



SuperScript

Volume 18, Issue 3 | May 2009

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. We welcome your articles, feedback and questions to our [editor](#). The submission deadline for our next edition is **Friday, June 5, 2009**.



President's Message

Jessie Channey, President

STC Alberta is bustling with activity! From [awards and scholarships](#) to [program nights](#), [workshop](#) and [conference](#), we have managed to squeeze in a lot in the past month. All that and we survived the tax season too.

On March 31, amid the bright setting of Ross Glen Hall, I attended a ceremony for the Faculty of Communication Studies at Mount Royal College. Students attended from the Technical Communication Program as well as those from Public Relations, Journalism and Electronic Publishing. On behalf of STC Alberta, I had the honour of presenting Ryan McLean, Robert Lancaster and Kevin Tetzlaff with scholarships for academic excellence, and Cheryl Mudge with the STC Alberta Award for academic proficiency and demonstrated leadership. Congratulations to all our winners! [More information on our scholarships](#).

In April, we enjoyed hosting visitors Neil Perlin and his lovely wife Connie, who celebrated their wedding anniversary touring our beautiful Rocky Mountains when Neil wasn't filling double-duty as our April program night and New Heights workshop presenter. [Read more...](#)

New Members!

Erika Sakrison, Memberships Manager

We welcome Janice Liwanag and Jody Osmond of Calgary to STC Alberta. This brings our total chapter membership to 169 souls!

If you would like to recommend a friend or colleague to the benefits of STC, encourage them to review our website, particularly our profile under [About STC Alberta](#). Better yet – pass along this edition of [SuperScript](#) for their reading pleasure, and invite them to join you at our next [program night](#)!

May Program Night – Writing Help for Touch-Enabled Devices and SMART Graphics

Rosalinda Hernandez, Program Manager

When there's no menu or text to type, how would you document using a touch-enabled device? Have you ever wondered how to develop effective, text-free graphics and technical documents?

Attend our double-header program night on May 21 to find out! Ken Schatzke, Deborah Nakaska and Alex Tassioulas of SMART Technologies will be presenting.

For full program details, see our [Events Calendar](#). Then [register online](#) or e-mail registration@stc-alberta.org to reserve your place.

April Program Review – So You Want to be a Contractor?

Roger Baumgarten, STC Member

Neil Perlin has 30 years experience in technical communication and his experience shone through in his presentation. In light of recent global events affecting the local job market, many Technical Communicators are considering contracting in order to gain control over their careers. Neil's presentation was candid and contained valuable insight into the realities of contract work.

The two hour session was well organized as Neil methodically took the attendees through all the considerations of life as a contractor. He led off the program by discussing personal traits suited for contract work. [Read more ...](#)

Tech Comm Job Postings Online - Jobline Update

Ian Hawkins, STC Jobline Manager

Along with other areas of the economy, the [STC Alberta Jobline](#) has had less activity this year than in previous years. Nonetheless, there have been some excellent opportunities for both full-time and contract employment, in a variety of industries for writers with an assortment of skills. [Read more ...](#)

Scrabble Anyone? Online Word Games

Melissa Ruryk, New Heights 2009 Manager

Do you like play with your words? Unjumble anagrams? Solve puzzles?

Somehow, I think a group of technical communicators might like to lighten up once in a while and play a few games. I know I do – even if it means another half hour a day in front of the computer, at least my chiropractor gets to benefit!

Check out www.merriam-webster.com and click on the Word Games links. There's a new home-page game every day, and then regular games are available in the section below, entitled More Word Games. Additional puzzles are available by searching the archives. [Read more ...](#)

The Cost of Not Having Process Documentation... \$1B?

Article from: Paul W. Goddard, Technical Writer and Instructional Designer

According to Aviation Week & Space Technology, June 9, 2008, the February 23 crash of the \$1 billion B2 bomber was caused by the failure to document a process. The process was a work-around needed because of the impact of humidity on air pressure sensors that feed critical information to the flight control computer. The problem had been around for two years, but the fix was only passed word-of-mouth.

Prior to the accident, some sensors on that B2 were falsely calibrated due to ambient humidity. Apparently the technicians were not privy to the work-around. The result was false information to the computer, which registered the plane going 10 knots faster than it was and that the nose was down. The automatic control adjustment caused a stall and roll at only 80 feet off the ground. Amazingly, the pilots ejected safely, but the plane was scrap.

I thought you might like to be reminded of the importance of what we do!

Is Indexing Obsolete?

