

# Super Script

Volume 13, Issue 4



## Project Management: Tips for Writers and Documentation Managers

- Mike Markley, STC Member

If you're looking for ways to increase the control you have over your projects, or if you're finding yourself in a leadership role on a project involving multiple developers, I encourage you to try implementing some or all of these suggestions into your process.

In my last article, (see [September](#) issue) I provided six suggestions for you to try:

1. What's the point? Define the project objectives before you start work.
2. The devil you know. Scope the project before you start work.
3. Let's make a deal. If you can't get it done on schedule, maybe you can negotiate.
4. Who's who on the project team? Define roles and responsibilities for each member of the team.
5. Train your subject-matter experts. Set mutual expectations with the stakeholders and subject-matter experts.
6. Provide for your team. Make sure the information development team has what it needs.

Here are six more tips:

### **7. Communicate, communicate, and communicate. Keep the team's progress visible to everyone.**

I don't think it's possible for a project leader to communicate too much. Here are three ways you can communicate that will make the biggest impact: (1) Write a weekly status report that

includes accomplishments, budget and schedule updates, and outstanding action items or issues. (2) Talk with members of your writing team on a daily basis—and listen to what they are telling you too. Make sure you're completely clear on the progress and challenges that they are facing. (3) Talk with the stakeholders (managers, engineers, and/or external clients) of the project at least weekly (if not more frequently), to ensure that they are aware of the project progress.

### **8. Keep your eye on the ball: Watch for scope creep.**

This is where your pre-project planning will pay off. As the project matures, the scope is likely to change and you need to keep track of this in order to gain leverage for negotiations on schedule or resources. If you originally estimated that your project would consist of a small quick-start guide and a 100-page user manual, but the project has grown to three set-up guides and a 200-page reference book, you obviously need to capture this information and communicate the change to the right people.

If you do experience growth in scope, you may need to ask for more time or more help, and you'll have a better chance of getting what you need if you are able to anticipate it in advance, which is why you need to monitor scope creep every day. Make sure your team under-

stands the original scope, and ask them to keep you informed if issues come up that change that scope.

### **9. Be a pessimist. Manage risks.**

What will you do if the project schedule is moved up two weeks? How will you ensure quality if you learn that the product design won't be frozen until a month after the documentation goes to the printer?

Make a list of potential problems or risks that could come up during the project. Work with your team to formulate this list, and determine how best to avoid problems. Communicate risks and preventive actions with everyone who is affected and get buy-in on the preventive action. You can include this in your

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INSIDE SUPERSCRIPT

# A Word from Our President

- Brian O'Malley, Acting President

In my October article I described the new membership options developed as part of the Transformation Initiative. An important part of the project is the move to a community-based model intended to put virtual and geographic communities (chapters and SIGs) on an equal footing. Existing communities are being “rechartered” to ensure that each is clear about how it provides value to its members. In this article I’ll share the key high-level elements of the STC Alberta blueprint for the future.

Our mission statement: The mission of STC Alberta is to promote and support technical communication in the province of Alberta and nearby areas not served by other chapters (Saskatchewan, SE British Columbia, Northwest Territories; collectively referred to as “the service area”).

We identified our community members: Practitioners, managers, educators, and students of technical communication, and others with an interest in the profession in the service area.


We identified our goals:

- Develop a strong, sustainable community of members located in the service area
- Provide community members with access to training and other resources to develop their professional skills
- Provide community members with opportunities for networking and relationship building
- Promote public awareness of technical communication in Alberta, notably with employers and potential employers
- Promote education of technical communication in Alberta
- Provide information on job opportunities in our field to our members, and offer employers the direct means to reach our members

We identified a variety of strategies to implement each goal, and a variety of programs and activities to implement the strategies. It is a plan that continues and builds on the successes of a host of STC Alberta volunteers, and is too lengthy to present here. The entire text is available on our Web site.

Finally, we stated our plan to provide value to the larger STC community and further the overall goals of the Society. It is a plan with global intent but local focus: STC Alberta will provide value to the larger STC community by offering services and activities to members at a local level while promoting the profession in the service area. In particular, the community will provide value through its support of local educational programs, including western Canada’s first bachelor degree in technical communication (through Mount Royal College), and the New Heights seminar program.

Clearly, our rechartering has continued STC Alberta’s strong focus on education and professional development, critical to survive the changes “of hurricane proportions” in our field that our Director-Sponsor Rahel Bailie described last month (see [October](#) issue). We have also developed a more cohesive plan to reach out to the broader communities of the public, employers, and sister professional organizations to promote our profession and our members.

As I said last month, it is just an initial blueprint for the future of STC Alberta that we’ll revise as we go. I encourage you to read the complete text online. Then, if you see an element of the plan that tickles your interest, by all means contact me to find out how you can get involved. Our accomplishments are limited only by our most critical resource: volunteers. 

