

Lines & Letters

Northeast Ohio STC Newsletter



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On the Front Lines

President's Notes

by Beth Williams, NEOSTC President



I wanted to let everyone know of a few items of interest to NEOSTC members both at the international and the chapter level. As we're getting close to the end of the year, and with the holidays approaching, here are a couple of strategies to make sure you get the most value out of your STC dollars.

Telephone seminars - A telephone seminar is like a large conference call in which the speaker makes a presentation over the phone. Upcoming seminars are listed at <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>. The NEOSTC chapter will subsidize these calls if we get enough members interested in attending. Also, if any of your companies are interested in sponsoring a seminar, this is a great way to inexpensively train your employees, help your STC chapter, and market your organization. Please take a look and respond to me bwilliams@software.rockwell.com if you are interested in attending or sponsoring a telephone seminar.

NEOSTC Listserv - The NEOSTC listserv is an e-mail mailing list available to all chapter members. The listserv was established to provide another way for members to communicate and network with each other. Please consider joining the listserv to receive meeting announcements, and for the opportunity to discuss technical communication issues with other chapter members. This listserv does not generate a lot of traffic (a couple of messages a day on average), so please do not think joining the listserv is going to fill up your inbox! We are considering cutting down on printed meeting announcements, so the listserv is a great way to receive chapter information and quickly update your calendar. Instructions for joining the listserv can be found at <http://www.neostc.org/official/listserv.htm>. [NOTE: As of 2015, the chapter listserv has been supplanted by our LinkedIn presence. Please refer to the [current chapter website](#) for details.]

Local meetings and seminars - Please attend the annual NEOSTC Happy Hour at the Winking Lizard in Independence on Dec. 17. New members of the chapter will be collecting \$5 or three cans of food for the local food bank, so please be prepared to make a donation. Also, we are planning a joint meeting with the Pittsburgh and Youngstown State chapters after the first of the year (tentatively Saturday, Jan. 18). Region 4 Director-Sponsor Mike Bates will present a usability workshop,

and everyone will have an opportunity to talk with other members in our region. Please check the calendar often for information on these upcoming events.

Members-only section - The international STC web site has a new members-only section that can be accessed at <http://www.stc.org/>. The jobs database, publications search, membership directory, and the annual salary survey are some of the areas that are now only available to STC members. And finally, please consider renewing your membership dues online through the members-only section of the Web site. Not only will this save a tree, it will also cut down on the international office's printing costs. You can renew dues online at <http://www.stc.org/renew.asp>.

Happy holidays!

Be a Judge for the Student Competition

by Karla Caldwell, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

Bege Bowers, chair of the international student competition committee for our chapter, is looking for two to three volunteers to help judge the student entry for our regional division (Northeast Ohio and Manitoba, Canada). Only one entry was received this year, so it should not take a substantial amount of time to do the judging.

Bege will send judges the entry and judging form so that they can judge the entry at their convenience. Each judge must fill out the one-page judging form and write a few paragraphs of praise and constructive criticism for the entry. Judging forms and written responses are due back by Dec. 15.

If you are willing to serve as a judge, please send the following to Bege Bowers information within the next few days:

- ◆ your name
- ◆ your mailing address
- ◆ your e-mail address
- ◆ your fax number
- ◆ your phone number
- ◆ the field in which you received your undergraduate or graduate degree your job title

Bege will then contact two or three of you and ask you to help with the judging. (STC stipulates that the judges have to represent a certain mix of college degrees, professional experience, etc., so don't be offended if you

volunteer and then don't get asked to judge. Selections will be made to fit the mix specified by STC.)

If you know of other chapter news or volunteer opportunities, e-mail the editors at lleditors@hotmail.com.

December Meeting Preview: Holiday Happy Hour at the Winking Lizard

A sampling of appetizers will be available. The cost is \$5 per person or three cans/boxes of non-perishable food items. Our membership committee is organizing all cash and food to be donated to the Cleveland Foodbank (please make all checks payable to the Cleveland Foodbank, Inc.). For more information, see <http://www.clevelandfoodbank.com>.

