

# Ragged Left



November 2001

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THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

BERKELEY CHAPTER

## Contracting 101: What You Should Know Before You Quit Your Day Job

Does contracting look a heck of a lot better than your current staff position? Find out what contracting is really like from a lively panel of contractors who will share their experiences and shed insight into the differences between working on staff and working as a contractor. They will explore the different ways to contract (through an agency or direct to a client), the ethics of contracting, and the mind-set of a contractor. And they will provide tips on what to include in (and exclude from) proposals and what contract traps to avoid. But they won't do all the talking—there will be time for your experiences and your questions.

Panelists include Susan Becker, a contract technical communicator since in 1989 and Director of the 1997 Touchstone competition. Susan specializes in helping start-ups and large companies develop the first print and online documentation for their new products; Melody Brumis, a writer and trainer with roots in the creative writing world. Melody is the current president-elect for the East Bay chapter of STC; Dana Chisnell, a technical communicator, usability specialist, and UI designer since 1982. Dana is a Senior Member of STC and the award-winning author of *Effective Web Design in 3 Days*; and Gwaltney Mountford, co-owner of Mountford Group, Inc., a software development company, and an Associate Fellow of STC. Gwaltney has provided contract technical communication services to clients in a variety of industries for the past ten years, following her years

as manager of training and documentation at Bechtel.

So, if you've got your toe in the water, but don't know if you should take the plunge, or if you've taken the plunge but not made a splash, join us on November 14th for a lively and fun first course in contracting.

### President's Message

Greetings to you from the STC Berkeley Chapter board. Along with most of America, we have been working to get our bearings back after the terrorist attacks in September. We regret the necessity of canceling our September meeting and offer our apologies for canceling the October edition of *Ragged Left*.

Looking out into the next three months we have some great activities in development. In November Gwaltney Mountford and friends will be speaking on will be speaking on *Contracting 101*. If you have ever considered working in technical communications as a contractor, this is the presentation for you. We will be taking a holiday break in December and on January 9, 2002 the Chapter will start off the New Year with a party and

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# Ragged Left

Editor: Jessica Livingston  
[newsletter@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-berkeley.org)

## Contact Us

Chapter email:  
[secretary@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:secretary@stc-berkeley.org)  
[www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org)

## STC Headquarters

901 N. Stuart Street #904  
Arlington VA 22203-1854  
703-522-4114  
[www.stc.org](http://www.stc.org)

email: [stc@stc.org](mailto:stc@stc.org)  
fax: 703-522-2075

Exec. Director: William Stolgitis  
[bill@stc.org](mailto:bill@stc.org)

Membership: Christopher M. Ruck  
[chris@stc.org](mailto:chris@stc.org)

STC President: Judy Glick-Smith  
[judy@idoc-inc.com](mailto:judy@idoc-inc.com)

STC Region 8 Director: Bonni Graham  
[bgraham@manuallabour.com](mailto:bgraham@manuallabour.com)

## Officers and Volunteers

President: Kathryn Munn  
510-865-9045  
[president@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:president@stc-berkeley.org)

VP Programs: Paul Sinasohn  
[programs@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:programs@stc-berkeley.org)

VP Membership: Ruth Wright  
510-206-9192  
[membership@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:membership@stc-berkeley.org)

Treasurer: Susan Marchionna  
[treasurer@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:treasurer@stc-berkeley.org)

Secretary: David McCoard  
[secretary@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:secretary@stc-berkeley.org)

Employment Manager: Madeleine Adkins  
510-891-3953  
[employment@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:employment@stc-berkeley.org)

Web Manager: David Alt  
[internet@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:internet@stc-berkeley.org)

Address, phone, or email changes:  
VP Membership (see above)

# About the STC

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.



STC has more than 20,000 members and 155 chapters worldwide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, photographers, audiovisual specialists, managers, supervisors, educators, students, employees, and consultants.

STC strives to:

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication.
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

## Membership

Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is \$110/year, with an additional \$15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is \$45/year.

To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email:

- Send email to [bkymbrs@stc.org](mailto:bkymbrs@stc.org).
- Send mail to STC-Berkeley, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007.

