. This helps to encourage ways to deliver positive feedback and learn how to give professional, helpful suggestions for improvement.

Toastmasters focuses on building communications skills. As technical communicators, this can only make us stronger.

Are you headed to the conference in Atlanta?

It's hard to believe that the 56th Technical Communication Summit, STC's International conference is less than three weeks away. This year's conference will be held from May 3 to May 6 in Atlanta, Georgia. Register now at stc.org.

Let us know if you are planning to attend the conference. We're planning to exchange contact information and organize a NEO STC lunch or dinner while we're in Atlanta. E-mail Amy at avogt11@yahoo.com if you are planning to go to the conference.

Membership Renewal Drive — Thanks to our Membership Committee!

Thanks to Julie Mason and Sharon Jendrisak on our Membership Committee for the excellent job they did to coordinate the Membership Renewal Drive! We won for a second year in a row!

Contact Information Change

Thanks to PPI Technical Communications for their support of NEO STC this year.

I am no longer with PPI as of the beginning of April 2009. Please contact me at avogt11@yahoo.com. I can no longer be reached at my PPI e-mail address or phone number.

May meeting reminder: Awards dinner

The NEO STC's May 14th meeting closes the year with an awards dinner at Bar Louie in Lyndhurst. We will recognize outstanding volunteer efforts and other

chapter achievements. We will also introduce the 2009 – 2010 NEO STC board members.

Additional details will soon be emailed to members and posted on the website or contact Denise Kadilak at 216-251-0716.

- ◆ Date: Thursday, May 14, 2009
- ◆ Location: Bar Louie @ Legacy Village

Hope to see you there!

Professional Development Workshop: Intuitive Images

Creating and evaluating usable graphics for international audiences

Please join the Northeast Ohio STC community for its May 16th, 2009 professional development workshop featuring Patrick Hofmann.

In our end-user manuals, web pages, portable digital devices, and interface designs, our pictures always seem to play a subordinate role to our words. We find them too hard to illustrate; we encounter too many resolution and incompatibility issues, and we can never seem to make them attractive enough, meaningful enough, and usable enough.

In this workshop, we will get very graphic with these challenges. We will spend a fun-filled day sharing common problems, evaluating your existing design challenges, visualizing different types of information, and working on some innovative hands-on exercises.

This workshop has received praise from the LoneStar, Los Angeles, San Diego, TransAlpine, UK, and Israel chapters, and the International STC Conference as well!

About presenter Patrick Hofmann

Patrick is known as “the man of few words.” He is an STC Associate Fellow with over 16 years of experience in technical writing, illustration, international usability research and iconography.

Patrick’s award-winning work and passion for visualization have landed him at Google in Sydney, Australia, where he has been working since 2007 as a User Experience Designer on their many famous products. You may also recognize his work in the new STC logo!

Event details

- ◆ Date: Saturday May 16, 2009
- ◆ Time: 9:00 am – 5:00 pm
- ◆ Location: Joseph-Beth Booksellers @ Legacy Village

Register: If you plan to attend, please e-mail the Programs Committee by COB May 12th. Or, call Denise at 216-251-0716.

Hope to see you there!

Upcoming events

NEO STC events

- ◆ 5/1/09: Best practices for job seekers: Get your next technical communications job. Free. See below for detail.
- ◆ 5/14/09: Awards banquet and introduction of the new board. See <http://neostc.org/calendar/>
- ◆ 5/16/09: Professional Development Workshop with Patrick Hofmann: Intuitive images: creating and evaluating usable graphics for international audiences. See <http://neostc.org/calendar/20090516.html>
- ◆ 5/19/09: Networking lunch. Watch your e-mail for details!
- ◆ 5/23/09: Waterfall hike in Cuyahoga Valley National Park. Watch your e-mail for details!
- ◆ 06/13/09: Join us for an Indians game. Watch your e-mail for details!
- ◆ 6/19/09: Networking lunch at Cheesecake Factory in Westlake. See <http://neostc.org/calendar/>
- ◆ 07/18/09: Listen to the Cleveland Orchestra under the stars at Blossom. Watch your e-mail for details!
- ◆ 7/15/09: Networking lunch. Claddagh Irish Pub, 25389 Cedar Rd., Legacy Village. See NEO STC website for more detail.

Other events of interest

- ◆ 4/21/09: Last day for Early Bird discount rate for Communication Summit. See STC website
- ◆ 4/23/09: NEOUPA event, “Cognitive Crash Dummies: Where we are and where we’re going .” <http://www.neoupa.org>
- ◆ 5/3 – 5/6/09: STC’s 2009 Technical Communication Summit in Atlanta, GA.

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- ◆ 05/06/09: Intermediate Captivate, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 5/12/09: Cleveland InDesign User Group Meeting, "GREP and more...#8221; 6:00 pm ET, at Cleveland Institute of Art. See <http://www.indesignusergroup.com/chapters/cleveland/events/803/> for details.
- ◆ 05/13/09: Intermediate RoboHelp, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 05/15/09: Online Networking, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 05/20/09: Instructional Design, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 06/04/09: Visio, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 06/11/09: Fundamentals of Technical Writing, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 06/17/09: Introduction to Framemaker, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm
- ◆ 06/24/09: Online Learning, Radcom, Inc. See http://radcomservices.com/Services_Training_Offerings.htm

Congratulations to Stephanie Webster as DCSA recipient

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

Please join me in congratulating Stephanie Webster as our newest recipient of the Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA)! The DCSA is bestowed by STC International and acknowledges the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities.

