

LASTC

The Technograph

Newsletter of the Los Angeles Chapter, Society for Technical Communication

December 2004



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Tech Writers, Screenwriters, and Joe McCarthy: the 50th Anniversary

By John A. Mignot, Associate Fellow, and Karen Bergen, Associate Fellow

In the early 1950's the Cold War was heating up. Americans were fighting in Korea, and the death of Joseph Stalin contributed to increased global tension. A missile gap between the United States and the Soviet Union led the U.S. to develop intercontinental guided weapons and step up production of jet fighters, bombers, and military transports.

Aircraft companies, especially in Southern California, did not have enough technical writers to produce

the specifications and manuals required for this increased production. Women had not yet entered the profession. Managers at these companies debated whether to hire technicians and teach them to write or get professional writers and teach them technical subjects. Since skilled electronics technicians and aircraft and engine mechanics were also in short supply, the managers chose to hire professional writers.

At the same time, the movie industry was in turmoil, phasing out the studio system and working with reduced

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New LASTC Meeting Place

A new year reportedly brings changes, and you will find that LASTC is in step with that philosophy. In the new year LASTC will have a new meeting place.

For those of you who have recently attended meetings at what was the Ramada Plaza Hotel in Culver City, you noticed the construction and also may have noticed the name change on the top of the building.

When the LASTC Council was notified of changes at the hotel, they decided to check out other meeting places for the monthly meetings.

Kate Montessoro, Kerry Tani, Betsy Suttle, and Melissa Stoller spent a great deal of time and energy calling and visiting restaurants, hotels,

and meeting rooms with the objective of finding a new meeting place that would be inviting, reasonably centrally located, and affordable for LASTC members and non-members.

The result is KJ's, a restaurant in Westchester. It has a banquet room, the food is good, and the price is right.

With a lower price for dinner and presentation, the LASTC council invites all its members to make a new year's commitment to come to the monthly meetings. The meetings are professional and informative, you have the opportunity to network, and maybe even to let your hair down .

Details are on page 3.

From the Editor

The Technograph
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The Technograph is published four times a year: March, June, September, and December. Please submit anything you want published in the Technograph to the Editor.

You may reprint original material appearing in the Technograph as long as appropriate editorial credit is given and you send the Editor a copy of the publication.

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles they wish to be considered for publication.

Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter 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 Editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

The Technograph is available for \$12 per year (4 issues) to non-STC members and members of other STC chapters. If you wish to advertise in the Technograph, please submit an electronic version of your ad to the Editor at least 6 weeks before publication. Cost per ad per issue is: full page, \$100; half page, \$65; quarter page, \$40. Discounts are available for repeat advertisers.

Work gets in the way of so many things. Okay, that's just my excuse for letting everything wait until the last minute (seconds), to write this column and to get this second newsletter out. But here it is, and in my view overflowing with all things technical writer.

On the first page, as you have already read or at least glanced at, there is a wonderful article by John Mignot and Karen Bergen on technical writing in Los Angeles during the McCarthy era. Fifty years ago is not far off, and I am really glad to have this article for our readers.

Inside we have Kate Montessoro's practical article on font usage for online publishing which reminds us that in the 50 years since the McCarthy era we have moved from typewriters and several layers of pre-press and production support to the point where many technical writers are expected to write and publish, and do both well. Writers also find that they must write and publish not just for one but for many mediums. Kate has another article ready for the March issue, which continues her thinking on online publishing tactics.

Not to pile on tools technical writers might require in their journey, but you will also find the second part of an article on indexing from Linda Sloan as well as a meeting review of an indexing program presented by Jean Gabriel. Anyone interested in stepping or jumping into the discipline of indexing, and needing a little inspiration, should have been at that meeting. The second half of Jeff Klein's interview with John Saia of Toyota provides a glimpse at a big company's real life technical writing requirements.

Finally (but not on page 12), Kerry Tani, LASTC's new president sums up all that I and (am I putting words in others' mouths?) everyone else writing for this newsletter seems to say: technical writing is an evolving and group effort. Even those screen writers turned technical writers of the

McCarthy era discovered that technical writing was not like the solo effort imagined when writing the great American novel.

LASTC is a vibrant group of writers more than willing to share experiences and support others in the profession. Sharing can't happen though if connections aren't made. That's what meetings are all about. Make it a new year's resolution to come to a meeting. It's only once a month. Don't be shy about speaking up when you are there. If you see room for improvement, let someone know. Volunteer. We're all busy, both in our personal and professional lives. But to be part of something larger than yourself is very rewarding.

Email me, email an officer in the chapter; they're all listed on the next page. If a tree falls in a forest and no one is there to hear it ...

I wish you all the best as we roll into the end of this year; put on our warm coats and celebrate our holidays. No December meeting, but I look forward to 2005 as a group, in a new meeting place, and a renewed sense of purpose.





