Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

On the Front Lines Column

President's Notes

by Beth Williams, NEOSTC President

What does it mean to you to be a technical communicator? Is that even your official job title? Or, do you refer to yourself as something such as information architect, user experience advocate, communication developer, or documentation evangelist? Does it really even matter?

When deciding on a subject for my final column, I spent some time considering what is going on in our profession and how things are changing. Even though we are doing a lot of great things as an STC chapter and as individuals in our field, we need to do things differently. And by differently I don't mean more, I mean smarter. Do what you already do, only do it better.

We need to spend more time considering how people learn. We need to deliver the best solution for a customer using the best method rather than just document a product. Just look at the fact that we don't always call ourselves technical communicators and this change becomes even more evident. And, if we aren't changing now, then we should be.

Yes, it all still comes back to the content of our information, but the opportunities we have to deliver that content in new and innovating ways constantly grow and change. How can we flourish is this time of change?

- **Be proactive.** There are so many chances for us as communicators to do things other than write hard copy documentation. If the company you work for still produces that hard copy, are you even the one still writing it? If you are, how can you create additional opportunities for yourself? What do you have to do to be the one in charge of your career?

- **Be creative.** Don't let the way things have always been done cloud your view of the possibilities. Again, what else can you do other than what you are used to doing? How can you go beyond your current task to help your company, yourself, and your field? Every extra project you do, and do well, raises the visibility and value of our profession.

- **Get involved.** Talk not only with the people who do what you do, but also with the people who do something else. Look at your networking opportunities as a way of learning new things as well as meeting people. Talking with someone, regardless of whether that person has the same interests as you, may be the spark you need to move your great idea forward.

- **See the big picture.** Always ask how the task you are trying to complete fits into how you are trying to accomplishing the larger goal.

- **Recognize your contributions.** Do not allow the work that you do to be considered a luxury, an afterthought, or less important than the "product" you are documenting. Do more than show that you add value to a product -- show that you are an integral part of that product.

The current changes in technical communication offer many exciting opportunities. Make it your responsibility to seize those opportunities. And finally, thank you for the opportunity to be your President this year.

NEOSTC Board Meeting Minutes

The NEOSTC board meeting took place on February 19, 2003. To view the minutes, click the following link: Board Meeting Minutes (PDF)

NEOSTC Named Chapter of Excellence at STC International Conference

by Karla Caldwell

NEOSTC President Beth Williams proudly displayed the certificate proclaiming the NEOSTC as a chapter of excellence for the second year in a row. The awards are given annually at the STC International Conference to a handful of chapters in each region. To receive an award of excellence or an award of merit, the chapter must qualify by adding significant value for its members. Ways of adding value include regular publication of a newsletter, hosting a competition, and reaching out to new members.

Lines & Letters Receives Award of Merit

by Karla Caldwell

Lines & Letters received an award of merit for the second year in a row in the annual STC newsletter competition. The competition is held internationally with judging based on criteria from content to editorial technique. Newsletters are grouped by chapter size; for example, *Lines & Letters* was entered in the 151-300 member range category.

"We were hoping to improve to an award of excellence this year, but realize we have some very tough competition. Hopefully, the comments we get back from

Lines & Letters
Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

the judges will help next year's editors to reach this goal," said Sharon Ambro, *Lines & Letters* co-editor.

On behalf of both Sharon and myself, we'd like to thank the members of the NEOSTC who contributed to *Lines & Letters* during the 2002-2003 chapter year.

For more information on the STC newsletter competition, click here. *[URL no longer valid as of 2017.]*

May Meeting Wrap-up

by Jeanette Evans, NEOSTC Senior Member

On Friday, May 30th at the Independence Holiday Inn, we held our Soft Skills in Independent Contracting wrap-up meeting and program/recognition banquet. Three members of our CIC SIG held a panel discussion on soft-skill issues in contracting. Bill Beadle ably addressed issues of motivation at home and on site. Barb Philbrick did a great job discussing how to separate work and home responsibilities. Bob Dianetti provided insight on the difference between contracting and consulting.

After the panel discussion, Beth noted that Wendy Majikas and Katie Stibora won an Award of Distinction at the international level this year. Katie Stibora and Brett Lilley won an Award of Merit at the international level as well. We then held a drawing for individuals who completed our NEOSTC competitions survey. Bob Young won the drawing for a free dinner meeting.

