

# Super Script

September 1999



society for technical communication



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- by Fena Maucieri, Mentorship Coordinator, 1999-2000

The STC Alberta Chapter is launching a mentoring program for the new 1999-2000 term. With the growing interest in technical communication as well as the various educational programs offered throughout the city, the STC Alberta Chapter would like to assist interested individuals ease into the technical writing profession.

Our mentoring program is intended to address the needs of would-be technical writers looking for that first break into the business. It is also for people currently working as technical writers who would like exposure to some area of technical writing with which they are less familiar.

The program allows individuals who participate to define their own objectives and scope of involvement. The mentoring program is not tied to any particular educational institution or program. It is simply a way to connect individuals and provide a networking system that is more focused. Mentors and mentorees can participate at a number of levels, ranging from telephone interviews to job shadowing, as follows:

**Discussions:** Phone calls or personal interviews with questions prepared by the mentoree. This arrangement could extend to several meetings, if necessary and desired.

**Email Buddy:** Email communication between the mentor and mentoree. This type of communication is useful for individuals in junior technical writing positions, or lone writers, who would like advice/support from a more senior technical writer.

**Job Shadow:** The mentoree observes the mentor at work. This type of activity may require signing non-disclosure agreements and/or employer permission. The mentor should determine the scope and procedure

of the job shadow so it fits into their daily schedule.

### Why should I be involved?

For new technical writers, the benefits include the following:

- a chance to examine the field of technical writing;
- a better idea of how to transfer your current skills as well as what skills you will need to acquire;
- introduction to tools and processes of tech;

nical writing

- networking contacts... and friendship;
- advice and guidance from a more experienced writer.

For mentors, the benefits include the following:

- an opportunity to assist others;
- networking contacts that could potentially lead to discovering new staff members... and friends;

(Continued on page 4)

## : HQUH + DYLOJ D & RPSHWLWLRQ!

Yes, the Alberta Chapter of the STC is having a Technical Publications and Online Communication competition this year.

### Who Can Enter?

Anyone. STC membership is not a requirement.

### What Can I Enter?

Your entries must have been originally prepared and accepted for publication by a client, employer or publisher. The entries must have been produced or substantially revised within 24 months prior to September 1, 1999, and must not have been entered in a previous STC competition. A substantial revision means significant changes to content, design, format, and organization. We will accept entries in the following categories this year:

*Online Communication: Help*

*Online Communication: Tutorials/Training*

*Technical Publications: Software/Hardware Guides*

*Technical Publications: Training Materials*

*Technical Publications: Organizational Manuals*

### Who is Doing the Judging?

This year we are swapping the judging with the West Coast Chapter. That means that West Coast documentation and training specialists will be judging our work and we will judge theirs. They will return a written assessment of your entry for your records. This is a great opportunity to get some concrete feedback on your work from an unbiased source.

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Interested in being a judge in STC Alberta's first Publications & Online Competition?

See the information enclosed with this newsletter or check the STC Alberta website (<http://stc.org/region7/alb>) for more information.

### What Does it Cost?

- STC members: \$50/entry
- STC student members: \$20/entry
- Non STC members: \$65/entry

### What is the Deadline for Entries?

- October 15, 1999

(Continued on page 2)



Summer is over, and with fall comes a new year of STC events. Our chapter will be continuing many STC traditions such as coffee nights, programs, courses, and the pub night. We also hope to start a few new traditions: a mentoring program, a wine and cheese, and a chapter listserv. For information about the mentoring program, please refer to Fena Maucieri's article in this issue of SuperScript.

We will be kicking off the new STC year at a wine and cheese reception. This is an opportunity to find out more about the mentoring program, meet the new executive, introduce new and potential members to the chapter, and get together with friends. Students are encouraged to attend. It will be held on Thursday, September 30 at the Memorial

Park Library. The doors open at 7:00 pm. Admission is \$6.00. Beyond that point, your wine, cheese, and other refreshments are free of charge. To help us plan for this event, please register by calling our phone line at (403) 230-6072. Press 2, listen to the message, and leave your name and telephone number. Thank you.