## Advertising Rates

Page \$70, 2/3 page \$50, 1/2 page \$40, 1/3 page \$30, 1/6 page \$20, business card \$10. STC members receive 20% off. Ad deadline is the fifteenth of the month prior to publication.

## Submissions

*Ragged Left* publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please contact the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

Deadline for unsolicited submissions is the 20th of the month preceding publication. Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

No *Ragged Left* in December. Back in January—Happy Holidays!

## STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, November 14.

The Silver Dragon Restaurant serves STC-Berkeley members delicious Chinese food. The meeting begins at 6 P.M. with networking and conversation, and dinner at 6:30 P.M. Chapter business and announcements are made around 7:15 P.M., followed by the speaker.

If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and *must* be received (by Ruth) no later than 12:00 NOON the Monday before the meeting (November 12). Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do *not* contact the restaurant.

Send checks to Ruth Wright, 586 Vernon Street, Oakland, CA 94610.



**RSVP online:** Use your credit card to order meeting reservations via the chapter Web site, [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org).

With a reservation, the meeting fee with food for members is \$20, for student members is \$17, and for nonmembers is \$23; if you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 P.M., the fee is \$12 for members and non-members (\$10 for students). If you are not eating, payments may be made at the door.

## Résumé or Portfolio Review

Does your résumé or portfolio present your qualifications in the best light? If you're new to the field, or just concerned that your résumé or portfolio may not be up to snuff, sign up for a free 30-minute review. We have a cadre of seasoned tech writers with hiring experience who can review your material and give you expert feedback.

To sign up for a review, email [employment@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:employment@stc-berkeley.org) by the Thursday before the monthly meeting.

State your name and the meeting at which you're hoping to have the review.

Be sure to write *resume review* or *portfolio review* in the subject heading of the email message. If it's for a résumé, paste your résumé into the body of the message. If it's a portfolio review, bring your portfolio to the appointment.

After you've sent the email, look for a reply from the Employment Manager, confirming that you are booked for a review. The message will also specify your review time (6 or 6:30) and who your reviewer will be.

Reviews are booked on a first-come, first-served basis. Since our reviewers are volunteers, the number of slots available varies for each meeting.

## Documenting APIs Class

As part of our Education Program, Berkeley STC will hold a class in January 2002 on Documenting APIs. Look for registration information in the next issue of the *Ragged Left*.

### Who Can Take the Class?

Berkeley STC Members. STC Members. The General Public. Technical Communicators are the intended audience for the Documenting APIs class.

### When, Where and How Long is the Class?

Documenting APIs is a three-day class offered by STC-Berkeley.

### What Background Do I Need to Take the Class?

You need be able to manipulate directories and files; you need to be able to author text documents. You need to know how to invoke a command line.

Experience authoring documentation is assumed. In particular, you need to be able to write procedures for end-users, and work within structured documents. A keen understanding of natural language and metaphors of grammar are assumed.

### What Will I Get Out of the Class?

Anyone with solid technical communications experience should feel comfortable producing API documentation after taking this class.

You will understand why APIs exist; you will participate in developing a white-board example of a simple API. You will have the opportunity to produce documentation for these homebrewed examples.

These in-class examples are practical to the extent that they relate to the operation of the STC-Berkeley Employment Center. Ideal training for STC Chapter Webmasters. Voluntary homework might be selected to be used as part of the group discussion the following day.

We discuss and demonstrate running javadoc and other automated tools for producing documentation or parsing source code, and discuss issues related to large-scale API Documentation projects.

### What Materials Are Included in the Class?

None. No class materials or notes are offered as part of the class, nor is there a recommended text. However, supporting materials will be available through the STC-Berkeley website, and students will emerge with samples done in class.

### Do I Get Lunch?

Yes. Lunch is included in the fee. A vegetarian lunch option will be available.

### What is the Focus of the Class and Do I Need a Laptop?

The class focuses on the concepts and principles, rather than tools and techniques. You do not need a laptop.

## President's Message

Distinguished Chapter Service awards presentation. We invite you and your family to enjoy food, fun, and dance. Start your 2002 calendar today and add the date.

One of the initiatives adopted by the board this year has been to establish a mentoring program for students and newcomers breaking into the technical communications field. Joseph Ryshpan has graciously accepted the responsibility for a lead role in setting up the program. Joseph may be contacting some of you in the next few months about your willingness to hold informational interviews with interested student and career changing members.

