

SuperScript



SOX and the Role of the Technical Writer

- Ruth Maryniuk, STC Senior Member

Sarbanes-Oxley (or SOX) legislation requires companies to assess their internal control over financial reporting. It was enacted in the U.S. in 2002 to deter fraud and ensure the accuracy and integrity of the financial information provided by publicly traded companies. Here in Canada, similar standards, such as Bill 198 (MI 52-109, MI 52-111), must be implemented by publicly traded companies between 2007 and 2009, depending on the market value of their security equities. Corporations which do not comply with these new requirements face delisting, steep fines, and jail sentences for their corporate leaders.

So what does this have to do with technical communication?

One of the key requirements towards compliance is the need to provide process and procedure documents that support the related objectives in the control framework (e.g., COBIT, COSO). The process of documenting, monitoring, analyzing, and reviewing those processes, risks, and controls proves that "someone is watching the door". Information Technology (IT) and business managers will need to work together to achieve SOX or Bill 198 compliance and must recognize the need for skilled professionals.

Louise Blank, Communications Specialist and President of Techlet Communication Inc., recommends a Project Control team made up of a project sponsor, a steering committee, a

project manager, a risk manager, and a technical writer. Being able to understand the underlying principles and requirements of the Acts and the risk assessment process can make the technical writer a hot commodity in today's job market. As part of the ongoing compliance process, risks, controls, and processes must be monitored and updated as they change. An annual review and attestation by management and the auditor must also be conducted and the internal control report submitted to the SEC. A technical writing position on a compliance project could result in a permanent position on the compliance team within the organization.

Using her practical experience, research, and analysis, Louise Blank has developed a methodology for documenting risks and internal controls. She also recognized a need to provide training. Her one-day workshop, "SOX out of the BOX", is designed for department managers, internal control project coordinators, subject matter experts, and technical writers. Louise has also developed two additional workshops: "SOX out of the BOX for Application Development", and "Change Management and SOX out of the BOX for Small Businesses".

The SOX out of the BOX workshop covers the key concepts for internal control project planning and assessing internal control against a control framework, such as COBIT (Control Objectives for Information and Related Technology)

and provides the answers to questions like:

- Where do I start?
- How long will the documentation project take?
- What are COBIT and COSO (Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission) and do I have to document risks and controls for all of the control objectives?
- What needs to be included in the project plan?
- How do I know what I need to document and to what extent?

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A Word From Our President

- Ruth Maryniuk, President

We are into March and it is nearly Spring—my favourite time of the year!

First, I would like to extend my congratulations to the graduates of the Mount Royal College and Grant MacEwan College Technical Writing programs who have won the STC Awards. Edmonton members sponsored a special awards evening at which they presented the awards to the Grant MacEwan students. The Mount Royal awards ceremony was held March 1.

Congratulations to the winners of those awards and to all the students who graduated from both programs. We wish you success in your future careers in technical communication. We hope you take the initiative to stay abreast of the latest trends and developments in technical communication through organizations such as the STC.

On to other news. For the past year, our newsletter team has been looking at giving *SuperScript* a much-needed facelift. The current newsletter masthead was created in 1999—over five years ago! The time has come to revamp the format and look as well as tighten up the procedures for creating the issue. The executive has given the team the go-ahead to re-create *SuperScript* in HTML. I have been meeting with the *SuperScript* team and Mai-Ann Sprung, who is acting as mentor and advisor to the team, to put together a plan for the development and, ultimately, the changeover. Ian Hawkins has graciously volunteered to help with the technical aspects. We have met to determine the requirements for the newsletter and are also taking into consideration the needs of our readers and the volunteers who create it. We hope to roll out a preliminary issue before the summer. The team is also looking for a Web designer to assist us with creating a professional look that can be easily maintained.

If you have some Web design experience and would like to volunteer with this task, please contact the editor, Kate Christie, at newsletter@stc-alberta.org.

Lastly, our Annual General Meeting is quickly approaching. In past years, we have made this a dinner event with the meeting following. We have decided to change things a bit this year, and will hold the AGM on our regular Thursday evening. We plan to teleconference our Edmonton members into the meeting. While not all the details have been finalized, the executive has unanimously voted to make this event free to all members. There will be food and drink and plenty of time to socialize with other members before and after the meeting. We hope that you make a point of attending.

