

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter



November/December 2001 • Volume 18 Issue 2

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On the Front Lines

Current events and announcements for NEOSTC.

If you have a story idea, e-mail the editors at lleditors@hotmail.com.

President's Notes

by Kris Henige, NOESTC President

I'd like to take the opportunity to explain how we select the locations for our evening meetings and networking lunches.

For evening meetings, there are three main considerations: accessibility, speaker convenience, and facilities.

According to the chapter mailing list, our nearly 200 members come from 14 counties. They come not just from Cleveland, but from Vermilion, Youngstown, Hiram, Wooster, Painesville, and even Erie, Pa.! We know we can't please everyone, so we try to make meetings as accessible to the greatest number of people as we can. For example, we try to have meetings in central locations near interstates, which brings me to the next consideration, speaker convenience.

In November, our speaker was a professor from Kent State University, so the meeting was held near Kent off I-76. Since we typically don't pay speaker fees or expenses for regular meetings, we believe it is important to make the location as convenient as possible for the speakers, who are being so generous with their time.

Having different meeting locations also allows for more diversity. While Kent was a long way for many Clevelanders, we did have attendees from the south and southeast areas who were unable to come to previous meetings that were held farther north.

The final consideration is facilities. The location we choose must allow food to be served, it must be open in the evening, and it must have a meeting room that holds 25-40 people. (These requirements eliminate many public libraries and company offices.) If necessary, it should be able to handle computers and audiovisual equipment.

For networking lunches, a main consideration is finding a restaurant that can handle 10-15 people at lunchtime (preferably with separate checks!). These are also held in a variety of locations around northeast Ohio, and they are a great way for members who cannot attend evening meetings to stay connected with the chapter

and other colleagues. To suggest a restaurant near you, contact Angie Dianetti.

Hope to see you in 2002!

Consensus Judging Teams Met on November 10

by Jeanette P. Evans, Competitions Co-Chair

About a dozen people met at the Eastern Campus of Tri-C on the morning of November 10 for NEOSTC consensus judging sessions. The campus proved to be an adequate location for the event. In addition to providing meeting rooms and catering services, the school let us use their computer facilities to view the online entries that we judged. I was surprised by what this beautiful new campus has to offer.

At the November 10 judging sessions, judging took place primarily in teams of three people each, as usual. The teams judged paper entries from the Middle Tennessee Chapter and online entries primarily from our chapter. Middle Tennessee is judging paper entries submitted to our chapter.

Most of the groups made their decisions for awards based on the discussions on Saturday. A few groups judged in telephone interviews before November 10. This year, like most years in the past, our judges had to complete a challenging number of entries.

Competition entrants got the benefit of receiving feedback and recognition from their peers. Judges got the benefit of seeing examples of current work. Judges also got the benefit of developing their abilities to evaluate technical communication products and spot problem areas.

If you have any questions or comments about the event or would like to be involved next year, please contact one of the committee members: Cheryl Bennett, Jeanette Evans, Lori Klepfer, Carol MacKay, and Gail Pogue. We are planning a banquet on May 17 to honor competition participants.

Introducing the NEOSTC CIC-SIG

by Barb Philbrick, NEOSTC CIC-SIG Manager

Introducing the Consulting and Independent Contracting Special Interest Group (CIC-SIG) of the Northeast Ohio Chapter of STC...

Yes, it's a mouthful, so we usually just shorten it to CIC-SIG (pronounced "kick sig"). A group of consultants in the Northeast Ohio chapter formed a local CIC-SIG last year, and we've been growing!

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So what is it and what do we do?

A little bit about SIGs in general:

For those of you that aren't familiar with special interest groups, SIGs are composed of STC members with common experiences and interests. They share their skills and knowledge with each other and with other STC members. SIGs are active at both the Society and local level. At the Society level, activity usually includes a newsletter and a list serve dedicated to members of the SIG. At the local level, activity usually consists of meetings of local members. Some of the SIGs are:

- ◆ Emerging Technologies
- ◆ Indexing
- ◆ Information Design
- ◆ Lone Writer
- ◆ Policies and Procedures
- ◆ Usability

SIGs cost \$5 per year to join. For more information about SIGS, see <http://www.stcsig.org/>.

General information about the CIC-SIG:

The CIC-SIG serves as a focal point for information about practicing technical communication as an independent contractor or consultant. It helps both new and seasoned independents practice their trade more effectively. The Society-level CIC-SIG includes over 2400 members. We have a newsletter (the Independent Perspective), a Web site (<http://www.stcsig.org/cic/index.html>), and a fairly active list serve (CICSIG-L).