Stephanie defines dedication in the Northeast Ohio (NEO STC) chapter. Stephanie joined STC as a student member, and then served in many positions as an NEO STC member. Stephanie served as Programs chair for four years, Vice President, President, Immediate Past

President, and is now serving as Member-at-Large. Member-at-Large is an appointed position only offered to select members in recognition of their past contributions to our chapter. Stephanie also co-chaired our highly successful 2007 Regional Conference. During Stephanie's year as President of our chapter, we earned a Community Achievement Award of Excellence. Recently, she arranged for our chapter to support the Cedarville University regional conference.

Stephanie has also presented at local programs meetings in progression formats, usually as the key "STC Value" presenter. Stephanie emphasizes STC value to all she meets.

Stephanie is currently working at TMW Systems in Beachwood as a Technical Training Manager. She started as a software writer in the International Department, and then moved into the base application Documentation department. In all her positions, her background with STC allowed her to use organizational networking relationships, confidence gained through committee work, and educational experience to enrich her career path.

Stephanie is a Pennsylvania native, but calls Ohio home as she went to college in the southwest part of the state and moved to Cleveland after graduating. She resides in South Euclid with husband, Tim, 2-year-old son Brandt, and brand-new son Graham!

Congratulations, Steph! We truly appreciate all your efforts.

NEO STC wins membership renewal challenge!

With a renewal rate of 73.24%, the NEO STC won the membership renewal challenge for the second year in a row! For full results, see <http://stc.org/membership/chapter-renewal-challenge.asp>.

Our chapter won two free registrations to this year's Technical Communication Summit, which it raffled off. The winners were Mario Morelos and Anna Miller.

Our chapter also raffled off two additional registrations. The winners were Colleen Price and Ginny Haas.

Congratulations to the winners and thanks to everyone who renewed!

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Nominations for 2009 — 2010 NEO STC Year

By Tricia Spayer (tspayer@yahoo.com)

As the Immediate Past President of the NEO STC chapter, it is my privilege to announce the slate of candidates who have volunteered for the executive board for the upcoming year.

The year runs from July 1, 2009 through June 30, 2010. The slate of board members is currently uncontested. As published in our chapter bylaws, the candidates are to be announced in our newsletter. Any opposition to these candidates must be recorded to Tricia Spayer within 21 days from the publication of this newsletter.

Please welcome to the board the following people:

- ◆ Vice President – Ginny Haas
- ◆ Treasurer – Sherri Henkin
- ◆ Secretary – Sarah Burke

As is written in our bylaws, the persons holding positions of President and Vice President advance to the offices of Immediate Past President and President, respectively. Amy Vogt will become Immediate Past President, and Denise Kadilak will be President of NEO STC during the 2009 – 2010 year.

There are several open volunteer chair and representative committee positions. If you are interested, please contact incoming chapter president, Denise Kadilak.

NEO STC scholarship update

By Jeanette Evans and Sarah Burke, Academic Relations Committee Co-Chairs

The NEO STC scholarship committee has been busy evaluating entries for the scholarship. NEO STC is offering for the second year a \$1,000 scholarship for one deserving Ohio undergraduate, graduate, or community college student studying a technical or scientific communication-related field.

Our community is delighted to offer this scholarship designed to encourage local academic excellence, provide the profession with educated communicators, and promote greater awareness of and participation in STC. Applicants are being evaluated based on their potential to contribute to the profession.

We will notify the winner by May 1, 2009, who will also be recognized publicly on the NEO STC web page and at our May 2009 meeting.

Direct any questions you may have about this scholarship to the Scholarship Managers Sarah Burke and Jeanette Evans.

The NEO STC Stimulus Package

By Jean Church (Jjchurch5566@att.net)

“My name is Jean Church and I’m unemployed.”

How many of us have said this or something like it? And how many more will have to say it?

For many years, our site has posted jobs and links to help those who are unemployed or looking to transition into another position. And now we’re trying to do more — for YOU! We’re trying to think beyond providing job leads to providing more services you can use right now.

Check out the list of job seeker groups. I have personally attended a few meetings and found them to be enlightening and valuable. Please let us know of other groups so we can expand our list. (I’m currently attending the Monday night job seekers meetings in Lake County and Chagrin Valley, and the Job Shop meetings on alternate Monday mornings at Lakeland College. I’m willing to give anyone a ride.)

I’d also like to start a Ladies & Laddies of Leisure Liquid Lunch group to meet for coffee once a week or whenever. I suppose we could share job sites, compare business card formats, discuss interview experiences, and the like if we have to. But maybe we just need a non-job event for a change where we can relax, talk, smile, and just be with friends who are in the same place we are. I’ve been to a few job seeker meetings and I think they’re pretty good, so do we really need another job seeker group? I reached out to Amy and Kim as people who could coax me out of my jammies one lunch a week. Sure, we’ll probably end up talking about work or the lack thereof. But I really just want a nice relaxing NON-meeting sort of thing — no structure, no agenda, no guidelines — nothing to remind me once again of my plight. Girls and guys just NEED ta have fun once in a while. Yeah, it really IS networking, but in a just-out-of-my-jammies sort of way. If this sounds like something you’d like to do, contact one of us. We’re open to any day/time/place.

What do YOU have to give?