We are also planning on establishing a chapter listserv. For those of you who are unfamiliar, a listserv is an email community. Members may post messages to the listserv, and those messages are then distributed to all members of the listserv to read and respond to. The goal of this listserv is to develop a

support network between our members. You can post ideas, ask questions, or just read the mail that comes to you. This listserv is currently being set up. Watch the web site and upcoming newsletter for information about subscribing. We ask that you restrict your messages to technical communication and STC topics. We are also considering the listserv as a method of notifying members about chapter events. If you have strong opinions either in favor or against using the listserv in this manner, please email me at leila.meyer@olantra.com.

I hope to see you at our coffee night and wine and cheese! ☺

)UDPHODNHU 5HWXUQV  
- Sue Scott, Programs Coordinator

STC Alberta is offering the highly successful "Introduction to FrameMaker", by Philip Sharman. Philip has worked with FrameMaker for a number of years on a variety of projects. He is a frequent contributor to the FrameUser's Internet discussion list, and a source of answers for many users. This is a hands-on course for people with little or no experience with FrameMaker.

**When:** Saturday October 16, 1999, 9-4pm  
**Where:** Mount Royal College main campus Computer lab E141

**Parking:** Visitor lot, west gate of MRC. Day passes available from the parking desk inside the west gate.

**Registration:** To register, please leave a message for the hospitality coordinator on the STC phone line. There is limited space,

and registration closes October 3. (Preference given to active STC Members)  
**Fee:** Members \$75, Student Members \$50, Non-members \$100. Lunch and beverages are included in the fee.

**Payment:** Cash or cheques at door. No credit cards. If you registered but do not attend, you *will be billed* for your fee.

**Contact:** For information on course content, leave a message on the phone line for the Programs coordinator, or email [suescott@telusplanet.net](mailto:suescott@telusplanet.net). For information on registration, leave a message on the phone line for the hospitality coordinator.

If you would like the STC Alberta chapter to offer an advanced FrameMaker course, please let us know. If there are more than 15 people interested in taking this course, we will offer it in the spring of 2000. If you are interested, please leave a message on the phone line for the program coordinator, or email [suescott@telusplanet.net](mailto:suescott@telusplanet.net). ☺

## &RPSHWLWLRQ 1999

(Continued from page 1)

### What Can I Win?

- Chapter-wide acclaim
- The admiration of your peers
- Recognition from employers and clients
- A great entry on your resume
- The opportunity to send your Best of Show or Distinguished award-winning entry to the international competition

### Where Can I Get More Information?

- See the Competition Call for Entries information included with this newsletter.
- Check the STC Alberta website <http://stc.org/region7/alb>
- Call/E-mail the Entries chair: Sandra Busby 264-4343, [sbusby@siwrites.com](mailto:sbusby@siwrites.com)
- Call/E-mail Laura Harvie: 264-4343, [laura@siwrites.com](mailto:laura@siwrites.com) ☺

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## Executive Meeting

Sep. 20, 5:30 p.m.

**NEW VENUE!**

#1400, 505 3 St SW

All members are welcome.

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**Phone** 230-6072 to register for Courses, Programs, or the Wine & Cheese.

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## Wine & Cheese – Sep. 30

This event is for technical and professional writing students, and all STC members. See “A Word From Our President” for more information. **Memorial Park Library, 7 p.m.**

**Admission: \$6.00**

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## Coffee Nights

Annie’s Books, 7 p.m.

912 16 Ave. NW. Free.

**Oct. 12**

*Tales of the Mad Archivist!*

**Facilitator:** Darren Tenor

**Discussion topic:** Gasp!

Can it be? In the Halloween spirit, we’ll explore technical writing horror stories of gut-wrenching madness that will chill you to the bone, and rattle your sanity! Attend if you dare!

**Nov. 9**

Contracts and Consulting

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## Course – Oct. 16

*Intro to FrameMaker*

This popular workshop by Philip Sharman makes its return this fall. See “FrameMaker Returns” for more information.

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## Programs

**Oct. 21**

*Contracting vs.*

*Employment*

A panel of local experienced technical writers will discuss the pros and cons of contracting and full-time employment.

**Nov 18**

*Web Pages: the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*

Join us for this program to get tips on how to improve your web page. See “Program Notes” for more information on these programs.

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- by Paul Sparrow-Clarke

In Strunk and White’s wonderful writer’s guide *The Elements of Style*, guideline 17 simply says *Omit needless words*. I submit that this is the single most important rule for technical writers to follow. We are all text-surgeons, as well as text crafters, and honing our editorial scalpels is extremely important.