So what are we doing locally?

We meet informally about once a month to network, share tips and professional practices, exchange leads and referrals, and benefit from each other's expertise, experiences, and contacts. Since we're a mix of new and experienced contractors, we cover a broad range of topics, from what you should do when starting up a business to sharing information on refining our sales techniques. The CIC-SIG also provides a handy network of people to contact when we run into a job that doesn't suit our skill sets -- we can refer the lead to someone else who does.

Last year, we held morning meetings about once a month. This year, we are meeting an hour or so before the regular STC meetings. Some of the possible topics for the CIC-SIG this year are writing for the Web,

techniques for getting business, sales, contracts, and estimating. Our local CIC-SIG also has a Web site (http://www.neostc.org/other_links/cicsig.htm) where we list any CIC-SIG member who requests it.

If you'd like more information about the CIC-SIG, please contact Barb Philbrick.

From the Desk of the Treasurer

by Dennis Verbiar, NEOSTC Treasurer

The chapter is operating within budget to date for this year, and we seem to be meeting all projections.

For up-to-date chapter financial information, contact Dennis Verbiar.

New Chapter E-mail List Provides Customizable Communication

by Karla Caldwell, Newsletter Co-Editor

PSSSSSST! Have you heard? The NEOSTC has an electronic mailing list (also called a listserv).

Chapter officers have been working to provide members with a easy-to-use, accessible form of electronic communication, and it looks like they've found the perfect answer in Lyris's e-mail list hosting service

The Lyris e-mail list, called stcneohio-l, is easy to get started and even easier to use. Two days ago, I joined stcneohio-l using the simple instructions from the chapter home page, and now I'm sending messages and getting answers to some tough questions from other technical writers who have the experience I don't.

I'm also first in line for opportunities within the chapter. My daily digest of all the posted messages has already informed me of training opportunities, chapter and regional programs, and even where to find vendors for software packages.

The best part about stcneohio-l is that I can customize the communication types I get. For example, my account is set to receive one e-mail daily that includes only messages that were posted in the last 24 hours. If I see a topic thread that I'd like to learn more about, it's easy to go to the Web and read the rest of the posted messages.

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Membership News

New NEOSTC members, membership status changes, and more.

Welcome New Members!

We'd like to personally welcome the following new members to the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the STC. If you see any of them at our meetings, be sure to introduce yourself and welcome them to the chapter.

- ◆ Alan Horvath
- ◆ Brian Baddour
- ◆ Jean Seitter Cummins
- ◆ Joe Jurczyk
- ◆ David H. Preston Jr.
- ◆ Monica M. Rini
- ◆ David J. Adams (transfer from Southeastern Michigan Chapter)

Congratulations New Senior Members!

We'd like to congratulate our newest group of STC senior members. To be a senior member, you must have 5 years membership in the STC.

- ◆ Stephanie Madden
- ◆ Laura Rios
- ◆ Timothy Yarris
- ◆ David Bihary

If you see any of them at our upcoming meetings be sure to congratulate them!

If you know a new member that we've missed or if you have some membership news, please let us know. Send messages for the editors.

Macromedia Overview at PPI

by Kim Lindsey, NEOSTC Secretary



Josh Healan of PPI speaks to NEOSTC members at the October meeting. Photo by Stephanie Webster.

After a time of light refreshments and networking, Cheryl Bennett encouraged everyone who could to help with judging the competition.

Josh Healan, M.I.S. Manager at PPI, presented an overview of Macromedia software tools. He demonstrated the function and features of Dreamweaver and Authorware, among others, and described typical uses for each. Audience participation further enhanced the presentation.

The evening concluded with brief tours of PPI's facilities.

KSU Information Architecture & Knowledge Management Program

by Karla Caldwell, Newsletter Co-Editor



Dr. Froehlich spoke about KSU's new masters program at the November meeting. Photo by Karla Caldwell

Froehlich explained the roots of the program stating that KSU had found the need for the IAKM degree due to the "transdisciplinary character of information and the rapid growth of information technology." To meet these needs, IAKM combines the business of knowledge management with the art of library science and

information design to produce "graduates with extensive and solid backgrounds in a variety of disciplines."