- ◆ Date: 12/17/2002
- ◆ Time: 4:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.
- ◆ Place: Winking Lizard Tavern, 6901 Rockside Road #9, (216-524-2226)
- ◆ Directions: 1) I-77 to Rockside Road exit. 2) East on Rockside Road.
- ◆ Price: \$5 and/or three cans/boxes of food for the Cleveland Foodbank donation.
- ◆ Menu: Appetizer Assortment
- ◆ RSVP: By Dec. 16 to Stephanie Webster at swebster@ppipubs.com

November Meeting Wrap-Up: E-Learning Concepts, Strategies, and Tools

by Sharon Ambro, NEOSTC Co-Editor

To begin the presentation, Klepfer defined e-learning as education, training, information, communication, collaboration, and knowledge management all delivered via technology. She stated that businesses are turning to e-learning to reduce costs as well as increase employee productivity. Companies no longer have travel and lodging costs for employees going to training classes. Also, employees can stay at their desks longer since they don't have to leave to "go to" training class — it's right there on their computers.

Businesses also find e-learning to be more beneficial than traditional training classes because they can tailor the training to the specific needs of each employee. Employees can pick and choose appropriate training

modules; whereas, skipping irrelevant parts of an in-person training session is more difficult.

In her presentation, Klepfer discussed these aspects of e-learning:

- ◆ Asynchronous
- ◆ Synchronous
- ◆ Virtual classrooms
- ◆ Computer-Based Training (CBT)
- ◆ Web-Based Training (WBT)
- ◆ Blended learning
- ◆ Learning Management Systems (LMS)
- ◆ Learning Content Management System (LCMS)
- ◆ Content Management System (CMS)
- ◆ Learning Objects
- ◆ Shareable Course Object Reference (SCORM)
- ◆ The Aviation Industry CBT Committee (AICC)
- ◆ Knowledge Management System (KMS)

Go to the [slides of Klepfer's presentation](#) for more details on the items listed above.

Klepfer also discussed several considerations for implementing e-learning. She stressed that IT management support is critical to any e-learning project. For instance, IT needs to support the tools and the delivery medium of the e-learning project or else the e-learning can't be delivered to its audience. In addition, e-learning developers need to take into consideration available bandwidth, end-user PCs, and compliance to e-learning standards (SCORM and AICC). Finally, to have a successful e-learning project, e-learning developers need to consider organizational readiness. Are your end users PC literate? Will management allow employees to train at their desks? Or, will employees constantly be pulled away to tend to day-to-day duties, limiting the effectiveness of the training?

To wrap-up her presentation, Klepfer also discussed the skills needed to develop e-learning and resources where you can learn more about e-learning. Please check out Klepfer's slides for more information.

Lori Klepfer is NEOSTC vice-president and a senior member of STC. She is president of LJK Consulting (www.ljkconsulting.com).

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October Meeting Wrap-Up: WebWorks Publisher and WebWorks WordHelp

by Karla Caldwell, NEOSTC Co-Editor

According to Bushick, Quadralay's newest products may be just the power technical writers need to "break through the single-source roadblock." Wordhelp and Publisher are single-source publishing tools that output native FrameMaker™ and Word™ files to print, Internet, and numerous online help formats (including Quadralay's own WebWorks Help™).

Single-sourcing with Quadralay's applications is repurposing in its purest form. "When you import or export, you break the single-source model," Bushick explained. Wordhelp and Publisher don't use imports or exports; rather, they allow the user to work from one source, customize that source, reuse it, and output to various formats.

WebWorks Publisher Professional is the heavy-duty version of the WebWorks application. According to Bushick, many communications departments do well with one copy of Professional (so that templates can be customized) and run all other users as clients.

Details on Quadralay's products can be found at their Web site <http://www.webworks.com>. Training is also available through WebWorks University (<http://www.quadralay.com/training/>).

STC Telephone Seminar Wrap-Up

by Karla Caldwell, NEOSTC Co-Editor

Telephone seminarThe session began with competencies inventory where Billé asked participants to rate themselves on hard and soft skills from help development to adult learning theory. Throughout the seminar, she returned to the competencies list and compared the competencies expected for an instructional designer to those of a technical writer while suggesting ways participants could boost their own ratings. To further explain her point, Billé provided sample resumes from instructional designers showing a wide gamut of skill sets.

[Billé's handout](#) also included a detailed collection of references for professional associations in the field of instructional design.

She concluded the seminar with a discussion of the tools, education, and career development strategies a future instructional designer should recognize and use.

Notable tools included Authorware™, Toolbook™, Camtasia™, Director™, NetMeeting™, and more.