We are also pleased and honored to announce that the Berkeley Chapter has been designated as the host for the Region 8 Conference to be held in September, 2002. Conference Director Sarah Lee Hauslinger has a ground breaking new concept for this conference and you will want to be a part of making history. We will be looking for volunteers who will help with all sorts of big and little activities.

Finally, the board will be considering three policy matters at our November board meeting: (1) program substitution and refund policy in circumstances such as those presented by the events in September, (2) an Education Program class refund policy, and (3) moving the *Ragged Left* to an electronic version, only available on our Web site. If you have any comments about the above matters I encourage you to contact me by email at [president@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:president@stc-berkeley.org) or by phone at (510) 865-9045. We welcome your input and comment. See you at the meeting on November 14!

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## What You Need to Know About Linux

that underlies Windows 95, Wiley publishes *UNIX for DOS Users* by Martin R. Arick (ISBN: 0-471-04988-3).

### Resources:

For a general introduction <http://www.linux.org/>  
Linux Documentation Project <http://www.linuxdoc.org/>  
Free BSD Documentation Project  
<http://www.freebsd.org/docproj/index.html>  
Open Source Office-like Suite <http://www.openoffice.org/>  
Silicon Valley Linux Users Group <http://www.svlug.org/>  
Bay Area Linux Users Group <http://www.balug.org/>  
Linux and Open Source Community  
<http://www.linux.com/>  
Apple's new operating system with UNIX-like features  
<http://www.apple.com/macosx/>  
The newest Linux "desktop" [http://www.ximian.com/products/ximian\\_gnome/](http://www.ximian.com/products/ximian_gnome/)

Thomas Albert, Ph.D (<http://www.WORDesign.com>), is a longtime member of STC and will be teaching *Technical Communication in the UNIX Environment* for U.C. Berkeley Extension in February 2002.

STC Berkeley *Ragged Left* Resource Corner  
Each month rotating guest writers offer resources that benefit the technical writing industry. If there is a topic you would like to cover for a future edition, email [newsletter@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-berkeley.org).

## What Technical Communicators Need to Know About Linux

BY THOMAS ALBERT, PH.D

Eric DeMund, freelance UNIX Systems Administrator, presented the world of Linux at to the Berkeley STC chapter meeting in October. Thomas Albert provides a more in-depth review of Linux.

### What Is Linux?

Linux is a free UNIX-type operating system originally created by Linus Torvalds with the assistance of developers around the world. Developed under the GNU General Public License, the source code for Linux is freely available to everyone. Linux is similar to many of the standard UNIX operating systems, including Solaris, HP-UX, Irix, BSD, AIX and even the new Mac OS, OS X. Linux runs on many hardware platforms, from laptops with a low-end Intel chip to high-end enterprise servers.

Linux is becoming increasingly popular, especially for the enterprise systems administrators and Internet service providers who deploy Linux for a wide range of uses, including application servers and databases.

Linux, running on a PC box, is a common, inexpensive solution for web firewalls, web hosting, and scientific computing. Linux is secure, reliable, and scalable, meaning that many Linux machines can work together. For example, the Google web search engine ([www.google.com](http://www.google.com)) runs on a cluster of many Linux machines.

Universities like Linux because they can use an operating system without cost (no need to purchase a Windows license), and the hardware can be cheap IBM PC clones instead of, say, expensive Sun workstations.

The Linux kernel runs independently of the graphical user interface (GUI). Therefore, people can recycle old PCs with 386 and 486 chips that cannot run a GUI with a large memory footprint such as Windows 95 or Windows 2000.

### Additional pluses:

- Whereas there are many Windows viruses, UNIX and Linux do not seem to have that problem
- Software developers have access to the Linux source

code and can therefore tweak and recompile the operating system to customize it to their needs.

### Why Should You Care About Linux?

If you want to work as a technical communicator in software development, you probably want to understand UNIX at least at the user level (if not the administrator level). The easiest and least expensive way to get your hands on a UNIX-style operating system is to install Linux onto your PC.

