

SuperScript



society for technical communication

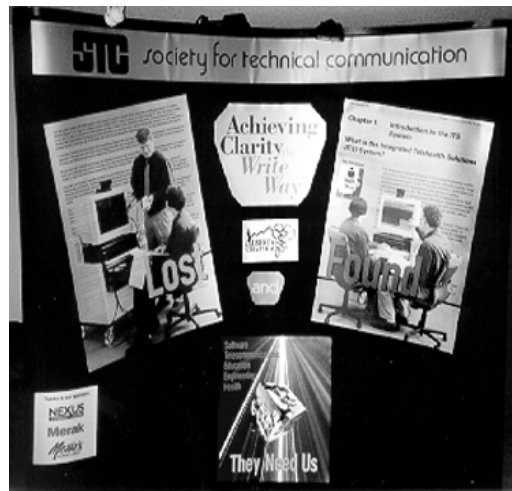


Smart 2000 Conference—The Conclusion

- Fei Min Lorente, Chair, Smart 2000 Committee

The Alberta Chapter participated in the Smart 2000 Conference that was held in Calgary on October 23 to 26. The conference was aimed at leading-edge technology, processes, business practices, and professionals. They wanted to attract people from business, education, health, research, and government—in short, our employers and clients. This was a prime opportunity to educate people about technical communication and the STC.

The Smart 2000 Conference organizers offered us a booth in the exhibit area for free (worth \$2800), in exchange for our support. We advertised their conference, encouraged people to attend, and encouraged people to volunteer to work for the conference organizers. We were successful on all fronts; and in return, the conference organizers called us a “partner”, and offered us the half-price registration fee beyond the deadline of May 2000. They also recognized our contribution at their opening ceremony where Mai-Ann Sprung, our president, represented the Alberta Chapter.



Our new booth features an impressive display that promotes technical communication and the STC.

On another front, we prepared a professional-looking booth to promote technical communication and the STC to the public and private sector. The committee prepared a proposal for STC International asking for a merit grant of \$3000 US to help us pay for a portable background display and the graphics to get our message across. With significant help from Ellen Fenwick, our director-sponsor, the executive board accepted our proposal and sent us the money. With the addition of some chapter funds, we were able to design and produce an impressive display as

shown in the picture. According to those working in our booth, the display was eye-catching.

Our booth also featured several manuals that were entered in the competition last year, and a laptop loaded with a copy of our Web site and several online help systems. We distributed brochures explaining how technical communicators can help businesses, and business cards with our contact information.

As expected, most attendees had not heard of the STC and were quickly educated by our people. Many expressed interest in joining or in

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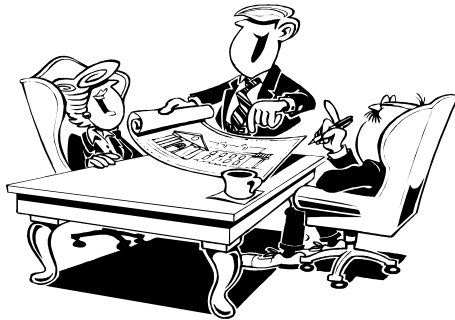
A Word from our President

- Mai-Ann Sprung

To Print or Not to Print—A Much Clearer Picture Now...

With both Canadian and American elections featuring prominently in our media these days, I'm sure we're probably all a little tired of hearing poll results—but we do have our own little survey to report on this month as well.

I'd like to start by thanking everyone who took the time to respond to the question, "Do you want to receive the *SuperScript* newsletter electronically (PDF format)?"




We *did* receive responses from over 50% of membership, with 110 members having sent in their votes. And now for the results.

77% of respondents voted in favour of receiving the newsletter electronically.

In September, the Executive Council agreed that we would need at least two-thirds of respondents in favour of an electronic version before considering a change in the delivery format. We now have that. However, many of those who responded in favour of retaining the hardcopy newsletter made some convincing arguments that the Council will have to take into consideration as well.

At the November 20th Council meeting, we'll discuss the results of the survey and look at all other options before making a decision. Members will be notified of the results and if a change in delivery format occurs, will receive at least one month's notification in a printed newsletter. Any change will also be accompanied by an evaluation period. No change in delivery format will occur before January, 2001.

If you have any questions or concerns that you feel haven't already been stated, please contact me at maianns@merak.com before November 20th. 

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Smart 2000 Conference—The Conclusion

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having the technical writers at their company join, so we can expect to see some new members in our chapter as a direct result of this conference. We also had some people express an interest in hiring technical writers. Our membership and jobline coordinators will be following up.