'Tis the Season for a New Committee

by Lori Klepfer, NEOSTC Vice President

We are launching a new committee to do just that: the NEOSTC Philanthropy Committee. Our mission is simple:

To provide an avenue for members to:

- ◆ Provide a valuable service to the Greater Cleveland and Akron Community
- ◆ Develop and build new skills
- ◆ Network with fellow members and members of the community

We've had initial discussions with Business Volunteers, ProjectLEARN, Cleveland Technical Council, and a local hospital. These organizations need people with our skills to write brochures, teach reading skills, etc. Also, many opportunities exist for us to branch out and serve in other ways, even involving our families and friends. Our time is limited with all that life demands on each of us, so we are exploring ways to make the volunteer opportunities inclusive of family and life goals.

Many of us already serve our community and our spiritual communities. We want to recognize that too.

We need feedback! What volunteer activities do you presently do? Are you interested in participating? What do you want to learn or accomplish? Would evenings or weekends be best? Or, would you volunteer for projects that you can complete at home? Do you want to help plan events?

Holiday borderTruly, what do we have to lose? An opportunity to meet people we would never have the chance to meet? A chance to deepen friendships? A chance to learn and contribute? A chance to build skills that could lead to new career opportunities?

To provide feedback, contact Lori Klepfer at ljklepfer@core.com.

Technical Review: Freetranslation.com

by Karla Caldwell, NEOSTC Newsletter Co-Editor

I tested the Spanish (Latin American) with colleagues in Mexico and found the translation to be fairly accurate. The application even recognizes common abbreviations like CPU and RAM, and provides translation when necessary.

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The translation interface is very easy to use. Users simply type the text they want to translate in the Text Translator box, select the translate-to and -from languages, and click Translate Now! The interface also includes frequently-used edit tools like cut, copy, and paste. Special characters are inserted by clicking a list arrow and selecting the appropriate choice.

Once you've translated the entered text, you can fine-tune your translation using the two-window interface that appears.

Recently, Freetranslation.com expanded its Web-based application to also allow translation of Web pages. The Web Page Translator works a lot like the translation tool on Google.com, but allows users to input any URLs they want translated and see the results with the page's original formatting.

I tried the Web Page Translator with a simple HTML page from the last issue of Lines and Letters and found that the layout was identical to the original.

Freetranslation.com offers a quick way to "get the gist" of foreign text and Web pages, but it's still wise to use the services of a professional translator when translations must be absolutely accurate, or when cultural differences can play a big role in the way things are communicated.

SIGs — Why Bother?

by Erika Welickzo, NEOSTC Member

SIGs cover many interest areas and reach members around the world. Originally, SIGs developed in the early 1980s as professional interest committees (PICs). The STC board of directors approved the name change to SIGs in 1997. STC currently has 21 Society-level SIGs. The areas range from the Special Needs SIG, the newest, to one of the oldest SIGs, the Education and Research SIG. The Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication SIG and the Scientific Communication SIG are currently considering merging. Each SIG has anywhere from a few hundred to several thousand members. Just under 40% of all STC members are also members of a SIG.

Activities happen on both the Society- and chapter-levels. At the Society-level, SIGs have been driven by momentum as new technologies and practices emerge. In turn, they help steer the Society as a whole in new directions. Rapid growth within a SIG may indicate a topic that could be of interest to the Society at large in the near future.

Why spend five more dollars?

As with any membership organization, you get out of your SIG membership what you put into it. SIGs are a way to customize your STC membership and focus your professional development efforts. According to Peter Herbst, STC's Deputy Executive Director, the main purpose of SIGs is to establish smaller communities of practice within the larger scope of technical communication.

A SIG membership costs five dollars per year in addition to regular STC membership. The easiest time to join a SIG is when you renew your STC membership. It is not unusual to join more than one SIG to address a variety of interests. Of SIG members, approximately two-thirds are members of more than one SIG. The vision and mission statements of a SIG should help you evaluate how well it aligns with your current work or a professional curiosity.

SIGs foster exchanges. SIGs foster a member-to-member exchange and development of expertise in several ways. You can learn from and with others through online discussion groups, a regularly published newsletter, or the SIG's Web site. All SIGs vary slightly in the way networking and knowledge exchange happen. You can determine these methods by visiting the SIG Web site and contacting the SIG's manager. The vital contact information for each SIG is available from the list of SIGs at http://www.stc.org/sig_info.asp.