Beth wrapped up the evening by reading from *The Magic of Thinking Big* by David Schwartz. She then presented copies of the book to the outgoing board, as a token of her appreciation. She also presented the Volunteer of the Year award to newsletter editors, Sharon Ambro and Karla Caldwell, who won an Award of Merit for Lines and Letters in the STC Newsletter Competition.

Our NEOSTC chapter also received an Award of Excellence at the international level. Incoming president, Lori Klepfer, took this chance to say a few words about her desire to continue this work in the year to come.

Calendar

When	What	Where	RSVP
Wed 7/16/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	TGI Friday's Steels Corners Rd. & ST. RT. 8 Stow	Angie Dianetti by 7/14
Thu 8/14/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Mallorca 190 W. 9th St Warehouse District, Cleveland	Angie Dianetti by 8/11
Tue 9/16/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	356th Fighter Group 4919 Mt. Pleasant Rd. North Canton	Angie Dianetti by 9/15
Wed 10/15/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Fox & Hound 1479 SOM Center Rd. Mayfield Hts.	Angie Dianetti by 10/13
Thu 11/13/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Weia Teia 140 Great Northern North Olmsted	Angie Dianetti by 11/10
Fri 12/12/2003 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Max & Erma's Rosemont Commons Shopping Center Fairlawn	Angie Dianetti by 12/8
Tue 1/13/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Pufferbelly 30 Depot St. Berea	Angie Dianetti by 1/12
Wed 2/11/2004 12:00pm - 1:00pm	Networking Luncheon	Winking Lizard 511 E. Aurora Rd. Macedonia	Angie Dianetti by 2/9
May 9-12, 2004	International conference	Baltimore, MD	
May 8-11, 2005	International conference	Seattle, WA	

What Technical Writers Can Learn from Teachers

by Dannette Thompson, NEOSTC Member

"Teachers and technical writers have fewer differences than you might think."

> Even if you already agree, NEOSTC member Dannette Thompson's article is a great read. It also offers a few tips and tricks used by teachers that can help sharpen your technical writing skills!

Stop me if you've heard this one. What's the difference between Windows and a virus?

OK … I've got a better one. What's the difference between a teacher and a technical writer? A teacher can fail people for not reading the materials.

Jokes aside, teachers and technical writers have fewer differences than you might think. After all, both of the professions strive toward a similar, overarching goal - to impart knowledge. In the strictest definition of "technical writer," the medium used to share information is probably different than that used by many teachers, who are encouraged to provide multi-sensory learning experiences for their students. However, most technical writers today do a lot more than just create paper manuals. We create online help systems incorporating digital media and interactive linking. We plan training courses and create both printed and electronic training materials. And in many cases, we conduct live training

ourselves. With so many tools in our book bag, we are more like teachers than we are just plain writers.

If we agree that technical writers and teachers have a lot in common, we might consider borrowing some of the tricks of the instructional trade. Why? Because the field of education is a hotbed for controversy and political action, and, as a result, a lot of money has been spent on research regarding the best methods of teaching. What's more, many of its best practices are tried and true. Here, then, are three things that teachers do well, and that technical writers would be well served to do.

1. Plan from the top down

In the food chain of the public education system, teachers fall relatively close to the bottom. While they must maintain control over a group of 30-or-so youngsters, they are governed by constraints coming from their building administration, district administration, school board and state department of education. All of those entities exert control over teachers' activities - everything from what topics they must cover to the standards by which they must evaluate their students. While many teachers find the myriad of regulations frustrating, they provide a specific and concrete platform from which they can launch a course. Before teachers ever begin planning a course they will teach, they research and investigate the requirements of the powers that be. They learn how the students will be tested in the subject matter, how their own success will be evaluated, what is covered in the related classes students will take before and after the course. Only when they have determined the top-level goals do they begin working on the specifics.

Think about a system in which each English teacher in a school system could cover whatever subjects they wanted and evaluate their students on anything they found worthwhile - a system in which teachers were left on their own to flounder or flourish. Can't imagine it? Well, you're lucky, because that description applies to the situation of many technical writers. Since documentation is usually not the main product of companies that hire writers, the specific focus and purpose of the documentation is not defined. You probably understand that your job's general goal is to "tell the customers how to use our product," but do you really know what management's specific goals are?