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Professional Business Services
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Long Beach, CA 90807
Off: 562-989-5526 Fax: 562-427-7432

LASTC—Meetings in 2005

January 11, 2005—White Papers In Your Future

Beau Cain, Region 8 Director

Professional writers who wish to move their careers closer to the decision-makers in their companies should consider writing white papers, because they help managers, engineers, governments, and consumers justify decisions. In business, ten types of white papers facilitate decision-making during the product development and sales process. Join us in exploring this most versatile and misunderstood of all business and engineering document types, and get a glimpse of how white papers can help insinuate writers into the planning phases of product development.

February 8, 2005—RoboHelp Advanced Features

Mike Hamilton, RoboHelp Product Manager

RoboHelp is a tool for creating professional Help systems and documentation for desktop and web-based applications. Mike Hamilton, Product Manager for RoboHelp, will discuss some of the advanced features of RoboHelp and provide useful tips and tricks for developing help systems. Topics will include using conditional build tags, generating printed output, and creating browse sequences. Come see what RoboHelp can do for your help system.

March 8, 2005—Communicating with Joe and Jane Consumer

Karen Bergen, Associate STC Fellow

Do you have trouble using gadgets like digital cameras or all-in-one printers? Welcome to the world of consumer electronics! Learn how technical communication can help.

Consumer electronics and computer gadgets play an increasingly important role in our lives, but they are still too hard to use. This presentation identifies common problems people have with devices such as printers, digital cameras, and PDAs, and shows how technical communicators can be part of the solution.

LASTC—A Classic

By Stanley Hansrajh, Vice President, Membership

It's that time of year again—time to renew your LASTC membership. This time, STC is offering membership choices, like "Limited" membership and "Classic" membership. We urge you to opt for the "Classic" membership and continue calling LASTC your home chapter.

LASTC member benefits include:

- Access to our jobs database
- Discounted monthly meetings
- Access to The Technograph, our chapter's award-winning newsletter
- Free access to select STC telephone seminars (regular STC cost: \$99/site)
- Scholarships for continuing education courses, workshops, and seminars.

When renewing your STC membership this year, please consider the ways LASTC enriches your membership experience and choose us again as your home chapter.

Thank you.



Meetings are held at
KJ's Diner and Restaurant
8731 Lincoln Blvd.
Westchester, CA 90045
310 216 0004

6:00 – Networking and check in

6:30 – Dinner

7:00 – Business meeting
and job forum

7:30 – Presentation

Price:

Members with reservations: \$18

Non-members with
reservations: \$22

No reservations: \$26

Program only: \$10

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Member Information

By Joe Hecht

In an effort to analyze LASTC member demographics, the LASTC administrative council asked Joe Hecht to study members' addresses and length of membership in STC. His analysis is summarized here.

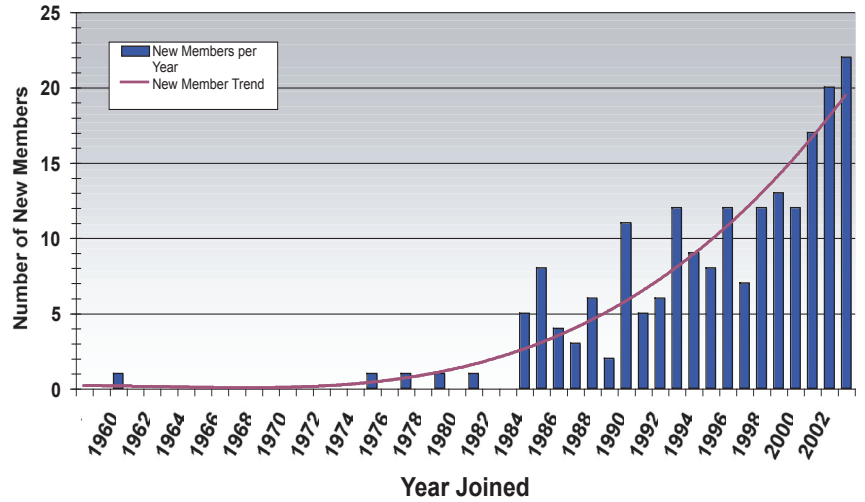
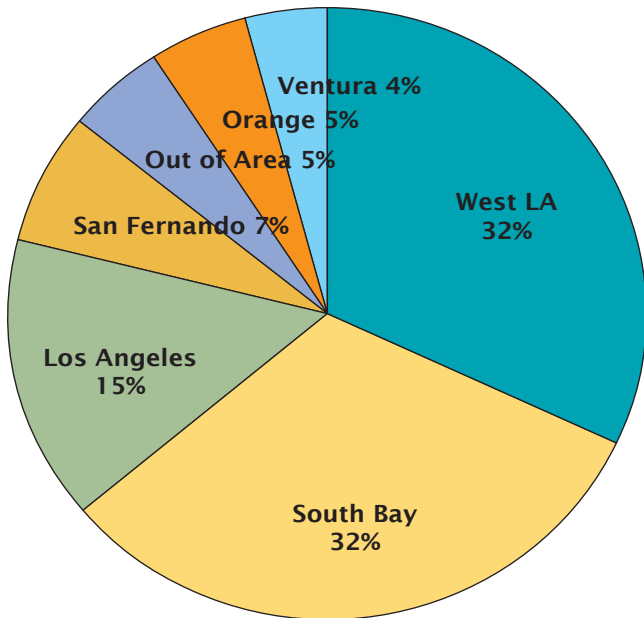
The raw member data used for this analysis contained 199 records. Only the city, zip code, and date joined fields were needed for this report. This analysis included only members with addresses in the United States. In addition, mislabeled cities were corrected.