Chapter-level SIGs that have Society-level counterparts are encouraged to coordinate efforts with the Society-level SIG. You may see co-sponsored activities on the local level. In addition, some chapters sponsor SIGs that may not have a Society-level counterpart. Here in Northeast Ohio, there is an active chapter-level Consulting and Independent Contracting (CIC) SIG. At the Society level, this SIG was established in 1989. If there is interest, you can start a Society- or chapter-level SIG. Information and handbooks are available at <http://www.stc.org>.

Not unlike the seminars and workshops we attend on a regular basis, SIGs offer a way to continuously add to your skills. In addition, the sharing of knowledge will lead both directly and indirectly to the continued development of professional standards, procedures and best practices. The access to professional support and knowledge is certainly worth the \$5 investment.



SIG Name	Members	Year Established
Canadian Issues	312	2000
Consulting and Independent Contracting (CIC)	2,090	1989
Education and Research	701	1984
Emerging Technologies	1,634	1996 (name change) 1990 (Advanced Technology)
Environmental Health and Safety	315	1992
Illustrators and Visual Designers	753	1997 (merging of previous SIGs)
Indexing	687	1997
Information Design	2,749	1997
Instructional Design and Learning	1,707	2000
International Technical Communication	1,081	1989
Lone Writer	942	1997
Management	1,436	1994
Marketing Communication	1,082	1993
Online Information	2,860	1994
Policies and Procedures	872	1994
Quality	616	1991
Scientific Communication	734	1993
Single Sourcing	1,013	2001
Special Needs	137	2002
Technical Editing	2,244	1998
Usability	2,226	1992

Total SIG Membership	26,191
Number of STC members currently in a SIG	9,561
Number of STC members in more than one SIG	6,555

Does Globalization Spell Trouble for Technical Writers?

by Peter Zvalo

Globalization moves work opportunities around the world. As I described in the Spring 2000 issue (<http://www.writersblock.ca/spring00/a-buswor.htm>) of this column, the nature of work for traditionally white-collar professions such as technical writing, is also changing. While a growing number of professional writers is opting for the life of the freelancer, and enjoying the freedom and earning potential that this lifestyle can provide, many permanent full-time writing positions are being eliminated when work is delegated to temporary or contract workers.

Part of a Larger Trend

This trend is part of a much larger phenomenon in which companies attempt to reduce the corporate payroll by not only contracting out the services of individuals but that of entire corporate functions (thus allowing the company to focus on its "core competencies"). For technical writers and other communications specialists such a trend is worrisome because documentation is widely regarded as a support function that is easily outsourced to individuals or consulting firms. A recent labor study in California's Silicon Valley revealed that between 27 and 40 percent of the Valley's employees are "contingency workers"—part-timers, temps, and contractors.

Microsoft, for example, is leading the way to create a virtually "employee-less corporation," a jigsaw puzzle of outsourced divisions, contract factories, and freelance employees. In its drive to get rid of the corporation's "useless fixed assets" — anything that falls outside the core functions of programming and product development — Microsoft now employs between 4,000 and 5,750 temporary and contract workers, not including people who are employed by "vendors" who have taken over some key corporate functions (Pitney Bowes, which took over the mail room; Xerox, which manages the print and copy center; and KAO Information Systems, which operates the CD-ROM factory). While technical documentation has not been fully outsourced, many writers at Microsoft and elsewhere are not in-house employees but rather contractors. However, some firms, in keeping with the employee-less philosophy, are experimenting with the idea of outsourcing their entire documentation function.

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Just how far corporations such as Microsoft will go in outsourcing most, if not all, of their documentation needs remains to be seen. However, it must be said that documentation does seem particularly well suited as an outsource function. The creation of good technical documentation is an expensive, labor-intensive task that many software firms would rather do without. While it supports the company's product, it does nothing in terms of functionality or pizzazz for the actual software. Few, if any, customers base their buying decision on the quality or completeness of a user manual or online help. Secondly, thanks to the power of technology — file transfer protocol, e-mail, and the World Wide Web — a writer need not perform the majority of work onsite. Rather than consuming valuable office space and other resources at a company's R & D facility, it is obviously beneficial to have contract writers working from home or from the offices of a consulting firm. Most of the communication between the writer and client can take place electronically: from interviewing subject-matter experts, to submission of drafts, to receiving client reviews of drafts.

How Real Is the Threat?