Thanks to some corporate sponsors—Merak Projects Ltd., Nexus Computer Books, and Moxie's—we were able to offer draw prizes to the volunteers who worked directly for the Smart 2000 conference organizers, the volunteers who worked the booth, and the attendees.

We can expect to see some new members in our chapter as a direct result of this conference.

A group of STC volunteers took time off work and out of their busy schedules to stay at the booth and inform attendees about technical communication and the STC. We also had some representation from the Mount Royal Centre for Communication Studies to promote the education programs available for technical communicators, and the availability of students through the co-op program.

Now that the conference is over, we have a professional, portable display that can be used for other conferences we attend, job fairs, or our own AGM. We have also offered to lend the display to other chapters if they will pay for shipping. As the display is

aimed at promoting technical communication, we feel it is generic enough to be used under many circumstances. Also, as each poster is separate and attached with velcro, the graphics are modular and replaceable for a low cost.

Finally, I must thank the dedicated group of committee members who successfully completed this task: Grant Sorensen, Linda Bligh, Patricia Postey, Margie Diakuw, Leila Meyer, Colin Ferguson, Diane Laverty, Don Harman, Mai-Ann Sprung, and Helen Schleedoorn. This is the group of people who have helped to establish technical communication as a profession in this province. 

Secretary's Message

- Blair McNaughton

And we just keep rolling along.... Smart 2000 is over and our new display looks GREAT! We've also finished the first (and sometimes more) round of events and programs. Competition entries are in, although




as I write this article I think we could still use a few more judges. The newsletter team is settled into their game plan, albeit not without a few technical glitches; but hey, sometimes it takes more than even a mighty

technical writer to make the software work properly. Things are looking good, so what now?

Funny you should ask. In case you've missed it elsewhere, the executive council could use a few new members: anyone interested in a little P.R. or running Programs? If the council seems a bit much, consider helping out at an event or program. There's always something that needs to be done and volunteering is a great way to network and meet your peers.

The mighty electronic newsletter debate has yet to be decided, but thanks to member response, the

executive has some of the input to consider. As others have commented, this issue is simply—or not so simply—about giving members the best bang for their buck. At least now we have a better idea of the targets. Thanks to everyone who replied to express an opinion.

As ever, the next few months are busy with programs and events. Be sure to check the newsletter calendar for the ones you want to attend. We look forward to seeing you. 

Perception and Ordering of Information

- Ken d'Albenas

A report on Alberta Chapter of STC's October Thursday evening Program presented by Dr. Barbara Schneider.

Friday, 8:30 a.m., Carol Lucas, a software company geologist and support specialist, is meeting with the technical writer for a new-feature demo and review of release notes. On the Sun workstation monitor are the maps and assorted dialogue boxes under discussion. In Carol's hands is a marked-up draft of the release notes.

She furrows her brow at the documentation of an enhancement to the well database interface. "I don't understand this Block Edit function in the well log spreadsheet," she says in a frustrated tone. "You say here that it can replace a block of sample values in a log with a single repeated value. But does that mean horizontally or vertically?"

Now it's the tech writer's turn to look perplexed, if not astonished. The documentation includes an illustration with call-outs. The meaning should be clear. There should only be one possible way to interpret the sentence that's stumping her.

"Vertically, of course," he replies, running his index finger down one of the



columns of the spreadsheet displayed on the monitor and leaving a faint vertical trail of doughnut grease and icing sugar on the glass. "Horizontally wouldn't make sense, because you'd be going across different logs."

"Ah," the geologist says. You can see the lights come on. "Well, if it had said vertical I'd have understood right away."

She shrugs. "I'm sorry, but I needed the visual direction in the sentence. It's just the way my mind orients things."

This story illustrates one of the core challenges of technical communication. As we analyze our target audiences, how can we provide for all their different styles of learning? Did Carol really just need to see the word "vertical" (which the writer did promptly add to the text), or did she actually need to hear someone confirm it? If you add a word here, a sidebar there, more illustrations everywhere, and your tight-as-a-drum document starts to bulge, will you then arouse others to complain about too much information?

To help deal with that problem, Dr. Barbara Schneider of the Faculty of Communication and Culture at the University of Calgary conducted a mini workshop on perception and ordering of information for the STC Alberta Chapter on October 19 at the McDougall Centre in Calgary.

"Don't we all wish everyone else thought just like us? Wouldn't that

make your jobs so much easier?" she asked, eliciting chuckles and wry smiles around the room. "But as you know, what is sensible and useful to one person may be senseless and useless to the next.