You might not. In fact, management might not. However, using your interviewing and analysis skills along with a little concentrated effort, you should be able to flush out a documentation mission statement of sorts. Your company must define - based on its market, its customers, its own mission - what it wants to accomplish with documentation. In some companies, it can be as simple as providing a "good face" and a little P.R. for the product. In others, it might be to reduce the number and complexity of support calls or returns on the product. Even that goal, however, can be made more specific. Reduce by how much? Which type of calls should be eliminated: those that cover basic product information or the more complex troubleshooting calls?

Before you ever begin a documentation project, you should start at the top level and determine the specific goals.

2. Write learning objectives

Planning from the top down inherently offers teachers the chance to form specific goals for the course they are planning. Most school districts, however, require teachers to go one step further. They must write and submit learning objectives, often on a weekly basis. Learning objectives are even more specific goals for each day's activities in a course and are student-centered. They clearly state what the student is expected to get from a topic and how the teacher will measure the student's success. While you should plan each documentation project from the top down, you should also write learning objectives for each topic/module/chapter in your documentation. What is it that you hope to convey? How will you determine if your readers successfully heard your message?

Most educational institutions subscribe to a behaviorist theory of learning, which holds that the only way to determine if someone has learned is to observe their behaviors that will indicate their knowledge or understanding has changed in some way. Therefore, objectives must indicate an expected, observable behavior. *Teaching in the Middle and Secondary Schools* (Callahan, Clark, Kellough, 1995) suggests that objectives can be written following an "ABCD" pattern:

- "A" stands for audience. First indicate to whom the objective applies. Examples for technical writers include "the reader," "the user," "the operator," etc.

- "B" stands for behavior. The objective must contain an action verb representing an observable behavior that the audience will demonstrate. You should avoid unobservable verbs such as understand, know, enjoy, or familiarize. Instead use action-oriented verbs such as construct, list, recall, or reproduce.

♦ "C" stands for condition. The objective should include the setting, materials, or tools needed for the audience to complete the expected behavior. If they should reference a manual or quick reference guide, that should be mentioned in the objective. If the objective is for them to complete the behavior in an actual job setting, that should be stated.

♦ "D" stands for degree. One of the most important elements of an objective is the measurement standard that will be used to determine if the objective was met. Is 100% accuracy expected? Is the audience expected to recall all of the steps from memory or only a portion? In most cases, complete mastery is the goal, but in the real world, mistakes happen.

Examples of ABCD-Style Learning Objectives

♦ The accounting-software-user will list all five steps of entering an invoice without referring to documentation.

♦ The reader will demonstrate the standard method for performing CPR using the CPR doll.

♦ The Microsoft-Word-user will create a form letter and merge it with a list of provided addresses in an Excel file.

♦ The machine-user will access the online help system and locate information on a given topic in less than one minute.

While writing learning objectives for each topic in your documentation may seem time consuming and tedious, it is a great habit that will become almost subconscious as you practice it. Eventually you may not have to actually write the objectives, but they will formulate in your head as you think about and plan topics. In order to reach this state, however, you must begin by studiously writing them as often as possible. When written well, objectives will make your documentation more purposeful and concise. When used with top-down planning, they almost guarantee your documentation will meet its goals and your users will be successful.

3. Use evaluation as a learning tool

Take a look at a few middle or high school textbooks. Almost every one uses a very simple formula. They list the chapter's objectives at the front, provide text and other learning aids, then ask students to complete a quiz or list of questions that precisely correspond to the learning objectives. The idea is that users can determine if they have successfully met the learning objectives by evaluating their success on the quiz.

Now take a look at the average user's guide. See any quizzes or worksheets? Unless it's used as part of a training program, probably not. That's because user's guides are not typically meant to be read front to back - they're meant to serve as a point of reference for users when their knowledge fails them.

However, that doesn't mean that Evaluating students technical writers can't evaluate their audience's success. Depending on your documentation's objectives (determined by top-down planning), you may find that your readers would like evaluation tools. These can be included in the form of quizzes in the manual or "games" in online help which point to additional help for wrong answers. Even if they don't, you can evaluate the success of your students - and therefore your documentation - through other tools such as support call records, product return rates, response cards, user interviews, and supplemental training programs. If you have written clear learning objectives, you should easily be able to see if your documentation has succeeded. After using it, does your audience exhibit the expected behavior to the degree indicated? If not, it's very clear what needs to be improved.