I would like to prepare a slate of candidates for next year's Administrative Council. If you are interested in volunteering as a team lead for any position or if you would like to take on one of the elected positions (President, Vice-President, Secretary, or Treasurer), please let me know. Many of the current members will be staying on or switching to other positions, so you will not be left out on a limb by volunteering. Perhaps you have only a few hours to spare? We are looking for some volunteers to assist with the AGM. If you plan to attend, could you please let Nancy Kirby (specialevents@stc-alberta.org) know if you can help out with the planning and execution for that evening.

And, as always, we are looking for volunteers to help out with open positions on the executive. We still have a few positions available that require a lot of fresh ideas and a small time commitment. Our administrative meetings are open to all members and are usually held on the second Thursday of the month. 📧

STC Alberta Community Administrative Council 2004-2005

Executive

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Subsetting and Customizing DITA

- Bernard Aschwanden, STC Senior Member

About DITA

The Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) is an XML-based end-to-end architecture for authoring, producing, and delivering technical information. This architecture consists of a set of design principles for creating "information-typed" modules at a topic level and for using that content in delivery modes such as online help and product support portals on the Web.

This architecture and DTD were designed by a cross-company workgroup representing user assistance teams from across IBM. After an initial investigation in late 1999, the workgroup developed the architecture collaboratively during 2000 through postings to a database and weekly teleconferences. The architecture has been placed on IBM's developerWorks Web site as an alternative XML-based documentation system, designed to exploit XML as its encoding format. With the delivery of these significant updates, which contain enhancements for consistency and flexibility, we consider the DITA design to be past its prototype stage.

This article explores ideas related to subsetting and customizing the DITA specification without the addition of new elements. Instead, we explore taking default rules and adapting them to meet the needs of specific writing and publishing environments.

Why subset and modify DITA?

Subsetting, in the context of this document, means to remove or reorganize elements, attributes, and attribute values to customize the way that options are presented, while ensuring all the DITA specifications are followed.

The three main reasons to subset include changing default tags, modifying the order of elements, and adjusting the frequency of element use.

The default tags in the DITA specification include close to 200 elements. In many cases, tags provide features that are not required in your documentation or provide undesired redundancy.

Modifications to the default element order allow restrictions to the organization of information. If this still adheres to the principles of the DITA specification, your

content remains compliant and your authors have a guided workflow.

Many of the elements in the DITA specification allow child elements to appear with no restrictions. This means that authors can insert a wide variety of elements as often as desired.

Sample subsetting of a DITA element

As a practical example of subsetting within the DITA specification, consider the **step** element. This element has numerous default child elements with few limitations placed upon them. By defining a subset of the step element we allow authors to create content while ensuring specific guidelines are followed.

The **step** contains numerous elements; some of which repeat and appear in an order that may not be repeated the next time the element **step** is used. By developing a custom rule, additional restrictions can be enforced for consistency within your organization.

An example of a custom definition of step is seen below:

cmd, (info, choices?)?

The **step** contains a required **cmd** element. After the **cmd** there is a single **info** and a **choices** element. The restriction helps to ensure consistency and provides more detailed guidance for each of the authors when working with a step.

The result of the customization is a document set that is more professional, consistent, and easier to manage. Editing and translation are simplified as there are fewer decisions that need to be made based on writing style.

Subsetting tags and attributes

There are close to 200 tags in the DITA specification. One of the easiest things you can do to make a DITA implementation simpler is reduce the number of tags.

It is important to plan your document set first and then begin to subset, as the removal of high-level elements and all associated child elements is difficult to undo later.

Remember that many of the attributes are reused throughout the DITA specification and it may be better to remove them on an element by element basis rather than removing them from the DITA specification completely.

Drawbacks to subsetting

There are two key drawbacks to consider before subsetting: *tab limitation* and *stricter rule requirements*. If a DITA implementation is well planned, neither should be a major problem in managing the way DITA is used.

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MRC Coffee Night

Tuesday March 7

7:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Room T126



Come join other STC members as we head out to Mount Royal College for a coffee night with their up-and-coming technical communicators.

2006 Mount Royal College Award Presentations

- Kate Christie, SuperScript Editor

On March 1, Ruth Maryniuk and Kate Christie represented STC Alberta at the Scholarships and Awards Presentation Ceremony for the Mount Royal College Centre for Communication Studies. The event was held at the Lincoln Park Campus.

Many deserving students in MRC Communications programs received awards from various donors during the two-hour ceremony. As part of the ceremony, Ruth presented awards and scholarships on behalf of STC Alberta and Polaris Communications Ltd. Glenn Ruhl, Chair of the Applied Communications – Technical Communication program was also on hand to congratulate the winners.

