

### From the Editors – February 2016

*Lynn Nickels and Jeanette Evans, Co-editors*



Welcome to our February edition. As usual we have some great programs and activities coming up.

Thursday, February 11, from 6-8pm, Lisa Adair and Kathleen Ruggeri speak on the topic of machine editing. Don't miss what should be a great learning experience from Lisa and Kathleen.

Two days before this meeting NEO STC hosts a lunch event at noon (February 9) at Bricco, 1 West Exchange St. (Corner of Main & Exchange) in Akron. We hope to see you there.

Thursday, March 10, from 6-8pm, one of NEO STC's favorite presenters Neil Perlin will visit us once again. The topic of Responsive Design should make for an informative evening.

We also have a much anticipated social event coming up on Wednesday, March 23, 5:30 to 9pm at the Rock Hall of Fame.

We are looking forward to your submissions at [newsletter@neostc.org](mailto:newsletter@neostc.org) and want you to remember we still have in place our promotion. If you submit an article you are eligible for a drawing for a gift card. Two lucky people will win. This promotion is in addition to the points you receive for every article you write. These points accumulate toward recognition and gifts from NEO STC for your involvement.

### Editor's Column: My Vendetta with the Serial Comma and the Space Time Continuum

*Lynn Nickels*



What keeps you up at night? Is it how to solve world hunger? Keeping safe drinking water available in our own country? Or something else. For me, and this seems to be causing me insomnia much more lately, it is the use, and inconsistent use, of two small items that are not much larger than the tip of a pencil—the evil serial comma and the dreaded extra space following a period.

#### The Serial Comma

I'M SORRY, BUT I JUST CAN'T  
KEEP ALL OF YOU IN MY  
MANUSCRIPT. IT'S  
NOTHING PERSONAL...



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I know, I know, there are different style guides to refer to that offer all sorts of arguments to the contrary. I'm a proponent of AP Style, but that's because I have a journalism background; others do not, and so a battle about style can ensue pretty quickly in my world. And ultimately, it will depend on your company's style guide. The powers that be in the workplace making those final decisions about the style guide your company uses may have decided otherwise, and sometimes with good reason, so it can be out of your hands.

I'm not here to start a war, just trying to appeal to your common sense and see how I see things with regard to change and the time we are living in. In this technical age of writing online articles and blogs, I would think that money would be the deciding factor—isn't it always, when you get right down to running a company? There is only so much real estate on a web page, so I just can't figure out for the life of me why we would be OK with dozens of extra commas taking up that coveted space? Even in a printed piece, over time, and with translations requiring, at times, much more space than English (German, for example) wouldn't every saved space count? To me it should, but in others' minds,

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there are bigger fish to fry than the crazy comma ramblings about my nemesis.

### Two Spaces after a Period



And then there's the problem of many writers putting two spaces after a period. Back in the "dark ages," this is how we were taught to write and type. I remember learning to type on a Remington typewriter in school, and you looked forward to hitting that manual space bar twice at the end of your sentences! It was such a sense of accomplishment, knowing that you were able to pound out one more sentence on that cumbersome machine! All through school, I was taught to put two spaces after a period, but then when I reached college, that roof caved in. Somewhere along the line (actually, around 1960) the rule changed. I had to rethink how to write all over again. The problem is, not everyone was retaught to write this way, and so, many times when editing, I see that extra space throughout an entire document. Again, in the times we are living in space matters more than ever, and that extra space has to go! Fortunately, when it comes to extra spaces, we have the tools to check and replace.

### Consistency Must Prevail

And in the end, as long as a document is consistent, I guess I can live with it. Most recently, I've been working on a large printed/digital piece that was totally inconsistent with serial comma usage—many different writers contributed to the piece. Again, sometimes the decision is out of your hands—it was out of mine. When I pointed it out, it was decided that due to tight deadlines, we would leave that little problem until the next revision...oh, the pain and lack of sleep that has caused me, wondering if I will be judged negatively by my audience for this atrocity! I also have issues when a website style guide does not stay consistent with the

other written documents within a company. But that's a battle for another day.

My war with the serial comma will continue and my education efforts about using one space after a period will go on...hopefully, eventually, with some iota of success. In the meantime, I will do deep breathing exercises, repeat the mantra "let it go," and try drinking some warm milk before bed! Keep in mind that the comments in this article may not be the views of the entire English/Technical Writing or NEO STC communities—just the ramblings of an editor/writer with very little sleep.