In the short term, this type of arrangement can seem like a win-win proposition; the software company saves money on documentation through reduced overhead, while the contract writer earns more on an hourly basis than if he or she were a permanent employee. But the future may be less bright for the contractor. As corporations have abundantly demonstrated in the relocation of their manufacturing activities to so-called export processing zones of developing nations — where labor is cheap and labor standards are all but non-existent — their commitment to the well-being of existing workers falls far short of their commitment to satisfy the short-term demands of their shareholders.

Globalization and writersOf one thing we can be certain: companies will continue to look for new ways to become more "competitive," that is, produce greater quantities of product using fewer, and cheaper, resources. And with transnational corporations having few ties with, or loyalties to, any one country, the search for inexpensive labor in developing countries is likely to intensify. Thanks to reliable and instantaneous electronic means of communication with any corner of the world, the day when traditionally white-collar activities such as technical writing will be contracted out overseas may not be far away. As evidenced by e-mail messages that I have received from writers looking for contract work from such places as India and Singapore, writers will not just

be competing with others within their immediate communities, but rather with writers from nations with substantially lower standards of living — and wages. If these arrangements prove to be feasible, writers could soon be scrambling to undercut each other in order to win contracts for such companies as Microsoft on a worldwide basis. Under such circumstances we can be certain that a writer in a developing country earning a fraction of what his or her counterpart in Canada, the United States, or Europe would demand, would have a definitive advantage.

Perhaps the saving grace for technical writers and editors is that there will never be a significant threat from countries whose first language is not English. And even in those countries where English is widely spoken, regional dialects may prove to be too big an obstacle for writers in those countries to mask. The "Microsoft style" of technical writing is basically a North American style, not easily replicated by someone with only a textbook knowledge of North American English.

While it may be technologically feasible to contract out writing services to the lowest bidder on a worldwide basis — and a strong business case can be made that this would save companies money — the creative aspects of technical writing are likely to prevent such a shift from occurring on a large scale. Technical writers and other communications specialists should be aware of the potential threats to their livelihoods, but until there is a global standard for the English language, such threats appear to be distant.

This article was originally published in the Fall 2001 issue of Writer's Block. (<http://www.writersblock.ca/>). Reprinted with permission.

Gender-neutral Technical Writing

by Jean Hollis Weber

Gender-neutral writing uses language that does not stereotype either sex nor appear to be referring to only one sex when that is not the writer's intention. In this article, you'll see why gender-neutral writing is important for technical writers to use, what gender-neutral writing is not, and how you can use gender-neutral writing in the documents you develop.

Why Should Technical Writers Care?

We should avoid anything that interferes with clear communicationWhy should technical writers care about gender-neutral writing? The answer is simple: Technical communication's goal is to convey information to an

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audience, in a form that the audience can understand and use. We should avoid, if possible, anything that interferes with clear communication. If part of our audience is insulted (or offended, irritated, confused, or misled) or stumbles over the way we express ourselves, that reaction will interfere with the reception and understanding of our message.

Additionally, using gender-neutral writing can help ease the document development process by avoiding issues that others on your team may raise. For example, some reviewers on your team may think that gender-neutral writing is an important issue, an opinion that distracts them from doing their real reviewing job. Instead of arguing that language is our job, not the reviewers' business, we could save ourselves a lot of hassle by avoiding potential problem areas. Or perhaps an editor may alert you to such issues, which may result in needing to rewrite passages late in the document development process.

If you dislike the whole idea of gender-neutral writing, you may find yourself using a lot of annoying alternatives (e.g., repeated use of the phrase "he or she"). However, you can produce writing that is gender-neutral but that is not awkward and does not mangle or revise the English language.

You may think gender-neutral writing is a good idea but of low priority. After all, you have only so much time, and your first priority is for the document to be complete and correct. I won't argue with that, but I know that with a bit of practice, you won't need to think about gender-neutral writing; it will just come naturally and won't take any longer than writing in any other style. Consider this: Many people had to pay a lot of attention before they learned to write naturally in active voice and plain English, but I hope we appreciate their value to clear communication.

If you're keen to improve your writing, you'll find gender-neutral writing a creative challenge. I won't say it's always easy, especially when your job is to revise existing material. I will say that I rarely meet a construction that I can't change into gender-neutral language. Out of context, a sentence may seem intractable; in context, it's frequently not a serious problem.

A word of warning: Some of the books (usually for business writers) that purport to cover gender-neutral writing include appalling collections of examples. Although their examples of phrases to be avoided is

often quite comprehensive and good, their suggested solutions are frequently tedious, annoying, and trivial.