Because Linux is relatively new, the playing field is relatively even; you can make an impact and get published. If you want to build your portfolio, you can contribute your editing and testing skills to the Linux Documentation Project, such as the Open Source Office project, which is a free, open suite of applications similar to Microsoft Office. There is also a documentation project for the free Berkeley Software Distribution (BSD) variant of UNIX. Free BSD, like Linux, can run on ordinary PCs.

You might enjoy the Linux culture, which has elements of an alternative social movement. Many people volunteer whatever expertise they have to the community, and there is an atmosphere of creativity and rapid change.

### What Do Technical Communicators Need To Know About Linux?

**End-User Tasks:** It is very common for technical writers, even if they use FrameMaker on a PC, to have to archive their books onto a UNIX server. This means the technical writers might have to know some basic UNIX/Linux commands for navigating a file system, creating and deleting directories, setting security permissions on a directory, creating an archive file, and compressing or uncompressing that archive. You should also know how to “kill” a job that the operating system is running if you decide the job is too time consuming.

**Online Documentation:** The original online documentation was UNIX manual pages (man pages). To this day, technical writers sometimes write or edit UNIX or Linux man pages. As a technical editor, you might edit a Linux Guide or HowTo (procedure).

### How Can You Get Started?

If you want to run Linux on your PC, you can lug your PC to a Linux “Install Fest” at one of the Linux User Group meetings (see “Resources” at the end of this article). There, you will find system administrators who are happy to loan you a CD and walk you through the entire process.

To learn about the operating system and the shell commands you use to get work done, O'Reilly publishes both Linux in a Nutshell and UNIX in a Nutshell. A lovely book for true beginners is *Visual Quickstart Guide UNIX* by Peachpit Press. If you are familiar with Microsoft DOS, the command prompt

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## STC Sacramento Chapter

FIRST WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH  
HILTON SACRAMENTO ARDEN WEST, BRANDYWINE ROOM  
6:15-6:45 P.M. NETWORKING  
7:00-8:00 P.M. PROGRAM  
DETAILS: [WWW.STCSACRAMENTO.ORG](http://WWW.STCSACRAMENTO.ORG)

Wednesday, November 7, 2001.

Program: *Project Management*, with Roger Kent

## STC East Bay Chapter

SECOND THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH  
CROW CANYON COUNTRY CLUB IN DANVILLE  
5:30 P.M. - NETWORKING  
6:30 P.M. - DINNER  
7:30 P.M. - CHAPTER BUSINESS/PROGRAM  
RSVP IN WRITING, TWO DAYS IN ADVANCE  
DETAILS: [HTTP://WWW.EBSTC.ORG/](http://WWW.EBSTC.ORG/)

Thursday, September 13th, 2001

Program: *Blue Skies Above Solid Earth: Skills for Thinking Visually*, with Beth Lisberg

## STC San Francisco Chapter

THIRD WEDNESDAY OF EACH MONTH  
LONDON WINE BAR, SAN FRANCISCO  
6:00 P.M.: NETWORKING AND SELF-SERVE HORS D'OEUVRES  
7:00 P.M.: PROGRAM  
NO ADVANCE RESERVATION REQUIRED  
DETAILS: [HTTP://WWW.STC-SF.ORG](http://WWW.STC-SF.ORG)

November: No Meeting

December: Chapter Holiday Party

Check Website for latest details

## STC North Bay Chapter

THIRD THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH  
PARKER COMPUMOTER, ROHNERT PARK  
5:30 P.M. - NETWORKING  
6:30 P.M. - INTRODUCTIONS & ANNOUNCEMENTS  
6:45 P.M. - PROGRAM  
8:00 P.M. - CONVERSATION, IDEA SWAPPING  
NO RSVP NEEDED  
DETAILS: [HTTP://WWW.STC-NORTHBAY.ORG/](http://WWW.STC-NORTHBAY.ORG/)

Check Website for latest details

## STC Silicon Valley Chapter

FOURTH THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH 7:00  
FOUR POINTS SHERATON, SUNNYVALE  
6:00 P.M. - NETWORKING, JOBS CORNER, AND DINNER  
7:00 P.M. - ANNOUNCEMENTS  
7:15 P.M. - PROGRAM

RSVP BY MAIL, ONE WEEK IN ADVANCE

DETAILS: [HTTP://WWW.STC-SILICONVALLEY.ORG/](http://WWW.STC-SILICONVALLEY.ORG/)

November & December Meeting combined!

