

SuperScript



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



What Technical Writers Can Learn From Comic Books

- By Kathy Franks, STC Member

On Thursday, April 18, at the McDougall Centre in Calgary, Glen Dresser (Mount Royal College) presented the topic, "What Technical Writers Can Learn From Comic Books."



This talk introduced terminology used to describe the activity of comic creators, and that may suggest options for technical writers in their communication projects.

With some of his own illustrations, and samples from Art Spiegelman's "MAUS: Working Through The Trauma of the Holocaust," along with several other comic book samples, Mr. Dresser illustrated the concepts of his talk.


From the work of Robert E. Horn, founder of Information Mapping Inc. (www.infomap.com), Mr. Dresser presented the concept of information nodes, which he described as units of information that are sequential, self-contained, and centred around a meaningful reference. Each node will contain necessary and sufficient information such that it may stand independently of other nodes, though a node may interact with others. In the comic book example, a node may be a single panel of the comic or one speech bubble within a panel.

Speaking about the transitions between different nodes of information, Mr. Dresser identified the following comic book transition types: moment to moment (time passes),

action to action (sequence of actions), subject to subject (scene and time are static, but subject focus shifts), scene to scene (shift in time and place), aspect to aspect (different aspects addressed within a single scene and moment), and non-sequiter (wholly disparate nodes without any apparent connection). Technical writing may incorporate a variety of these transitions to move the reader through a series of ideas.

Mr. Dresser pointed out the comic book strategy of providing emphasis or focus by varying the level of detail. For example, the main character in a comic may have minimal detail to allow many different readers to identify with this character. Further, a setting with minimal detail becomes more generic and accessible. For technical writers, information that is not important to the main message may be described or illustrated in minimal detail, with key points standing out by use of greater elaboration.

Finally, Mr. Dresser spoke about the advantage of incorporating images into documentation, saying that they facilitate quick processing of information and can show precise physical relationships (whereas text is well-suited to describing actions explicitly, or presenting abstract concepts and information that is non-visual).

The combination of text and image can emphasize the text, the image or both equally. An image may add information to existing text or work in parallel to illustrate the same information in a different way. Finally, a montage can incorporate both text and image, presenting a strong and compelling message that invites the "reader" to interpret the interaction of words and pictures. 

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A Word from Our President

- Ian Hawkins

Thanks!

Volunteers are what makes the Alberta Chapter so successful. As we approach the AGM and the end of another year for the Chapter, I would like to thank all the people who have freely contributed their time and efforts over the past year. Somehow, in spite of the competing demands of jobs, families, and friends, our volunteers kept the Chapter running smoothly and efficiently.

Although my brief words here cannot do justice to their contributions, I would like to thank them as best I can. In addition to the listed duties, everyone here provided advice and perspective, making my own job much more manageable. In no particular order, these are the people who have done so much for all of us this past year:

The newsletter editors, **Jean Bauer, Jessie Channey, Lorraine Gorman, Rosemary Reed, and Helen Schleedoorn**, who collaborated to publish *SuperScript* ten times this year. Producing the newsletter requires significant effort (and patience waiting for the President to submit his monthly column, usually late!).

Kathy Gerritsen, the Vice President. Kathy also helped organize the AGM and was a presenter at one of the program events.

Leila Meyer, who took on the multiple roles of Membership Coordinator, Jobline Coordinator, and E-mail lists. Leila created our mailing lists, and has done a great job keeping them going.

Brian O'Malley, who produced the Membership Directory, and was also Competitions Coordinator. In addition, Brian is always a source of advice gleaned from his considerable experience, both as a writer and a volunteer for the Chapter.

Mai-Ann Sprung, the immediate past President, Webmaster, and Treasurer. Mai-Ann has helped make my year as President much easier, and was always available for advice or assistance.

Marcia Wright, the Edmonton Liaison. The Edmonton members have become much more active over the past few years. This year, much of the credit for that is due to the efforts of Marcia.

Andrea Hogg, Hospitality and Registration. Andrea handled the logistics of registering people for programs and events, getting rooms set up, and providing refreshments.