LASTC has retained members for an average of 7.9 years, with the median member being part of the organization for 6.1 years. Our chapter's longest membership has been 43.3 years.

Member Distribution

The chart below shows a grouping of cities into regional areas. Additionally, here is a breakdown by city:

- Los Angeles 53
- Torrance 33
- Santa Monica 15
- El Segundo 10
- Redondo Beach 9
- Marina Del Rey, Long Beach, San Pedro, Hermosa Beach, Agoura Hills 4 each
- Other cities 41



Most of the chapter membership is concentrated in the areas near the 405, south of the 10 and north of the 105.

Conclusion

- Most members live or work in the West LA, Torrance and LAX areas
- Membership retention is about 6 to 7 years
- Membership is growing each year

More Information

Joe Hecht is a data analyst, Access Database developer, and LASTC volunteer. He automated and initiated state and federal compliance reporting systems for Southern California Edison in 2000-2002. Joe has been consulting for businesses in the medical and administrative services industries for over six years. Feel free to contact Joe Hecht at 310-779-0201 or jmhla@earthlink.net.

LASTC New Members

LASTC welcomes the following new members into LASTC. We hope our new members will take the time to explore all LASTC has to offer.

September 2004

- Lyndon D. Baugh
- Karen L. Johnson
- Marcy Tichacek

Old members please welcome our new members.

October 2004

- Alexander Ness

Additionally, we recognize two new Senior Members, with five years of membership in LASTC.

Senior Members

- Terri Avizienis
- Linda Magee

August 2004

- Valerie M. Rodrigues
- Barbara Voss
- Kimberley Yang

Preparing for the Future

By Kerry Tani

We stand on the shoulders of those who have come before and owe our best to those who will follow. No great purpose relies upon any single individual. It is always a group effort.

—Laurence G. Boldt, *Zen and the Art of Making a Living* (2nd rev. ed., page 199)

Perhaps you're reading this copy of the Technograph that you received in the mail. It's also likely that you're reading the online version.

If you joined STC fairly recently, reading a newsletter online may not seem like such a big deal. For members who have been in the profession a little longer, though, the evolution to online delivery is just one of the changes experienced by technical communicators since the Los Angeles chapter was founded 50 years ago.

What technology will be used to create the Technograph 50 years from now? What types of deliverables will technical communicators create in 10 years? What will be the hot topics discussed at chapter meetings in 5 years?

Of course, none of us can answer those questions—not with any certainty, and not today.

But we can prepare for future trends, and this preparation means fully recognizing the value of technical communication. The value we bring extends from knowing how to structure documentation and keeping abreast of various development tools to understanding the business requirements of the industries we serve. We also add value by utilizing the resources of STC.

STC supports numerous communities of practice to help technical communicators add value to their careers. These communities of practice have traditionally been defined as chapters and special interest groups (SIGs). We each belong to several communities. For example, I'm a part of the Los Angeles community of practice, with local

technical communicators with whom I can network; I'm also an independent contractor, so I know that there are STC folks throughout the world who can support me in how I make a living. My recent work products have been policy and procedure documents, and the information is delivered to users online. Two more communities right there.

Of all these communities, I find that the Los Angeles chapter is one of the best technical communication resources I have to help me constantly improve the services—the value—I provide to my employers. Within our chapter, I know of RoboHelp users, web designers, policy and procedure specialists, and successful independent contractors, and I never hesitate to ask questions of any of them. I'm convinced that if my career takes me to other industries or other software tools, I'll be able to find support and expertise at LASTC.

The Los Angeles chapter wants to help its members achieve success. I'm proud of the networking opportunities and the members-only jobs listserv we offer our members. I'm pleased with the numerous learning opportunities LASTC provides. But you get what you give. New technical communication practitioners need the advice and guidance of our senior members. Conversely, senior members can benefit from brushing up on the latest tools and ideas. Our meeting speakers enjoy interactive sessions with attendees. We all want to prepare for future career success—and membership in the chapter provides this opportunity.