## STC Alberta Chapter Administrative Council 2004-2005

### Executive

#### President

Past Presidents  
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#### Vice President

Vacant  
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#### Treasurer

Gary Ten-Hove  
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#### Secretary

Allison Toms  
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#### Past President

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### Events

#### Programs

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#### Workshops

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# Project Management

*Continued from Page 1.*

weekly status report (mentioned above). You're going to need a "plan b" and a "plan c" if some of these issues come to pass, so keep this risk list maintained throughout the project.

## **10. We need to talk. Convince your reviewers to hold face-to-face reviews.**

Receiving comments from the reviewers is critical in the process, but the most challenging part of getting feedback from multiple sources is reconciling contradictory comments and changes. If one of your reviewers suggests eliminating a whole section in her mark-up, while another person suggests expanding that same section, then you or someone on your team will need to spend time negotiating between these two people to determine whose preferences will prevail in the next draft of the document. It would be so much faster if they could talk to one another and work this out, wouldn't it?

Face-to-face review meetings provide an excellent venue for the reviewers to settle their differences in the content of the documentation—and it takes the writing team out of the position of being the liaison between the various individuals.

## **11. Bury the hatchet. Hold post-project meetings.**


This is the thing that I find to be the most difficult to implement. When the project is complete, most people (myself included) are eager to move on to the next thing. Indeed, a fresh start on a new project is very appealing. However, in the spirit of continuous improvement, you

should seriously look at how you are capturing lessons-learned from one project to the next. Evaluation and post-project activities can be as simple or as complex as you want it to be—you can spend a few weeks or a few minutes completing an evaluation of a project. At a minimum, you should have a post-project meeting.

Here's my starter-kit for a post-project meeting: develop an agenda with three items on it: (1) "what do we want to avoid next time?" (2) "what do we want to continue to do next time?" and (3) "what do we need to do to communicate or implement these ideas for next time?" Keep control of the meeting and don't let it turn into a grievance hearing (no blamestorming!). Look for solutions to the issues and keep the attendees focused on how to improve the process. Keep minutes for the meeting and share them with anyone who may benefit from them.

## **12. Stay calm.**

There will be days when staying calm will be difficult; days when deadlines are moved up by several weeks or months; and days when your team catches the flu the day before a deadline. If you're leading a team and you panic—your team will panic too.

Don't get me wrong: there's nothing wrong with expressing a sense of urgency—but make sure to channel that energy into being productive. As a leader on the project, your team is looking to you for stability through the rough periods of the project. The better you are able to stay focused and keep your team focused, the better they're able to survive the challenges. 

## **Administrative Council Positions Still Available**

We need volunteers to help fill the following positions on the 2004-2005 Administrative Council. These positions are critical for the chapter to continue to offer its events and services to members.

**President:** Lead the Chapter, develop your management skills, add an important role to your resume. This is your last chance to have the opportunity to fill this position. The Administrative Council is preparing to appoint a President using an In Council vote if no volunteers step forward to run the chapter.

**Vice President:** Assist the President and other Council members, learn new management skills, network with others in the profession

**Coffee Nights Coordinator:** Organize the Chapter's Tuesday coffee nights, network with others, share thoughts and ideas in a casual environment

**Competitions Coordinator:** Organize the Chapter's annual competitions, coordinate entry and judging, have an opportunity to review your peers' work

**Volunteer Coordinator:** Assist new volunteers to move into positions matching their skills and interests, track volunteer effort and manage Chapter recognition program, interact with a variety of your peers

In most situations, the volunteer commitment for these positions is minimal while the benefits are numerous, including adding experience with a professional organization to your resume, meeting and networking with other technical communicators, and having a say in the Society at a local level. If you would like more information on any of these positions or would be interested in volunteering in other capacities, contact the Acting President, Brian O'Malley at [president@stc-alberta.org](mailto:president@stc-alberta.org).

# Reminder



## STC Membership Dues Renewal

Annual STC membership fees were due on December 31, 2003; however, it's not too late to renew. You have the option of mailing in your dues renewal invoice or renewing online. Renewing online is easy and enables you to pay by credit card on STC's secure Web site.

The Web form asks you for your postal code and membership number. You can find your membership number on the address label of your *Intercom* magazine. It is also the invoice number of your dues renewal invoice. Renew online today at [www.stc.org/duesRenewal/Renewal01.asp](http://www.stc.org/duesRenewal/Renewal01.asp). (Note: You will need to log in first.)

## Update Your Contact Information

Keeping your STC member information (including your mailing and e-mail addresses) current ensures that you don't miss out on STC publications and announcements.

## STC International

Member information can be updated online on the Society Web site at [www.stc.org/formAddressChange.asp](http://www.stc.org/formAddressChange.asp). (Note: You will need to log in first.)