"If we can't assume others think like us, then can we classify the differences and put this knowledge to use?"

"If we can't assume others think like us, then can we classify the differences and put this knowledge to use?" she continued. A brief summary of learning theories and applications followed. Hemi-

spheric Functioning (logical left-brainers, recreational right-brainers). Kolb's Learning Styles. The time-honoured Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.

"There are hundreds of them," she said.

Dr. Schneider then homed in on the fully trademarked Gregorc Mind Styles system, which has its roots in phenomenology. It identifies two dimensions of individual styles: how people perceive the world (concrete vs abstract), and how they order it (sequential vs random). She reminded workshop participants that they themselves bring a personal template to their jobs. To prove it, each person filled out a Gregorc Style Delineator card containing a matrix of ten groups of four words that might or might not describe their inner self. Ranking the descriptions gave a personal score in each of four "mediation channels," or Mind Styles: Concrete Sequential (CS), Concrete Random (CR), Abstract Sequential (AS), and Abstract Random (AR).

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Calling All Volunteers!

- Laurie Holtby

The Alberta Chapter STC currently needs the following volunteers:

- **Competition.** Judge the entries from St. Louis in this year's publications and online competition.
- **Executive Positions.** Take on one of the following open positions: Public Relations or Programs Coordinator.
- **Region 7 Conference.** Act as Publications Coordinator for the 2001 conference in Portland, Oregon. Help in the planning for the Alberta Chapter to potentially run the conference in 2002.
- **Annual General Meeting and Workshops.** Join the AGM committee.



- **Mentorship Program.** Act as a mentor to new technical writers. Create a survey (in January) for those who are participating in the program.

If you want to help out with any of these positions, contact Laurie Holtby at holtby@cadvision.com. 

IMPORTANT REMINDERS

THE JOBLINE ACCESS CODE HAS CHANGED!

Effective November 1, 2000 you will need to enter a new code to access the Jobline.

To get the new code, send an e-mail with your full name (as it is registered with STC) to our Jobline coordinator, Lucinda Yaworski (yaworskl@cadvision.com).

HAVE YOU MOVED?

If your mailing address, phone number, or e-mail address changes, please inform us so you will continue to receive STC communications. You can update your contact information with STC international online at http://www.stc-va.org/fmbr_menu.htm.

Also, please e-mail Leila Meyer at leila.meyer@olantra.com to update your contact information for chapter communications.

Technical Writing Instructors Wanted!

The Faculty of Continuing Education & Extension at Mount Royal College offers a Technical Writing Certificate of Completion Program. We currently offer courses in: Technical Writing, Editing for Technical Writers, Online Documentation, Introduction to Indexing for Technical Writers, Writing Technical and Training Manuals, and RoboHelp.

We are planning to expand our instructional team for the Winter and Spring 2001 term.

We are looking to hire technical writing professionals who have:

- **Content expertise**
- **Several years industry experience in technical writing**
- **Proven ability to facilitate/train adult learners**

If you are interested in instructing in this dynamic area, please forward your resume to Gina Kordoski, Coordinator, Business Education and Training, by e-mail: gkordoski@mtroyal.ab.ca or fax (403) 240-6670. For more information, please phone 403-240-6857, or visit our Web site: www.mtroyal.ab.ca/conted.



Perception and Ordering of Information

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“Everyone has all four mediation channels, but also a preferred one or two—the style(s) that get the highest score,” explained Dr. Schneider.

She handed out three pages from experts describing the dominant learning styles and numerous other characteristics of each type. According to the handouts, a Concrete Sequential learner wants examples and clear instructions, while a Concrete Random despises detail, preferring trial and error. Abstract Sequentials positively purr over polysyllabic prose, but humour is wasted on them. Abstract Randoms are multitasking, defocused by detail, and need reinforcement from people.


An experiment followed. Having identified their own styles, participants put themselves in their readers’

shoes. They split up into four groups according to their dominant style, and each group worked up answers to two questions: how do you prefer to receive information, and what turns you off? After fifteen minutes they presented their answers to the room, and the patterns of the answers were compared to the predictions of the experts. The Abstract Sequentials held true to form: although we were the smallest group, we were the last to finish, and reacted to the ensuing teasing with tolerant deadpan expressions.

