

# SuperScript

Volume 13, Issue 2



## Project Management Tips for Writers and Documentation Managers

- Mike Markley, STC Member

This is the first in a series of articles on managing your documentation projects. My intention is not to establish the commandments of project management according to Mike, but rather provide you with tips and tricks that you can use to keep your projects on track without losing your hair, your friends, or your mind.

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.

1. What's the point? Define the project objectives before you start work.

I've seen writers spend countless hours reworking content because marketing groups are so eager to jump into the project that they never take time to define what their objectives are. I once had a manager refer to this as the "ready-shoot-aim" syndrome.

A few years ago, I purchased a modem and the only way to get technical support was through their Web site... now think about that for a minute. If I'm having trouble with my modem, do they really think I'm going to be able to access their Web site? Ready, shoot, aim.

Even if you can engage your stakeholders in a discussion around the project objectives for 10 minutes, you will uncover some valuable information that will help you throughout the project.

### Tips

1. Define the project.
2. Scope the project.
3. Get it done on schedule.
4. Define roles and responsibilities.
5. Train your subject-matter experts.
6. Provide for your team.

Maybe the objective is to reduce the support calls on software installation, or perhaps your competition's product has provided some motivation to make changes to the way the product features are described in the documentation. Their input could uncover conflicting priorities among them, or it might uncover a major flaw in the documentation strategy that you could address early in the project.

2. The devil you know. Scope the project before you start work.

Now that you know the objectives of the project, take some time to define the project in as specific terms as possible.

My suggestion is to define the number of pages or help topics, the number of graphics, the amount of content or graphics that you can use from previous projects, the number of review cycles you will have, and consider any intangible factors that will play into the scope.

Ideally, you will have some idea how much time it typically takes to complete these tasks. At the very least, this exercise should help you get a feel for the whole project and enable you to begin thinking about how many people you might need and how long it might take.

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INSIDE SUPERScript

## A Word from Our President

- Open, President

# THIS SPACE RESERVED FOR THE NEXT PRESIDENT

### **Executive**

#### **President**

Past Presidents  
[president@stc-alberta.org](mailto:president@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Vice President**

Vacant  
[v.president@stc-alberta.org](mailto:v.president@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Treasurer**

Gary Ten-Hove  
[treasurer@stc-alberta.org](mailto:treasurer@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Secretary**

Allison Toms  
[secretary@stc-alberta.org](mailto:secretary@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Past President**

Ken Schatzke  
[pastpresident@stc-alberta.org](mailto:pastpresident@stc-alberta.org)

### **Events**

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Linda Robson/Laura Swainson  
[program@stc-alberta.org](mailto:program@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Workshops**

Ken Schatzke  
[workshops@stc-alberta.org](mailto:workshops@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Coffee Nights**

Vacant  
[coffeenights@stc-alberta.org](mailto:coffeenights@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Registration/Hospitality**

Vacant  
[registration@stc-alberta.org](mailto:registration@stc-alberta.org)

#### **New Heights Seminar**

Brian O'Malley  
[president@stc-alberta.org](mailto:president@stc-alberta.org)

### **Operations**

#### **Membership**

Micki Kosman  
[membership@stc-alberta.org](mailto:membership@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Mentorship**

Kristie Sinclair  
[mentorship@stc-alberta.org](mailto:mentorship@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Archivist**

Dave Krebes  
[archivist@stc-alberta.org](mailto:archivist@stc-alberta.org)

### **Communications**

#### **Newsletter**

Jessie Channey, Team Lead  
Sandy Gough  
Deirdre O'Riain  
Lynda Baxter  
Rosemary Reed  
[newsletter@stc-alberta.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Webmaster/Jobline**

Doug Waddell  
[webmaster@stc-alberta.org](mailto:webmaster@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Public Relations**

Nancy Sequeira, Team Lead  
Theresa Tremaine  
Natashia Menezes  
[publicrelations@stc-alberta.org](mailto:publicrelations@stc-alberta.org)

### **Edmonton**

#### **Liaison**

Danita Haysom  
Nancy Slawski  
[edmontonliaison@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonliaison@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Programs**

Diane Laverty  
[edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org)

### **Education**

#### **Mount Royal College**

Glenn Ruhl  
[mrcliaison@stc-alberta.org](mailto:mrcliaison@stc-alberta.org)

#### **Grant MacEwan College**

Lucille Mazo  
[gmcliaison@stc-alberta.org](mailto:gmcliaison@stc-alberta.org)

#### **University of Calgary**

Tania Smith  
[uofcliaison@stc-alberta.org](mailto:uofcliaison@stc-alberta.org)

# Transformation Update

- Andrea Ames, STC President

We've updated the Transformation Web site once again!