Victoria Clarke, STC Member

Long gone are the days when I would pour over topic after topic in my help file generating clever and helpful index entries. Instead, I spend my time crafting topics that enable the user to find the

information by searching for the text or clicking on links. With software improving the way users can find information, I find little value in spending the effort required to build a great index because I'm not convinced anyone will use it. And, let's face it, either build a great index or don't build one at all! [Read more ...](#)

Quotes & Quips

"Let me live, love and say it well in good sentences." — Sylvia Plath (*The Bell Jar*)

"A scrupulous writer, in every sentence that he writes, will ask himself at least four questions, thus: 1. What am I trying to say? 2. What words will express it? 3. What image or idiom will make it clearer? 4. Is this image fresh enough to have an effect?" — George Orwell (*Politics and the English Language*, 1946)

"As a writer, you should not judge, you should understand." — Ernest Hemingway

Submitting to SuperScript

Alex Kelly, Editor

Thank you to those who sent in articles to include in this edition of *SuperScript*. For June's edition, please submit to newsletter@stc-alberta.org by **Friday, June 5**. With thanks in advance!

Dear "Ab-stc" (Abby)

Alex Kelly, Editor

Dear Ab-stc,

I'm currently "consulting" - a.k.a. between jobs/contracts! - at the moment. What STC resources are available to assist me in developing my skills and finding my next role?

Sincerely,
G. Whillikers

Dear GW,

Fortunately, by association with STC, you have access to a number of resources.

Online:

- [STC Alberta's Jobline](#) lists postings directly from local employers.
- [STC's Career Centre](#) lets you post your resume and search postings within the wider STC community.
- [Volunteering](#) builds your skills and portfolio, showcases your talents and indicates you take initiative, are proactive and have real world experience - key things employers look for!
- [Live Web Seminars](#) provide quick, easy, low-cost access to online learning on a range of topics.
- [STC Special Interest Groups \(SIGs\)](#) share their skills and knowledge with each other on a particular subject area, with the diverse [list of SIGs](#) including *Lone Writer*, *Consulting & Independent Contracting*, *Technical Editing* and more. SIGs often have mailman lists where you can ask questions, discuss and collaborate any SIG-related topic that takes your fancy.
- [Salary Survey](#) gives you the lowdown on the all-important subject of what to charge, and in what context.

In Person:

- [Program Nights](#) and [Workshops](#) allow for both learning and networking combined! As with volunteering, this also shows you are the kind of worker with current skills

and personal characteristics worth hiring.

- [Mentoring](#) lets you benefit from the experience of a senior member and/or lets you provide guidance to those less experienced than you. It can be a great way to collaborate and, at times, commiserate with another fellow technical communicator.
- Continuing Education certificates and programs provide formal professional development such as those at [Mount Royal College](#) in Calgary or [Grant McEwan College](#) in Edmonton.

The above presents a quick summary to get you started. Stay tuned for additional articles!

Sincerely,
Ab-stc

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STC Alberta Funded Scholarships and Award Programs

STC Alberta is committed to technical communication education at the post-secondary level. As such, we fund scholarship and award programs at Mount Royal College in Calgary and Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton. These programs are open to all students in the technical communication degree programs at these schools. Each year, faculty members of the two colleges independently nominate scholarship and award recipients based on criteria defined by STC Alberta.

Grant MacEwan College

Honours students who excel in their academic standing in the technical writing specialization.

Award Winners

- STC Alberta Scholarship Recipient -- Goldwin McEwan, (second year student)
- STC Alberta Award Recipient -- Christie Campbell (second year)
- STC Alberta Award Recipient -- Rhonda Skinner (third year)

Mount Royal College

On March 31, 2009, at the Mount Royal Lincoln Park Campus, STC Alberta President Jessie Channey had the pleasure of presenting four noteworthy students enrolled in the Bachelor of Applied Communications – Technical Communications program with the STC Awards. Marc Chikinda, Dean of the Centre for Communication Studies, hosted the awards presentation. Dr. Glenn Ruhl and Brian Traynor were also on hand to congratulate the students.

Award Winners

- STC Alberta Award Recipient Year 2 – Ryan Mclean
- STC Alberta Award Recipient Year 3 – Robert Lancaster
- STC Alberta Award Recipient Year 4 – Kevin Tetzlaff
- STC Scholarship Award Recipient – Cheryl Mudge

STC Alberta congratulates all the students!