As we close 2004, which marked the Los Angeles chapter's 50th anniversary, I'd like to share my wish for the new year: the continued growth of our chapter, so we can all keep on providing value as technical communicators for years to come.

May we all create effective communication in 2005!



STC Spotlight Awards—An International Affair

This year's Southern California STC technical communication competition—the Spotlight Awards—is officially underway! A new element has been added to this year's competition. We've literally gone global. Judge feedback this year will have come from St. Louis, Missouri (technical publications) or Israel (online entries)—not just the southern region of this state!

Spotlight Award judges, likewise, have evaluated entries from those two chapters. So not only was judging even more anonymous than ever before, but it was also done by experts in the field across the country and the world, who have added different experiences and perspectives to the critiques. Perhaps the Spotlight judges are the luckiest of all, however, since they have the opportunity to review in detail the work done by colleagues from very far away places, seeing the similarities and differences to the judges' own work and experience. But don't worry. We'll all have a chance to review the entries submitted, at the awards banquet to be held at the end of January/beginning of February.

Stay tuned for the competition results and details about the awards banquet, where all STC members and friends will have the opportunity to celebrate and review some of the best of this year's technical communication!



Technical Writing at Toyota

By Jeff Klein

This is the second of a two-part interview with John Saia, Technical & Body Training Development Manager at the University of Toyota. If you missed part I, you can find it in the September 2004 issue on the lastc.org web site.

STC: *Can you give me an overview of the writing department?*

JS: Our organization is part of the University of Toyota. University of Toyota is a division of Toyota just like Lexus is a division and Scion is soon to be a division. So there's the Toyota division, the Lexus division, the University of Toyota.

In our little corner of the world, we're responsible for technical and body training development. We design and develop all of the technical training curriculum for Lexus and Toyota technicians. So our audience is about 10,000 Toyota technicians and about 3,000 Lexus technicians, and another 5,000 collision repair technicians.

STC: *What kind of materials do you supply them with?*

JS: It's all up there.

He sweeps his hand in a Charlton Hestonian manner, to indicate a wall full of manuals which would pale that of any law library.

JS: The first on the far left is our repair manuals. We don't create those. They're created in Japan by our parent company. But most of the rest of the stuff up there are a lot of our training materials.

STC: *What about language translation?*

JS: They do it.

STC: *How reliable are the translations?*

JS: They're pretty reliable, but sometimes we have to do Jenglish.

STC: *Not to be confused with jingles.*

JS: *No. It's Japanese English.*

STC: *Oh.*

JS: So sometimes sentence structure is goofy. Sometimes they use the wrong

verb. There are some idioms they use that just don't work here. But my department doesn't have anything to do whatsoever with repair manuals, another group takes care of that. We don't edit them, or distribute them, or manage them. We just have a library of them because they're our reference materials.

We do make technician handbooks, instructor guides, videos, web-based learning. All the people in my group are SMEs. They do all the research, design and development of those materials. Once the research, design and development is finished and we have a pretty tight document, it goes to a vendor. The vendor's job is to make it look pretty, make sure everything is spelled right, it's paginated right and laid out correctly. They don't have responsibility for the content.

STC: *What are typical issues that your group has to tackle?*

JS: The biggest challenge is getting accurate information early enough. In the car business, when you're working on a new model, you're working against an immovable deadline. The car is going to go on sale on a certain date. That deadline is immovable. So you have to have your stuff ready to roll. The challenge is getting the resource information early enough so that we can make something out of it. We're in the creativity business. The first thing we need to do is have source documentation in order to make materials.

STC: *What's the solution to the deadline problem?*

JS: You change your process. You work smarter. For instance, in the old days, we used to get line art from Japan in paper form. Now we get it digitally. We used to get it on CDs. Now we go to an FTP site to get it, as soon as it's available. We don't have to wait for the OCS guy to get it across the pond and get it through customs.

We also have some work group tools that allow us to better manage those assets while they're in development. We have a program that we've developed, in collaboration with a vendor, called Access

Toyota. When one of our developers is working on a new model, he creates what we call a "project." As the project chief he can invite others to join the project. Everyone in the project then has access to the same assets he has. So if he's working on some line art, and somebody else wants to use it, that other person can grab that line art and also modify and edit it. The edits from both guys can be separate and distinct, if we want it to be. But everybody in the project work group can see those edits. And each of them has access to all of those assets at the same time. Ultimately, a PowerPoint presentation is built from this. And we use assets like photographs, line art, colorized line art and so forth. All of that stuff is in this project while it's being developed.

When it's all done, after we walk away from that new model and go on to another one, we take all those assets that we built for the RX-330, and stick them back into the database, where we can reuse it for some other group in another part of Toyota; or a magazine editor can have access to it.

That's just one example of some of the tools we've created that allow us to better manage the assets that we do have, and to streamline and increase the efficiency of the process.