Blair McNaughton, Mentorship Coordinator. The mentorship program improves the profession by providing important support and advice to those who are new to technical communication or are looking to expand their knowledge and skills.

Darren Tenor, Coffee Nights Coordinator. The Coffee Nights have become an important part of the Chapter's monthly events. Darren started them a few years ago and has continued to provide an informal atmosphere for open discussion.

Debbie Barry, Secretary. The minutes were always accurate, on time, and complete. As any writer knows, this is much easier to describe than it is to accomplish.

Continued on page 3.

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A Word from Our President

Continued from page 2.

Fena Maucieri, Conference Coordinator and Public Relations. Fena has prepared us well for hosting the Region 7 Conference in 2003, and she and Glenn Ruhl have also launched a program to increase awareness of the Society and our profession in Calgary high schools.

Glenn Ruhl, Mount Royal College Liaison. The Chapter has a mutually beneficial relationship with Mount Royal College. Glenn has worked hard at fostering and improving this relationship. He also collaborated with Fena Maucieri in their presentation to the Calgary Board of Education and the Calgary Catholic School District.

Jeanne Gonnason, Judging Coordinator. Without judges, we couldn't have a competition. Jeanne made sure the judges got everything they needed to do a professional job.

Ken Schatzke, Programs Coordinator and Workshops Coordinator. Ken arranged for presenters, kept the programs information on the Chapter Web site current, and made sure that events were publicized as widely as possible.

Lois Hamilton, Special Events Coordinator. Lois organized the Wine & Cheese night in September and the Pub night in January.

Nancy Sequeira, Public Relations. Nancy promoted the Chapter, the Society, and the profession through participation in job fairs and targeted advertising.

Grant Sorensen, Archivist and Programs Coordinator. Although work duties prevented Grant from continuing his roles, he arranged programs for the first part of the year and he has continued to provide storage space for the Chapter's archives.

Micki Nielsen, Volunteers Coordinator. Micki joined the council late in the year, and has helped organize the AGM.

Kevin and Lisa Slywka, who arranged facilities for two workshops in Edmonton. This has been a very important part of our ongoing efforts to provide more services to our members in Edmonton and area.


The competition judges: **David Cutten, Ken d'Albenas, Bob Hogarth, Laurie Holtby, Marie Frison Klassen, Tim Klassen, Penny Longworth, Ruth Maryniuk, Philip Sharman, Mai-Ann Sprung, Lynne Webber, Angela Wiens, and Marcia Wright.**

The presenters at our programs and workshops: **Bill Bunn, Murray Nicholson, Diana Patterson, Tim Flaman** and the people at **West Canadian Graphics, Hugh Read, Kevin Slywka, Fena Maucieri, Terry Williams, Blair McNaughton, Glen Dresser, Jean Bauer, Kathy Gerritsen, Allison Strilchuk, and Darren Tenor.**

Merak Projects kindly let us use their conference room for many meetings throughout the year. Thanks to **Mai-Ann Sprung** and **Helen Schleedoorn** for making arrangements.

In Edmonton, **Ottewell Junior High** provided access to their computer lab for two workshops.

In Calgary, **Mount Royal College** provided access to their computer lab for one workshop.

Finally, thanks to all the members of the Chapter. It has been an eventful year, and I'm glad that I have been able to play a part in it. 

Region 7 Conference 2003 Update

- Fena Maucieri, Conference Coordinator

A planning meeting was held on Wednesday, May 8 with approximately 20 individuals signing up as volunteers for the Region 7 Conference in 2003. At the meeting, we tentatively set the conference dates as October 2-4, 2003 and discussed themes and hotel options. As well, we began building volunteer teams with the following individuals as leaders:

Facilities: Blair McNaughton	Finance: Ian Hawkins
Registration: Brian O'Malley	Website: Mai-Ann Sprung
Exhibitors: Laurie Holtby	Hospitality: open
Sponsorships: Don Harmon	
Programs: Ruth Maryniuk & Jeanne Gonnason	
Publications/Publicity: Helen Schleedoorn	

Our second meeting will focus on the following:

- Conference theme
- Hotel venue
- Volunteer positions

Please join us if you are interested in volunteering for the Region 7 Conference in 2003. For those outside Calgary, please e-mail Fena Maucieri at conference@stc-alberta.org.