History

To recognize academic excellence and encourage student involvement in our community, STC Alberta began an award system for students in Mount Royal College's Bachelor of Applied Communications in Technical Writing (now Technical Communication) program in 1997. The system awarded student memberships in STC to the students with the highest GPAs in their respective years of the program. [[Past Recipients](#)]

In 1998, STC Alberta decided to expand our support through the creation of a scholarship for a student in the second year of the program. We voted to donate \$3,000 to create an endowment fund to operate the scholarship, and applied for and were successfully awarded \$3,000 in matching funds from STC. (That matching-fund program no longer exists.) The first scholarship was awarded in February 1999. The award criteria are a combination of academic achievement and demonstrated

leadership qualities.

For many years, STC Alberta provided small thank-you gifts to volunteers at our AGM. In 2001, the Administrative Council revisited this practice. Our volunteers made it very clear that they did not contribute to our community to obtain thank-you gifts and generously voted to redirect funds toward increasing the endowment of the Scholarship at Mount Royal. The Administrative Council set an annual contribution of \$1,000. That endowment now amounts to almost \$10,000. Only net investment returns are used to pay the scholarship, not the principal, and so the endowment generates an annual award that varies, but is always less than \$500.

In 2004, the Administrative Council voted to create awards for the Bachelor of Applied Communication in Professional Writing program at Grant MacEwan College in Edmonton comparable to those offered to Mount Royal. The first awards were presented, amid fanfare and excitement, at a celebration in February 2005.

Finally, in 2005, STC Alberta decided to create a second scholarship for Grant MacEwan student. The award amount for this scholarship (\$500) is identical to that of the Mount Royal scholarship, and the criteria are similar.

Criteria

Scholarship

The scholarship awards \$500 each to two students (one at Mount Royal and one at Grant MacEwan) who are nominated by the faculty of their respective schools and who meet the following criteria:

- Are registered as second-year, full-time students in their respective technical communication degree programs
- Are actively involved in student affairs or extracurricular activities
- Maintain a GPA of 3.00 or higher in the first semester of the year

Awards

Each award is a one-year student membership in STC and is given to the student with the highest GPA in the fall semester of his or her year in the technical communication degree program at his or her college. The student must be taking a full course load and must have a minimum GPA of 3.00.

A maximum of seven awards are handed out each year, with four awards going to Mount Royal students and three going to Grant MacEwan. The difference in the number of awards distributed to Mount Royal and Grant MacEwan is due to a difference in the structures of their technical communication degree programs.

Other Scholarships and Awards

The Society for Technical Communication offers scholarships and awards to both secondary and post-secondary students. For more information, visit the [STC website](#).



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STC Alberta Activities

Check out our [Programs](#), [Workshops](#), [Administrative Meetings](#), and [Social Events](#) for an opportunity to meet & greet, learn a tool or skill, or further develop your technical and writing expertise.

The calendar shown below outlines upcoming Alberta Chapter events. These events, unless otherwise stated, are held in Calgary. Please see our [Edmonton](#) page for a listing of "Upcoming Events" in that city.

2009 Upcoming Events

Mark Your Calendars: Ceili's on September 17, 2009

STC Alberta welcomes September with an evening at Ceili's. Mark your calendars now to come out and meet your colleagues and catch up with old friends. There will be door prizes (Starbucks Gift Certificates), 2 drink tickets, appetizers, and an ice-breaker activity so you'll get to meet everyone.

DATE: Thursday, September 17, 2009

LOCATION: Downstairs at Ceili's on the corner of 7th Street and 8th Avenue SW

TIME: 6:00 – 9:30 pm

COST: Member \$5, Non-member \$10

REGISTRATION: [Register online](#)

See you at Ceili's!

Throughout the year, STC Alberta presents a wide variety of opportunities to learn, share and to become involved in the field of technical communication. Through workshops, social events and regular meetings we endeavour to:

- Present the latest information regarding theory and practice of technical communication
- Provide opportunities to learn and experiment with new tools and techniques
- Open up opportunities to network by meeting and exchanging ideas with fellow STC members
- Provide on-the-job training and opportunities to share your skills through our mentoring program.

Register in advance for all Programs and Workshops through our [online registration page](#).

Note: When space is limited, preference is given to current STC members.



Last updated: August 15, 2009



New Heights 2009

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New Heights 2009 was a great success!



Thanks to Neil Perlin of Hyper/Word Services and all who attended this fun and informative event.

Looking for an exciting way to challenge your event management skills?