New in this round of changes is an article written by Jackie Damrau, Management SIG newsletter editor and president of the Lone Star chapter. She provides a perspective on the transformation from a community leadership perspective.

Thanks Jackie!

We've also set up an opt-in distribution list for members called Transformation News. I'll be sending a separate note out to members (only those who have agreed to receive STC-related e-mail) to:

- Inform them of the transformation, if they're not already aware of it.
- List today's information resources, including Transformation News with subscription instructions.
- Invite and encourage them to take advantage of these resources.


Please help me to spread the word about these resources! The transformation is not about the Board, the Office, or even community leaders like yourselves; it's about member value, and it's going to take all our efforts to ensure that everyone gets all the information they need to understand the transformation and the value and benefits it will have for members.

Thanks for your help and support as we work together to *Provide member value and communicate it!*

You've said you want more value in your STC membership, and we're listening!

As you might know, the STC Board of Directors and a team of amazing additional volunteers is leading the Society through a transformation to provide increased and improved value to you. You probably have many questions about this effort and what it means to you, so the Communication Committee is providing several information resources for you to read and hear about the transformation and ask questions and provide feedback.

I personally invite and encourage you to take advantage of these resources! Here's a list and brief description of what's available today. I hope you'll opt to receive updates, as we have several other interesting programs rolling out in the fall.

- On the Transformation Web site ([www.stc.org/transformation/](http://www.stc.org/transformation/)) you'll find articles and presentations, as well as instructions for subscribing to the Transformation News distribution list (go to the Web site, and click the "Transformation Discussion List" link at the top of the left column of the page).
- Transformation News ([transform@lists.stc.org](mailto:transform@lists.stc.org)): Subscribe to this distribution list to receive Web site update information and other tidbits (go to the Web site, and click the "Transformation Discussion List" link at the top of the left column of the page).
- Send a note to the Communication Committee ([transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org)) to ask questions or provide transformation feedback and suggestions. 

## Reminder



### 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).

# IABC Canada Conference

energize, advance, excel  
IABC Canada Conference 2004

**P U S H**

| Calgary | November 7 – 9

## The PUSH is on!

The Calgary chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) is hosting the 2004 IABC Canada Conference in Calgary from November 7-9, 2004. We would like to invite the members of your association to join us at this exciting event.

The theme for the conference is "PUSH". PUSH is about the every day relationship we experience in both our personal and professional lives. In our professional lives we aspire to create strategies that PUSH the current boundaries, perceptions, or benchmarks. In our personal lives there is a PUSH to balance everything we want to do for ourselves or with family and friends. It's about the PUSH from the world around us or how we PUSH ourselves.

We know you attend conferences to develop new skills, be inspired by riveting speakers, and learn from industry experts. This is what you will find at our conference. We took a national approach when booking speakers in order to ensure all areas of Canadian communication are represented at the conference. The result is a stellar roster of exceptional speakers and workshop leaders. We look forward to seeing you at the conference!

Visit our conference website at [www.iabccanadaconference.ca](http://www.iabccanadaconference.ca) for more details.

Non-member: Full Conference Rate \$900

Non-member: Day Rate \$375

## Project Management Tips

*Continued from Page 1.*

3. Let's make a deal. If you can't get it done on schedule, maybe you can negotiate.

Now that you have a more precise definition of the project, you will have some rationale for committing to a schedule. I know schedules are rarely negotiable, but the scope of the project certainly is. If you are assigned a project with 500 pages to be written by you and another writer in the next 15 business days, and you estimate that it should take you 30 business days, you might think about negotiating the size of the book (if not a longer schedule), or maybe the number of writers available to work on it can be increased.

If you took the time to define the objectives and the scope of the project, you should have some good ammunition for negotiation. For example, if you can quantify the effort required to write those 500 pages and show exactly why 15 days is not enough time, your stakeholders may be more receptive to negotiating.

4. Who's who on the project team? Define roles and responsibilities for each member of the team.

At the beginning of the project, take time to pull the information development team together for a few minutes to define each person's role in the project. Who will take the lead on communicating with the subject-matter experts for each deliverable? Who will perform the editing, indexing, proofreading tasks? What information does each person need to track for the project manager?

Defining roles and responsibilities may seem like a luxury to you, but it's a critical element of keeping control of your projects and ensuring that no details are left undone. The bigger the team, the more important this is.

5. Train your subject-matter experts. Set mutual expectations with the stakeholders and subject-matter experts.

You should also take time to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the team with anyone who is reviewing the documents, i.e., the managers, programmers, and engineers who will be reviewing and commenting on the content.