Date: Wednesday, June 5, 2002
Time: 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.
Where: Merak Projects Ltd.
(600, 322 - 11 Avenue SW - Calgary)

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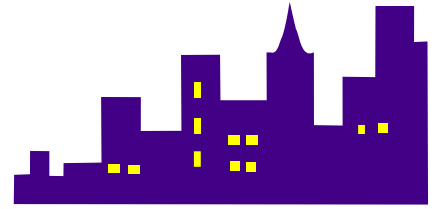
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- Lorraine Gorman, Edmonton Correspondent



Passing the Torch



The Edmonton Liaison serves as the contact between the council and Chapter members and is responsible for coordinating the activities of the Edmonton group. This includes finding member volunteers to organize and run the events and sending e-mail notices about the events. Events include coffee/discussion meetings, short evening presentations, and all-day workshops. The liaison also responds to enquiries about employment opportunities, available positions, and questions about technical writing. As many of you may know, the members of the Edmonton group work together to put on presentations and we often have informal coffee meetings.

Marcia Wright has tirelessly served the Edmonton members for the past year as Edmonton Liaison. She is retiring. Here are her parting words: "Although I served for only one year as the Edmonton Liaison, I very much enjoyed the activities associated with the position. What I liked best was the opportunity to meet people who were interested in moving into the technical writing field. Also, we held two very successful workshops this year and plan to continue with this initiative. My sincere thanks to Lorraine Gorman, who volunteered to take over this position. Under her very capable direction, the Edmonton group will surely flourish."

Past Events



Thursday, May 9, 7:30 p.m. at our Coffee Meeting, we had a guest: Audrey Whitson. Audrey is a freelance editor who is interested in finding out more about this strange species called Tech Writers. She has willingly consented (I only twisted her arm a little) to giving us talk or presentation on editing sometime this fall with the hopes of answering our questions and learning more about us. In order to study our manners and habits, she would appreciate questions from you on which she will base her talk. You can forward your questions to me over the summer at lhgorman@telusplanet.net.

Pub-night in September



We'll be celebrating the harvest moon with a pub-night in September. Keep an eye on the Web site for the date and location. I have one volunteer who is willing to "expose all" in her journey to find true career happiness. Watch for her story in the September issue of *SuperScript*. I am looking for more who have ventured out on their own to share their joys and heartbreaks in their search for self-fulfilling employment. Contact me at lhgorman@telusplanet.net if you are a freewheeling entrepreneur.

Notes for CISIG Members on 49th STC Conference

- By Alexa Campbell, STC Fellow

Overall, the conference was great, although I returned to Winnipeg on Thursday, May 9, to be greeted by 30 centimetres of wet, slushy snow! Big change from the cocoon-like tropical environment created by the Gaylord Opryland Hotel in Nashville. (Check out their Web site, at www.gaylordopryland.com. You can even take a virtual tour.)

This report has three sections:

- A reflection on SIG activities at the conference
- Ideas for next year
- Honours won by Canadian STC members at the conference

SIG Activities at the Conference

There was a SIG meeting on Sunday, May 5, which must have been one of the best kept secrets of the conference (next to the networking lunch). However, four people attended (including me) and we did get some ideas. The networking lunch was a little better attended, although a couple of people joined us simply because there wasn't room at other tables.

However, despite the lack of numbers, the quality of discussion was good, and I gathered a number of ideas and questions for the SIG. Here they are.


- We need greater visibility-as a profession, as an organization, as a SIG in Canada. Two people who attended the SIG meeting had heard about STC only by accident and only recently. As a corollary, STC has approximately 20,000 members, of whom slightly over 1600 are Canadian. That's approximately an 11:1 ratio. The US population is just under 300 million. Ours is just over 30 million. That's a 10:1 ratio. So we're not doing too badly. (Ten years ago we had 715 members, out of 15,000 STC members overall, a 20:1 ratio.)
- How can we help members learn more about the legal aspects of their jobs, about taxes, and about consulting issues in Canada?
- Can we develop some regional representation for the SIG?
- Why isn't every Canadian STC member a member of the Canadian Issues SIG? What are the barriers to joining the SIG?