Note: This newsletter does not use AP Style, hence you will see my nemesis making an appearance. Can you find it? If you have your own grammar nemesis or personal vendetta, let us know about it. We would be glad to hear your thoughts at *Lines & Letters* at [newsletter@neostc.org](mailto:newsletter@neostc.org).

### In the Spotlight: Brigid Brockway

*Lynn Nickels and Brigid Brockway*



Say hello to Brigid Brockway! Brigid works at DRB Systems in Green, Ohio. DRB Systems provides automated management systems and point of service systems for car washes, quick lubes, petroleum marketers, and convenience store businesses.

Brigid is a newer member of NEO STC, joining just over a year ago and says she has found membership very rewarding. "I've attended many STC webinars and found them all great. I learned an incredible amount at last year's STC summit in Columbus, Ohio, and I hope to attend the 2016 Summit in Anaheim as well. In addition,

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I've done some work with the NEO educational outreach committee."

Brigid attended Ursuline College where she majored in English and says, "I'm also a proud alumna of Beaumont High School in Cleveland Heights, Ohio."

"I read and write all day at work, and then I go home and read and write some more. I'm an amateur photographer, and I play the piano (very badly)," she says of her hobbies, and has a "wonderful husband and two horrible cats!"

Brigid is also a regular contributor to Lines & Letters, contributing both articles and wonderful photography!

### Writing for Intercom and Technical Communication

*Jeanette Evans*



STC membership, as you know, includes access to *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* through stc.org. I like to remind myself that contributing to these publications can provide a writing sample in the public domain plus a chance for professional development.

Writing an article for *Technical Communication* can be a career enhancer. Writing book reviews is a great option too. I've been involved for several years now writing book reviews for *Technical Communication*. Book Review Editor Jackie Damrau is a thoughtful and skillful editor. She has given me ideas on how to be an effective editor as I learn from her. Please see stc.org for details on how

to become a book reviewer. I think you will greatly enjoy the experience plus enjoy getting the free books.

Writing an article for *Intercom* can also be a career and skills enhancer. The experience of working with the editorial staff at *Intercom* has been enjoyable for me. Dr. Chuck Dull and I recently submitted a column idea that was accepted. Now, for the shameless self promotion, I could tell you that I hope you might enjoy seeing the column.

### NEO STC Membership Points/Recognition Summary

*Claudia Thompson*

Did you know that you can earn points as a member of the NEO STC chapter and earn recognition and gifts from the chapter?

Contributing an article to this newsletter is one way to earn points. Read on for more details.

The vitality of NEO STC depends on the efforts of its members and volunteers, and the Membership Points Program is one way the chapter can show its appreciation for those efforts.

#### Methods for earning points:

- ◆ Attending chapter events (program meetings, workshops, book club, networking lunches, networking socials) – 1 point each
- ◆ Volunteering on a chapter committee (programs, academic relations, newsletter, website, sponsorship/advertising, book club, networking, membership, and educational workshops/webinars) – 3 points for each chapter committee
- ◆ Volunteering to be on the chapter Executive Board (Vice President, Treasurer, Secretary, and Immediate Past President) – 3 points for each board position (note: chapter president is exempt from receiving a chapter award)
- ◆ Volunteering at the STC International level – 3 points
- ◆ Writing/submitting a unique newsletter article to the NEO STC newsletter or STC International publication – 1 point for each article submitted (no more than 1 point per month)
- ◆ Starting and maintaining a new initiative within the chapter – 1 point

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- ◆ Represent the chapter at a third-party event (for example, speaking at a local college about NEO STC) – 1 point
- ◆ Submitting an entry to the NEO STC Annual Technical Communication Competition – 1 point
- ◆ Judging for the NEO STC Annual Technical Communication Competition – 1 point
- ◆ Present a topic for a program meeting – 1 point
- ◆ Submit a speaking proposal to present a topic for a program meeting – 1 point
- ◆ Judging scholarship entry applications – 1 point
- ◆ Additional points may be awarded by the chapter president at his/her discretion for contributions not identified above.

### Volunteer and contribution benefits:

Get personal fulfillment by giving back to the profession.

Practice leadership skills and techniques to share with colleagues.

Meet others from your community and industry.

Stay up-to-date on industry trends and best practices.

Contribute to your chapter's success.

### Program period:

Earn points from July 1 through April 30 each year.

Members with the highest number of points are recognized at the NEO STC Annual Awards Banquet and Election each May with a certificate and gift from the chapter president.