Many of these folks are unclear of their role in the documentation review process, so spell it out for them: Engineers and programmers need to focus on providing details and verifying technical accuracy of the content before they spend time debating the location of commas and semicolons. Managers and marketing staff need to make sure the content lives up to the promises they've made to the customers before they start commenting on the finer points of initial capitalization in headings and titles. I know this sounds a little cynical, but hey! Everyone has a role to play, and writing and editing is yours. You need to work to keep these people focused on the things they know best and the project will go much more smoothly.

6. Provide for your team. Make sure the information development team has what it needs.

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# Mix, Mingle, & Munch

at the



# Meet & Greet

hosted by the

**Alberta Chapter  
Society for Technical Communication**

on

**Thursday, September 23, 2004**

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

**Memorial Park Library**

1221 - 2 Street SW, Calgary

## Students

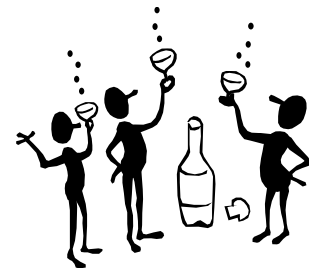
- Meet professionals working in the field
- Establish networking contacts
- Learn about the Society and upcoming Chapter activities

## Members & Friends

- Meet the Executive and Administrative members
- Find out what your peers are doing
- Renew old acquaintances and make new friends

## Door Prizes

Pre-register by e-mail to win door prizes!



**RSVP** by Monday, September 20

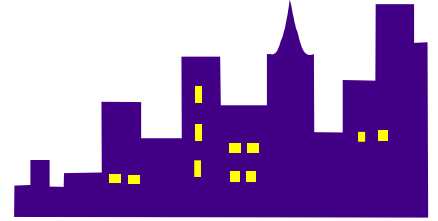
E-mail [registration@stc-alberta.org](mailto:registration@stc-alberta.org) to have your name included in the draw for door prizes.

Cost: \$5 per person (refreshments will be provided). Free for students.

# EDMONTON

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- Nancy Slawski, Edmonton Liaison



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## Calling All Students

By the time you're reading this, you'll be back to classes and thinking about the future of your career and how best to further your technical writing goals. There is no better way to learn more about getting started in technical writing, and to network with prospective colleagues, than attending STC events.

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The STC would like to extend an invitation to all student members to become active in your Edmonton STC sub-chapter by attending events, writing for *SuperScript*, talking to new students about the benefits of STC membership, and directing any questions to the STC Liaisons ([edmontonliaison@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonliaison@stc-alberta.org)).

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The STC would also like to encourage our student members to give us feedback on events, and to suggest ideas for future events. Please feel free to contact your Edmonton Programs Coordinator ([edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org](mailto:edmontonprograms@stc-alberta.org)) at any time with your suggestions for events.

## Next Event

Event: Coffee Night  
When: Tuesday, September 28  
Where: Upper Crust Café (10909-86 Avenue)  
Time: 7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

## Upcoming Events

Event: Building Usability into your Documentation, Interfaces and Web Site Seminar with Ginny Redish  
When: Saturday, November 13  
Where: Delta Edmonton Centre  
Time: 8:30 a.m.- 4:00 p.m.  
Cost: Members \$110  
Student Members \$55  
Non-members \$175

Includes: Lunch

Registration: Register online at [www.stc-alberta.org/Edmonton/edmonton.php](http://www.stc-alberta.org/Edmonton/edmonton.php)


## Professional Development

This fall, the MacEwan Writing Works will be offering several courses that may be of interest to STC members. For more information, or to register, call 497-5346, or visit the Web site at [www.macewan.ca/writingworks](http://www.macewan.ca/writingworks)

**Plain Language for Business WRIT 0100 (570)** Learn how to make your writing user-friendly.

**Writing for the Web WRIT 0209 (570)** Create Web content your audience will want to read.

**Production Editing WRIT 0241 (570)** Production editing involves different criteria than all other editing functions. Checking graphics and text and their relationships to each other is an essential part of the process.

**Writing a Non-Fiction Book WRIT 0244 (571)** Do you have an idea for a non-fiction book? Learn where you can find a market for your book in print. 

## 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

**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

**Registration and Hospitality Coordinator:** Handle registration and hospitality duties at Chapter events, meet with members and others; showcase your organizational and hospitality skills

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

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 at [president@stc-alberta.org](mailto:president@stc-alberta.org).

### Note:

The starting times for programs and administrative meetings have changed this year!

#### Meetings:

5:45 p.m. - 7:15 p.m.

#### Programs:

7:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.

#### Program Registration:

Starts at 7:00 p.m.