The recipients of STC and Polaris awards and scholarships are listed below. Some of the recipients and attendees also appear in the photos.

STC Communication Award:

- Year One: Andrea Chalmers
- Year Two: Jason Plett
- Year Three: Karen Beaton
- Year Four: Lucille Worone

STC Scholarship Award:

Jason Plett

Polaris Communication Ltd. Scholarship:

Jason Grabinsky



Ruth Maryniuk, Andrea Chalmers, Jason Plett, Glenn Ruhl



Jason Grabinsky



SOX and the Role of the Technical Writer

Continued from page 1.

- What else has to be documented in conjunction with the control documents?
- How do current recommended documentation standards such as governance, ITIL (IT Infrastructure Library) and ISO (International Organization for Standardization) work in conjunction with control documentation?

The technical writer must be able to bring to the project control team the ability to create and update document templates and editing checklists. The project team will also need to inventory process documentation related to the control objectives. Furthermore, the technical writer works with the process owners to create, edit, and update documents for review by management, manage the review process, coordinate signoff, and submit

documentation to the auditors. In a nutshell, the technical writer's role in the control environment is an extremely important responsibility.

Arming yourself with SOX knowledge and know-how could make you a sought-after commodity in the Canadian job market. For more information about SOX compliance and the workshops offered by Techlet Communications, visit the Web site: <http://www.techlet.ca>.

Ruth Maryniuk is the president of A Few Good Words, Inc., a technical communications consulting company. She can be reached at rmaryniuk@gmail.com. Thanks to Louise Blank at Techlet Communications for her fact-checking and editing assistance. ✍️

EDMONTON

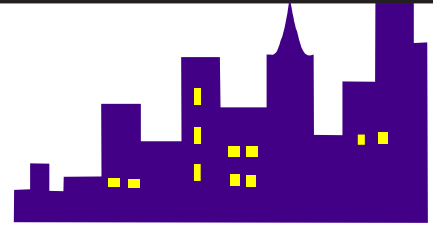
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- Rick Paisley, Edmonton Liaison

On 16 February, Diane Laverty and I had the pleasure of presenting the Second Annual STC Alberta MacEwan Awards at the downtown campus. With over 30 students and guests in attendance, we presented the following awards to those specializing in Technical Writing:

- Top Third Year Student - Melissa Di Natale (who also won last year for top 2nd year student)
- Top Second Year Student - Trevor Ackerman

We also awarded the first-ever \$500.00 MacEwan scholarship to Talea Medynski.

Don McMann, Director of the School of Communications, opened the proceedings, followed by Peter Roccia, Program Chair, then Lucille Mazo, lead Technical Communications instructor. Diane and I then presented the three awards, but not before talking about what the STC offers, locally and internationally—and how the organization enables technical communicators to improve and broaden their skill set (and have a good time doing so).

Following the presentations, a number of graduates hosted a panel discussion, taking questions from current students on what to expect once they graduate.

MacEwan was kind enough to provide food and beverages—all in all, a fine evening.

Congratulations again to the winners.



*Melissa Di Natale, Trevor Ackerman,
Talea Medynski*

Upcoming Event

A coffee night is also to be held on 23 February at Block 1912.

Other News

Though the STC program year still has several months to run, Diane and I are looking for some interesting souls to take our positions before September. We've both had a great time representing the STC in Edmonton. You'll have the opportunity to broaden your network, meet new and interesting people, and bring your ideas to the fore for the Edmonton community of technical communicators.

The two positions are Edmonton Liaison and Edmonton Programs. Alternatively, one person may want to take both roles, as Mala did a couple of years ago. We're starting now so as to ease the transition and, with luck, introduce you to some of the fine folks with whom you'll be interacting, including a number of the fun folks at MacEwan.

Drop us an e-mail at:

edmontonliaison@stc-alberta.org (Rick)

edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org (Diane) 📧

Who Plays Video Games?

- Margaux Porth, Registration/Hospitality Coordinator

This article is a review of a recent program entitled “Teaching Multimedia to Play: What Popular Culture Can Teach Us About Digital Learning”.

“Who has read comic books?” Lee asked. Hands shot up. “Who plays video games?” More hands. We know these colourful, immediate, interactive media bring people in. They entertain and they captivate: They tell a story. Knowing that situations where learning occurs must be authentic—meaning-making and meaningful—provides a hint at the potential power that the “gaming” genre has for use in instructional multimedia.