You probably heard about Jay Leno's "free jokes for the jobless." On March 10th, he unveiled his own stimulus package for the jobless in Detroit. He hosted a free comedy show on April 7th called "Jay's Comedy Stimulus Plan." Pretty funny, huh? If I had his money, then ... hey! I wouldn't be unemployed! Ba dum-pa!

So what DO you have to give? True, we're not all Jay Leno. And we're unemployed. So what do we do?

I came across some ideas from an April 3rd article on [The Monster Blog](#).

Four Ways to Help the Unemployed

When times get difficult, sometimes the best way to cope is by taking action. Here's a list of ways to help the unemployed. You may have more ideas of your own.

Make a donation: It doesn't have to be money (but it never hurts). Organizations like Dress for Success help disadvantaged women get the proper clothes and skills for interviews. Consider becoming a mentor.

Reach out to alumni: People you graduated college with are great networking contacts, whether you're employed or not.

Listen: When any loss happens, from death to a layoff, platitudes don't help — being there does. Let your friend or relative know you're available to talk about anything, not just their work situation. This is especially important when your partner or spouse has been laid off.

Patronize new businesses: Some people start their own companies when their corporate jobs don't work out. You can help by giving your business to someone you know who's just starting out. Help the little guy. Skip the chain restaurants and visit the local eateries. It's a win-win for you and for them.

Editor's note: Another way to help people in our chapter — please send us any job leads that you see, especially if they are off the beaten path (not through the big job boards). You can use the Job submission tool at <http://neostc.org/jobs/form.php> or send them to the employment committee at employment@neostc.org. Thank you for helping your fellow members! [NOTE: As of 2014, employment resources have shifted to the chapter's LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the [current chapter website](#) for details.]

Services and new networking activities for unemployed members

By Amy Vogt (avogt11@yahoo.com)

The economy is challenging and has affected our community. We currently have several unemployed members in the NEO STC.

We have added some services for our unemployed members recently, including: free webinars, a free networking event donated by Wendy Schwarz, registration specials for our meetings and Professional Development Workshops, and we've sponsored two free registrations to the STC conference in Atlanta.

NEO STC would like to continue this support by offering networking events for job seekers. This is an extension of our Social Networking series. We plan to offer some structured events to focus on job seeking skills, but mostly this will be a chance to casually network with friends from our community.

Thanks to Jean Church and Kim Lindsey for suggesting this idea!

Watch neostc.org for more information about additional future events.

Free workshop for job seekers: Best practices for job seekers

Bob Dianetti, President of Radcom, has graciously offered to facilitate an exploratory workshop for those who are seeking easier and more effective ways to conduct their job search in the present economic climate. The workshop will take place at the Radcom facilities in Hudson.

This workshop will focus on:

- ♦ determining what kind of work environment you would like
- ♦ opening up to alternative applications where you can apply your TC skills
- ♦ best practices for a job search in the field of technical communications

Title: Best practices for job seekers: Get your next technical communications job

- ♦ Presenter: Bob Dianetti
- ♦ Date: Friday, 5/1/09
- ♦ Location: Radcom, Hudson, Ohio
- ♦ Cost: Free for NEO STC members (the event is limited to NEO STC members)

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Register by 4/28/09 to Amy Vogt (avogt11@yahoo.com) or phone 440-717-9749. Space is limited for this workshop.

The Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest: The winners (?)

The sentences were read, breaths were bated, and the results are in: Kim Lindsey won the NEO STC Bulwer-Lytton contest. Lisa Mileusnich was a close runner-up in the voting, with Tricia Spayer and Jean Church tied for third. Here are the entries:

- ◆ It reminds me of that time when Eadmon caught the fish — well, it was two fish really, but one was inside of the other, the outer one being a “cannibal,” as it were, so whether that counts as one or two is debatable — and while he was walking home those people in the Mercedes stopped him and asked for directions to the Inn at Belwyn’s Point, which is ‘way the other side of the county, and what with the covered bridge having been washed out these two years hence, he was stumped on what to tell them until he thought of what yours truly would have said, and facing those city-slickers with his proudest, dumbest, fake-hillbilly expression, told them, “Yew kin’t gitt thayr frum heer, felluh,” so that you never saw anybody roll up their car window so fast (what did they think? — that he’d spit tobacco on their white leather seats?) and drive off like the devil himself was chasing them with a pitchfork — it was as funny as that, but twice as strange. — *Kim Lindsey*
- ◆ He slowly ran his fingers through her long black hair, which wasn’t really black, because she used Preference by L’Oreal to color it, because she was “worth it”; her carrot-colored roots were starting to show, and it reminded him of the time he’d covered his car’s check engine light with black electrical tape, but a faint orange glow still shone around the edges. — *Lisa Mileusnich*
- ◆ Just as lightning struck, who should walk in the door, but for the ever-perspicacious inspector Columbo who is famous for his “oh, and one more thing line” that he likes to pull on his suspects, knowing well that they are guilty, yet he tries to trip them up by acting loggerheaded and unretentive, and then the electric lights of the ostentatious manor house flickered like the many lit Mackinac Island Fudge-scented candles that were placed all along the churriguesque entry hallway. — *Tricia Spayer*
- ◆ “Ryder” she howled hoarsely to her mate after endless hours of agonizing labor, culminating in the birth of a 10-pound, ruddy-skinned male of the species, knowing as she gazed upon the fledgling’s pumping fists and powerful jaws emitting primordial screams that his name would be — must be — Ryder, a moniker of power and speed like the mighty trucks flying along the highway, carrying the lives and hopes and dreams of entire families in their bowels, and as the name Ryder rang joyously in every fiber of her being she turned her eyes to the certificate, now proudly thrust before her by her befuddled, but obliging, spouse, upon which he had dutifully inscribed and bequeathed to their wondrous issue for now and evermore the name — oh, the name! — U-Haul. — *Laurie Klappauf*
- ◆ With sword ceremoniously drawn, the hot and horny knight was approaching the scantily clad Lady Gwen over the steak-roast grill when Arthur noticed his boss’s face fiercely superimposed over Gwen’s in the monitor’s reflection and he realized that even if the bull were lit on fire, her next words would be, “Lord CyberSlacker, you’re fired!” ... — *David Bihary*
- ◆ In its cyber-2 voice, the bleary-eyed alarm clock articulated, “Get up! It’s 5:00 am,” but Arthur knew what it should be saying — “art for art’s sake” — but oh how he hated its becoming a joke at the pub’s roundtable instead of a golden pair a shoes to pound the pavement with since his unemployment benefits run out today. — *David Bihary*
- ◆ It was a long day for all of the guys in the office, except that all of them really weren’t guys; some of them were women and to be gender-inclusive we should really refer to the group with a gender-neutral term, such as: “people” or “everyone” or “you all” in the office, and to make matters more complicated there was one man who had just decided that he would like to change his gender entirely and become a woman. — *Amy Vogt*
- ◆ He was starting to get used to the long drive on Interstate 80 from Detroit to Cleveland, and had found that the route had some fairly interesting points of interest along the way (although the stretch from Elmora to Elyria was especially boring), which caused him to smile knowingly as he passed each one, such as the airport on the outskirts of Cleveland, the billboard for the all-night pancake