## Upcoming Region 8 Conference

- Rahel Bailie, Region 7 Director-Sponsor

The 2004 STC Region 8 Conference is now only a month away. The conference organizers are making the final push to ensure the conference is a success. As Region 7 isn't having a conference this year, and Sacramento isn't that far away, you might have members interested in attending the Region 8 Conference. You can find more info at [www.stcregion8conference.org](http://www.stcregion8conference.org).

They have done a lot to promote the conference via bulk e-mail, announcements at meetings, newsletter articles, and so on. People are signing up, but written communications can only do so much. They'd like your help with talking up the conference to friends and colleagues, and urging them to register.

The sponsorship coordinator says that there is still room for more sponsors and exhibitors, as well.

## STC Mentorship Program

- Kristie Sinclair, Mentorship Coordinator

The STC Mentorship program provides the opportunity for more experienced technical communicators to share their experiences with new or less experienced "protégés". Through e-mail, phone, and job shadowing (optional), the mentorship relationship provides mutual benefits and professional growth to both individuals.

**Mentor Benefits.** Personal satisfaction from helping others discover and reach their potential, gain exposure to new perspectives from the protégé, expand professional networks, enhance coaching, provide feedback, and gain leadership skills.

**Protégé Benefits.** Learn to adapt to changing professional and organizational circumstances, increase visibility, enhance skills needed for career advancement, and develop valuable sounding-boards and networks.

To become a part of this valuable program, contact STC Mentorship at [mentorship@stc-alberta.org](mailto:mentorship@stc-alberta.org).

## Project Management Tips

*Continued from Page 4.*

As the project manager or project leader, one of the most useful things you can do is remove the obstacles that keep your team from developing content. Work to reduce the meetings that they need to attend. Make sure they have the correct templates, style guides, and software to complete the project. Don't let your team get bogged down by computer problems when your company has IT support staff to assist with this.

Spend your days seeking ways to advocate for their needs. If the writers aren't writing or attending to the critical tasks related to writing (research, interviewing, etc.), your project might be at risk.

# First Annual New Heights Seminar

## Building Usability into Your Documentation, Interfaces and Web Sites

### Ginny Redish

STC Fellow, Bethesda, Maryland

Spend the day with internationally recognized expert, trainer and speaker Ginny Redish for an interactive, hands-on workshop on one of the hottest topics in our profession: usability. Topics and practical exercises will benefit practitioners and students at all levels:

- Usability: What is it? Why is it so important?
- What's in the usability professional's toolkit?
- Doing user and task analysis; creating personas; gathering scenarios.
- Setting measurable usability objectives.
- Building usability in: applying research to practice.
- Evaluating your drafts and prototypes.

#### Our Speaker

In 1979, Ginny founded the Document Design Center at the American Institutes for Research in Washington, DC, which she directed for 13 years. There, she and her colleagues studied the problems that people have with workplace documents and helped major companies and government agencies develop model print and online documents.

In 1985, Ginny set up one of the first independent usability test laboratories in North America where she and her colleagues had users come to try out interfaces and documentation for clients including Hewlett-Packard, IBM, SAP, and Sony. Since 1992, Ginny has been working with private companies and government agencies as a consultant in usability and documentation. Most of her work today is helping clients make information-rich Web sites and Web applications meet both business goals and users' needs.

Ginny helps companies and agencies bring user-centered design into their processes. She greatly enjoys mentoring people who want to learn more about how to make products and processes work for people and how to communicate clearly. Ginny is a graduate of Bryn Mawr College and has a Ph.D. in Linguistics from Harvard University.

#### The Details

Calgary:	Friday, November 12, 8:30 a.m - 4:00 p.m. Delta Bow Valley
Edmonton:	Saturday, November 13, 8:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. Delta Edmonton Centre
Cost:	Members                 \$110 Student Members     \$55 Non-members         \$175
Includes:	Lunch
Registration:	See the Chapter Web site





# 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.

## September

Tuesday, 21 Coffee Night  
7:00 p.m.

Thursday, 23 Meet & Greet  
7:00 p.m.

## October

Thursday, 14 Administrative Meeting  
5:45 p.m.

Tuesday, 19 Coffee Night  
7:00 p.m.

## Coffee Night at MRC



The October Coffee Night will be held at Mount Royal College. Check the October issue of *SuperScript* for more details!

## Membership News



- Micki Kosman. Membership Coordinator

In June, the Alberta Chapter reinstated one member.

## New Calgary Members

Mary E. Nasi, Senior Member (Reinstated)

As of June 30, 2004, the Alberta Chapter had 201 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 mandatory for Thursday programs.

# SuperScript

### Contact the Editors:

Jessie Channey, Team Lead  
Sandy Gough  
Deirdre O'Riain  
Lynda Baxter  
Rosemary Reed

[newsletter@stc-alberta.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-alberta.org)

*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.