Our Thursday evening program on a chillingly cold February 16 was hosted by Lee Easton who proposed that videogames are critical to the future of instructional multimedia. We spent our time at the Thursday evening program exploring multimedia teaching strategies that we could learn from video games, and from comic books. Teachers are becoming responsible for their students’ learning; therefore, teachers must find new ways to get the attention of the learners—both children and adults. Combining the imagination-created story lines of comics with the hypermediacy and immediacy of video games, Lee believes that teaching methods will shift from lectures and textbooks to interactive software programs and graphic novels. The benefit? People will want to learn, because it is fun! Based on the surveys we did at the program, most people around the table already enjoy reading comics and playing video games. So, why not take these enjoyable experiences one step further, and make them educational experiences as well! 🎮

Help Wanted

Writers, reporters, and editors needed to:

- Write short, lively reports about meetings and workshops
- Interview speakers and write about upcoming events
- Write about a process used to improve technical communication
- Review books on relevant topics
- Write about adventures in technical communication
- Report on successful job-hunting strategies
- Write about the value of technical communication to your company or clients
- Explain new technology or research
- Submit ideas for relevant stories
- Copy-edit, do layout, take photos....

If you would like to be a newsletter volunteer, or if you have an idea for a story that you would like us to write, please send a message to the editors at newsletter@stc-alberta.org.

Membership News

- Lucille Worone, Membership Coordinator



The January membership update report was not available by the *SuperScript* deadline. By now, current members should have received their renewal packages by mail. The deadline for renewal was February 28, but it is still not too late to renew!

Please note that classic or e-membership includes ONE of the following membership options:

- 2 chapters,
- 1 chapter and 2 special interest groups, or
- 4 special interest groups.

Why belong to the Alberta chapter? The advantages include:

- e-mail notification of upcoming Alberta chapter events
- reduced chapter member pricing for STC events, programs, and workshops
- ability to attend and vote at the STC Alberta annual general meeting
- ability to attend Alberta STC Chapter member-only events such as the 25th anniversary celebration
- access to the STC Alberta jobline
- ability to subscribe to the STC Alberta discussion list

A portion of each member’s fees is rebated back to the chapter. This rebate provides the Alberta chapter with the revenue required to maintain ongoing programs and services to our members. Your choice does have an impact on STC Alberta’s future!

Details of these and other membership options may be found on the STC head office Web site at <http://www.stc.org/join.asp>.

Editors’ Association of Canada Workshop

Dealing with Photographs and Photographers

Date: Monday, March 13
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
Location: Mount Royal College, Room Y316
Fee: EAC Members \$10
Non EAC Members \$15

To attend, e-mail your name and contact information to kathe@kathemon.com and send a cheque to Käthe Lemon, 2 317 21 Ave SW, Calgary AB T2S 0G7. Make the cheque payable to EAC-PPB. Include your contact information, including your e-mail address, with the cheque. Receipts will be provided at the workshop.

Mastering FlashHelp, Metadata, and Visual Fluency

- Laurie Holtby, Webinar Coordinator

Do you know the difference between HTML help and HTML Help? What can you tell me about metadata? How do you fix the background in your illustrations? A varied group of Calgaryans have learned these and other fascinating details about technical documentation this fall and winter in the STC Web seminars hosted by several accommodating companies: Wind River, Schlumberger, and Peloton.

So far, we have listened to Neil Perlin tell us about the different help formats, had Jack Danaher guide us through the complexities of metadata, and participated with William Horton as he offered tips and techniques for using graphic illustrations in our documents. (William Horton set up his presentation so that we could draw on our screen, and other attendees could see our arrows and other scribbles. Isn't modern technology amazing?)

Here's one tip: if you are using a screen capture in your online help system, alter the edge with a faded, jagged, or torn page look so that users know it is just a picture and do not frustrate themselves trying to click on the buttons.

What's next?

Currently, we have no offers to host the upcoming seminars, which include the following:

April 12, 2006

Software Simulations: Tips, Tricks, and Best Practices

Presenter: William Horton

May 24, 2006

Life After RoboHelp – How We Got Here and Where To Next

Presenter: Neil Perlin


June 14, 2006

Introduction to DITA

Presenter: Paul Prescod

Does your company have a conference or training room that can be booked for a couple of hours? Let me know: webinar@stc-alberta.org. I know nothing about DITA—do you?

We're still hoping Edmonton will be able to arrange a seminar. Diane Laverty offered to host one in January, but it was cancelled due to insufficient enrolment.