house that he never had been able to locate, and especially the factory alongside the highway just outside of Parker Town, which he never understood because it always had all of its office and factory lights on, even late at night when he drove by, yet there were never any cars in the parking lot. — *Tom Glennan*

- ◆ It was the best of chapters, it was the worst of times, it was the best of traditions, it was the worst of traditions, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way — in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only. — *Jeanette Evans*
- ◆ She wasn't a normal teenager who roamed the halls of St. Catherine's like an elephant whose ears fell to the ground and found herself constantly tripping over them in an effort to make it to Mrs. Handel's second period gym class, where they would be learning the fundamentals of archery this first day of school. — *Sharon Jendrisak*
- ◆ Captain Bruck was a simple man, but when he landed on the third moon of the planet of Oo-guk-huk he could only think of the time when his mom made him a very complicated breakfast in his grade school years, which consisted of blueberry and ham pancakes, topped with mayonnaise and chives (she was out of whipped cream and cherries). — *Sharon Jendrisak*

For more information on the contest, visit <http://www.bulwer-lytton.com>

Review of March 25 webinar

Mark My Words: How Editors Can Coach Clarity

By Laurie Klappauf (lklappauf@msn.com)

Leave it to the folks at Copyediting newsletter to demonstrate the nuts and bolts of shaping copy without choking the life out of it.

Copyediting editor Wendalyn Nichols did just that in a March 25 webinar, *Mark My Words: How Editors Can Coach Clarity*.

During this live four-hour session, Ms. Nichols tackled everything from deciding when to ax the word "that" to recognizing and removing clichés and hidden bias. She offered guidance for dealing with jargon and bureaucratese, and finished with tips for coaching writers more effectively.

While geared toward copyeditors, the webinar was relevant to anyone who cares about language and the written word. After all, it's not just editors who struggle with unwieldy sentences or wonder if the occasional "in order to" might just be necessary.

Nearly a dozen NEO STC members attended this webinar held at the Booz & Company office downtown. Thanks go to Booz Allen Hamilton employee Sarah Burke — a long-time NEO STC member — for coordinating this event.

Added strengths of the webinar included practice exercises to do in advance, titles of useful books and other resources (see list following this article), and follow-up presentation slides that were sent to participants. The abundance of detailed examples also gave life and context to the major principles discussed.

Wield a scalpel

The webinar sessions covered:

- ◆ How to tighten copy without strangling it
- ◆ How to deal with bias and loaded language
- ◆ How to deal with jargon, business speak and clichés
- ◆ How to help writers write better

The first three sessions used before-and-after examples to illustrate key principles. The strategy of sending out practice exercises prior to the event was a clever way to engage attendees, who were apt to pay close attention to find out the "right answer."

And in some cases, the right answers weren't so obvious, as Ms. Nichols dared to challenge some long-held conventions.

For instance, in illustrating how to "wield a scalpel rather than a hacksaw," Ms. Nichols took on one of the most basic principles in writing: "Omit needless words Vigorous writing is concise." (Strunk & White, *The Elements of Style*).

(continued below)

She said that to accomplish this goal, editors are typically told to follow six rules:

- ♦ delete unnecessary *thats*
- ♦ use *to/for* instead of *in order to/in order for*
- ♦ get rid of dummy sentences
- ♦ make passive sentences active
- ♦ eliminate redundancy
- ♦ break up long sentences

Valid rules, certainly. But what happens with sentences like this one?:

Judge Kent will attempt to have a disability certified in order to receive pay and benefits as a senior judge.

Ms. Nichols said that replacing “in order to” with just “to” creates ambiguity; she would keep the original phrasing for clarity in cases like this.

