

# SuperScript



society for technical communication



## Bye-Bye WYSIWYG, Hello Structured Writing

- Caroline Kutschke

**“It’s like playing three-dimensional chess.”** Thus speaker and chapter member Robin Etherington described her experience with planning and implementing an XML-based environment, at February’s Thursday night Program, “Managing Change to an XML Toolset.”

Unlike traditional desktop publishing tools that handle the presentation of information, **“XML’s forte is managing information and data,”** explained Etherington, project manager of the ‘Authoring Tools and Graphic Tools Requirements’ teams that are part of the XML initiative in the Training and Documentation Services at Nortel Networks. XML (eXtensible Markup Language) describes and manages *content*, not formatting, she said.

“Companies use XML to manage their information and cut printing costs,” said Etherington. For writers, it means “de-coupling” authoring from publishing, with a shift from publishing books to writing content (using XML editors instead of desktop publishing systems) that is

highly task-based, and distributed to customers via multiple media, be it web page, palm pilot, printed manual, or animation. **“The 8.5 x 11 page is no longer the center of the conceptual framework,”** she said. **“The framework is a module of information that fits in a screen... no scrolling. It’s a different way of writing.”**

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A driving force of XML is e-commerce, she said, because it allows companies to control and manage large volumes of data for an audience drawing on specific

pieces of information according to their needs at any given point in time. Also, companies need to control ‘secured’ information, e.g., credit card numbers.

Choosing an XML editor tool is only one part of getting ready for XML, says Etherington. **“There’s a whole tool set you need to plan for.”** For example, she outlined the planning stages:

- Global processes. First, a company’s “global processes will change,” she said. “Think through the process.” This allows

you to build your information model. Remember you will need to create a new set of standards, before you can tag your content using the DTDs (document type definition; creating DTDs is information architecture), or even deliver your material using a variety of media.

- Content management and task analysis. Analyze content, identify tasks based on customer information needs; structure the content. Etherington used the example of writing for a field engineer who wouldn’t want a manual to know about a specific

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# Special Presentation

# AGM 2001

## Alberta Chapter of STC welcomes WinWriters President Joe Welinske to the AGM

Planning for our Annual General Meeting has begun, and we're pleased and excited to announce that Joe Welinske, President of WinWriters, will be joining us for a special presentation. Look for registration forms to hit the mail in early April, but until then, book yourself for June 9<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm. Cocktails and our annual dinner and meeting will follow Joe's presentation (outlined below).

### The Evolving World of Software User Assistance

The opportunities for technical communicators in providing support for software applications continue to grow. As technologies in the computer arena evolve, so do the skills required to create effective software user assistance. Joe's presentation will offer a review of the current state of affairs and provide insights on the roles you'll be expected to fill in the coming months and years. The session will highlight techniques and technologies like browser-based help, embedded help, and XML, and discuss the increasing role of technical writers in the development of the software user interface. There will also be a brief look at some of the latest online help design models from Microsoft, Macromedia, Apple, and other prominent software companies.

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Joe Welinske is President of WinWriters, a Seattle company specializing in training for technical communicators specializing in software user assistance. WinWriters produces the annual WinWriters Online Help Conference, as well as conferences in Boston, Europe, and Australia. Joe has been involved with technical communications for over 18 years. He has a B.S. in computer engineering (University of Illinois) and an M.S. in instructional design (Loyola University). He has taught online help at the University of Washington and University of California, Santa Cruz. Joe co-authored Developing Online Help for Windows 95 and publishes the Online Help Journal.