STC: *Welcome to the 21st Century.*

JS: Yeah! It's fantastic!

End of part II



Indexing Tips and Techniques

By Linda Sloan

Editor's Note: This is the second part of a two part article on indexing. The first part can be found in the September 2004 issue on the lastc.org web site.

Limit Page References

Limit single main headings to 5-7 page references. If you have more than that, create sub-headings that are context appropriate for the heading.

Example:

Not This	Do This
Mars spacecraft, 2, 4, 6, 8-10, 26, 34-35, 45, 50-52, 65	Mars spacecraft
	Mars Exploration Rovers (MER), 2, 6, 26, 45, 50-52
	Pathfinder, 4, 8-10, 34-35, 65

Write Relevant Entries

The goal of an index is to include relevant material. Often you will find a topic only mentioned in passing within a sentence. Other times it will be discussed for a paragraph or more, even for several pages. You need to index these discussions of the topic to help your readers quickly find relevant material and not be searching for it through every occurrence of the word.

Concise Writing

In both headings and sub-headings always put the most important word first. In the example Mars is not the most important word in the subheading, geology is.

Not This	Do This
Mars exploration	Mars exploration
Mars geology	geology

Cross-references

A "See" reference should be used to direct the reader to the preferred term used in the index.

Spacecraft

See Mars spacecraft

Use a "See also" reference to guide the

reader to related information about the topic. Be careful not to refer to non-existent index terms.

Mars spacecraft

See also Mars exploration

Double Postings

Many subheadings should be double posted as main headings. Just be sure that they have the same page references as the first entry.

First entry	Sub-entry as main entry
Mars Spacecraft	Mars Exploration Rovers (MER), 26, 45
Mars Exploration Rovers (MER), 26, 45	Pathfinder, 4, 8-10
Pathfinder, 4, 8-10	

Format

Many indexers prefer the indented over the run-in format for published indexes. This format is much easier to read than the run-in format. This example should show why:

First entry	Sub-entry as main entry
Mars Spacecraft	Mars Spacecraft
Mars Exploration Rovers (MER), 26, 45	Mars Exploration Rovers (MER), 26, 45: Pathfinder, 4, 8-10, Viking, 12, 24,
Pathfinder, 4, 8-10	
Viking, 12, 24	

Other aspects of formatting will depend on your company or publisher's requirements. Above all strive for reliability in your work. This will make both the book and the index easier to use.

Hire an Indexer

In some cases you may want to consider hiring an indexer to do the work. Any thoughts from "I'm too busy to index it" or "It's too big for me to index in time for publication" to "It needs a better index than I can do" are good reasons for hiring a professional indexer. Here I will give you the short and sweet version of how to hire an indexer.

The best place to find indexers is online at the American Society of Indexers (ASI) Indexer Locator. You can search this with

a variety of requirements including subject, location, software formats, etc. ASI also has a Jobs hotline for posting to list subscribers. You can find ASI at www.asindexing.org then click the "Find an indexer" link.

You may want to make a list of indexers that you find as any one of them may be too busy to handle your job.

Contact your list and see who is available. The indexers will have questions regarding your work. Have this information available—subject, number of pages to be indexed, deadline, book format, index format, type of index required, and your contact information. Have some concept of what you can afford to pay the indexer for the proposed work. Traditional indexing are usually by the page while embedded and online indexing charges may be by the hour. At this point you can negotiate a final contract with the indexer. As this is an abbreviated description, you can find more information at the ASI web site and in Dan Connolly's article listed below.

Resources

ASI - www.asindexing.org

STC Indexing SIG

www.stcsig.org/idx/index.html

Articles, books and web sites

Indexing from A to Z by Hans H. Wellisch 2nd Edition

www.wrightinformation.com

Linda Sloan's web site:

www.informationuniverse.com

Connolly's "Hiring an Indexer" article at www.wfwbooks.com/howto.htm

See also the meeting review on indexing, page 9.



LASTC—Meetings, Networking, ...

Two Sides of Interviewing: The “Dating Game” and “Guiding the Interviewer to Give You a Job”

By Dan Warren

In the LASTC General Meeting held on September 14, 2004, the audience got two perspectives on the job interview process. The first was from the point of view of the potential employer. Michelle Wier, new owner of Technical Standards, compared the process of interviewing to the steps you might go through in dating, with the objective of finding someone with whom you can spend a lot of time. The second presentation by Jack Molisani, of Pro-Spring, was from the interviewee’s point of view. He went to the “other side of the desk,” with important tips and techniques for how you can guide the interviewer to see the value of what you can contribute to their organization.

Courtship vs. Interviewing a Job Prospect

Michelle Wier identified the basic steps of courtship, and drew the parallel of each to the process an interviewer goes through to identify and select a candidate for a position. These were “First Impressions,” “Compatibility,” “Is this a Fling?” and “Red Flags.”