She also listed seven guidelines for the use of that, with examples for each. The examples were particularly useful for those of us not well-versed in restrictive pronouns, conjunctive constructions, or other grammatical terminology. My favorite rule: Leave that in when it’s not doing any harm. Finally, she noted that, “some verbs simply sound better with *that*: *feel, seem, think, believe, suppose, find, hope, wish, pray.*”

And while most sentences become more potent when changed from passive to active, Ms. Nichols said that eliminating “there is/there are” may not always be the right choice. There are exceptions.

Is your language loaded?

In raising awareness of hidden bias, Ms. Nichols gave examples of potentially offensive language, such as “a cripple” or “someone suffering from” an affliction. She suggested ways to rephrase the text using alternative language that could reduce blunders and bias without being painfully PC. For instance, writing “people with disabilities” or “person with asthma” are effective ways to put the person before the disability. (A list of resources from the webinar aimed at bias-free writing is included below.)

Cut the clichés

Perhaps the most entertaining portion of the webinar was the segment covering bureaucratese, clichés, and jargon. Ms. Nichols managed to pull up some cringe-

inducing examples of what can go wrong when business-speak is allowed to run amok.

While a certain amount of jargon may be necessary, such as the use of *right lateral deltoid muscle* in a medical document, over-reliance on jargon can make terms meaningless.

Take the following statement:

XYZ Company meets the unique needs of mid-to-large sized organizations through comprehensive solution offerings for a variety of industries.

Just what does “comprehensive solution offerings” mean? Ms. Nichols wondered the same thing, and said that this would likely merit a query from the editor to the writer, along the lines of: “I apologize if this seems obvious to you, but I’m not sure I understand what ‘comprehensive solution offerings’ means. I’m concerned that your lay readers won’t either.”

Ms. Nichols suggested the following method for reducing jargon:

1. Create a list of terms you encounter often
2. Write out your own plain-English definitions of them
3. Replace some of the terms with your definitions in text that is too dense

Overuse of clichés also can muddle or undermine your message, and many are difficult or impossible to translate into other languages — an important consideration with increasingly globalized communications.

Coach for clarity

Ms. Nichols finished the afternoon with tips for coaching writers and she provided commonsense suggestions for developing positive working relationships between editors and writers.

When using queries to pose questions or make suggestions to the writer, focus on facts, not emotion. Keep the word “you” out of queries, and refer to style guides or other rationale for suggested changes. Include the phrase, “OK as edited?”

Other tips: Create a clip file (electronic or paper) with examples of both good and bad writing, and provide clear expectations through submission guidelines, templates, or document checklists.

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The session ended with a discussion of controlled authoring tools — software that can be run on a document to standardize the text. These tend to be good for companies that produce high volumes of documentation, use lots of outside vendors, and/or often translate documents. Capabilities and cost vary by product. Programs mentioned include: MegaReplacer (www.editorium.com); Acrocheck (www.acrolinx.com); Maxit from Smart Communications (www.smartny.com); HyperSTE from Tedopres (www.simplifiedenglish.net); and AuthorAssistant from SDL (www.sdl.com).

If it is offered again, I would recommend this webinar to anyone involved in writing or editing. The presentation provided on-target advice supported by plenty of examples sure to resonate with anyone who has ever struggled to find just the right word or clean up a clunky sentence.

About the presenter:

Wendalyn Nichols, the editor of *Copyediting* newsletter, was a teacher of remedial English, ESL, and composition for 12 years before entering publishing. She began as a freelance researcher, writer, and editor, and then became a lexicographer and editorial manager with the Longman Group in England. For four years, she was the editorial director of Random House Reference and Information Publishing.

Copyediting resources

During the webinar, Ms. Nichols cited numerous books and websites that she has found useful for editing copy and coaching clarity. These included:

- ♦ *The Elements of Style*, by William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White
- ♦ *The Global English Style Guide*, by John Kohl
- ♦ *The Copyeditor's Handbook*, by Amy Einsohn
- ♦ *A Writer's Coach*, by Jack Hart
- ♦ *Garner on Language and Writing*, by Bryan Garner
- ♦ www.plainlanguage.gov — a federal government website dedicated to promoting clearer communication between the public and government.

Resources for guidelines on bias-free writing

The webinar presentation also identified resources for avoiding bias in language. These included:

- ♦ *The Bias-Free Word Finder*, by Rosalie Maggio (1991; Beacon Press).

- ♦ *The GLAAD Media Reference Guide*, seventh edition, downloadable PDF: http://www.glaad.org/media/guide/GLAAD_MediaReferenceGuide_7thEdition.pdf
- ♦ *Guidelines for Bias-Free Writing*, by Marilyn Schwartz and the Task Force on Bias-Free Language of the Association of American University Presses (1995: Indiana University Press).
- ♦ *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*, second edition, by Casey Miller and Kate Swift (1988; Harper and Row).
- ♦ *Language, Gender, and Professional Writing*, edited by F. W. Frank and P. A. Treichler (1989; Modern Language Association).
- ♦ "Expressing Ideas and Reducing Bias in Language," in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, fifth edition, American Psychological Association, 1994.

Meeting review: Follow-up: Your secret weapon

By Tom Glennan (tomglennan@wowway.com)

Remember all of those manners that our mothers tried to teach us in our earlier years? Things like not talking with your mouth full, sitting quietly in church during the sermon, and always sending your aunt Alice and Uncle Bill a thank-you note for the clothes you got for your birthday? Well, NEO members and guests who attended the March 12 NEO chapter meeting were treated to an energetic and interactive presentation that reinforced just how right Mom was about the thank you notes, and how critical this social skill continues to be in our business relationships today.