What Not to Do

If you've been thinking that you have to break grammar rules to use gender-neutral writing, you may be surprised at what not to do:

- ◆ Do not use "he" as a generic pronoun; use it only to refer to men and boys.
- ◆ Do not use "she" as a generic pronoun; use it only to refer to women and girls.
- ◆ Do not use "they" as a singular pronoun unless you are confident that your audience won't mind. This usage is gaining in popularity and acceptance, but a lot of people dislike it or stumble over it.
- ◆ Avoid phrases such as "he or she" and "he/she" or made-up words like "s/he."
- ◆ Do not use a feminized noun (e.g., manageress) when the normal noun (manager) covers both sexes.

What to Do

With what not to do in mind, here are some techniques you can use:

- ◆ Bypass the problem of gender whenever possible. For example, when writing procedures and instructional material, you are usually speaking directly to the reader, so you can use:
 - Imperative mood (Do this.).
 - Second person (you) instead of third person (he, the user).
 - First person plural (we), as used, for example, in parts of this article.
- ◆ Use plural nouns and plural pronouns. Avoid problems with using singular nouns and pronouns by using plural ones, like this:
 - No To log in, the user must enter his login name and password.
 - Yes (In a user document) To log in, enter your login name and password.
 - Yes (In other documents) To log in, users must enter their login names and passwords.
- ◆ Avoid pronouns completely when you can. Instead, try these techniques:

- ◆ Repeat the noun (sometimes this also makes your meaning clearer):
 - No Technical documentation exists for the reader. You are writing it for him, not for your ego.
 - Yes Technical documentation exists for the reader. You are writing it for the reader, not for your ego.
- ◆ Use "a" or "the" instead:
 - No The writer should know his reader well.
 - Yes The writer should know the reader well.
- ◆ Rewrite the sentence or passage In some cases, you may need to rephrase the sentence, like this:
 - No Each user has his own login name and password.
 - No Each user has their own login name and password.
 - Yes Each user has a personal login name and password.

In other cases, you may need to rewrite an entire passage, like this:

- No The successful applicant will use his skills to contribute to the commission's work in remote areas. He will be posted to various locations during his two-year appointment. His removal costs will be paid, and he will be entitled to one return airfare each six months to the capital city of his choice.
 - Yes (If a report, before the person is selected) The successful applicant's skills will contribute to the commission's work in remote areas. The person will be posted to various locations during a two-year appointment. Entitlements include removal costs and one return airfare each six months to the capital city of the person's choice.
 - Yes (If a recruitment advertisement) As the successful applicant, you will use your skills to contribute to the commission's work in remote areas. You will be posted to various locations during your two-year appointment. Your removal costs will be paid, and you will be entitled to one return airfare each six months to the capital city of your choice.
- ◆ Use a mixture of male and female names and scenarios in examples, unless the situation clearly

cannot include both sexes (e.g., in a medical text discussing pregnancy, the doctor can be male or female, but the patient is always female). You can then refer to John as "he" and Mary as "she." Similarly, beware of stereotyping the senior person as the male and the subordinate person as the female, but don't use reverse stereotyping for everyone either.

- ◆ Use generally-accepted titles Job titles are usually not a major problem in technical writing; for example, jobs in the IT (Information Technology) industry tend to have gender-neutral titles (as in, engineer, programmer, analyst, project leader, technician, manager, assistant, sales representative, and service engineer). However, keep in mind that your audience may be working in any field, so use titles that are generally accepted in your audience's industry, just as you would use other industry-specific terms.
- ◆ Use other strategies, as necessary Finally, although the techniques mentioned here will help you develop and revise documents to be gender-neutral in the vast majority of cases, you may need to explore other resources and techniques. Some technical communications may need to distinguish between the reader of the document ("you") and someone else. For example, a specifications document might be written for programmers but be about the activities of end users. In these situations, you may need to use other writing strategies or examples, specific to the type of document you're developing.

Conclusion

Using gender-neutral writing does not mean that you use awkward constructions or non-standard English; instead, it simply means using language that does not stereotype either gender or refer to only one gender when that is not the writer's intention. By making a few minor changes to ensure your writing is gender-neutral, you can avoid distracting your audience and contribute to clearer communication. In the process of doing so, you may also find that you avoid potential problems during the document development process. The techniques and examples offered in this article provide a good starting point for using gender-neutral writing in the documents you develop.