This form of evaluation works extremely well when used in conjunction with top-down planning and learning objectives, and it evaluates the success of both your work and the students'. As with writing learning objectives, analyzing this type of information will become second nature when carefully practiced long enough.

If you incorporate these three teacher techniques into your own habits and practices, you may find yourself imparting more knowledge than you ever thought possible. Unlike a teacher, you still won't be able to fail people who don't read your work, but you will be able to confidently say that those who do will be more knowledgeable for it!

Oh … and if you're wondering … the difference between Windows and a virus? It's simple: Viruses are well supported by their authors, their program code is fast and compact, and they tend to become more sophisticated as they mature. Hey, I didn't write it. I just tell it!

Book Review: *eResumes: Everything You Need to Know About Using Electronic Resumes to Tap into Today's Hot Job Market*

by Jeff Staples, Information Developer

Publication information: Susan Britton Whitcomb and Pat Kendall. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002. [ISBN 0-07-136399-8. 225 pages, including indexes. $11.95 (softcover)].

Should I use PDF, RTF, or maybe ASCII for creating my e-resume? Do I want to provide specific contact information or do I want my e-resume to convey little contact-related information? These decisions and many others-such as the right keywords to use-are addressed in *eResumes*. The descriptive subtitle says it all: "Everything you need to know about using electronic resumes."

The authors have included a host of resources for the e-resume developer, including effective writing strategies, visual aids, and effective design templates. Start with the Preface for a quick overview of the book. There, you find a brief synopsis of each chapter and its focus.

Chapter 1 provides interesting information on various types of electronic resumes. However, much of the chapter focuses on why you should take your resume online. Most people in today's job market probably will not need convincing on the value of providing their resume to the wider market that the Internet can offer.

Chapter 2 focuses on keywords and the value that they add to an e-resume, which will probably be searched rather than read. You learn that today a computer will probably be scanning your resume searching for keywords to decide whether you are a match for the position available. The authors coin a new definition for ROI and consider it "the secret to writing a winning eResume" (page 33). It's important to be familiar with keywords in your particular industry, and the chapter offers a list of keywords that recruiters say they typically look for and a number of resources for finding applicable keywords.

Chapter 3 covers ASCII e-resumes. You learn coding for ASCII characters and see examples of what can go wrong when characters are used incorrectly. There is a great discussion on formatting resumes to be inserted in e-mail messages and in e-forms on job-search Web sites.

If you have covered Chapter 3, then you have created an ASCII resume. Chapters 4 and 5 take you through the process of submitting your ASCII resume into an e-form and attaching it to an e-mail message. An important point of the chapter is to use the universal language-plain text-when submitting your e-resume via email and the Internet. Plain text may not be pretty, but it will deliver something that is understandable to the recipient. And don't forget the cover letter, or you run the risk of being regarded as "a bit clueless."

Chapter 6 is basically for supplemental reading unless you are unsure of the value inherent in an electronic resume or portfolio. However, it does provide information on the differences between the Web resume and a portfolio. There are good examples on how to enhance the look of a web-based resume.

Chapter 7 conveys options for getting external help in creating your e-resume. No, you do not have to go it alone. Details are provided on various options, such as hiring a professional web page designer and using Microsoft Word's Save as Web Page option.

In Chapter 8, the focus is on the effectiveness of your e-resume. Many items that you focus on in your printed resume, such as typography and capturing an employer's attention, hold true for electronic resumes as well. In addition, with an online resume, you can consider features such as graphics and color. Good examples of resumes demonstrate before-and-after effects on e-resumes that use the techniques the authors recommend.

In contrast to Chapter 7 and its options for external help, Chapter 9 is for the do-it-yourself individual. The focus is on creating your own e-resume by working directly with the HTML code. You get a brief overview of the basics of HTML and a reference to resources that offer additional information.

Chapter 10 is a must read, even for the seasoned e-resume developer. Here, you find a discussion of privacy issues associated with posting and distributing e-resumes. In addition, several examples convey how much or how little you want your resume to reveal. But the information does not stop there. Now that you have created your electronic resume, where do you send it? This chapter provides several suggestions on where to post your resume, including career, recreation, and resume-distribution web sites.

The authors have assembled information that covers a multitude of items related to the creation and distribution of e-resumes. This book should serve both

as a great starting point to compile or enhance your electronic resume and a great reference in your technical communication library.