Wendy Schwarz, a marketing and training consultant from northeast Ohio known as the Goddess of Networking®, shared her expertise in networking, self-marketing, and job search skills with us using personal stories, anecdotes, and common sense. Her presentation, titled "Follow-up, your secret weapon," focused on the effective use of thank-you notes and other forms of "follow-up communication" with colleagues, clients, and potential customers. Wendy explained that, although following up with someone in either a business or personal relationship significantly increases the chances of a favorable response, 80% of us fail to do so. She then helped the meeting participants understand when to use follow-up communication (including before a meeting, not just

after), how to use it most effectively (follow-up as soon as possible and always, always check the spelling of names), and the different forms (e-mails, snail mail, and handwritten notes) that follow-up and thank you notes can take (example — e-mail is becoming acceptable in just about all situations, except funerals). Especially helpful (unfortunately) were Wendy's suggestions and advice regarding how to write a thank you note following a rejection (imagine that!). The evening concluded with everyone pairing up to practice writing follow-up notes to each other, which had the side benefit of demonstrating what talented and quick-learning members we have in this chapter.

Throughout the meeting and at its conclusion, Wendy answered questions and provided the encouragement needed to help us understand her lessons. Among the suggestions that Wendy offered: you'll get a better response from notes and e-mails than phone calls, be sure your written notes are brief and legible, and set aside an hour or more each day to follow-up with people you have met. And remember, it's all about manners and etiquette — and making Mom proud.

Thank you to Wendy Schwarz for offering members a free networking workshop!

Wendy Schwarz, the Networking Goddess who spoke at the NEO STC March meeting, offered a complimentary networking workshop to any members who were interested.

We met March 30 at Panera Bread for another informative, energetic networking learning session.

Thank you Wendy!

Webinar review: Providing effective editing comments

By Sarah Burke (sarahwilsonburke@hotmail.com)

My husband and I frequently remind my two-year-old daughter that "using her manners" will get her far in life. Being polite is sound advice for toddlers still learning how to interact with their world, but also for editors trying to communicate with writers.

At a March webinar, veteran technical editors Michelle Corbin and Paula Cross shared guidelines, each with specific examples, to help technical editors provide effective comments and queries as part of an edit. They defined effective comments as being "professional, objective, and helpful" and having a "positive effect on the writer and the information."

They also described comments as being along a continuum, varying in their length, detail, justification, and degree of suggested change. They defined four common types:

- ◆ Imperative — an imperative is based on fact and is rarely deferred by the writer. The majority of editorial comments are this type.
- ◆ Opinion — an opinion states the preference of an editor; it does not refer to a specific guideline, standard, or requirement for justification. For this reason, editors should avoid this type of comment, and the writer can choose whether to implement the suggested change.
- ◆ Query — a query points out ambiguity that the writer must respond to. Writers rarely defer queries because doing so allows unclear copy to stand in their documents.
- ◆ Criticism — a criticism expresses dissatisfaction of some sort. Although this type of comment is acceptable, editors should use them judiciously and should avoid being hypercritical.

In addition, the presenters offered the following guidelines for how to word comments (their tone), what to include in comments (the content), and how to present comments (their style). The tone, content, and style of an editor's comments reinforce the writer-editor relationship and convey a sense that "we're in this together."

How to word comments: Tone

- ◆ Be constructive, not accusative.
- ◆ Convince the writer that you're on the same side (that you're partners in quality).
- ◆ Avoid condescension; don't assume that you're the expert.
- ◆ Do not insult the writer. Avoid using "you" and focus comments on the topic.
- ◆ Make comments in a positive tone.

What to include in comments: Content

- ◆ Include helpful information and details.
- ◆ Use positive reinforcement.
- ◆ Use questions sparingly or in queries only.
- ◆ Avoid hint-based comments.
- ◆ Explain why a change is necessary.

- ◆ Provide enough detail.
- ◆ Include pointers and reference information, for example, by referring to a style guide topic.
- ◆ Focus on strengths, not weaknesses, without sending mixed messages.
- ◆ Provide implementation guidelines where possible.
- ◆ Use factual statements when a change is required.
- ◆ Convey opinions clearly and be cautious about sounding too confident.

How to present comments: Style

- ◆ Follow your own guidelines.
- ◆ Use good handwriting for hard copy edits.
- ◆ Use appropriate pens and color. Colors such as green and purple contrast well with black type and don't emphasize the concept of being corrected (like red does).
- ◆ Use good typing etiquette in online formats, for example, by not using all caps or excessive bolding.

The presentation concluded by recommending the following ways to summarize comments and queries to writers:

- ◆ Create an editing report, a summary of general and global comments. Refer to other sources and include additional tips for tricky issues.
- ◆ Meet with the writer, in person if possible or over the phone, to go over the markup.
- ◆ Include a global assessment if possible.
- ◆ List the global comments and tell the writer how you marked up the information.
- ◆ Prioritize the comments and ensure the writer knows which ones must be addressed. For example, "of the other comments, I strongly encourage you to focus on..."
- ◆ If there are only a few comments, point out the pages containing comments and only return those pages.

Other tips

- ◆ Comment on a variety of levels and maintain the quality of your comments throughout. Don't fade out at the end.

- ◆ Teach yourself a consistent way to use tools for writing comments such as using the search function to find a comment that you already made.
- ◆ Edit from the perspective of a first user.