First Impressions

“First Impressions” are, rightly or wrongly, the way the tone is set for the rest of the interview, as is true in a dating situation. “Looks aren’t everything, but they are the first things we see.” Dress and grooming should be in keeping with the seriousness of the interview process, not necessarily in the usual dress code of the workplace, especially if that code is casual. Extremes in dress should be avoided. One recommendation that brought concurrence from the audience was for women to avoid wearing perfume and men cologne or aftershave. The consensus was that there were more negative possibilities (strength of the scent, difference in taste, allergic reactions) than any positives. Excellent personal hygiene is required. Lack of good hygiene will be

noticed, rather than your getting “higher marks” because of good personal hygiene. Give some thought to your introduction and remember to make good eye contact with the interviewer. Also, you might think of some “ice breakers” you might fall back on if the interviewer does not take the lead in this.

Compatibility

The interviewer assesses compatibility by your demeanor (casual vs. professional, introvert vs. extrovert), your attitude (positive or negative, nervous vs. insecure), and whether you are confident or just plain arrogant. All of these go to the interviewer’s judgement as to whether you will fit in or not. Your skills and capabilities also need to pass muster for the requirements of the job. This includes your background, relevant experience, and appropriate skills. You want to establish a mutual interest between you and what you have to offer, and the interviewer and the skills for which the interviewer is looking.

Is This Just a Fling?”

Criteria change when only a short-term relationship is under consideration, rather than long term. In the interviewer’s world, this can be seen when a short-term contract is the object of the process, compared to an indefinite employment position. For a short-term contract, emphasize specific skills or experience that relate to the position. There is less flexibility in your availability in this situation, and probably less emphasis on compatibility. For longer term positions, your overall skills, abilities, and compatibility with the organization are more likely to be important factors.

Red Flags

In dating, red flags are behaviors or points of view that reveal potential issues later on in the relationship. Examples are the interviewee providing too much personal information in what should be a business

context. Storytelling (scary tales about their “Ex”), inappropriate questions or remarks, and over-emotional or intimidating mannerisms are other examples of “red flags” that could signal later trouble. Red flags tend to be “deal-breakers” that can lead to a negative decision on your candidacy.

What do People Say?

You may make a date because of a friend’s recommendation. In interviewing, references are the equivalent input to the interviewer. You should make sure that anyone you give as a reference knows from you that they might be contacted, and that what you have told the interviewer about the reference matches what the reference will say when they are called. It is a great mistake to assume that references will not be checked. The community of technical writers turns out to be fairly small once you examine it. It is not worth the risk of being “found out” in a reference check. The community members tend to have long memories for that sort of thing. Once damaged, your reputation is devilishly hard to repair, and the process will take a long time.

Making the Decision: 2nd Date or Throw Them Back?

The end of this process (dating or interviewing) is for the interviewer to decide whether the person they are talking to is worth continuing with (for a 2nd date, or for a job). Hopefully in the interview situation, you have presented a favorable, compatible view of yourself to the interviewer, convinced them you have the skills and abilities they need for the position in question, and have given them the reasons to make you an offer for the position. (And in the other situation, you get asked for a 2nd date!)



...Learning, Friendships...

Indexing – An Essential Tool for Technical Writers

By Nels Hanson

Jean Gabriel started her presentation on indexing at the November LASTC meeting by saying “real indexers have good indexing tools.” She admitted this was a small dig at indexing tools that come with Microsoft Word, FrameMaker and other writing applications. But you get what you pay for. Later she would name some good indexing tools: Cindex, MacRec, SkyIndex.

Jean emphasized that technical writers sometimes just fall into indexing jobs. When writers finish that long document they’ve been working on and have time on their hands, wondering how to add value to the document, one thing they can do is create an index. In such cases they may not have the choice of indexing tools, but they do have the choice to create a good index for the document.

Please note that I am very loosely paraphrasing some of Jean’s witty and convincing “I want to be an indexer” presentation. Jean has a long list of indexing accomplishments and credentials (currently an officer of the Southern California Chapter of the American Society of Indexers) and the audience (or was it just me) knew they were getting the real scoop on indexing.

Jean organized the presentation around the theme “Avoiding 10 Common Mistakes of Beginning Indexers,” and then provided a “better” way to handle that indexing problem. The ten mistakes she identified are:

1. Including document title keywords in the index.
2. Having index entries with long strings of undifferentiated locators.
3. Using an adjective alone as a main heading.
4. Having a main heading with only one subentry.
5. Having numerous subentries leading to the same page or pages.

6. Writing subheadings that do not place the keyword first.
7. Having inconsistency within and between index entries.
8. Using cross-references incorrectly or not at all.
9. Failing to include key ideas and concepts in the index.
10. Omitting an introductory note to explain multiple indexes or use of special devices in an index.