Ideas for Next Year

- Develop a plan for advertising STC and technical communication more widely within Canada.
- Increase STC's Canadian membership by some amount to be determined.
- Appoint a regional representative for the SIG from each chapter (and from the Maritimes, even if they don't get a chapter started).

- Develop a SIG progression for the conference in Dallas next year. Some ideas: consulting issues, taxes, legal issues in Canada, copyright issues in Canada, insurance issues in Canada, markets (Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver, Calgary), educational opportunities in Canada, marketing your chapter and technical communication.
- Let's start lobbying for a National Occupation Code for technical writers. Why do all writers have to be classified under 5121, Writers?
- Should we create Canadian Issues SIG buttons or stickers for next year's conference in Dallas?

Awards

- Jamie Conklin of the Manitoba chapter was given the President's Award, "for your unwavering loyalty and willingness to serve, and particularly for your leadership in the area of STC's efforts to improve our governance." The president's award honours one or more persons or institutions that have made distinguished contributions to the profession or the Society. The STC president announces the names of the recipients during the opening session of the Society's annual conference. The president's award is granted at the discretion of the president and may not be given every year. Jamie is continuing his involvement with STC's strategic planning initiatives.
- Leanne Logan of the Southwestern Ontario chapter became an Associate Fellow. Leanne was previously involved with the Canadian Issues Committee. She is, unfortunately, moving to Memphis. Our loss; their gain.
- The Alberta chapter won an award of merit for its newsletter. The Canada West Coast and Manitoba chapters won awards of excellence for their newsletters.
- The Canada West Coast chapter won a chapter award of excellence. 

Membership News



As of April 30, 2002, the Alberta chapter has 201 members. This number has reduced somewhat since previous months since members who did not renew their 2002 membership were removed from the list as of April 1.

In April, we welcomed five new members to our chapter:

- Louise Blank, Calgary
- Robin Bly, Calgary (student)
- Kathy Franks, Calgary
- Susanne Kaprowski, Calgary (student)
- Kay Tollefson, Calgary

Welcome to our new members!



Mark Your Calendars!

Programs

Attend programs to discover the ideas and technologies that affect today's technical communicators.

Location: MacDougall Centre
455-6 Street SW, Calgary

Time: Third Thursday of the month, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.
Please arrive by 6:30 p.m. for registration.

Registration: **Required.** Register by the Monday prior to the program.

Fee:

	Registered
Members	\$5.00
Student Members	Free
Non-members	10.00

Workshops

Attend workshops to gain in-depth knowledge and skill through instruction and hands-on activities.

Location: Mount Royal College (Room E141)
4825 Richard Road SW, Calgary
\$8.00 parking passes can be purchased from the parking office located by the West Gate.

Time: Scheduled Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Registration: **Required.** Register at least 10 days prior to the workshop.
Registration must be cancelled one week in advance of the workshop or the registrant will be billed for workshop fees.

Fee:

Members	\$50.00
Student Members	25.00
Non-members	110.00

Coffee Nights

Attend Coffee Nights to meet with your fellow technical communicators and discuss a monthly topic in a casual setting.

Location: Annie's Books (Literary Salon)
912-16 Avenue NW, Calgary
Parking is available behind Tim Hortons.

Time: Second Tuesday of the month, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Registration: Not required.

Fee: Free for both members and non-members.

Executive Meetings

Location: Merak Building
600, 322-11 Avenue SW, Calgary

Time: Third Monday of the month, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
Building doors are locked after 5:30 p.m.

June 2002

Wednesday, 5 Region 7 Conference Planning Session

Saturday, 15 Annual General Meeting

Monday, 17 Executive Meeting



To register...

...for programs and workshops, use our online registration form at www.stc-alberta.org/registration.php.

Note: Due to new security policies at MacDougall Centre, advance online registration is now mandatory for Thursday Programs.

SuperScript

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Rates:

Full page	\$160.00	Quarter page	\$50.00
Half page	\$100.00	Business card	\$20.00

To place an advertisement: send your cheque, payable in advance, to Society for Technical Communication, Alberta Chapter, Attn: Treasurer, at:

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