To develop this extensive and solid background, IAKM draws on expertise from all over the university. The IAKM program's eight core courses are taught by faculty from six different fields:

- ◆ Library and Information Science
- ◆ Management Information Systems
- ◆ Communication Studies
- ◆ Journalism and Mass Communication
- ◆ Visual Communication Design
- ◆ Mathematics and Computer Science

With a total of eight core courses (24 credits), four courses in a specialty concentration (12 credits), three courses outside the concentration (9 credits), and a master's project or thesis (3 credits), the hefty IAKM program comes to a total of 48 required credit hours. Currently, the degree offers three specialty concentrations:

Information Architecture: the art and science of organizing information and interfaces to help information seekers solve their information needs efficiently and effectively, primarily within networked and web-based environments.

Information Use: information ergonomics is key: adapting the information system or sources to fit the environment of users and their information needs so as to achieve goals of maximum access, usability, efficiency and effectiveness.

Knowledge Management: takes a comprehensive, systematic approach to the information assets of an organization by identifying, capturing, collecting, organizing, indexing, storing, integrating, retrieving and sharing them.

The first class to begin the IAKM degree coursework this fall largely met faculty expectations as far as previous experience and backgrounds. Roughly half the students were recently graduated with degrees in liberal arts. These students intended to use IAKM as a means to begin a career in the knowledge industry or to pursue doctoral degrees. The other half of the students enrolled are currently professionals in the knowledge industry looking to improve skill sets or to learn new techniques.

"Because roughly half of the expected students are professionals with full-time employment," Froehlich

explained, "the course schedule has been planned so that at least four of the eight core courses will be offered in the evenings during each semester."

Froehlich concluded by listing some of the professions that he hoped newly graduated IAKM students would take including:

- ◆ Web Designers
- ◆ Systems Analysts
- ◆ Digital Archivists
- ◆ User Experience Designers
- ◆ Information Officers
- ◆ Knowledge Architects

For more complete information on coursework, faculty, and program requirements, or to apply for spring enrollment in the IAKM program, visit <http://IAKM.Kent.edu>.

For a brief description of the program and coursework, see the IAKM brochure.

Nov/Dec Networking Lunches

The Dec Networking Lunch will be held Dec 7 at the Don Pablo's, 145 Montrose West in Copley.

The Jan Networking Lunch will be held Jan 10 at the East Side Grille, 8575 E. Washington in Bainbridge.

The Feb Networking Lunch will be held Feb 6 at the Ground Round, 6652 Macedonia Commons Blvd. in Macedonia.

The March Networking Lunch will be held March 8 at Cecil B's, 4754 Ridge Road in Brooklyn.

Lunches begin at noon. Contact Angie Dianetti to RSVP.

The Esoteric Editor

by Sharon Ambro, Esoteric Co-Editor

In my quest to find interesting and relevant articles to reprint in Lines & Letters, I stumbled upon a couple very useful technical communication Web sites:

1. EServer Technical Communication Library
<http://tc.eserver.org/>
2. Suite101.com: Technical Writing
<http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/8567>

I thought we should share with you not only the great articles we found using these resources but also the resources themselves.

The EServer Technical Communication Library is a collection of more than a thousand technical communications writings. The site categorizes these writings into academic, articles, books, careers, design, humor, journals, organizations, random, recent, reference, and resources. It also offers a detailed site map to better narrow down a search. When you choose a category, several writings are displayed. For each writing, the site includes the title, a link to the writing, a one-sentence description, the author, the source, and a rating from one to five stars.

Two things I really like about this site (besides the vast resources) are:

1. I can add sites to the library.
2. Each time I clicked on a link, a new window popped up with the site, so I didn't have to continually use the back button on my browser (This made my search more organized).

Suite101's Technical Writing page is also a wealth of information. This site includes articles, Web site links, and discussions. The articles are organized from most recent to least recent and include the title, a link to the article, and a few-sentence description that mentions the author. At the end of each article, you can rate it and participate in a discussion about it.

Two things I really like about this site are:

1. I can easily e-mail an article to someone.
2. It was easy to contact article authors.

I encourage you to check out these Web sites too. Let us know what you think, share with us some of your favorite resources, or just ramble on about anything you want (preferably about technical communications). Karla and I created this new section not only to share our own "esoteric" thoughts, but for you, our recondite readers, to share yours as well. Please send letters to the editors.

The Battle of the Screen Capture Programs

by Karla Caldwell, Newsletter Co-editor

After she takes the screen shot, she reopens the image in Adobe PhotoShop™ for editing, and finishes by placing the image into Word™, PageMaker™, or Lotus Notes™. Overall, she gets great results.