In her presentation Jean emphasized that indexing was based on principles, that there are many different types of indexes (database, journal, legal, online), and that in indexing, “every book or document is different.” Not only will content be different, but indexing styles will be different. Technical writers will most often use an indented indexing style rather than the paragraph style found in most books.

Jean stated that indexers have a responsibility when indexing to do more than just use a writer’s language. Write indexes to be read. And at sometime in her presentation, Jean added that she often chooses a book (especially those computer books that all seem to say the same thing) by how well it is indexed.

If you are interested in a fuller PowerPoint explanation of each of the 10 indexing mistakes listed above, with real life examples of bad indexes, plus definitions of indexing terms and recommended books (several are self-published), download her presentation from www.gabe.org. It seems obvious to me that to be a good indexer, like a good technical writer, takes experience, but Jean’s presentation provides an excellent foundation for jumping into indexing.



Jean Gabriel and Kerry Tani at the November LASTC meeting.



Kerry Tani presenting certificate to Michael Cárdenas at the October LASTC meeting. Writers are always welcome to write up meeting reviews for the technical writer community.

STC’s 52nd Annual Conference

May 8-11, 2005, in Seattle, Washington.

STC members receive a significant discount relative to the nonmember rate. The last day to register at the advance rate is April 22, 2005.

Attendees can choose among several conference hotels, all within easy walking distance of the Washington State Convention and Trade Center, where the conference will be held.

A conference advertisement can be downloaded from the STC Web site.



Fonts for the Web

By Kate Montessoro

When designing online help or HTML manuals, it's important to consider font size. This article is for advanced web-based writers familiar with cascading style sheets (CSS).

In a style sheet, size text using the font-size property: **font-size: 12px;**

The units for designating font sizes are:

- Point pt
- Pica pc
- Pixel px
- Em em
- Ex ex
- Percentage %

Point and Pica

To define a class with points: **p { font-size: 10pt; }**

Points and picas were designed for print design. A point has a fixed size of one seventy-second of an inch, and a pica is one sixth of an inch. A printed document specified with these units comes out exactly as intended. Computer monitors, however, display points and picas with varying results across platforms and browsers. In general, avoid them when designing for the Web.

Pixel

To define a class with pixels: **p { font-size: 12px; }**

Pixels make it easy to achieve consistent displays across various browsers and platforms. However, pixels ignore user preferences and, in most browsers, cannot be resized. This is a problem for those who need to make text larger to read it clearly. If you're creating a document for print or using a print style sheet, avoid pixels entirely as they have no meaning in the world of print.

Em

To define a class with ems: **p { font-size: 1em; }**

The em is a relative font measurement, where one em is equal to the height of the letter "M" in the default font size. Users

can resize the text, corresponding to the text size preferences set in their browsers. As a designer, this gives you less control over the way users view the document. However, it means users who need a very large font size can read your content.

Em values can be set using decimal numbers. To display text at a size 10% smaller than the user's default use: **p { font-size: 0.9em; }**. To display the text 10% larger than the default or inherited size: **p { font-size: 1.1em; }**.

Ex

The ex is a relative unit measurement corresponding to the height of the lowercase letter "x" in the default font size. Unfortunately, modern browsers don't yet support the typographical features needed to determine the size of an ex precisely. For this reason, exes are rarely used.

Percentage

To define a class with percentage: **p { font-size: 80%; }**

As with ems and exes, percentages honor users' text size settings and are resizable by the user. Setting the <p> tag to 100% displays text at users' default settings. Decreasing the percentage makes the text smaller. Increasing the percentage makes the text larger.

Keywords

You can also size text using absolute and relative keywords:

- xx-small
- x-small
- small
- medium
- large
- x-large
- xx-large

Keywords are defined relative to each other, and browsers implement them in different ways. Most browsers display **medium** at the same size as unstyled text. Internet Explorer 5 (and version 6, depending on the document type), however, treats **small** as being the same size as unstyled text. The problem is that you could design a document to be perfectly

readable in IE6 on Windows, but microscopic in Mozilla on Linux.

Relative keywords

Relative keywords—**larger** and **smaller**—take their size from the parent element, the same way that em and % do. If you set your <p> tag to **small** using absolute keywords, and you want emphasized text to display comparatively larger, add the following to the style sheet:

```
p { font-size: small; }
em { font-size: larger; }
```

Using this style, create the following markup:

```
<p>Several hundred tons of explosives remain <em>missing</em> from a military installation south of Baghdad.</p>
```

This displays the following (Windows IE6):



When choosing a method to size text, select one that allows users to resize the text, and ensures the text complies with the users' browser settings. Relative font sizing tends to work well with CSS layouts and simple table-based layouts, but it can be tricky to implement in a complex nested table layout because of the way the elements inherit sizing. If you decide that your only option is to size fonts using an absolute unit of measurement, consider developing a style sheet switcher to allow users to change the font size from within the interface of your site.