As this webinar reinforced, communicating effectively with writers is critical to both the editorial process and to the writer-editor relationship. Writers must be able to understand and easily implement changes in edited information. Writers must also feel as if they are partners with their editors. Politeness in editing comments helps foster such partnerships. Who knew such a little politeness could go such a long way?

Bios

Michelle Corbin is a Senior Technical Editor and Information Architect at IBM. She has been a technical communicator for 20 years, with the past 12 years being spent as a technical editor. She is an Associate Fellow of STC and is currently the managing editor of *Corrigo*, the newsletter for the Technical Editing SIG of STC.

Paula Cross is an advisory software engineer and a technical editor for IBM. She has 24 years experience as a software developer and as an information developer, both as a writer and an editor. Paula resides in Santa Fe, NM.

See also

For more detailed descriptions and examples of effective and not-so-effective editing comments, listen to an archive of the webinar at <https://lobby.mc.iconf.net/gcc/a.asp?ba=6&aID@0055577&at=4&rtp=2> – contact Sarah Burke for the login information.

Future webinars

If you are interested in hosting a webinar, contact Amy Vogt (avogt11@yahoo.com).

Book review: *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue*

By Jeanette Evans (jeanette.evans@sbcglobal.net),
Associate Fellow

Book information: *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue*, by John McWhorter. List price \$22.50 (Hardcover). 197 pages. Published by Penguin Group (USA). Published October 2008. ISBN: 1592403956. ISBN-13: 9781592403950.

Called a survey of the quirks and quandaries of the English language, this book provides a focus on English grammar and its history. This is in contrast to *Alphabet Juice*, the recent Roy Blount book that has a focus more on usage (and was recently reviewed in *Lines and Letters*). Both books are an interesting read.

Author John McWhorter is an American linguist and political commentator. He is the author of numerous books on language, including *The Power of Babel*, *Defining Creole*, and *Authentically Black*. A senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute and a contributing editor to *The New Republic*, he has also taught linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley.

This book covers a subject that reminds me of Baugh and Cable's standard *A History of the English Language*. Surprising to me was that the voice of *Our Magnificent Bastard Tongue* is so different. The Baugh and Cable book is textbook-like and almost stuffy — but likeable and not necessarily stuffy in a bad way. McWhorter's book is more conversational. However, his book is still authoritative. This is especially so in its analysis of language and arguments about how languages change.

McWhorter's ideas come from a study of Creole languages and linguistics. His interests are in showing underlying changes in language — not just a study of new words that enter the language. McWhorter's book covers the Celtic and Welsh influence on English, as well as the impact of the Viking raids, Normal Conquest, and Germanic invasions. He also describes reasons for the simplicity of English — with its lack, for example, of declensions — as it became a type of universal vehicle of expression during the early formation of Britain.

When I checked on amazon.com, 10 reviewers gave the book an average of 4. Five reviewers gave it a 5. Four reviewers gave it a 4. One reviewer gave a 1. I give it a 4 as the topic is fascinating and the treatment original. However, I can understand that reviewer who gave the 1. The author does tend to dwell on the particular idea that English grammar was influenced by Welsh and Gaelic. His arguments, while convincing, are at times bordering on what I would call overkill. Perhaps he does this to provide the arguments needed to effectively challenge current thinking on language change.

A relatively short book at 197 pages, it is in a small size and very readable format.

Book review: *Made to Stick*

By Kim Lindsey (ke.lindsey@windstream.net)

You have received two e-mails:

- ◆ The first is professional and polished; the second is amateurish and sloppy.
- ◆ The first is from a trusted source; the source of the second is highly suspicious.
- ◆ The first follows a logical style guide; the second contains multiple misspellings and entire paragraphs in ALL CAPS.
- ◆ The first is actionable; the second is not apparently related to your life.

Which would you remember?

One more thing ...

- ◆ The first e-mail contains proxy-voting instructions for your company's shareholder meeting; the second contains an urban legend about a victim of a "kidney theft ring."

Now, which is more memorable?

This story demonstrates the thesis of *Made to Stick*, a 2007 best seller by brothers Chip Heath and Dan Heath. "Some ideas survive and others die" because some ideas are more "sticky" than others — easier to remember, or harder to forget.

The book is structured after its own "six principles of sticky ideas," on the acronym **SUCCESS**: **S**imple, **U**nexpected, **C**oncrete, **C**redible, **E**motional, and **S**tores. Dozens of real-world examples with just the right level of detail bring each principle crisply to life: Jared of Subway fame, Army mess halls in Iraq, the padfolio that sparked the invention of laptop computers. The breadth of examples underscores how the six principles apply in almost any arena.

Though the authors' primary audience is marketing and advertising professionals, **SUCCESS** can be useful for anyone in communication, and that means us. Of particular interest to technical communicators is what they call the "Curse of Knowledge": "Once we know something, we find it hard to imagine what it was like not to know it."

The [Made to Stick website](#) indicates that the book is popular among CEOs; perhaps it should be on your reading list as well?

Book review: *Clear blogging*

By Sayantani Roy (roy_sayantani@yahoo.com)

Bob Walsh wants you to start blogging, which, according to him, is the order of the day, whether you want to get your name out there or are simply trying to boost your company sales. *Clear blogging* (Publisher: Apress; 1 edition February, 2007), is his book on all things blogging.