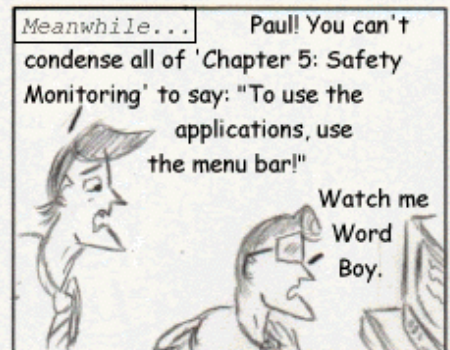
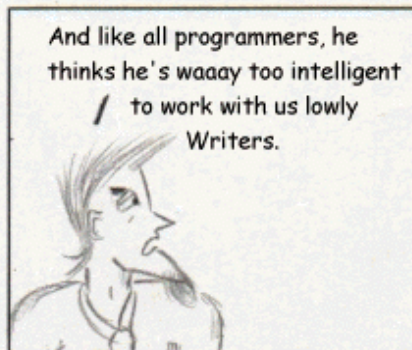
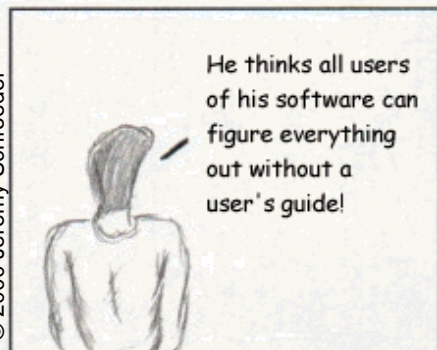
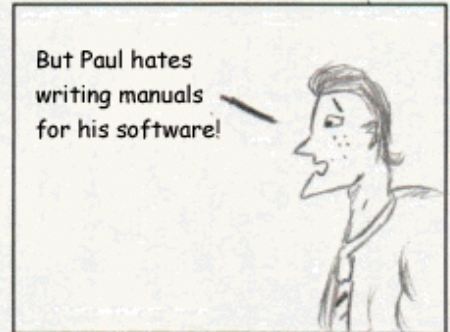
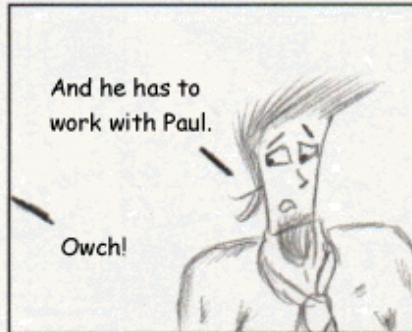
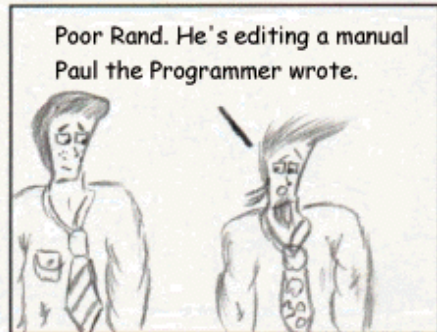
Now, remember those hundreds of other schemes for describing personality and learning styles? Is there a Grand Unified Theory? “No,” says Dr. Schneider. What about “visual” learners versus readers? Do they correlate with any Mind Styles? “No

correlation,” she says. “It seems likely that there might be some correlation with other schemes, but I have never been able to figure it out.”

What did the workshop give participants to take back to their jobs, then? We give the last word to Barbara Schneider.

“The message for technical communicators begins with an axiom of Psych or Management or Tech Writing 101 that bears repeating from time to time: “Not everyone sees things the way we do”—which may be a plus. Familiarity with any system of learning styles will help you to remember this more vividly, and give you ideas on how to anticipate the needs of your target audiences, as well as help you factor your own style into the equation.” 

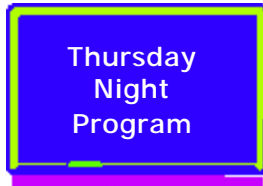
Bitter Ink.



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E-publishing with WebWorks Publisher

- Caroline Kutschke



Get a lead on e-publishing and online help development using WebWorks Publisher at the November 23rd Thursday Night Program from Alberta chapter member Ken Yasenchuk.


WebWorks is rapidly becoming the premier tool for converting FrameMaker files to online formats (e.g., HTML, DHTML, Javahelp, Microsoft Help, and XML). A condensed version comes with FrameMaker 6 and a full-functioning version can be purchased

separately. Ken, a Senior Technical Writer at Neles Automation, has been designing and maintaining WebWorks templates for more than a year now. The November 23rd program will include an introduction to Webworks Publisher and a demonstration of how it can be used to convert Framemaker files to an HTML-based online documentation system. Ken will also describe some of the problems he encountered while using this tool and how he solved them. He is currently researching the recently released WebWorks Publisher Professional Edition.