Oh, and HTML help is a generic name for help on a web page, but HTML Help is a proprietary help format from Microsoft. HTML Help is soon to be replaced by Longhorn Help (now called Vista). As for metadata (data about data), I'll leave that one to the experts! 

Subsetting and Customizing DITA

Continued from page 3.

While subsetting helps to implement a stricter implementation of the DITA standard, it also deviates from it. By only supporting a key set of tags you restrict the ability to import other content that complies with the DITA specification.

By redefining the order of elements and their frequency, you effectively rule out some combinations of elements that others may use. In doing so, you may be limiting the usefulness of content that others provide that matches the DITA specification.

Conclusion

Subsetting the DITA specification and modifying the default rules can provide many benefits to an organization. A restricted set of elements reduces the need to develop formatting and transformation rules for all possible combinations of elements. It also allows organizations to further control the types of content used and the way that they are used. This results in far more consistent documentation.

The author of this article is involved in several events in 2006.

2006 DITA Conference, March 23 to 25
conf.travelthepath.com

FrameMaker and DITA Seminar, March 3, May 5
www.pubsnet.com

DITA Summit, June 7
www.pubsnet.com

A recognized publishing technologies expert, Bernard Aschwanden presents at conferences and events across Europe and North America. Bernard is an Adobe Certified Expert, a Certified Technical Trainer, a senior member of the STC and the author of numerous publications on publishing and single sourcing.

A complete copy of all 4000 words in the original version of this article (in PDF, HTML and XML formats) can be found online at:

www.publishingsmarter.com 



Mark Your Calendars!

Programs

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

Location: Calgary Technologies Inc.
3553-31st Street NW, Calgary

Day: Third Thursday of the month

Time: Doors open at at 6:30 p.m.
Program: 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Registration: Register by e-mail (registration@stc-alberta.org).
Sign up quickly as space is limited.

Fees:

STC Alberta Members	\$5.00
Student Members	Free
Other STC Members	\$7.00
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 O211)
4825 Mount Royal Gate SW, Calgary
Please bring \$3.00 in change for weekend parking at Mount Royal College.

Time: Scheduled Saturdays, 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Registration begins at 8:30 a.m.

Registration: **Required.** Register at least 10 days prior to the workshop. Late Registration Fee: \$10.00.
All registrants must pay in full by the Tuesday before the event. Cancellations must be received not later than five days before the workshop or the registrant will be billed for the fees.

Fees*:

STC Alberta Members	\$ 50.00
Student Members	\$ 25.00
Other STC Members	\$ 75.00
Non-members	\$110.00

*Includes lunch and two coffee breaks

Payment Options: Cash, cheque, Visa, or MasterCard.
Non-members must pay in advance by credit card.

This section is for Calgary events only. Edmonton members, see the Edmonton Events page ([page 5](#)).

March

Thursday 2 Administrative meeting

Tuesday 7 Coffee Night, Mount Royal College

Thursday 16 Program: Trina Rodes-Reyes
Editing is Not Evil

April

Thursday 13 Administrative meeting

Thursday 20 Program: Kathy Legg
Handouts Make a Difference

May

Thursday 11 Administrative meeting

Thursday 18 Program: Nancy Sequeira
Content Tone

June

Thursday 8 Annual General Meeting

Administrative Meetings

All members of the Society are welcome to attend.

Location: Calgary Technologies Inc. (CTI)
(a.k.a. Alastair Ross Technology Centre)
3553-31 Street NW, Calgary

Time: 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.

SuperScript

Contact the Editors:
Kate Christie
Deirdre O'Riain
Rosemary Reed
newsletter@stc-alberta.org

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta Community of the Society for Technical Communication and is published 10 times annually, including double issues in July-August, and December-January.

Submissions: The Editors invite readers to submit articles, news, reviews, and other items of interest. Articles may be edited for size. By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to *SuperScript* to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editors know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

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Distribution: *SuperScript* is distributed to members in Alberta and the Northwest Territories, to all Canadian Communities, Region 7 contacts of STC, Newsletter editors of STC, and to interested companies and individuals upon request. Circulation is approximately 180.

Advertising: *SuperScript* accepts advertising of interest to our readership, and which furthers professional development. We reserve the right to limit or refuse advertising.

Rates:

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

Volume discounts available.

For detailed information on sizes and formats, see www.stc-alberta.org/Newsletter/newsletterAds.php.

To place an advertisement, contact the Editors.