On the other hand, if you have a look at my Compaq Deskpro™, you'll see that SnagIt™ is my "weapon of choice." I work on a lot of the same types of projects as Margaret, but I also add to my docket some HTML/Web Design and graphic design for everything from manual covers to PowerPoint™ presentations. Like Margaret, I make the screen captures using my preferred capture program and retouch/resave the image using PhotoShop.

I spent a little time exploring the two packages and found out that on the surface, they're a lot alike. Both programs offer the garden variety of formats for saving screen captures (BMP, GIF, JPEG, TIFF, and TGA), and in both cases special tools for optimizing output are available. For example, when saving an image as a bitmap (BMP) using either program you can select a bit depth anywhere between one and 32.

Both programs also offer a variety of ways to capture information onscreen. You can select from full screen, selected region, active window, and so on. Both programs also boast the ability to capture screens from popular video games that use complex images from DirectX, 3Dfx, Direct3D, etc. Finally, both applications will accept input from a TWAIN source like a scanner.

However, on top of these capture options, SnagIt offers two more interesting features: the ability to capture ASCII text in programs that don't have text select options and the ability to capture animated sequences of onscreen activity for storage in an AVI file.

Both applications also have image editing tools. In HyperSnap, however, the tools are built into the main interface. To access the tools for SnagIt you'll need to toggle between the capture program and SnagIt Studio. Another issue that comes up when using SnagIt is that the Studio uses a proprietary file format (*.SSD) meaning that you must use the Import/Export functions in order to save files in widely-used formats like BMPs and graphics interchange format (GIFs).

The image editing tools provided by the two programs generally offer the same functionality, but SnagIt wins out for better usability. When you add to a captured image using SnagIt Studio, your addition retains its autonomy from the rest of the screen capture. For example, when adding an annotation using the text tool, SnagIt maintains the "handles" on the corners of the annotation that allow you to move it anywhere on the work area.

At first glance, it looks like HyperSnap has about twice as many image editing tools as SnagIt, but closer

inspection shows that SnagIt uses common Windows-style menu commands and tool bars to make the two applications comparable. The only image editing functionality that HyperSnap does have over SnagIt is the availability of PhotoShop-like filters that allow you to blur, shear, and mirror the image.

The last feature of note in this article is SnagIt's "Catalog View." On more than one occasion, I've come face to face with a folder full of images with unknown content. Rather than open the images one-by-one to see what they are, you can use SnagIt's Catalog View to see thumbnail images of each of the files in the folder.

The bottom line on the programs is that they both sell for less than \$40, and either program is an improvement over editing ALT + PRINT SCREEN captures in Painter. SnagIt will still be the choice for screen captures on my computer but I won't hesitate to use HyperSnap in the future.

TechSmith's SnagIt

www.techsmith.com

\$39.95 -- free trial program available

Hyperionics HyperSnap

www.hyperionics.com

\$35.00 -- free trial program available

Re-evaluating Your Skills

by Mike Bates, Region 4 Director-Sponsor

Given our current economic conditions, it is proving very difficult for a lot of technical communicators to find new positions as either contractors or full-time employees. It is important now, more than ever, to look closely at the core skills we have and can offer our future employers. Almost all of you that I have talked to are technical communicators who develop online help and hardcopy documentation. You are writers, editors, and managers. Many of you understand the intricacies of the tools of the trade like Adobe FrameMaker and RoboHelp from eHelp. You understand the products so well that you can troubleshoot the problems faster than the product support teams.

These are hard skills. But, take a look at the software skills that you have to offer. You have been trained not as masters of the tools of the day but as information developers. You have the skills necessary to work with human factors engineers and market analysts to conduct ethnographic studies, focus groups, and contextual

inquiries. You can write a user and task analysis document and then work with your lead development engineers to define the vision of your next generation product. Once the vision is defined, you are able to create cases which define how your customers want to work. These use cases are then easily transposed into a low-fidelity prototype of your next generation product or service.

My message is simple. Look beyond what you are doing today. The highly skilled writers of today are transitioning into the content providers of tomorrow. Whether you are looking for a new position or are looking at more efficient ways to work within your current position, consider how you can transition your soft skills back into the application lifecycle. You may find yourself in higher demand than you think.

Mike Bates is the Manager of Information Architecture at Rockwell Automation and Region 4 Director-Sponsor.

Adding to Your Tool Box

by Paula Puffer, Freelance/Contract Technical Writer

Teaching yourself is the first option. One way to teach yourself is to download a trial version of the software program you want to learn, if it is available. Many popular programs, such as Macromedia's Dreamweaver or Blue Sky Software's RoboHelp, have trial versions available for download and evaluation. In most cases, you can use the program and save the projects as you would normally. However, some programs do not allow you to do this. This approach works well to learn the basics of the tools and if you pair the demo with a good how-to book, you can end up with basic knowledge of how the software works along with some very good tips from the books.