## Alberta Chapter

To update your information for the Chapter, send an e-mail to our Membership Coordinator at [membership@stc-alberta.org](mailto:membership@stc-alberta.org).

## Upcoming Programs

- Linda Robson, Laura Swainson, Program Coordinators

Our 2004-2005 season will begin on November 18 with Lee Shenkman presenting "All You Ever Wanted to Know About Copy Editing." Lee has over 25 years of experience working in the publishing field for a variety of companies in the United States, Japan, and Canada.

On February 10, Jeff Jewett will present "Confidence, Planning, and Non-Verbal Signals for Public Presentations. Jeff is the owner and operator of Fresh Communication, specializing in presentations. As well, he is an instructor in the Theatre, Speech and Music Performance department at Mount Royal College.

The next program will be March 10. At present, we are still negotiating with a speaker for this presentation. More information will be provided in the next issue of *SuperScript*.

Bill Bunn will present on April 14. Bill is a technical writer and an instructor in both the English and Communications departments at Mount Royal College.

Our last program will be on May 12. Rowena Sampang will present "Industry Trends in Technical Communication." Rowena has worked as a personnel consultant in Alberta and is currently Career Services coordinator for Technical Communications at Mount Royal College.

Programs are held at the McDougall Centre in the Media Room from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. All attendees must register for programs at [registration@stc-alberta.org](mailto:registration@stc-alberta.org). Programs will follow the monthly administrative meeting, held from 5:45 to 7:15 p.m. Everyone is welcome to attend these meetings ahead of the presentation.

For more information on programs, feel free to contact [program@stc-alberta.org](mailto:program@stc-alberta.org). 

## Announcing the Capture Technical Writing Service Scholars Program

Capture Technical Writing Service Inc. is offering a scholarship to a deserving Albertan pursuing a career in technical communication, specifically technical writing and editing. One scholarship valued at \$500 will be presented each year, beginning December 2004.

For details on eligibility and the application process, visit [www.capturewritingservice.com/scholarship.html](http://www.capturewritingservice.com/scholarship.html)

# EDMONTON

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- Nancy Slawski, Edmonton

## September's Coffee Night

Thank you to our Programs Coordinator, Diane Laverty, for organizing September's coffee night at the Upper Crust Café. We had a great turnout, and everyone enjoyed catching up with each other after the summer break.

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## Upcoming Events

### New Heights Seminar - Only a Few Spots Left!

The next major Edmonton event is the New Heights seminar on usability presented by Ginny Redish, on Saturday, November 13. There are only a few spots left, so get your registration in quickly so that you don't miss out on this great learning and networking opportunity. For seminar and registration details, visit [www.stc-alberta.org/NewHeights/newheights.php](http://www.stc-alberta.org/NewHeights/newheights.php).

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### Christmas Party - Wednesday, December 8

Once again, Jenny Whittome is graciously opening her house to Edmonton members for the annual STC Christmas party.

**When:** Wednesday, December 8 at 7:00 p.m.

**Where:** Jenny's house. We will send you the address and directions when you RSVP.

**What to bring:** An appetizer. Desserts and drinks will be supplied.

**RSVP** by November 26 by sending an e-mail to: [edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org).

## Call for Event Suggestions

As we put together plans for the winter season of Edmonton STC events, we'd love to hear from you. If you have an idea or a suggestion for an event, or have a skill that could benefit your fellow Edmonton STC members, please get in touch with us at [edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org).

## Professional Development

**MacEwan Writing Works** ([www.macewan.ca/writingworks](http://www.macewan.ca/writingworks))

**WRIT 0209 (570) Writing for the Web** (Saturday November 27 - 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)

**WRIT 0241 (570) Production Editing** (Saturday November 20 - 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)

**WRIT 0164 (571) A One-Day Grammar Refresher** (Friday December 3 - 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.)

**University of Alberta, Faculty of Extension** ([www.extension.ualberta.ca](http://www.extension.ualberta.ca))

**Writing and Editing for the Web (3359fa1)** (Saturday November 6 - 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

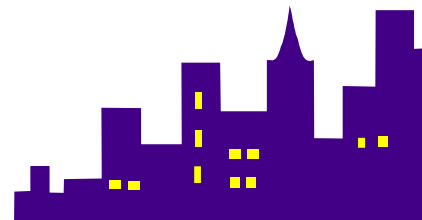
**Information Design for the Web (3360fa1)** (Saturday November 20 - 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

**NAIT** ([www.nait.ab.ca/it/pt](http://www.nait.ab.ca/it/pt))

**CWW 103 - Clear Writing Workshop 3** (Saturday November 20 - 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

**CWW 104 - Clear Writing Workshop 4** (Saturday December 11 - 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.)

For more information, contact Linda Hoffman at 471-7836 or Hugh Read at 471-8353 





## **NOTE:**

*We will be holding the 2005 AGM on Saturday, June 4, at the Village Park Inn.*

*See the travelling exhibit of winners from the 2005 STC International Competitions.*