The TechComm Job Market

by Rahel Anne Bailie, STC Region 7 Director-Sponsor

Before I launch into my opinions of trends for the technical communication field, I feel I should provide a bit of context for my comments. I entered the industry in the late 1980s, when the PC market was just taking off. In fact, I worked for a PC manufacturer, working on the documentation launching their line of 286 computers. I've worked in the field through the economic downturn of 1992, the boom years of the late 1990s, and the recent downturn of 2002. My experience has given me a long look at where we've been, which is important when looking at where we're going.

The number of technical writers seemed to grow exponentially in the 1990s. It was the "weatherproof". profession that grew, first because of the proliferation of software programs being created for PCs, and later because the need for technical communicators grew as the presence of the Internet became as ubiquitous as the presence of the PC.

Four important shifts happened during that time. First, the vast numbers of technical communicators working in the software industry radically shifted the focus of the profession. New, exciting trends had the technical communication community exploring single sourcing, visual communication, and document design. Second, technical writers were expected to increase their depth of skills: learning word processing to input our own text, desktop publishing software to design our own documents, and even drawing our own graphics using graphic programs-we became technical communicators, with a wider skill set and a steep learning curve. Third, these changes brought new ways of working, shorter publication cycles, and a consolidation of tasks and increasing breadth of skills. And fourth, many of us moved into spin-off professions and though we stayed under the STC umbrella, we became content developers, and translation coordinators, defining ourselves in broader terms.

Where are these opportunities, and how do I tap into them?

In the early 2000s, the downturn began in the telecommunications industry, and seemed like it would never bottom out. Companies made deep cuts, and

technical communicators moved into adjacent career spaces to continue working in the industry-marketing communication, instructional design-or into new work such as interaction design, usability analysis, or information architecture. The STC has twenty-one special interest groups, reflecting the range of work done by people who identify with some variation of technical communication.

Today, the biggest single issue seems to be unemployment. Technical communicators are looking for jobs, but the jobs aren't coming. They're not being listed on the job banks, and they're not being published in the newspapers. And though the job market in North America seems to have turned a corner, far too many technical communicators are still looking for jobs instead of working. So where is the disconnect?

One of the shifts I see in the marketplace is that while there is lots of work available, there are few jobs. Companies don't want to post an ad on a job board and get bombarded with hundreds of resumes. Right now, they don't even want to commit to having a job. The software industry tends to be a young industry. Some of the engineers I've worked with are younger than my own child; I've reported to Engineering Directors and VPs with children the same age as my grandchildren. These professionals may have had their first economic downturn, and are still smarting from the heavy lay-offs of the past couple of years. They aren't ready to commit to a new relationship, and their CFOs aren't confident enough about the financial picture to commit to the expense of a salary. As well, the documentation has traditionally been seen as a burdensome expense, a cost centre that takes away from profits, much like accounting and human resources.

To meet this new shift in perspective, we need to shift our perspectives. Technical communicators need to think more like entrepreneurs, think of ourselves as "free agents", and prove how investing in us will bring a return on investment for the product. We need to prove this, not just in "soft and fuzzy" terms, but in arguments that business people understand. We're more likely to find freelance, contract, and consulting opportunities than we are to find a job. We know that the user's point of view is important, and that we can affect the quality of the entire product, not just the documentation. But we haven't been very good at proving it in ways that can be quantified for the bean counters.

I can hear the next question in your mind: Where are these opportunities, and how do I tap into them? Herein lies the conundrum. By nature, perhaps, and by

numbers, certainly, technical communicators are introverts. On the Meyers-Briggs scale, the number one profession for INTPs is writer. This doesn't mean that we're shy or retiring, but it does mean that we tend not to like to engage in professional socializing. We shun small talk and would rather communicate by e-mail than by schmoozing with the executive crowd. In other words, we don't like to network. Ah yes, there's that word again, and here's how it plays out in the marketplace today and in the future.

