

# SuperScript

Volume 10, Issue 1



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



## Thrifty Writing

- Jolie A. Gallagher  
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Most of you write for high tech industries. Some days, a new technology sparks your creativity just enough that you won't stop writing even for a bathroom break. But other days, 14 cups of coffee and nine candy bars can't keep you awake. Technology can be exciting but, frankly, it can also be boring.

**Instead of writing as if you are paid by the word, write as if each word is money spent.**

But why should it be boring? When you research a subject, do you sometimes discover such tediously written sentences as "This document provides a description of the role of backup and restore technologies, with the specific intent to provide the context for standards efforts and solutions development for data movers, with an additional analysis of the issues that compel migration to a new solution, along with the proposed solution and analysis of ...."? With documentation like that, of course, technology becomes boring, if not downright incomprehensible!

Unfortunately, many people never learned to write simply and directly. They are afraid to appear (heaven forbid!) informal. Hoping to impress the reader, these folks lard their sentences with nominalizations, passive voice, and bloated phrases. But instead of impressing readers, they sedate them. And worse, overblown

diction can cause readers to suspect the author is masking ignorance of the subject.

Even as seasoned writers, we occasionally discover in our own drafts more words than ideas. (Remember those grade-school assignments when the teacher required a minimum of 1,000 words?


How creatively did you pad your essays?) We were conditioned to fill the page; now, writing with fewer words can be difficult, like breaking a bad habit.

To trim the fat from your own writing, look for some of these:

- **Passive voice.** Scan your paragraphs for those weak "to be" verbs. Find any passive constructions that you can rewrite in active voice. For example, rewrite "the unit can be installed in a rack" as "install the unit in a rack."
- **Nominalizations.** Nominalizations, or verbs transformed into nouns, can drag a sentence into dull and difficult reading. If you have used lengthy nouns with endings in "ment," "tion," and "ence," try replacing the noun with a verb to communicate the same idea. For example, rewrite "this document

provides a description of" as "this document describes." You keep the same meaning with half the words.

- **Unnecessary phrases.** You may be overusing fatty phrases such as "due to the fact that," "it is important that," or "under circumstances in which." In many cases, you can replace these phrases with such simple words as "because," "must," or "if."

Short, simple sentences help readers move quickly through the document and easily comprehend instructions. So be thrifty! Instead of writing as if you are paid by the word, write as if each word is money spent. 

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INSIDE SUPERSCRIPT

# The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

- Robin Etherington, Senior STC Member



## The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership

By John C. Maxwell

Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1998

ISBN 0-7852-7034-5

As we approach each phase and step of our careers, we increasingly become involved with teamwork and with assuming team leader roles. For that matter, we may be in management positions or seriously considering management as the next step in our careers. Come to think of it, in all aspects of our lives—parenting, volunteering, church/spiritual activities, sports—we face situations where leadership skills and ability are important to the success of the activity or event.

Maxwell has taught leadership and has written several books on leadership. This one summarizes much of his teaching on leadership. It is an easy to read and pragmatic book. It is full of examples of leadership (good and bad) by people we know from the news and history (mainly American history). Maxwell also presents many examples from his professional life. He skillfully uses the examples to demonstrate each of the 21 “laws of leadership” he puts forward as critical for all leaders to learn and practice.


Some of the laws are:

- The Law of Influence: the true measure of leadership is influence—nothing more, nothing less

- The Law of Process: leadership develops daily, not in a day
- The Law of Timing: when to lead is as important as what to do and where to go
- The Law of Magnetism: who you are is who you attract
- The Law of Buy-In (how often have we heard that term): people buy into the leader, then the vision.

A couple of my favourites are the Law of Explosive Growth: to add growth, lead followers—to multiply, lead leaders; and The Law of Navigation: anyone can steer the ship but it takes a leader to chart the course. Basically, if we lead and develop people who will become future leaders in our organizations, then they in turn will lead people. The organization will grow and prosper by having more excellent leaders in its ranks. Also, in order to ensure the success of a major change or project in a group/organization, the leader needs to plan every detail and set a visionary yet pragmatic course toward the goal.

If you are thinking about leading a team, becoming a manager, or coaching a children’s sport team you may want to read this book or any other books and articles on leadership.