Another option is to take a class. Many different class types and price ranges are available. The first type of class is a workshop. Workshops for a specific product can be as short as a couple days or up to a week. Workshops are focused on the product and are generally the most expensive option. Depending on the type of workshop, the attendee may receive a certificate of completion.

College courses are another type of class that you can take. Many community colleges offer classes for continuing education purposes. The downside of this option is that it takes a number of weeks to complete. However the benefits are that you get a longer period of time to hone your skills through the assignments and

that your employer reimburses you for a part of the tuition and books through education benefits.

The final class type is online classes. These may be offered through a university, but often you can find them through job sites such as monster.com, or at other online learning venues such as u4all.com. There may be a long time commitment depending on the course and the thoroughness of the instructor, however the downside is that there is no guarantee of how good the classes may actually be.

Volunteering may also be a way to learn a particular skill. Most not-for-profit organizations need volunteers who can help them with promotional materials. They often need the skills that a technical writer has and they are often willing to let you use the pieces as part of your portfolio. The downside of trying to gain skills in this manner is that many not-for-profits do not have money to spend on expensive software.

The final way to gain experience is through on-the-job training. Even though you don't have experience on a specific piece of hardware, an employer may still hire you if you have experience with a similar piece of software. For example, if someone has experience with Forehelp, she may be hired to work on a Robohelp project because she understands the basic principles of the writing help.

These are just a few options for gaining new skills for your technical communicator's tool box. No matter which option you choose, the you'll end up with a new project for your portfolio and a new skill that you didn't have before.

Paula Puffer is a freelance/contract technical writer in Houston, TX. This and other articles can be found at Paula's Web site <http://www.hyperlinkservices.com/psquared>.

Worst Manual Contest

by Jim Desmond

Just a reminder for the holiday season: when all else fails, read the manual.

Have you ever been so frustrated with a set of instructions that you cursed the manual and wished you had never bought the thing in the first place? How about when you tried to use the help function on your computer and every click of the mouse got you to a new set of decisions, none of which applied to your problem?

Does this sound familiar? How about \$500 for your frustration? Technical Standards, Inc. (TSI), a Southern California documentation services company, is offering \$500 for the winning entry in their Worst Manual Contest.

This is the second year of TSI's annual contest. Last year's winning entry was a set of directions for exercise equipment that included statements such as "if you feel vomitive" and "can't relax at any time when you exercising."

To enter, send a copy of the excerpt of the manual or set of instructions that is hard to understand, poorly written, or just plain wrong. The winning entry could have bad grammar, too much legalese, poor translation, or missing steps. Check your holiday gifts for potential entries.

If your entry is the worst, you win \$500. The deadline for submissions is January 31, 2002. Visit the TSI Web site at www.tecstandards.com for complete contest rules.

"We thought we would have fun with this contest. Everyone has had trouble with a manual," says Michelle Wier, Director of Operations, "That's why we started TSI. People like products they understand how to use, and good technical documentation reduces the need for technical support. That's why good manuals are so important."

Technical Standards, Inc. specializes in documentation staffing. Since 1993, TSI has provided writers and editors to the high-tech community who produce printed documents, online Help, and Internet documentation. Technical Standards, Inc. is located in San Marcos, California.

Structured Writing Workshop

- ◆ How do I write modular content without knowing the context in which modules will be presented?
- ◆ What information types do we need to use for our content?
- ◆ Is it possible to have too many different information types?
- ◆ Will I lose my creativity if I just write modules instead of creating an entire book or help system?

These and more questions occur every time I talk about content-management and single-source strategies to an audience of writers, editors, and managers. Everyone wants to understand what it will be like to write in a

content-management environment. People who are willing to embrace a new way of working want to know what to expect. Those anxious to expand their career options want to learn what the new options are all about. They are prepared to take on new roles like information architect and repository manager, once they understand what the new roles are.

To respond, I designed the new structured-writing seminar as an extension of my long-standing Single-Source Strategy seminar. Structured writing gets closer to the decisions that writers, editors, and project managers need to make. The emphasis is on your own materials with much hands-on participation. From information types through content units, you discuss with teammates and other attendees what the best solutions might be. You tackle granularity and semantic markup, as well as the implications of XML.