## Plan to Attend!

### Alberta STC Executive Council 2000-2001

**Mai-Ann Sprung**  
President  
*maianns@merak.com*

**Suzanne Scott**  
Vice President  
*suescott@telusplanet.net*

**Blair McNaughton**  
Secretary  
*final.draft@home.com*

**Ian Hawkins**  
Treasurer  
*ihawkins@telusplanet.net*

**Leila Meyer**  
Past President/Membership  
*leila.meyer@olantra.com*

**Lucinda Yaworski**  
Jobline  
*yaworski@cadvision.com*

**Fena Maucieri**  
Mentorship  
*fena.maucieri@windriver.com*

**Angela Wiens**  
Liaison, Edmonton  
*wiens@telusplanet.net*

**Grant Sorenson**  
Archivist  
*wallis@telusplanet.net*

**Ken Schatzke**  
Education Programs  
Hospitality and Registration  
*ksschatzke@home.com*

**Brian O'Malley**  
Competitions  
Membership Survey & Directory  
*omalley@nucleus.com*

**Darren Tenor**  
Coffee Night/Special Events  
*tenor@nucleus.com*

**Glenn Ruhl**  
Canadian Issues Committee  
Mount Royal College Liason  
*gruhl@mtroyal.ab.ca*

**Andrew Donegan**  
Webmaster  
*adonegan@sprint.ca*

**Allison Strilchuk**  
Webmaster  
*AllisonStrilchuk@smarttech.com*

**Bonnie Schott**  
Webmaster  
*bonnieschott@netscape.net*

**Peter Adamski**  
Webmaster  
*Peter\_Adamski@adc.com*

**Laurie Holtby**  
Volunteers  
*holtby@cadvision.com*

**Roger Baumgarten**  
SuperScript Editor  
*roger.baumgarten@cdcg.com*

**Jessie Channey**  
SuperScript Editor  
*jessie.channey@hyprotech.com*

**Helen Schleedoorn**  
SuperScript Editor  
*hschleedoorn@visto.com*



## A Word from our President

- Mai-Ann Sprung

### Awarding Excellence: Alberta Chapter honours MRC Technical Writing students

I've thought for a long time that I am very lucky to be living where I do—not just in Canada, but in Alberta, where we have the best of so many worlds. Professionally speaking, this is also a great place to work as a technical writer. Not only is Alberta home to a wide variety of industries that employ technical communicators, but we also have access to one of the only undergraduate-level, degree-granting technical writing programs in Canada (offered by Mount Royal College). This well-respected program provides us with a steady stream of trained professionals who are eager to get out into the working world and write some stuff!

I had the pleasure a couple weeks ago of attending the awards reception for the Center for Communication Studies at Mount Royal College. Forty-three awards were presented to 87 students in the Applied Communications Program, which includes Public Relations, Journalism, Electronic Publishing, and Technical Writing. Every year,

the Alberta Chapter of STC sponsors 4 awards, given to one student in each year of the 4-year Technical Writing program, and a scholarship given to a full-time, second-year student who demonstrates academic proficiency and leadership qualities through student affairs and/or extracurricular activities.



**MRC Technical Writing Program students (from left) Andrea Hogg, Jolene Fleming, and Annae Jensen were among the winners of Alberta Chapter of STC's technical writing awards.**

There were two things that impressed me most about the reception: The number of students who have chosen professional writing as their careers, and the visible support from the occupational community. I never knew anyone who said they wanted to be a technical writer when they grew

up. In fact, many of us happened into our current profession through an extension or shift in the jobs we were already doing. But, as we move further into the information age of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where knowledge management and communications are increasingly in demand for so many industries, technical communications is less and less a job that happens by accident, and more often a career of choice.

So, let's extend our congratulations and welcome to this year's recipients, individuals who have chosen technical writing as their career, and shown a commitment and dedication to their education and to their profession that will stand them in very good stead as they move into the working community.


**Year one:** Alexis Macpherson

**Year two:** Jolene Fleming

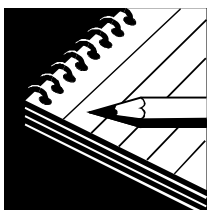
**Year three:** Annae Jensen

**Year four:** Dean Allen

**Scholarship:** Andrea Hogg

Cheers to a job well done! 

## What a HOT Topic!



The Advanced FrameMaker program, scheduled for Saturday, March 17, is full and there is a waiting list.

If you registered for this program and cannot attend, please notify the Registration Coordinator Ken Schatzke [ksschatzke@home.com](mailto:ksschatzke@home.com) so that we can contact a member on the waiting list.

Please remember that if you can't attend, according to the STC Alberta Chapter policy for Saturday programs, you must cancel at least one week prior to the program or you will be charged the full program fee.

# Ethics in Technical Communication — Definition and Understanding

- Ken Schatzke, Programs Coordinator

Thursday, April 19, 2001  
7:00 to 9:00 pm  
MacDougall Centre (Calgary)



If you have always assumed that ethics were the domain of long-dead philosophers and not of modern technical communicators, the Alberta Chapter's April Thursday program is for you.

In "Ethics in Technical Communication – Definition and Understanding," Dr. Glenn Ruhl, an instructor with

Dr. Glen Ruhl will define values and interests and why the two often come into conflict, both in individuals and companies.