As an example, I completed a project last year writing a detailed technical proposal (a response to a Request for Proposals, or RFP) for a telecommunications company. The technical experts in the company had already compiled a rough draft of the response document. It was some 80 pages long, and my first task was to review and edit it. Upon reviewing this document, it became apparent that the authors had done a “data dump” of all facts they could think of that were even remotely connected with the subject of each RFP question. So, the first step was to edit out all the needless text. Heh, heh.

To cut a long story short, I (and the other writer who eventually teamed up with me) reduced 80 pages to about 50. And throughout the writing process, this core of material was reduced even further. The final document was wonderfully concise, succinctly answering each question with the relevant information only. The company was happy, got shortlisted for the project, and eventually won the RFP competition. All helped by the consistent application of the *omit needless words* principle.

At this point, some of you may be dissenting, saying that technical writing includes a whole range of skills, not just the one under discussion. Lest you think I’ve forgotten that, let me assure you I haven’t. But on a writing project, the most important thing you can do, and the task that takes the most time, is to make your text lean and mean.

The people we work for may not recognize how much work it is to write with brevity. During meetings with clients, I frequently emphasize the effort needed to produce a shorter document. I can’t remember who said it, but I recall a quote by a famous writer who, at the end of a letter, apologized for the length of the letter, and noted that they didn’t have time to write a shorter one. It takes skill and work to use the text-scalpel and hone away at our writing without losing the meaning.

This last point is worth re-emphasizing: *we must not lose the meaning*. And here’s where the skill really comes in. Many can cut; comparatively few can cut effectively. Technical writers must find the *core message* and com-

municate it as briefly and clearly as possible. However, we must not be afraid of text.

I’ve gotten into discussions and arguments with other writers on removing text for the sake of it. There seems to be a school of thought that says text is bad, white space or graphics are good. I don’t want to get sidetracked here, as this is the substance of another planned *Meditations* column, but suffice it to say that this is not necessarily so. Often, lean and concise text is the best way to get a complex message across. Pictures may tell a thousand words, but sometimes 100 well-chosen words can tell the same story more effectively.

So, be a text-surgeon. Find the core message, and cut away all the useless parts of the text that either don’t support that message or obscure it. Reconnect and rework what remains.

We focus so much on other aspects of the technical writing profession—using software, managing projects, multimedia, etc.—that it sometimes seems we forget we are first and foremost *writers*. And as such, we must be disciplined to learn, improve, and practice writing skills. *The Elements of Style* is a wonderful text for helping get back to the basics of being a writer. And *Omit needless words* are truly words to live by for all technical writers.

And I apologize for such a lengthy column, but you see I didn’t have time to write a shorter one. 📧

*“But on a writing project, the most important thing you can do, and the task that takes the most time, is to make your text lean and mean.”*

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Think you’ve got the stuff to teach up-and-coming tech writers? Lucille Mazo, of Grant McEwan Community College in Edmonton, is looking for a speaker with technical communications experience (preferably in systems/software documentation) to give a guest lecture to technical writing students in her Systems Documentation class. Students are likely to have some previous career experience. Contact Lucille at almazo@v-wave.com.

: KHUH: Grant McEwan College, Edmonton  
: KHQ: within first 2 weeks of October  
&0DVV WLPH: 30-45 minutes, plus Q&A  
&0DVV VL]H: 25-30 students  
)HH: no honorarium, but an opportunity to promote your own contracting business, or for recruitment.

- by Sue Scott, Programs Coordinator, 1999-2000

**Contracting versus employment: what are the benefits? - October 21**

A panel of local experienced technical writers will discuss the pros and cons of contracting and full-time employment. Many technical writers prefer contracting, while others prefer to be an employee of one company for many years. If you are an employee and are considering making the switch to contracting, this discussion may help you make your decision. If you are a contractor and want to hear how other contractors do their bookkeeping, marketing, and work estimates, you will enjoy this as well.

**Web pages: the good, the bad, and the ugly - November 18**

Presenter: Todd Kuipers, Merak

Join us for this program to get tips on how to improve your web page. This is not a web

page design course, but a discussion of the basic principles of web design. The discussion will also include:

- Some design ideas that can improve the look of your web page.
- How a good web page can benefit your company.
- Some neat tools to use to add features to your web page, such as animation, and how to access these neat tools.