If you want to understand how your job is changing and how to respond creatively, join me in this two-day seminar. The best course? Bring a small team so that you can begin to make decisions together.

- ◆ When: January 31-February 1, 2002 8:30 AM to 4:30 PM
- ◆ Where: Arlington, VA
- ◆ Fee: Special rate of \$725, almost 40% off the standard rate
- ◆ To Register: Online or by phone at 303-234-0123
- ◆ Instructor: JoAnn Hackos

Student Competition Opportunity

By STC International Office

The International Student Technical Communication Competition (ISTCC) is accepting entries for the 2001-2002 year. You can retrieve an updated copy of the Rules for the International Student Technical Communication Competition (AD-57-2001) from the STC web site at www.stc.org, or you may contact the STC office directly for a paper copy. Of special note is the addition of the category of student website entries in this year's competition.

Chapters that do not sponsor their own competitions can send entries to other sponsoring chapters. The updated Rules for the International Student Technical Communication Competition provides details concerning the entry requirements for the international competition, as well as guidance for use in sponsoring a local chapter competition. It also includes an updated entry form.

Please use this updated form for your entries. Contact me at 813-854-5971 or karenlynn@mindspring.com if you need any additional information.

Estimating Editorial Tasks: A Five-Step Method

by Robin A. Cormier, Vice President for Publications Services, EEI Communications

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Accurate time estimates are essential to projecting the costs of doing work, whether it's for external clients or other departments within an organization. In the olden days, it didn't seem to matter how many hours were spent editing, as long as all the errors were caught. Now, managers everywhere are looking for ways to cut costs; they want to know in advance how long things will take so they can monitor their increasingly strained budgets. Publications are often a prime target for cost cuts.

Productivity guidelines help everybody

But how can we calculate how long it will take? "But how can we calculate how long it should take?" Managers and editors alike can benefit from a system that makes it possible to estimate costs and set reasonable performance goals. But editors in particular often say that it's difficult for them to look at a stack of pages and come up with a time estimate. There are so many variables, they say, that even a ballpark estimate can be tricky to calculate.

Everyone would agree that publications work is subject to many unknowns, but it's still possible to pin down key aspects of a project, apply educated guesswork, and calculate a relatively accurate time estimate. Here's a five-step method for arriving at that elusive number.

1. Define your process by creating a task list.

First, list all the steps in your editorial process. Most projects include more than just editing -- you also have to make photocopies, write cover memos to authors, type up query lists and style sheets, make backup copies of disks, and do whatever else comes with the territory in your organization. Even though you may not perform every step on every project (for example, some projects may begin with a meeting with the author, while others may not), you should create a master list of every possible task and use it as a starting point whenever you

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do an estimate. This list will help ensure that you don't forget a step. Make sure you include on your master task list any administrative tasks that usually take more than 15 minutes.

2. Include levels of edit on your master task list so that you can specify a level of effort and the appropriate productivity rate for each project.

At EEI, we have three general levels: proofreading, copyediting, and substantive editing. You may prefer to call the levels light, medium, and heavy. In most organizations, not all documents receive the same level of scrutiny, and your estimate will depend on how much help the document needs (or how much you're allowed to give). If the person requesting the estimate doesn't specify a level of edit, read through portions of the text and recommend one.

3. Calculate how much material you have to edit.

There is really no such thing as a standard "page" of text. These days most authors have access to a wide range of fonts and formatting options, and the number of words on a page can vary greatly.

For example, a 50-page draft can be anywhere from 10,000 to 30,000 words or more, depending on the format and type size. So you can't simply count pages and get an accurate estimate (unless, of course, every manuscript comes to you in exactly same format and type size).

Here's the formula for converting the actual page count into "draft-equivalent" pages:

- ◆ First pick a common denominator. That is, set a number of words per page that will become your standard definition of a "draft page." A 250-word page is typical for a double-spaced draft with one-inch margins and 12-point type.
- ◆ Pick a representative page in the document you're estimating and count the number of lines on the page.
- ◆ Then count the number of words in a typical line and multiply by the number of lines to get an average number of words per page.
- ◆ Count the number of pages (count partial pages as half pages), and multiply the total by the number of words per page.
- ◆ Divide the result by 250 words (or your standard draft equivalent), and that's the number of draft-equivalent pages in the document.

- ◆ Don't try to be absolutely precise by counting every word in a document. If you get carried away with assessing every last detail, you can easily spend almost as much time estimating a project as it would take to complete it.