This program will be held at the MacDougall Centre, 5th Avenue and 6th Street SW, Calgary. The program

starts at 7 pm and runs until 9 pm, but please arrive from 6:30 pm on to sign in, get your receipt, and mingle.

The deadline for advance registration is Monday, November 20. The advance fees are: \$7 for members, \$5 for student members, and \$10 for non-members. Drop-in fees are: \$10 for members, \$8 for student members, and \$13 for non-members.

To register in advance, please dial 230-6072 and then press 2. After the message, leave your name and number and specify for which program you are registering. 

Canadian Members SIG Formation Proposal

Alexa Campbell, an STC member from Manitoba, has forwarded a proposal to the STC Board of Directors to establish a Canadian members SIG.

The mission statement of the proposed Canadian Members SIG is to foster communication among Canadian members of STC to allow them to exchange information and to discuss issues within STC that:


- are of a particular concern to Canadian members;
- arise by reason of political, socioeconomic, and geographical constraints because the members reside in Canada.

This proposed SIG will explore these areas of interest:

- Increasing the technical communications profile and reputation across Canada;

- Monitoring, helping shape, and publicizing technical communication education in Canada;
- Helping evolve standards to encourage a consistency in the technical communications courses offered across Canada;
- Communicating the value of technical communication to business, industry, and academe;
- Enabling educational institutions, industry, and practitioners to share ideas on technical communication.

Alexa would like 100 signatures for her proposal, which would represent about 10 per cent of all Canadian members.

If you would like more information on this proposal, or if you would like to add your signature, please see the proposal document on the Alberta Chapter Web site <http://stc.org/region7/alb/>. 

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

STC Manitoba is initiating a project that they hope will be appealing to a number of Canadian STC members: putting together a primarily Canadian anthology featuring examples of technical communication and articles about technical communication. The working title of the anthology is "A Northern View: State-of-the-Art Technical Communication in Canada."

If you have articles that you would like to submit or if you would like more information about this project, the request for submissions article is on the Alberta Chapter Web site.

The URL for the article is <http://stc.org/region7/alb/finalcall.doc>.



Mark Your Calendars!

Executive Meetings

Mon. November 20, 2000

Mon. December 18, 2000

5:30pm - 7:30pm

All members are welcome.

Coffee Nights

7pm - 9pm

November 14, 2000

Incorporation and other
Minor Miracles

December 12, 2000

Building a Better
Style Guide

Workshops

Sat. November 18, 2000

9am - 1pm

Editorial Responsibilities:
An Introduction
by Walter Bruno

Programs

November 23, 2000

6:30pm - 9pm

E-Publishing
with WebWorks Publisher
by Ken Yasenchuk

Alberta Chapter's Year-At-A-Glance

(Dates and locations subject to change.)

November 2000

14 (Tues) Coffee Night¹

18 (Sat) Workshop⁴

20 (Mon) Executive Meeting²

23 (Thurs) Program³



December 2000

12 (Tues) Coffee Night¹

18 (Mon) Executive Meeting²



January 2001

13 (Sat) Workshop⁵

15 (Mon) Executive Meeting²

18 (Thurs) Program³

25 (Thurs) Pub Night -TBA

Thursday Program Fees

Advance Registration

Members:	\$7
Student Members:	\$5
Non-Members:	\$10

Drop In

Members:	\$10
Student Members:	\$8
Non-Members:	\$13

Location and Details

1. 7pm at Annie's Books. 912 - 16th Ave NW in the Literary Salon. Parking behind Tim Horton's. Free for both STC members and non-members.

2. 5:30pm at the Merak Building. #600, 322 - 11th Ave SW. Free parking available in the lot on the west side of the building. Open to all STC members.

3. 6:30pm at the MacDougall Centre. 455 - 6th Street SW. Discounted rates for advance registration.

4. 9am to 1pm at Mount Royal College. Main Campus, East Wing Lecture Hall E167. **Advance Registration is required.** Pay Lot Parking only - bring LOTS of change.

5. 9am to 4pm at Mount Royal College. Main Campus, Computer Lab E141. **Advance Registration is required.** Pay Lot Parking only—bring LOTS of change.

To register in advance:

Phone **403-230-6072**, press **2**, leave your name and phone number after the message and indicate which event you wish to attend. The Hospitality Coordinator will call back to confirm. The advance registration deadline is always the Monday previous to the event.

SuperScript

SuperScript is the official newsletter of the Alberta Chapter of STC, 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.

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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