Why not volunteer to organize New Heights 2010?

Main volunteer functions include:

- picking a speaker, topic and venue
- menu/catering decisions
- organizing registration & payments
- attending to details so the day-long seminar flows smoothly

You receive lots of support from the STC-Alberta executive, a complete job description, templates and adequate budget to host a memorable event.

This accomplishment looks wonderful on your resume!

For more information, attend an STC-Alberta event, email president@stc-alberta.org, or newheights@stc-alberta.org.



Last updated: April 28, 2009



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May 2009

President's Message

Jessie Channey, President, STC Alberta

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On March 31, amid the bright setting of Ross Glen Hall, I attended a ceremony for the Faculty of Communication Studies at Mount Royal College. Students attended from the Technical Communication Program as well as those from Public Relations, Journalism and Electronic Publishing. On behalf of STC Alberta, I had the honour of presenting Ryan McLean, Robert Lancaster and Kevin Tetzlaff with scholarships for academic excellence, and Cheryl Mudge with the STC Alberta Award for academic proficiency and demonstrated leadership. Congratulations to all our winners! [More information on our scholarships](#).

In April, we enjoyed hosting visitors Neil Perlin and his lovely wife Connie, who celebrated their wedding anniversary touring our beautiful Rocky Mountains when Neil wasn't filling double-duty as our April program night and New Heights workshop presenter.

Neil spoke to a full house on Contracting which we also webcast for Edmonton members. For a detailed review, see Roger Baumgarten's article in this edition of *SuperScript*.

Neil then spent a full day providing an overview of MadCap Flare (plus some witty anecdotes and a few bad jokes) to 21 rapt STC members. Many thanks to Mellissa Ruryk, our 2009 New Heights Manager, who organized a great workshop for us.

We are now looking for our next New Heights Manager to organize New Heights 2010! Is there a speaker that you always wished would come to Calgary? Is there a topic you always wanted to learn more about? Perhaps your company is talking about using different tools or methods that you haven't used before. There's no better way to learn more than to hand-pick an expert speaker who spends a day with us offering their insights and technical know-how. New Heights is an excellent forum for making your idea come to life – and an exciting way to build your event management skills. Main volunteer functions include:

- Picking a speaker, topic, and venue,
- Choosing the menu and catering options,
- Organizing registration and payments,
- Attending to details so the day-long seminar flows smoothly.

If you are interested in this opportunity, please contact [Mellissa](#) or [me](#).

In early May, two STC Alberta members travelled to Atlanta, Georgia for [STC's 56th Annual Summit](#). Karen Lowe presented a *Two-Click Mandate* case study and Alex Kelly attended her first conference including a certificate session on Content Management. Stay tuned in the near future for more about what they learned and how much fun they had!

I hope to see you at our next program night – May 21 – on *Writing Help for Touch-Enabled Devices*

and SMART Graphics. [More information.](#)

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April Program Review – So You Want to be a Contractor?

Roger Baumgarten, STC Member

Neil Perlin has 30 years experience in technical communication and his experience shone through in his presentation. In light of recent global events affecting the local job market, many Technical Communicators are considering contracting in order to gain control over their careers. Neil's presentation was candid and contained valuable insight into the realities of contract work.

The two-hour session was well organized as Neil methodically took the attendees through all the considerations of life as a contractor. He led off the program by discussing personal traits suited for contract work. The traits Neil expressed as the most successful for a contractor are:

- Possessing a high level of self motivation with the ability to work unsupervised.
- Strong personal discipline with the ability to finish a task in a timely manner.
- A risk taker who is willing to take full responsibility for the success or failure of their efforts.
- Knowing your work preferences such as length of contracts - some people prefer short contracts where others prefer long-term contracts.
- A healthy sense of humour to stave off personal stressors.

As the night progressed, Neil focused on the marketing and professional development aspects of contracting. Some of the marketing ideas consisted of:

- Do define yourself by what service you provide, not by the software tool you use.
- Do create brochures that highlight your key services and use your website to further describe each service.
- Do not place ads as they are expensive and do not pay dividends, but do attend professional seminars of industries you want to work with - and make sure to bring your business cards and brochures.
- Do not call yourself a consultant as some clients may interpret the term as you lost your job and can't find work. Instead, define yourself by the service you provide.

In regards to professional development, the nature of technology is constant change and Neil suggested reading professional journals such as Intercom, Wired, Info World, Health Care Informatics, Business Week and technical reviews written by MIT. Along with changing trends, advancements in software used in the technical communication industry demand retraining in order to stay competitive.