**Fees:** Members \$7, Student Members \$5, Non-members \$10. Pay at the door with cash or cheque; no credit cards please.

**Registration:** leave a message on the STC phone line for the hospitality coordinator. *When space is limited, preference is given to active STC members.*

**When:** Programs (unless otherwise stated) start at 7:00pm (doors open at 6:45 p.m.) at the MacDougall Center, 455, 6 Street S.W., Calgary.

- Blair McNaughton, Jobline Coordinator

As summer winds to an end, postings on the jobline have been picking up. With the increase in postings I want to remind everyone that full job postings, minus the contact information, are available on the STC website: <http://stc.org/region7/alb>. Limitations of the current phone service make it impossible to post full descriptions to the phone line when there are more than one or two concurrent listings.

Contact information will continue to be available only on the phone line, with the web and phone listings cross-referenced by job number. Although there may be occasional lapses between the Web site and phone line postings, every effort will be made to keep both current. Members without Internet access and requiring information not available on the phone line may contact me at (403) 281-3299.



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STC Alberta welcomes the following new members:

Lisa Brassard, Calgary  
Glen Dresser, Calgary  
Donald Harman, Calgary  
Haydee Jelinski, Edmonton

Kim Overes, Calgary  
Gerald Smith, Calgary  
Sylvia Siemens, Calgary  
Marty Steadman, Calgary

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(Continued from page 1)

- a chance to examine your current role and profession;
  - exposure to fresh ideas about technical writing.
- +RZ GR , JHW LOYR0YHG"
1. Visit the website at <http://www.stc.org/region7/alb/index.html> or contact Fena Maucieri (email [fena@audesi.com](mailto:fena@audesi.com) or call 275-6336).
  2. Fill out the appropriate form. (There are forms for mentors and mentorees) and send it back to Fena Maucieri.
  3. Fena Maucieri will compare all the forms and attempt to match individuals.
  4. If there is a match, both parties will be notified via email or phone. The mentor will be responsible for making initial contact.
  5. If there is not a match, Fena Maucieri will actively seek a mentor for you.

**1HZV IURP WKH ([HFXWLYH & RUOHU . . .**

- by Marty Steadman, Secretary, 1999-2000

Hello, my name is Marty Steadman. I'm the new Secretary for the Alberta chapter for 99/00. For those that don't know me, I am a woman despite the spelling of my name. I was sorry to have missed meeting members at the AGM.

Hope to see more of you at the Exec meetings sometime during this year. I know we all have busy schedules outside of work, family, and professional organizations. I have 3 children who all like to play hockey, so I too will have schedule conflicts now and again.

We held the first meeting of the new exec on August 16<sup>th</sup> at the Mc Dougal Centre.

There were fourteen in attendance.

**Meeting Highlights:**

- Coffee Nights & Programs are planned for this year, after their success last year. See

"Mark Your Calendars" for dates/topics.

- Competitions Alberta is holding it's first Competition, Chaired by Laura Harvie. Deadline for entry is October 15<sup>th</sup>. For more information, see the Competition Call for Entries, enclosed in this issue.
- Mentorship program has been developed and is under review. The program is intended to address needs of would-be technical writers.
- Treasurer reported funds are looking okay for this year.
- Web site will be under construction in September. Watch for the new look.

**Next Meeting:** September 20<sup>th</sup>, at 5:30. Exec meetings will now be held at #1400, 505 3<sup>rd</sup> Street SW.

Hope to see some new faces there.



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.

SGYHUMVLOJ: SuperScript accepts advertising of interest to our readership, and which furthers professional development. We reserve the right to limit or refuse advertising.

(GLWRUV:

- Don Harman [donaldh@merak.com](mailto:donaldh@merak.com)
- Mai-Ann Sprung [maianns@merak.com](mailto:maianns@merak.com)
- Alyssa Thys [alysst@merak.com](mailto:alysst@merak.com)
- Michael Trumper [michaelt@merak.com](mailto:michaelt@merak.com)

6XEPLVLRQV: The Editors invite readers to submit articles, news, reviews, and other items of interest. Articles may be edited for size.

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LVWULEXWLRQ: SuperScript is distributed to members in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Northwest Territories, to all Canadian chapters of the STC, and to interested companies and individuals upon request. Circulation is 200.

5DIWHV: 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 of Technical Communication, Alberta Chapter, Attn: Treasurer, at:

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