Jean Hollis Weber is a technical editing consultant based in Australia. She has over 25 years of editing experience in scientific, engineering, computing, and other high-

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tech fields. Jean maintains the Technical Editors' Eyrrie Web site, at <http://www.jeanweber.com>

The Esoteric Editor

by Karla Caldwell, Esoteric Co-Editor

We saw... we heard... we fixed it!

We've gotten feedback from a few Lines and Letters readers, and Sharon and I wanted to let you know how we've been using that information. Whether you sent an e-mail message to lleditors@hotmail.com, or contacted us personally, we've been working hard to integrate the changes and improvements you've suggested. Here are just a few:

At the request of Programs committee chair Stephanie Webster, Sharon and I have been working with the Web committee to develop standard, easy-to-use, online and print chapter calendars. As you can see by clicking the Calendar link, Brain Baddour has reformatted the calendar to allow you to sort dates by different categories like monthly seminars and luncheons.

Sharon and I have doubled the effort by reformatting the print calendar you receive in Lines and Letters Light and including more information on upcoming meetings in each issue.

You'll also notice that in each issue, Lines and Letters gets a little closer to matching the style and format of the chapter's Web site. The November/December issue represents Lines and Letters's first-ever use of cascading style sheets (CSS) and uses styles set up by the Web committee for use in the entire site.

Sharon and I want you to know that your feedback is important to us, and that we will do everything we can to make your chapter newsletter the best it can be. As always, you can contact us by sending e-mail to lleditors@hotmail.com, or by e-mailing either of us directly.

Membership News

Welcome New Members

In October and November, the following new members joined the NEOSTC. Please help us in welcoming them to our chapter.

- ◆ Steven A. Gotch
- ◆ Michelle A. Higgins
- ◆ Nancy C. Kernin

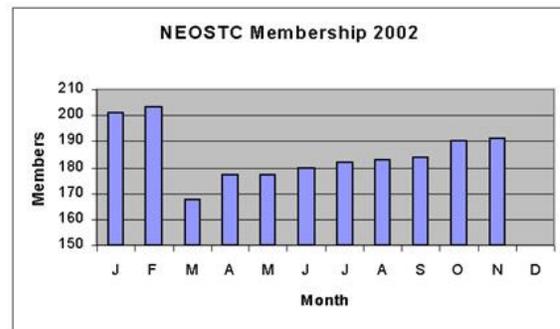
- ◆ Andrea J. Robinson
- ◆ Valerie A. Santia
- ◆ Janean B. Voss
- ◆ Jeanne M. Wyatt

NEOSTC Senior Member Presents for Kansas City Chapter

Robert J. Dianetti presented *Documentation Project Methodology* to members of the Kansas City Chapter in October. For a description of his presentation and links to presentation slides and handouts, see the October meeting on the Kansas City past events page.

Chapter Membership Counts

The membership count as of Nov. 30 was 191 for the NEOSTC.



Total membership for STC International reached 21,456.

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

Regional Opportunities

STC Telephone Seminars

STC is offering 10 telephone seminars in 2002-2003. Beginning Nov. 7, two seminars will be offered each month through March 2003. Telephone seminars have been very successful in bringing cost-effective training to STC members and others seeking to improve their skills and knowledge. This year, STC is offering online registration at <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>.

- ◆ Date: See schedule
- ◆ Cost: \$145.00 per site (US) \$160.00 (Canada)

For more information: <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>

Third Annual Worst Manual Contest

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

Have you ever been so frustrated with a manual or set of instructions that you cursed the author and wished you had never bought the product in the first place?

Does this sound familiar? How about \$100 for your frustration? Technical Standards, Inc. (TSI), a Southern California documentation services company, is offering \$100 for the winning entry in their third annual Worst Manual Contest.

- ◆ Deadline: 1/31/2003

More Details:

Send a manual or set of instructions that is hard to understand, poorly written, or just plain wrong. Send it if it has bad grammar, too much legalese, is poorly translated, or has missing steps. If it is the worst entry, you will win \$100.

"We thought we would have fun with this contest. Everyone has had trouble with a manual," says Michelle Wier, Director of Operations of Technical Standards, Inc. "That's why we started our company. 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."

You don't have to send the whole manual; excerpts of the worst parts are okay. The deadline for submissions is Jan. 31, 2003, so check those holiday gifts for potential entries. Entries must be in English. For complete contest rules, see the TSI Web site at <http://www.tecstandards.com>. The winner will be announced on the Technical Standards web site, on Feb. 28, 2003.