### Recognition awards:

- ◆ **Volunteer of the Year –**  
Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)  
Description: Chapter member who achieves the highest number of points during the program period overall. Awarded by the chapter president for the member's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals during the year.  
A chapter member may receive this recognition more than once as a member.
- ◆ **Committee of the Year –**  
Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)  
Description: Awarded by the chapter president to chapter committee volunteers for the committee's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals during the year.

A chapter committee may receive this recognition more than once as a committee.

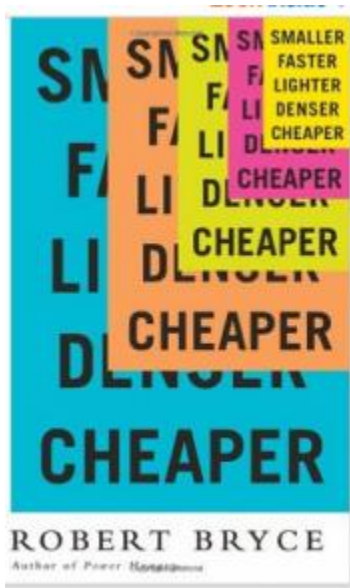
- ◆ **Rookie Volunteer of the Year-**  
Number awarded each year: 1 (or 2, if there is a tie)  
Description: A first-year member/volunteer who achieves the highest number of points period amongst their peers during the chapter year.  
Awarded by the chapter president for the individual's outstanding efforts to help the chapter achieve high goals.  
A chapter member that qualifies may only receive this recognition once as a member.
- ◆ **Volunteer Recognition Achievement –**  
Number awarded each year: Varies (usually 3 – 5)  
Description: Recognition for chapter members who achieved a high number of points in the chapter, but did not receive the Volunteer of the Year, Committee of the Year, or Rookie Volunteer of the Year award.  
Awarded by the chapter president for their volunteer efforts and active participation during the year.  
A chapter member may win this award more than once as a member.
- ◆ **President's Achievement Award –**  
Number awarded each year: 0 – 2. This award may not be awarded each year.  
Description: Awarded by the chapter president to a member that has provided consistent contributions to keep the chapter running smoothly over the years.  
A chapter member may only receive this recognition once as a member.

More information about our awards, including awards from STC International, are identified here:  
[http://www.neostc.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=29](http://www.neostc.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=25&Itemid=29)

Our current chapter secretary -  
Claudia.Thompson@keithley.com logs the points during the year. If you are interested in volunteer opportunities and contributing to the chapter, contact our current chapter president.

### Book Review: **Smaller, Faster, Lighter, Denser, Cheaper**

*Jeanette Evans*



**Smaller, Faster, Lighter, Denser, Cheaper: The Catalysts Driving Business**, [Hardback] By Robert Bryce (2014), Public Affairs Publisher, The Perseus Books Group, ISBN-9781610392051, \$17.95

Author, journalist, and public speaker Robert Bryce has published many articles on energy and oil use and five books such as *Power Hungry*, *The Myths of "Green" Energy*, and *The Real Fuels of the Future* and serves as a senior member of the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research. His latest book – *Smaller, Faster, Lighter, Denser, Cheaper: The Catalysts Driving Business* – provides a positive take on the future.

The author argues that solutions to today's environmental challenges will come from technology. This technology will in the future reflect a human need to make things better, where better means faster, cheaper, lighter, denser, and smaller. This includes lighter cars and faster computers.

He reports from locations such as California, Oklahoma, Canada, and Panama and shows how companies are providing improved products and services using newer technologies that improve our lives. Not only do they improve our lives, they are earth-friendly.

What kinds of technologies are these? Bryce mentioned the printing press and mobile phones, nanotech

medicine and advanced drill rigs, vacuum tubes and mass produced fertilizer.

Which companies are involved? Bryce cites newer groups such as Khan Academy as well as established names such as Intel and Ford. These are both start-ups and well-known companies.

The positive message appears as how we will have a better and more sustainable future as we do what humans do – make things better by making them smaller, faster, lighter, denser, and, of course, cheaper.

If you feel like the future faces social, economic, and environmental challenges, you might enjoy reading about how innovation, technology, and human drive should continue to preserve the planet and the human race.

Is the book fun to read? If you don't mind optimism about the future, a look at innovation and human progress, comments about a future with abundant energy, lighter cars, and faster computers, you could find the book fun to read. You will also read about how people's lives continue to improve to be more comfortable even addressing issues of overcoming poverty. Entrepreneurs will continue to improve technologies and provide innovation, solving current problems on our planet.

Note to readers: A version of this book review is scheduled to appear in *Technical Communication*.