The night concluded with a question and answer period, and I had the opportunity to talk one-on-one with Neil. One of the points Neil made that I will always consider is "you don't have to be the best writer to be successful as a contractor, but you do have to be fast."

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Tech Comm Job Postings Online - Jobline Update

Ian Hawkins, STC Jobline Manager

Along with other areas of the economy, the [STC Alberta Jobline](#) has had less activity this year than in previous years. Nonetheless, there have been some excellent opportunities for both full-time and contract employment, in a variety of industries for writers with an assortment of skills.

Since June of last year, there have been over 40 different job listings. Given the importance of the petroleum industry to Alberta's economy, you might expect that most of the jobs might be related in some form. In fact, the represented industries covered a broad range, including those in such diverse areas as computer hardware and software, training, marketing, advanced education, energy production, oil field services, real estate, instructional design, manufacturing and more. The only common thread would be that employers recognize the value proper communication can bring to their businesses, and are looking for the right people to add that value.

For employers, there is no cost to use the Jobline. It's a simple way to reach a large group of communications professionals, ready to step in and contribute.

Complete access to all listings on the STC Alberta Jobline is available to all STC Alberta members. You do not have to be living in Alberta, but you do need to select the [Alberta Chapter](#) as one of your STC communities.

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Scrabble Anyone? Online Word Games

Melissa Ruryk, New Heights 2009 Manager

Do you like play with your words? Unjumble anagrams? Solve puzzles?

Somehow, I think a group of technical communicators might like to lighten up once in a while and play a few games. I know I do – even if it means another half hour a day in front of the computer, at least my chiropractor gets to benefit!

Check out www.merriam-webster.com and click on the Word Games links. There's a new home-page game every day, and then regular games are available in the section below, entitled *More Word Games*. Additional puzzles are available by searching the archives.

A recent addition to the page is the SCRABBLE Sprint game. Essentially, you are playing against the clock on a scrabble board where speed counts as you create words from the seven letters on your tile holder. The premium squares are operative and the more points you score while making words, the more time you earn on the clock. Time left over and points scored are tallied to give you a score for that round. I regularly score in the 600's... can you beat me?



Yes, there are scrolling ads and sidebar ads and even a banner ad, but you can't quite blame Merriam-Webster for trying to earn a bit of cash from click-throughs. These are fun games, and free; you don't even need to sign up or give away your email address.

My personal favourites are the Daily Jumble, Jumble Solitaire, Up & Down Words, Play 4 and the Universal Cryptogram. While I could never figure out a cryptogram on paper, having the computer fill in all the squares or change a guess for me makes all the difference. After one or two letters, I feel like I'm playing Wheel of Fortune.

The crosswords are easier on the computer too – specially if you use the setting that marks incorrect letters in red. I guess it's kind of cheating, but at least you don't need to find an erasable pen or use a pencil – nor wear the newsprint out when you erase too often.

One more thing... although it's very American-centric, it is a great site for quickly looking up word meanings and pronunciations. You can't do that too often though because cookies track your usage stats, or else they try to sell you a "premium" membership. That might be worth it but I just restrict myself to the freebies and enjoy my lunches at work at my desk, entertaining myself with words. Just turn down your computer sound as a few of the games have very repetitive sound patterns!

Do you have any word game sites you can recommend? I'm always on the lookout...

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Is Indexing Obsolete?

Victoria Clarke, STC Member

Long gone are the days when I would pour over topic after topic in my help file generating clever and helpful index entries. Instead, I spend my time crafting topics that enable the user to find the information by searching for the text or clicking on links. With software improving the way users can

find information, I find little value in spending the effort required to build a great index because I'm not convinced anyone will use it. And, let's face it, either build a great index or don't build one at all!

Searching

In a culture of Web surfers, people no longer search for information by looking at a static list of topic headers decided upon by the writer. Instead, the first thing most people do is search. In a recent usability study of our software, the observer noted that the participants' first approach to the help file was to search for what they wanted. Because of this trend, I now have our online help opening with the Search pane by default instead of the Contents pane.

My switch to "no index" happened when my company changed to the MadCap Flare software, which ranks the search results by weighting the text found. For example, text in a header has more value than text found in the body of the topic, so header search results are higher on the list.

The search was very efficient, and to rank topics higher, I included important text in topic headers and alternative text in the body. For example, a previous topic header was "Result Set Properties". In the new system, this topic is now called "Rename a Result Set", because that's the point of the dialog box, and the body text will have words like "rename", "change the name", and "new name". This topic is now more likely to appear in the users' search.