4. Establish a productivity rate for each function on your master task list.

Start with a standard productivity rate and adjust it up or down, depending on the type of material to be edited. For functions that don't easily lend themselves to hourly rates, establish standard times (for example, 15 minutes to write a cover memo; 30 minutes to type up a style sheet and query list). To keep your estimates from getting too complicated, round all times to the nearest quarter-hour.

5. Put it all on a spreadsheet.

Let your computer do the math. Create a spreadsheet with formulas for each function on your master task list so that all you have to do is select the relevant tasks and type in the number of pages. The formulas can be set to divide the number of pages by the productivity rate for each function and give you total hours for each function as well as a grand total for the project.

Create a spreadsheet with formulas for each function.

Save the spreadsheet while the project is in progress so you can easily recalculate if the specifications change along the way.

Reevaluate your system frequently

The task list and productivity rates should be reviewed at least once a year. It's easy to think of established rates as gospel, but circumstances and processes change. For example, once editors spend a year or so working on documents that deal with a particular subject, they will pick up speed and be able to spot errors in industry-specific terminology more quickly. Hence, their productivity rate will increase.

Likewise, if you add tasks to your editorial process -- for example, requiring editors to code text as they edit -- their productivity rate will decrease. Keep a record of actual hours spent on individual projects and compare the data with your estimates so you can watch for trends that indicate it's time to rework your estimating system.

Continually educate your customers (or coworkers) about the variables that affect the editorial process. Be sure they understand that if the scope of work changes, the estimate will change as well. If, for example, you're

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asked to incorporate someone else's revisions to text you've already edited, you'll also have to check to be sure that those revisions didn't introduce any errors or inconsistencies -- and that will take additional time.

Even the most experienced estimators still look at each new stack of pages and say to themselves, "I have no idea how long this will take!" Then they go work on their spreadsheets. The more you estimate editorial projects, the easier it becomes.

Robin A. Cormier is vice president for publication services at EEI Communications. She is also the author of Error-Free Writing: A Lifetime Guide to Flawless Business Writing and an associate editor of The New York Public Library Writer's Guide to Style and Usage. To order those and other books directly from EEI Press, call 800-683-8380 or use our secure online order form.

STC Policy: Campaigning for Society Office

By STC International Office

STC seeks to provide a fair election environment. As the 2002 election season approaches, candidates and chapters should review the following guidelines regarding campaign activity.

Individual Candidates

Individuals may actively campaign for Society office. Appropriate activities include visiting chapters, attending regional conferences, and publishing articles in chapter publications or on chapter or personal Web sites. (Upon request, the Society office will provide candidates with contact information for newsletter editors and webmasters.) Note: Every year, the February issue of Intercom includes a Q & A with the candidates for second vice president.

While candidates may solicit votes in person, they are specifically requested NOT to campaign using direct mail marketing or mass e-mail. (Nominees may, of course, directly contact personal acquaintances, including elected Society officers, regarding their campaigns.) Please note that negative campaigning is strictly prohibited.

Chapters

Individual members (excluding all those STC members who hold any elective office within STC) are free to endorse "favorite daughters or sons" or other candidates. However, upon request, chapter newsletters must provide balanced coverage to all candidates. For instance, if a chapter newsletter publishes a campaign article by one candidate, it must grant his or her opponent's request to publish an article, and must do so in a timely manner. Likewise, if a chapter Web site "links" to a candidate's Web site, it must, on his or her request, link to the opponent's Web site.

STC Resources

Except for labels and material supplied by the STC office, or articles in regularly scheduled STC publications, STC resources should not be used to promote the candidacy of any individual.

Please use these general guidelines to direct your activities during the campaign season. If you have any questions regarding the suitability of campaign activity, please contact the STC office at stc@stc.org.

Region Re-Alignment / STC Region Shift

From STC International Office

STC is a movin' and a shakin' things up a little with a region re-alignment

Chapters Changing Regions

- ◆ Central New Jersey moves to Region 1
- ◆ Philadelphia moves to Region 1
- ◆ France moves to Region 2
- ◆ Sweden moves to Region 2
- ◆ The Netherlands moves to Region 2
- ◆ Transalpine moves to Region 2
- ◆ United Kingdom moves to Region 2
- ◆ Pittsburgh moves to Region 4
- ◆ Intermountain moves to Region 5
- ◆ Brigham Young University Student moves to Region 5
- ◆ Utah State University Student moves to Region 5
- ◆ Republic of China moves to Region 7
- ◆ Singapore moves to Region 7
- ◆ Australia moves to Region 8
- ◆ Southern Nevada moves to Region 8

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Qualified Judges Sought for International Technical Publications Competition (ITPC) and International Technical Art Competition (ITAC)

By The STC International Office

Judging in the competitions is a great way to get a sneak preview on what your colleagues are doing and to network with interesting people in a relaxed, fun atmosphere. You might even learn something new!