*We are currently seeking a keynote speaker. Please send suggestions to the AGM/Special Events coordinators at the e-mail address shown on Page 2.*

## **New Season of Programs**

- Linda Robson, Linda Swainson, Program Coordinators

**November 18** Lee Shenkman

*All You Ever Wanted to Know About Copy Editing*

**February 10** Jeff Jewett

*Confidence, Planning, and Non-Verbal Signals for Public Presentations*

**March 10** TBA

**April 10** Bill Bunn

*The Future of Technical Communication*

**May 12** Rowena Sampang

*Industry Trends in Technical Communications*

Time: 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.

Location: McDougall Centre - Media Room

See [Mark Your Calendars](#) for registration information. 

## ***Editors' Association of Canada Eight-Step Editing is Filling Up!***

Whether you're a novice or a seasoned editor, a would-be writer or a supervisor of others' writing, Eight-Step Editing will help you make your words (or somebody else's) work better.

Using a step-by-step process, the program identifies the most common factors in writing that become obstacles for readers. Then it shows you quick and simple techniques for fixing them. The workshop combines theory with practice. Participants gain an understanding of the principles underlying each of the eight steps, and then apply those principles in exercises.

Jim Taylor has taught Eight-Step Editing every year since 1985, when he developed the workshop for the Editors' Association of Canada. A graduate of the University of British Columbia, Jim has over 40 years' experience in writing and editing. He regularly teaches writing and editing workshops across Canada.

### ***Workshop Details***

Saturday, November 20, 2004

9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.

University of Calgary

Education Block, EDC 152

Campus map: [www.ucalgary.ca/map](http://www.ucalgary.ca/map)

Parking information: [www.ucalgary.ca/parking](http://www.ucalgary.ca/parking)

### ***To Register***

1. E-mail the name and contact information for the person planning to attend to [eac-calgary@nucleus.com](mailto:eac-calgary@nucleus.com).
2. Send a cheque to The Treasurer, Box 12082, T5J 3L2. Make the cheque payable to EAC-PPB. Include the participant's name and contact information.
3. Your registration will be confirmed by e-mail upon receipt of the cheque.

If you have any questions about the Calgary workshop, e-mail Lori Burwash at [eac-calgary@nucleus.com](mailto:eac-calgary@nucleus.com).

### ***Fees***

EAC member: \$95.00 (+ GST) = \$101.65

Non-member: \$145.00 (+ GST) = \$155.15

Refreshments and lunch are included in the course fees.

### ***Note***

This program is not affiliated with the University of Calgary



# Mark Your Calendars!

## Programs and Administrative Meetings

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

**Location:** McDougall Centre  
455-6 Street SW, Calgary

**Time:** Third Thursday of the month  
Meeting: 5:45 p.m. to 7:15 p.m.  
Program: 7:30 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.  
*Registration for the program begins at 7:00 p.m.*

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

**Fee:** Members \$5.00  
Student Members Free  
Non-members 10.00  
*The fee is for the program portion only.*

## 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  
*Please bring \$8.00 in change for the parking meters at Mount Royal College.*

**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:** Third Tuesday of the month, 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

**Registration:** Not required.

**Fee:** Free for both members and non-members.

## November

Friday, 12 New Heights Seminar - Calgary  
8:30 a.m to 4:00 p.m.

Saturday, 13 New Heights Seminar - Edmonton  
8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Tuesday, 16 Coffee Night

Thursday, 18 Administrative Meeting  
Program: All You Ever Wanted to Know About Copy Editing

## December

Wednesday, 8 Christmas Party - Edmonton

Tuesday, 14 Coffee Night

Thursday, 16 Administrative Meeting

## Membership News

- Micki Kosman, Membership



### New Members

Herbert Claxton (New)  
Blair Toker (Reinstated)  
David A. Ranson (Transferred)

## Welcome to our new members!

## To register...

...for programs and workshops, use our online registration form at [www.stc-alberta.org/Calendar/registration.php](http://www.stc-alberta.org/Calendar/registration.php).

**Note:** Due to security policies at McDougall Centre, advance online registration is required for Administrative Meetings and Thursday programs.

# SuperScript

### Contact the Editors:

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*SuperScript* is the official newsletter of the Alberta Chapter 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 Chapters, Region 7 Chapters of STC, and to interested companies and individuals upon request. Circulation is 230.

**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

For detailed information on sizes and formats, see [www.stc-alberta.org/Newsletter/newsletterAds.php](http://www.stc-alberta.org/Newsletter/newsletterAds.php).

To place an advertisement, contact the Editors.