*Robin Etherington is owner of Peregrine Communications. She worked with Nortel Networks in Calgary and BNI in Winnipeg. During her career Robin has worked in Mexico and across Canada. She enjoys murder mysteries, gardening, walking, Mexican cuisine and football.* 

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## Alberta Chapter STC's Annual

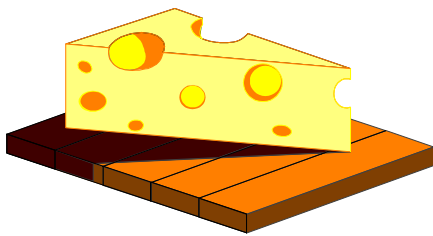
# Wine & Cheese



Kick off the year with an opportunity to meet and greet your fellow technical communicators.

Meet the new executive and make some new friends. We'll supply the food, just don't be late!

Confirm by Monday, September 17 ([lhdcadvision.com](mailto:lhdcadvision.com)) in order to have your name included in the draw for door prizes!



Wednesday, September 19th, 7 pm - 10 pm

Memorial Park Library

1221 2nd St. SW, Calgary

Cost: \$5 per person

## Volunteer Opportunities

Alberta Chapter STC is currently looking for the following volunteers:

- **Public Relations.** A great position for someone who wants to flex his/her PR/Marketing muscles. This position requires someone who can publicize Chapter events and establish liaisons with other Chapters and organizations to help promote the services we offer technical communicators. This may also include writing and producing promotional materials.
- **Volunteers Coordinator.** The Volunteers Coordinator works to match those generous individuals who come forward during the year with upcoming events or vacant Council positions. This job has a low demand for regular work and gives you the opportunity to meet and greet new volunteers while helping to fill the needs of the Executive Council.
- **Special Events.** This is the perfect position for someone who is looking for the chance to volunteer on a limited basis but still wants a solid networking opportunity. Duties include booking a venue for the January Pub Night, working with the Competitions Coordinator to host the Competitions reception, and helping out with the annual Wine and Cheese in September.



If you want to help out with any of these positions, contact Ian Hawkins at [ihawkins@telusplanet.net](mailto:ihawkins@telusplanet.net).



# Mark Your Calendars!

## Thursday Programs

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

Location: MacDougall Centre  
455 6 Street SW, Calgary

Time: 7 pm to 9 pm  
*Please arrive by 6:30 pm for registration.*

Pre-registration: **Recommended.** Pre-register by the Monday prior to the program.

Fee:	Pre-register	Drop-in
Members	\$7.00	\$10.00
Student Members	5.00	8.00
Non-members	10.00	13.00

## Saturday Programs

Attend Saturday programs to gain in-depth knowledge and skill in areas such as editing, Microsoft Word, and Adobe FrameMaker.

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: 9 am to 4 pm

Pre-registration: **Required.** Pre-register at least ten days prior to the program. **Note:** Registration must be cancelled one week in advance of the program or registrant will be billed for course fees.

Fee:	Members	\$75.00
	Student Members	50.00
	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: 7 pm - 9 pm

Pre-registration: Not required.

Fee: Free for both members and non-members.

## Executive Meetings

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

Time: 5:30 pm to 7:30 pm (Building doors are locked after 5:30 pm)

## August 2001

Monday, 20 Executive Meeting

## September 2001

Monday, 17 Executive Meeting

Wednesday, 19 Wine and Cheese Reception

## To pre-register...

To pre-register for Thursday and Saturday programs, e-mail Andrea Hogg, our hospitality coordinator, at [andrea.hogg@explorersoftware.com](mailto:andrea.hogg@explorersoftware.com), indicating your name and the program you want to attend.

## Reminder



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](http://www.stc.org).

### STC Alberta Chapter

To update your information for the Chapter, send an e-mail to our Membership Coordinator, Leila Meyer at [leila.meyer@olantra.com](mailto:leila.meyer@olantra.com).

## SuperScript

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**Submissions:** The Editors invite readers to submit articles, news, reviews, and other items of interest. Articles may be edited for size.

**Reprints:** Original articles appearing in *SuperScript* may be freely reprinted, provided that the author and source are acknowledged, and a copy of the reprint is promptly sent to the Editors. Reprints may not be edited for content, or used for commercial or morally repugnant purposes.

**Distribution:** *SuperScript* is distributed to members in Alberta and Northwest Territories, to all Canadian chapters and Region 7 chapters of the STC, and to interested companies and individuals upon request. Circulation is 275.

**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

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

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