Once a journalist, Walsh is now a micro-ISV (Independent Software Vendor) and author, and owns a website of the same name (www.clearblogging.com). Chock-full of statistics, this book brings to light how blogging in recent years has added to the participatory affair that is web 2.0.

In this book, Walsh does a lot of hand holding and explaining of the nitty-gritty of the job. Whether you have just been introduced to the blogosphere or are trying to blog professionally, this is a good book to dig into.

Walsh wants you to take note that good blogging is not a random activity. Rather, it is done with a purpose, be it earning more revenue for your small business or sharing your passion with a cyber-audience to generate fellow-feeling. Most importantly, he teaches you to be an active reader. He wants you to post comments, keep track of them, and organize your favorite blogs. He introduces tools he likes and teaches how to make good use of them. Soon you can start to subscribe to RSS feeds from your favorite blogs, use bookmarklets, write comments, and tag effectively. At the end of each chapter, Walsh has some action items for you — simple hands-on exercises that motivate you to dive deeper into the world of blogs.

The book's credibility and real value lies in the advice and valuable insight culled from interviews with experienced bloggers. Walsh conducted interviews with bloggers from all walks of life — unknown bloggers, relatively well-known bloggers, and famous bloggers, such as David Sifry, CEO of Technorati, the leading search engine for blogs. Each person offers a fresh perspective on how to make your mark on the blogosphere.

The book offers general tips on blogging, as well as advice targeted to a particular tool, such as Livejournal or Feedburner. You'll know which tools to use for personal blogging and which tools to choose if you need to tweak the style sheets to your liking. Walsh even lays out the legal implications should you choose to blog

something controversial. Whole chapters are devoted to podcasting, monetizing your blog, and building a readership. All in all, if you are a beginner or an intermediate blogger, this book has much to offer. It is very much targeted to the cutting edge tools and websites of today, so it is worthwhile to read it now.

Of interest

Update on periodic table of type faces

The periodic table of type faces that I mentioned in last month's newsletter is now available for purchase in a variety of formats at [http://www.squidspot.com/Periodic Table of Typefaces.html](http://www.squidspot.com/Periodic_Table_of_Typefaces.html).

It shows a number of major fonts along with information about the family and classification, the designer, the year the font was designed, and a ranking.

Check for website plagiarism

The free Copyscape service makes it easy to find copies of your content on the Web. Copyscape finds sites that have copied your content without permission, as well as those that have quoted you. <http://www.copyscape.com/>

STC news

Member conference savings

Room sharing. Alan Houser, head of the program planning committee for the conference, started a forum for room-sharing. See <http://stcforum.org/viewtopic.php?id=1659>.

Conference scholarships. Up to 250 scholarships of \$400 will be given to members wishing to attend the STC Technical Communication Summit 3 — 6 May in Atlanta, GA. To apply for the scholarships, members should download the PDF of the Scholarship Registration Form from the STC website (<http://www.stc.org>).

Reduced room rates. The STC conference room rate at the Hyatt has been lowered from \$174 to \$159 for single or double accommodations. Individuals who have already reserved rooms for the Summit will automatically get the lower rate.

Split-payment options

Split membership dues. STC officials have initiated an option for members to split their dues into four equal payments spread over four months. This optional payment plan is available for both new and renewing

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members and for all categories of membership except students. See <http://www.stc.org/2009/03/19/STC-Offers-Split-payment-Option-for-Members-Dues.asp> for more information.

Split conference fees. STC members may choose to spread their registration payment by paying half with their registration form and half onsite. See <http://www.stc.org/2009/03/20/Split-payment-Option-for-Conference-Registrations.asp> for more information.

Chapter reminders

Amazon.com helps fund STC

Reaching Amazon.com through the portal on the home page of STC's website (www.stc.org) contributes to funding programs that have no direct revenue stream, such as committee work. STC receives a small percentage from every purchase made through the portal.

Join NEO STC on LinkedIn

Our chapter now has a group on LinkedIn named Northeast Ohio STC Community.

Join our LinkedIn Group on <http://www.Linkedin.com> (you must be a member of LinkedIn, which is free for a basic membership). FYI : There will be waiting period while your membership is approved.

NEO STC listserv

[NOTE: As of 2015, the chapter listserv has been supplanted by our LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the [current chapter website](#) for details.]

To subscribe or change your settings for the Northeast Ohio STC listserv, see <http://mailman.stc.org/mailman/listinfo/stcneohio-l>.

Please let Kris Henige, the NEO STC Listserv Administrator, know if you have any questions.

Premium pages for members

[NOTE: As of 2016, the current NEO STC website does not have password-protected content.]

NEO STC has some Premium pages for NEO STC members only. These pages include links to our very own Wiki, an Employer Directory — a listing of businesses that hire technical communicators — and more.

To enter the Premium pages, you will need a user name and password — this is different from the STC

International site. Please contact our Webmaster for password information.

Change of address? Remember to tell the STC office

Send new addresses to the STC office to avoid interrupted delivery of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*. Some members assume that informing the post office of their new address is enough to ensure that all of their mail is forwarded. However, the United States Postal Service forwards only first-class mail, not publications such as *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*.

Members may also update their contact and mailing information on the STC website.

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Love it? Hate it? Let us know! Contact us: newsletter@neostc.org

See something interesting? Tell us about it!

Many of our NEO STC members are also members of another STC community or SIG. If you receive a newsletter and find an interesting article, please consider passing it on to the Lines and Letters editors at newsletter@neostc.org.

You can also submit articles directly through <http://www.neostc.org/lines/submit.html>.