The judges for each team are responsible for evaluating the entries and for providing each participant with constructive feedback. Awards are given to deserving entries based on the consensus of the judging team. STC will provide transportation and lodging expenses for judges to attend the consensus judging meeting in Houston, Texas, April 5, 2002.

The ITPC and ITAC judge coordinators are currently recruiting both new and experienced international judges. In addition, we want to have at least one judge from each region.

To be considered for a judge position, you must meet AT LEAST TWO of the following criteria:

- ◆ Master's degree or higher in technical communication, graphic arts or design, or a related field
- ◆ Teaching experience in technical communication, graphic arts or design, or related field (five years full-time or seven years adjunct or part-time)
- ◆ Seven years experience in the technical communication, graphic arts or design, or related field (art judges must have experience in the visual aspects of technical communication)
- ◆ Strong publishing background (for publications: 5 articles or 1 book; for art: published graphic art or document design work)
- ◆ Winner of an STC or other communication, graphic arts, or graphic design competition award
- ◆ Certification by a communication-related professional organization (for example, in the art competition, certification by or association with a graphic arts or design organization)
- ◆ Senior membership or higher in STC

To apply to be an international judge, contact Kit Brown (Publications Competition) or Patricia McDaniels (Art Competition) by December 15, 2001. You will be notified

of your judging status in January, and will have approximately one month to complete your evaluations before the consensus judging meeting.

New Canadian Issues SIG Signing Up New Members

By Alexa Campbell, SIG manager

In May 2001, STC formed a new SIG devoted to improving communication among its Canadian members. I am Alexa Campbell, a long-time member of STC who is serving as SIG manager. I'm inviting Canadian STC members, and others who are interested in Canadian issues, to join this new group.

Right now, STC members can sign up for the Canadian Issues SIG for free until the end of the year. SIG membership dues will be billed in the 2002 STC dues notices scheduled to be sent out in November. To sign up for SIG membership, email your request to the STC membership department (membership@stc.org).

Keys to the success of any organization are the enthusiasm and support of its members. I hope many of you will step forward to help make this one of the most effective SIGs in STC. We can use volunteers to fill important positions of newsletter editor, webmaster, listserv coordinator and membership coordinator. The tasks are not hard nor take a lot of time; however, they will take your commitment.

We already have established a listserv that will be a good source for exchanging information and ideas. To subscribe to the list, go to the registration page and click the "Join stc-ca-l" button. Complete the information and you're there. (Note that the l is a lower case L.)

If you have any questions about the Canadian Issues SIG, please contact me, Alexa Campbell.

About the Canadian Issues SIG

Here is some information about the Canadian Issues SIG, its mission, its name, and its goals.

Mission statement

The Canadian Issues SIG fosters communication among Canadian members of STC to allow them to exchange information and to discuss issues within STC that

- ◆ Are of a particular concern to Canadian members
- ◆ Arise by reason of political, socioeconomic, and geographical constraints because the members reside in Canada

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Rationale for name

The name reflects the membership of the SIG, and carries on the title of the Canadian Issues Committee, which was formed in 1990. In the ten years of its operation, this committee helped identify and resolve many issues of concern to Canadian members of STC. Membership in the SIG is not necessarily restricted to Canadian members but is open to anyone with an interest in the special needs and concerns of Canadian STC members.

Areas of interest

The Canadian Issues SIG explores the following areas of interest:

- ◆ Increasing the technical communications profile and reputation across Canada
- ◆ Monitoring, helping shape, and publicizing technical communication education in Canada
- ◆ Helping evolve standards to encourage a consistency in the technical communications courses offered across Canada
- ◆ Communicating the value of technical communication to business, industry and academe
- ◆ Enabling educational institutions, industry and practitioners to share ideas about technical communication
- ◆ Promoting a professional development program for Canadian technical communicators, by making it easier to advertise such programs

Goals

The following are the goals of the Canadian Issues SIG:

- ◆ To link Canadian chapters, which are spread out geographically, and which lack a unified voice in STC internationally
- ◆ To provide opportunities for Canadian members to communicate about needs, concerns and issues that are unique to Canada by virtue of geography, economics or politics
- ◆ To provide a venue for promoting professional development activities for Canadian members