> *Technical communicators need to think more like entrepreneurs, think of ourselves as*

We need to be able to look at our offerings differently, explain what we can contribute, and show how we enhance the product. We need to become comfortable with volunteering the cost-benefit analysis that makes companies want to write out a contract on the spot. We need to rewrite our resumes as profiles, to highlight what we can bring to the table, instead of documenting where we've been. Once we've done that, we need to network with the people who can lead us to the opportunities that exist, and the opportunities that are still just a gleam in a software developer's eye. I notice that we tend to organize get-togethers with our peers: other communicators and job seekers in technology professions. This is socializing, but it's not networking. These encounters rarely lead to the decision-makers. We need to work our professional selves into the same rooms where arguments are made, and where decisions are made. We need to develop relationships with people who want to know more about what we do, not because they do something similar, but because they can assess whether their companies need our services.

Statistics put out by various governments continue to point to technical communication as a growth profession, and as the market becomes more stabilized, there will again be more jobs. But we'll never return to the heyday of the 1990s, when employers faced such a shortage of professional staff that they wore their desperation on their sleeves. Meanwhile, we are in a perfect position to learn yet another new skill: marketing ourselves like the professionals we are.

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Approximately "Real World" Learning with the Hybrid Model

by Rachel Spilka, Associate Professor, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

> Rachel Spilka describes her model for teaching students to write in the new "real world" workplace: without supervision, using the latest technologies, and working with colleagues from around the world.

Most workplace professionals write documents in a fairly mature way. They typically write:

♦ Independently or with collaborators, without direct or constant supervision;

♦ With frequent interaction with team members at remote locations, and not just with those at their own division or company;

♦ With computers and other electronic equipment; and

♦ With the freedom to make important decisions about project and time management, such as determining when and how to interact with others, how to collaborate with irresponsible writing partners, how to resolve unexpected problems that arise, and how to meet deadlines despite mishaps and obstacles.

How can instructors of business and professional writing prepare students for the relative freedom and independence of this kind of thinking and writing?

Several years ago, I discovered the value of using the hybrid model to teach business and technical writing. Up to that time, while teaching in traditional classrooms, I wasn't able to simulate writing situations in workplace settings, or to expose students to the complexities of workplace writing. Sure, like many instructors, I tried innovative teaching methods such as routinely sending students out to "the real world" to conduct research or work on short-term service projects for actual clients. But my students still tended to work on projects with too much instructor oversight and supervision, to collaborate mostly in person with writers they knew well instead of collaborating from a distance with writers they barely knew, and to manage projects with regular instructor or peer input, instead of mostly on their own.

In the traditional class, I was there every week. I was monitoring everything. I was there constantly to answer student questions. In short, I was there too much. My students never had the opportunity to collaborate and write without my constant presence. With so much

instructor input and oversight, of course my students never quite managed to develop the level of maturity or responsibility or the kind of complex thinking and decision making that they would later be expected to demonstrate in full-time, post-graduate writing positions.

Then, in spring 2001, I used the hybrid model to teach advanced business writing at UW-Sheboygan. Most of the class was populated by nontraditional students with full-time jobs and family obligations, students with very busy lives. They enjoyed the hybrid course tremendously, because it gave them the freedom and flexibility to choose when and where to do their work.

I also enjoyed this class very much. One reason is that I discovered that it really is possible for academic courses to simulate complex workplace writing situations. While teaching this course, I would meet with students several weeks in a row to teach basic principles of writing. Then we would spend several weeks away from the classroom, so that the students could work on projects from start to finish all on their own.

I was somewhat accessible. If the students needed questions answered, they could email or call me. But because the work was done mostly online, the students developed many skills that they would need to use, later on, in workplace jobs. They became much more responsible for solving their own problems, and I encouraged that, because I wanted them to work on their own to the fullest extent possible without my help.

My students were now required to exercise the kind of maturity, responsibility, and flexibility necessary to initiate, sustain, and complete writing projects. They needed to use their own judgment to overcome the challenges of collaborating with people they hardly knew, in order to produce coherent, high-quality documents. And through Blackboard discussion forums, they were required to extend their thinking much further than in traditional face-to-face discussions. Students could reflect on their own ideas over a longer period of time and benefit from one another's responses. In fact, I had never before been able to elicit from the students the kind of high quality analysis and thinking that I could from my hybrid students through this new way of teaching. Students working online learn to explain their thoughts more completely, and some clearly gain a certain analytical distance from their initial ideas. As a result, these students produced much more thoughtful, tactful, and sensitive memos, letters, and reports than have students in my traditional, face-to-face classes.

I evaluated their work according to how well they could meet these challenges. For each writing project, I asked questions like these:

- Did the student demonstrate independent thinking and decision making, and limited reliance on the instructor?