Technical Standards, Inc. specializes in contract technical writing projects, technical writer staffing, and training. Since 1993 in San Marcos, CA, TSI has provided writers and editors to the high-tech community who produce printed documents, online Help, and Internet documentation.

For more information: <http://www.tecstandards.com>

Training 2003 Conference and Expo

As a learning professional, you intuitively know that the most effective training doesn't always subscribe to one particular theory or employ one particular delivery mechanism. Rather, the most powerful learning often occurs when we borrow from a variety of methods –

whether that means using time-tested classroom techniques in an online environment or blending old and new instructional design principles to create an entirely different kind of training experience.

As a learning professional, you also know that the more tools you have in your training toolkit, the better off you – and your learners – will be. And that's exactly why, when it comes to your professional development dollars, you're looking for one event that brings together as many facets of organizational learning as possible and puts them into a context that's built to address your one-of-a-kind needs.

- ◆ Date: 2/24/2003 - 2/26/2003
- ◆ Location: Atlanta, GA
- ◆ Cost: \$1195.00 (register before 12/20 and save \$200)

Full Details:

Once again, Training magazine's 26th Annual Training Conference and Expo is that event, bringing you the proven strategies, the current best practices and the future technologies and techniques you need to succeed in one blockbuster blended learning event that you can't afford to miss.

Which tools will you add to your training toolkit at Training 2003?

- ◆ Proven strategies for creating an organizational learning plan – in case studies from world-class organizations.
- ◆ Tactics for blending e-learning into your existing training curriculum – in a special blended learning track and in breakout sessions from this year's co-located Online Learning Spring Conference and Expo.
- ◆ Stand-up training skills – in the Training Instructor Certificate program (back this year by popular demand!), in a new classroom training track of sessions, and in breakouts from the co-located Presentations Conference and Expo.
- ◆ Tips and techniques for course design and development – in this year's simulations track, in hands-on learning labs, and in the new Instructional Design Certificate program.
- ◆ Key ingredients to successful assessment, evaluation and return on investment – in a new assessment/evaluation/return-on-investment track of sessions and in breakouts from leading authorities

such as Don Kirkpatrick (author of the famous four levels), needs analysis expert Elaine McRae and ROI authority Toni Hodges.

The list goes on ... and on ... and on.

Taken together, Training 2003 and its two co-located events, Presentations 2003 and Online Learning Spring, cover the entire spectrum of what you need to succeed in building a first-rate learning organization. Whether you're an executive, a manager, a strategist, a classroom trainer or an e-learning designer, or whether you work in the government, private or non-profit sector – Training 2003 is tailored to your unique professional and organizational development needs. You simply can't find a better value or a more comprehensive learning experience anywhere else.

So register today ... and start stocking up your training toolkit to meet the challenges of tomorrow.

For more information:

<http://www.trainingconference.com/>

Technicom Conference

The Northeast Ohio Chapter of STC is hosting Technicom on March 14, 2003. This one-day conference will be held at the Hilton Gardens in Twinsburg, Ohio, which is south of Cleveland. Judy Glick-Smith will introduce our theme, Embracing Change: Finding New Ways to Apply Your Technical Communication Skills, during her keynote address.

The conference features three tracks for the break out sessions:

- ◆ Instructional design and e-learning
- ◆ Single-sourcing
- ◆ Life-planning and a panel on careers in other types of writing

Complete details on the event will be published in the January/February issue of Lines and Letters.

- ◆ Date: 3/14/2002
- ◆ Location: Hilton Gardens: Twinsburg, OH

For more information: jmccauslin@radcominc.net

STC's 2003 Election: Preliminary Slate of Candidates

by STC International

The following STC members have been nominated for society office. This slate will also appear in the Dec. issue of Intercom.

- ◆ President: Thea Teich
- ◆ First Vice President: Andrea L. Ames
- ◆ Second Vice President: Sandra W. Harner or Deborah F. Sauer
- ◆ Treasurer: Mary Jo Stark (unopposed)

Director-Sponsors

- ◆ Region 2: Victoria Koster-Lenhardt or Doreen A. Mannion
- ◆ Region 3: Hary-Janos Bottka or Beth Tanner

Nominating Committee (Two to be elected, each for a two-year term)

- ◆ Kathleen B. Aughey
- ◆ Rita B. Johnson
- ◆ Christopher Juillet
- ◆ John O. Shipman

Lines & Letters Editors

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