Mount Royal College's Centre for Communication Studies, will define values and interests and why the two often come into conflict, both in individuals and companies. He will also examine the three kinds of values and how business ethics grow

out of personal integrity and social values.

As a participant in this program, you will look at the factors that motivate good business ethics: prudence and virtue. And you will discover an


approach to finding the best course of corrective action to determine the conflicts of interest and value that underline a problem. At the same time, you will examine and

come to understand the "gray" areas that often arise in ethical issues.

This program will be held on Thursday, April 19, from 7:00 to 9:00 pm in the media room of Calgary's MacDougall Centre. Please

arrive at 6:30 pm for registration and payment purposes.

Pre-registration is recommended, and the pre-registration deadline is April 16. Pre-register by e-mailing me at [ksschatzke@home.com](mailto:ksschatzke@home.com), indicating your name, contact information, and that you wish to attend the ethics programs.

The pre-registration fee for this program is \$7 for members, \$5 for student members, and \$10 for non-members. The drop-in fee is \$10 for members, \$8 for student members, and \$13 for non-members. 

## EDMONTON

- Angela Wiens, Edmonton Liaison



### V E N T S March is Grammar Month

The Edmonton members of the Alberta Chapter met on March 8th for an engaging presentation on grammar and word usage.

Hugh Read, an instructor from NAIT's School of Business program, presented a session entitled "**Grammar Gripes and Gremlins II.**" This session answered many of the grammar and word usage questions that torment us all. It also revealed the secret to "undangling" those modifiers.

accept or except?

affect or effect?

between or among?

- only the folks in Edmonton know!



## **Team Lead - Documentation Department**

Hyprotech Ltd. is a company where people are individuals. Autonomous. Creative. A place where who you are is as important as what you do.

Hyprotech develops high tech engineering software, specializing in computer simulation software for the Oil & Gas, Petrochemical and Chemical industries. Our highly sophisticated engineering modeling tools are used in plant design, optimization and operator training in more than 80 countries worldwide. Our Calgary office is both our corporate head office and our primary development office.

We are currently seeking an enthusiastic, dynamic, yet well organized individual with experience in technical writing to join our Documentation department.

### **In this role, you will:**

- Be responsible for the day to day operations within the Documentation Department.
- Be responsible for Product Management of the documentation product including the online help system. This involves Design, Quality and Technical Sophistication of the system.
- Write, maintain and update product documentation, utilizing your technical writing skills to ensure that Hyprotech's documentation is user-friendly and consistent in style and structure.
- Interact with Development staff and promote the Documentation Department within the company.
- Research, design, develop, test and maintain corporate technical publications and training materials.
- Assist in alpha and beta level product testing for new and updated product releases.

### **In this role, you require:**

- A diploma in technical writing, a Bachelor's Degree, or equivalent experience.
- Previous management or supervisory experience would be beneficial.
- At least five years of experience in technical writing, with specific experience in the Oil & Gas, or Software industry.
- Superior verbal and written communication skills, and the ability to express complex ideas in a concise and effective manner.
- The ability to work independently and as a team member.
- Strong organizational and project management skills.
- Strong computer skills, including excellent knowledge of FrameMaker, RoboHelp, MS Office products, Paint Shop Pro and Adobe Acrobat.
- Exposure to process simulators would be an asset.

### **In this position:**

Your decisions and actions will make a difference. Your drive to succeed coupled with your experience will give you the opportunity to be part of an exciting future with Hyprotech.

For more information, check our Web site at [www.hyprotech.com](http://www.hyprotech.com).

**If this position is of interest to you please apply to: [HR@hyprotech.com](mailto:HR@hyprotech.com)**

**Important:** Please use "Team Lead – Documentation Department" as the subject of your e-mail for any applications and inquiries regarding this position.

## Bye-Bye WYSIWYG, Hello Structured Writing (cont'd)

*Continued from Page 1*

cable install, but only that specific piece of information, which he could download on a palm pilot and after only a brief search.