- Did the student cope well with unexpected or "messy" problems?

- Did the student demonstrate the ability to manage their own time and their own projects?

- Did the student keep up with the work, even without the structure of a traditional class?

Whether they bring maturity to the hybrid class from the start, or acquire it as a product of the hybrid experience, students often do learn--and the instructor must actively encourage them in this--to do the independent, systematic, timely work that the hybrid requires. To my delight, all but two students in my class of 15 were able to handle the challenges of this "real world" learning extremely well. Even these two less mature students made progress by the course's end; the other 13 came to the course ready to handle this kind of challenge. They surpassed my expectations (and perhaps their own). All of the students did struggle to some extent. I noticed that they had a hard time starting up projects and keeping them going when their classmates would slack off or wouldn't participate regularly on Blackboard discussions. But they also demonstrated the ability to collaborate over a distance and to manage writing projects in ways that are fairly similar to those found in and across workplace settings. They grew to be responsible collaborators. As they moved from one project to the next, they improved their skills and displayed such qualities as good judgment, tactfulness, empathy, patience under difficult circumstances, and the ability to negotiate. All of these qualities they will have to demonstrate when they work and write in workplace settings.

To some extent, students can develop these qualities in a traditional classroom. For example, students in traditional classes also need to know how to start up and sustain writing projects and how to collaborate smoothly with people who don't pull their weight. But the hybrid model helps students develop the project and time management skills they will need to display when they have a job. It puts students into challenging situations, and the students know that a large portion of their grade is based on how well they fare in those situations. They have to meet high expectations, and if

they have trouble doing so, they have to be accountable for that.

This kind of education I could not have duplicated in a traditional class.

Rachael Spilka is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. She also serves as Coordinator of the UWM Graduate Program in Professional Writing.

The Esoteric Editor

by Karla Caldwell, Esoteric Co-Editor

Meet the New Editors

We would like to introduce the incoming *Lines & Letters* editors for the 2003-04 year, Nora Ebie and Erika Welickzo. Their inaugural issue will be July/Aug 2003. Be sure to check it out at the beginning of August.

Nora Ebie

Nora has been an NEOSTC member for one year. She works for the Cuyahoga Community College, Metro Campus, Distance Learning Center as an Information Support Specialist. Nora designs new pages and re-designs old pages, maintains, edits, and writes content for the Distance Learning Web site (http://dlc.tri-c.edu/). Additionally, she is developing a single-source solution for the Distance Learning course schedule for print and Web. She also is responsible for writing, maintaining, and monitoring content for a new Distance Learning Helpdesk Web site.

Nora became interested in technical communication from her years experience and interest in information technology and her skill and experience writing software documentation.

She decided to become a *Lines & Letters* editor because it would give her a chance to strengthen her writing ability, as her current position does not allow her to write in a strictly "technical" manner.

Nora hopes to continue the great job the current editors are doing with the printed *Lines & Letters Light* and the Web version of *Lines & Letters*.

Erika Welickzo

Erika has been an NEOSTC member for two years. She became interested in technical communication through working as a math teacher. In her teaching, she found herself trying to develop technical communication skills in her students as a critical component of the problem solving process. Erika still enjoys teaching math and is currently developing an alternative energy business.

Since Erika has had such great experiences with other NEOSTC members, she decided it was time to contribute on a more formal scale and volunteer as a newsletter editor. She looks forward to working with Nora to further develop *Lines & Letters* as a vital member resource.

We wish them the best of luck and look forward to their first issue!

Membership News

Welcome New Members

In March and April we added nine new members to our chapter. Please join Lines & Letters in welcoming:

♦ Felicia R. Blue

♦ Christine L. Cooney

♦ Glenn G. Goldney

♦ Deborah M. Johnson

♦ Joel Lantz

♦ Jennifer Noll

♦ Robert Radcliffe Radcliffe

♦ John Rummell

♦ Carla I. Sparks

Members transferring into the Northeast Ohio Chapter during March, April, and May included:

♦ Thomas P. Hudson (formerly of the Philadelphia Metro Chapter)

♦ Nancy L. Secrist (formerly of the Bowling Green Student Chapter)

♦ JoAnne Willett (formerly of the Cedarville University Student Chapter)

Special welcomes to all of you. We look forward to seeing you at upcoming meetings and events!