Technical Writers in the McCarthy Era

budgets. More than 200 screenwriters were unemployed, providing a very talented pool of writers for aircraft industry recruiters. And Hollywood was still reeling from the impact of the “Hollywood Ten”—those writers investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and blacklisted in 1947.

Culture Clash

It took as long as nine months for the Hollywood screenwriters to get security clearances. Without access to any confidential or secret information, they couldn't work, even though they were being paid. The writers sat around in “deep freeze” playing cards, reading books, or writing the great American novel using the company's typewriters and supplies.

To old-guard technical writers, the Hollywood newcomers were an odd lot. Their suits were not “off the rack,” some (such as J. Charles Alexander) wore scarves and had manicured nails, and a few even used cigarette holders. Most technical writers hadn't seen a man with a cigarette holder since Franklin Roosevelt; many former screenwriters thought that *ordnance* was a typo for *ordinance*, and *LOX* (liquid oxygen) was smoked salmon.

The Hollywood crowd viewed technical writers as uncultured plebians who read nothing but Mickey Spillane novels. After all, some technical writers actually fixed their own cars, repaired their TV sets, and even brown-bagged their lunches. It was a classic culture clash. The dandies learned that a *joule* didn't come from Tiffany's, and the grunts learned the difference between *use* and *utilize*. Those who couldn't adapt were left behind, and the fittest survived.

Loyalty and Fear

Despite their differences, the two groups soon had a common nemesis: Joe McCarthy. The Junior Republican Senator from Wisconsin made a name for himself by alleging that Communists had infiltrated the U.S. government and military. According to McCarthy, the news media

were propagandizing the nation on behalf of Communists.

McCarthy and his followers attacked individuals ranging from Dean Acheson, former Secretary of State, to a drafted Army dentist, Lt. Irving Peress. One outcome of this witch hunt was the national promulgation of loyalty oaths throughout higher education, for fear that Communists would infest our universities and poison young minds. At Berkeley, the faculty was pitted against the regents of the University of California over an imposed loyalty oath. Even in the small town of Harrison, New York, the school board had secretly voted, before a public hearing, to institute a requirement for loyalty oaths in 1952.

During this period of national paranoia, the Los Angeles chapter of the Technical Publishing Society (a predecessor of STC) held an all-day seminar at Los Angeles Trade Technical College. Conversation during breaks and over lunch was not about the presentations or speakers, but about McCarthyism (an enduring term coined by the late *Washington Post* cartoonist Herblock).

Some members with movie backgrounds were concerned because they had gone to Communist Party meetings while attending Ivy League or California universities. Among the blue-collar writers, some worried because they had relatives behind the Iron Curtain or in France, Italy, or Spain—Communist countries by association. All were concerned about having their clearances pulled and losing their livelihoods. There was good cause for concern, according to an article that appeared in the *Los Angeles Times* on February 2, 2002: “The roughly 600 people affected in Hollywood were among thousands of ordinary people across the country who lost jobs because they were accused of being communists or communist supporters.”

Although some technical writers were denied clearances during the investigation process, the writers of this article are not aware of any who lost their jobs because of their associations with American Communists or because they had relatives in

the wrong country. However, we know of one writer who lost his clearance during the 1960's because of an alleged connection with the Italian Communist Party.

Censure

Senator McCarthy caused havoc throughout the nation and turned friend against friend until legendary CBS newsman Edward R. Murrow exposed him for what he was. The network then provided Senator McCarthy with airtime to rebut Murrow's facts. That show led to nationally televised Senate hearings and the vote to censure McCarthy in December 1954.

The noble profession of technical communication survived McCarthyism while embracing talented writers with diverse backgrounds. We need to remember the lessons of the 50's to ensure that suspicion and false accusations of disloyalty will never again divide our nation or impart fear into members of our profession.

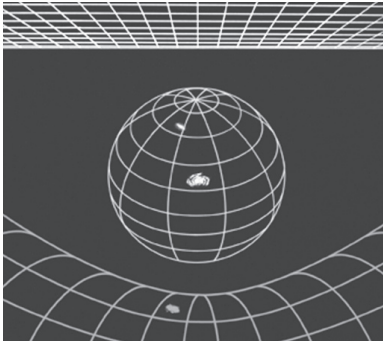
John Mignot wrote launch manuals for Northrop Aircraft's Snark weapon system and worked at The Aerospace Corporation for more than 35 years. He has taught at El Camino College and is one of a dozen master teachers at UCLA Extension. “Mig” has the longest continuous membership in the Los Angeles chapter of STC.

Karen Bergen is an information developer and consultant specializing in document usability. She has worked for Epson America since 1993, creating award-winning information products for computer hardware. A past president of the Los Angeles chapter, Karen is currently serving as chapter historian.



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