- Authoring tools. Once you understand your content and how you want to manage it, you're ready to decide which XML editor best suits your purpose. Etherington called Arbortext's Epic Editor "the Cadillac" of XML editors, while adding that Toronto's SoftQuad product, XMetal, may work just as well for smaller companies and contractors. I4I is another Canadian company, whose S4/Text tool works with MS Word.
- Repository. The amount of content and how you want to manage it determines the kind of server tool you'll need to store, maintain and manage large volumes of information.
- Information delivery system. Choose the "engine" that will help delivery to the web, or printed book.
- E-solutions. Design the user interface for the information system pushing out the data, e.g., a website with good navigation.
- Proof and pilot project. Test-run your XML environment. Start small and simple; make sure all components work well together and then progress to more complex and high-volume tasks.
- Change management. Train users, including technical communicators. Using XML means learning a new way of thinking, writing, and organizing information so end-users can use it in a way that best suits their needs.


Each of the above stages must be managed separately and together, Etherington said. And she stressed using teams. **"It's important that you have representation across the board,"** she said, adding it was crucial for buy-in and for the project to work. In her case, each stage was worked on individually by a team, which then worked with the others to implement the full process. Each followed a mandate to collect and rationalize the information, to publish the requirements for information and/or data distribution to customers, to develop and use test cases and to participate in tools testing, she said. Each stage represented a learning curve, she said, adding that it's time-consuming and tedious work, **"but it's worth it."**

Asked why the need for all the tools, including why a technical writer would need to know more than an XML editor tool, Etherington replied that while writers could just focus on the writing tool, XML's **"ultimate goal"** is to deliver information over multiple media. If you want to implement an XML-based system that handles all of a company's information, and **"if you're truly doing web-based training, you will need other tools to facilitate that process,"** she said, citing predictions that within 5 years, most major companies will be using XML. To be fully capable, and because writing should be earlier- and more fully-integrated into a company's processes, communicators need to know about the XML editing tools, multimedia tools, and repositories in order to successfully manage a company's documentation and data storage.

However, Etherington encouraged writers to get started before even thinking about spending money or making huge changes. XML forces

writers to think about how the customers will use the data and the information, she said and **"that will only enhance your documentation and training material."** Writers can still consider, for example:

- knowing your audience and content/task analysis of existing information: this allows you to build an information model based on tasks and functions. "You can plan your writing to that information model," which can act as a guide, and ultimately facilitate a reduction in the amount of writing, and maintain consistency, she said. (As for legacy documentation? You can wrap PDF documents with 'XML wrappers' that can tag the entire PDF as a unit. By doing this you can search for that information unit. The downside: the user cannot search within it.)
- minimalism: a principle based on getting the user "up and running" as fast as possible and allows users to think and improvise and choose units of information as they are learning.
- structured writing.
- information modules.
- chunking information to what can fit on a web page and geared to what the customer might want at any point in time.

XML changes how information is created, managed, assembled and delivered, according to Etherington. With a lot of information on the web and not always a lot of time to access it, **"we must manage (it)...If there's no control, then that information is dead."** 





# 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: 7:00 pm to 9:00 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: 9:00 am to 4:00 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 Horton's.*

Time: 7:00 pm to 9:00 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)

## March 2001

Thursday, 15 **Demystifying Java**  
Thursday Program

Saturday, 17 **Advanced Adobe FrameMaker**  
Saturday Program

Monday, 19 Executive Meeting

Tuesday, 27 **It's Alive: Focus on Portfolios**  
Coffee Night

## April 2001

Tuesday, 10 **A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Water Cooler...**  
Coffee Night

Monday, 16 Executive Meeting

Thursday, 19 **Ethics in Technical Communication**  
Thursday Program

## May 2001

Tuesday, 8 **Job Security**  
Coffee Night

Monday, 14 Executive Meeting (New night)

Thursday, 17 **Quality Assurance**  
Jim Armstrong



## To pre-register...

To pre-register for Thursday and Saturday programs, e-mail Ken Schatzke, our hospitality coordinator, at [ksschatzke@home.com](mailto:ksschatzke@home.com), indicating your name and the program you wish to attend.

# SuperScript

### Editors:

Roger Baumgarten [roger.baumgarten@cdccgy.com](mailto:roger.baumgarten@cdccgy.com)

Jessie Channey [jessie.channey@hyprotech.com](mailto:jessie.channey@hyprotech.com)

Helen Schleedoorn [hschleedoorn@visto.com](mailto:hschleedoorn@visto.com)

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### STC Alberta Chapter

Box 2947, Station M  
Calgary AB T2P 3C3

Web site: <http://stc.org/region7/alb>

E-mail: [albwww@stc.org](mailto:albwww@stc.org)

Phone: (403) 230-6072