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter

Chapter Members Take Home International Awards

Both of our Awards of Distinction winners went on to take awards at the international level.

- Brett Lilley and Katie Stibora won an Award of Merit in the Training Materials category for "Maintaining and Troubleshooting Advanced SLC Applications using RSLogix 500 Software."

- Wendy Majikas and Katie Stibora won an Award of Distinction (!) in the Quick Reference Guides category for the "ControlLogix Controllers Troubleshooting Guide."

Click to see International Publications Awards winners. *[Link not valid as of 2017.]*

Distinguished Chapter Service Award

The Society for Technical Communication has long recognized the importance of the hard work and commitment of its chapter members. Without their energy and enthusiasm, the Society would cease to be the largest, most effective, and most prestigious organization of technical communicators in the world.

In 1988, the Society initiated the distinguished chapter service award, designed to recognize exemplary dedication to the chapter and its activities. The first awards were presented in 1989.

This year's Distinguished Chapter Service Award for the Northeast Ohio Chapter went to Jill McCauslin. Jill, along with being a former NEOSTC president, has made numerous contributions to the ongoing success of the chapter, from organizing the Technicom Conference to meeting and greeting members at meetings and networking lunches.

Chapter Membership Counts

The membership count as of May 31 was 169 for the NEOSTC.
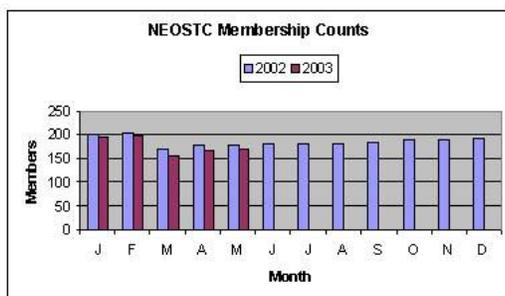
Total membership for STC International reached 18701.

If you or someone you know in the chapter has good news to share, e-mail the editors at lleditors@hotmail.com.

Regional Opportunities

Writing for Magazines - Telephone Seminar

Regardless of the type of writing you do, you should try your hand at writing articles for magazines. It's fun, profitable, and can be done by anyone who has a few extra hours here and there. This seminar is a practical look at how to write and sell magazine articles of all kinds.

- Date: 6/18/2003, 1-2:30 PM

- Location: Your Office

- Cost: $145.00 per site

For more information: www.stc.org/seminars.asp

Society Announcements

STC's 51st Annual Conference Call for Proposals

The call for proposals for STC's 51st Annual Conference was mailed as an insert with the April 2003 issue of Intercom. (A PDF version is also available on the STC Web site at http://www.stc.org/51stConf/index.asp.) The deadline for the Society office to receive proposals is August 1, 2003. The conference will be held May 9-12, 2004, in Baltimore, Maryland. The conference theme is "Navigating the Future of Technical Communication." For more information, please contact Buffy M. Bennett at buffy@stc.org.

2003 - 2004 Society Election Results

The Society for Technical Communication is pleased to announce the results of its election for 2003-2004.

- President: Thea Teich, a senior member with the Southwestern Ohio chapter, assumes the office of president after a year of service as first vice president.

- First Vice President: Andrea L. Ames, an associate fellow with the Silicon Valley chapter, assumes the office of first vice president after a year of service as second vice president.

- Second Vice President: Suzanna Laurent, an associate fellow with the Oklahoma chapter, has been elected second vice president.

- Treasurer: Mary Jo Stark, a senior member with the Rocky Mountain chapter, has been re-elected treasurer.

- Director-Sponsor, Region 2: Victoria Koster-Lenhardt, a senior member with the TransAlpine chapter, has been elected director-sponsor of Region 2.

- Director-Sponsor, Region 3: Beth Tanner, an associate fellow with the Middle Tennessee chapter, has been elected director-sponsor of Region 3.

- Nominating Committee:

  - Rita B. Johnson, a senior member with the Middle Tennessee chapter, has been elected to serve a two-year term on the nominating committee.

  - Christopher Juillet, a fellow with the Southeastern Michigan chapter, has been elected to serve a two-year term on the nominating committee.

Lines & Letters Editors

- Sharon Ambro (sharon.ambro@grc.nasa.gov)
- Karla Caldwell (kcaldwell@parker.com)