When you remove a traditional form of searching for information, like an index, you have to make sure you're providing that type of search in other areas. Besides working with the search results, I introduced three alternate areas of importance: breadcrumbs, portal pages and improved related topics links.

Breadcrumbs

The idea of breadcrumbs isn't new, but Flare does make it easy to produce them. Essentially, a breadcrumb is a hyperlinked path at the top of a topic that takes the user to a previous topic in the workflow. However, because Flare only creates a breadcrumb if that topic exists in the help file's contents book, I have to carefully construct my table of contents. It's important to only put a topic into the contents one time, to make sure every page and book in the contents is linked to a topic, and to create smart groupings.

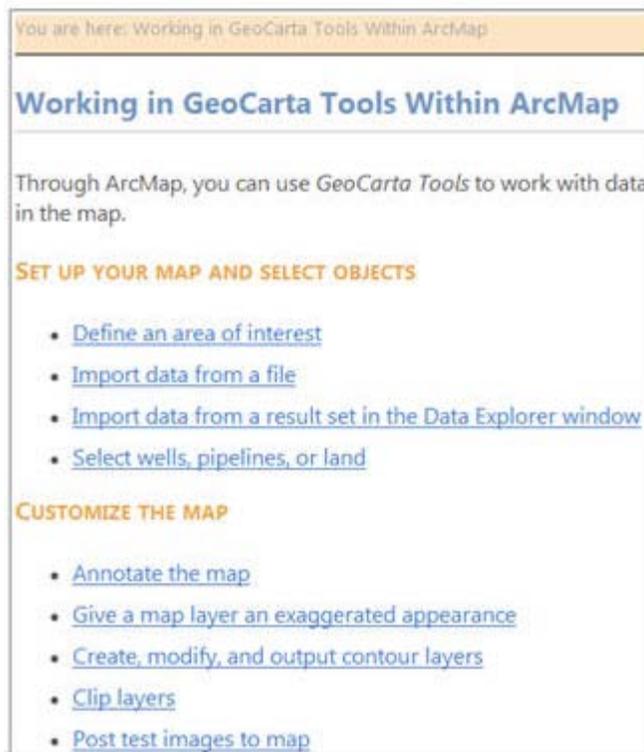


Breadcrumbs are not the first place a user will look to search for information, but they are helpful if constructed properly, and with Flare they are easy to implement and require minimal time to set up.

Portal Pages

These pages are like mini tables of contents throughout the help. For example, if there are several ways to export information from the software, I will create an export portal page that lists hyperlinks to each export topic in the help file. Or, if there are multiple ways you can work with the data, I'll categorize and list those links on one page. The user can land on this page and go from there.

Search	
rename	Search
Rank ▲	Title
1	Formation Aliases
2	Rename a Result Set
3	Data Explorer Results View
4	Add or Edit Curve Aliases
5	"How Do I" Workflows
6	Import UWIs
7	Import Seismic Lines
8	Export Curve Aliases



In essence, I've taken the major categories you would have found in your index, and I've turned them into topics. The user can find these topics in several ways: from the Contents pane, through a search, by following a breadcrumb, or by linking to it through a topic.

Related Topics

The bottom of every topic should list alternate topics the user can look at. I put my links under a heading titled "What do you want to do?"

To make these links truly helpful, I write them in a way that tells the user what they'll get if they go there. Instead of using the names of the topics in the links, I use action sentences that tell the user the purpose of the link. My links typically fall into three categories:

- Links that provide additional information about items in the current topic.
- Links that take the user to topics they might have wanted to go to instead of this one.
- Links that take the user to topics they might want to read after this one.

For example, a link that says "Add Columns Dialog Box" doesn't tell the user the reason why you listed it at the bottom of the topic. The user would have to go to that topic to see how it's helpful. If the link was "Create a data template", the user would now only click the link if that's something they want to do. You've saved them time and frustration.

So, is the index obsolete? Well, not for printed material, such as manuals, those require an index. But for online help files – well, I think the traditional index is replaced with better searching, smarter page layout, and better ways for the user to find the information they need in the location they need to find it. For me, the days of pouring over an index are now a thing of the past.

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What do you want to do?

- [Create a data template](#)
- [Group your results by column header](#)
- [Calculate values for a column of data](#)
- [See other ways you can work with your result set](#)