Thursday, December 6, 2001

Program: *Management By Leveraging Your Personality Flaws*, with Bonni Graham

## East Bay Editors Guild

THIRD TUESDAY THIS MONTH  
ROCKRIDGE LIBRARY  
5366 COLLEGE AVENUE (AT MANILA),  
OAKLAND

7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM

Tuesday, November 20, 2001

Tuesday, December 18, 2001

The meetings are held in the Rockridge Library's community room. Enter through the front door and come up the stairs. The front door may appear closed, but should not be locked; slide it open by hand.

Optionally, some members meet in front of the library at 5:40 for a no-host dinner at a nearby restaurant before the meeting. Check the door for a note naming the location.

Editors Guild welcomes everyone interested; there are no dues, fees, or membership required. To be added to the Editors Guild listserv, email [jyl@dolby.com](mailto:jyl@dolby.com).

## STC Berkeley Chapter

NOVEMBER 14, 2001

Program: *Contracting 101: What You Should Know Before You Quit Your Day Job*, a panel discussion with Gwaltney Mountford and friends

FUTURE PROGRAMS

DECEMBER

No Meeting! No *Ragged Left!* Happy Holiday!

JANUARY 9, 2001 CHAPTER PARTY IN ALAMEDA

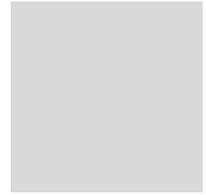
Bring your friends & family for live music, food, Chapter Awards, and fun!



# Ragged Left

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## Next Meeting:

# Wednesday

### November 14:

## Contracting 101: What You Should Know Before You Quit Your Day Job

with Gwaltney Mountford and friends

Meal reservations deadline: Monday, November 12.  
See page 2 for costs and meeting details.

**RSVP online:** Credit cards accepted at  
[www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org).

Silver Dragon Chinese Restaurant:

835 Webster Street (at 8th) in Oakland

Dinner 6:30 - 7:30

Announcements and Program 7:30 - 9:00

Please do *not* call the restaurant!

## STC-BERKELEY MEETING DIRECTIONS

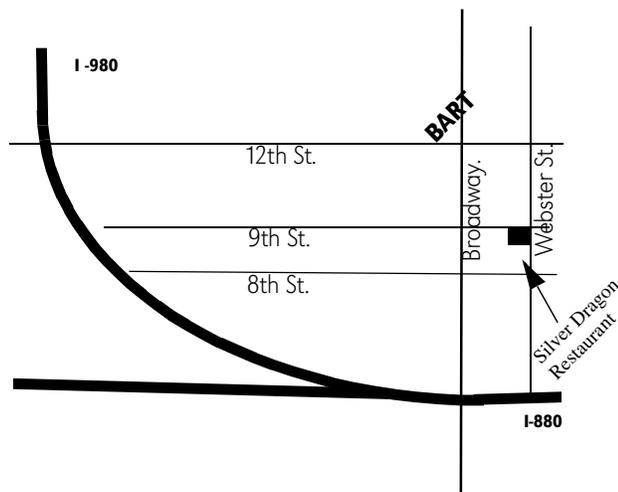
From north of Oakland: Take the I-880 North. Merge onto the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

From south of Oakland: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Take the Oak Street exit towards Lakeside Dr. Turn right onto Oak St. Turn left onto 8th St. Turn right onto Harrison St. Turn left onto 10th St. Turn left onto Webster St.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, take the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland (CA-24)/Hayward-Stockton. Merge onto I-580 E. Take I-980 West ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel. Highway 24 west becomes I-980 west. Take the 18th street exit towards 14th street. Merge onto Brush St. Turn left onto 17th St. Turn right onto San Pablo Ave. Turn slight right onto City Hall Plaza. Turn left onto 14th St/International Dr. Turn right onto Webster St. and proceed to 8th & Webster.

EAST



## Join us in our New Meeting Location in Oakland

By BART: Exit the 12th Street Oakland station. Walk south for two blocks, to Webster St. Turn right and walk west to 835 Webster St.