

# Ragged Left



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THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

BERKELEY CHAPTER

## Writing For Training Programs

If you can write user manuals, you can just do the same thing to create training materials, right? Not exactly. Not if you want to make the best use of a workshop or an e-learning session. At April's meeting, Linda Stoneall will suggest how instructional design differs from writing documentation. She'll discuss how research and preparation to write varies; how the writing styles are distinguished and the divergent deliverables between writing documentation and writing training materials.

Linda Stoneall is the author of the book, *How to Write Training Materials* and numerous articles published in *Training and Development*, *Training Magazine* and *Personnel Journal*. As a learning expert, she has over twenty years of experience in training, instructional design and technical writing. Linda Stoneall holds a Ph.D. in sociology and has taught in universities and public schools. She has consulted with a variety of corporations and currently has a contract managing proposal writing for Educational Testing Services (ETS).

## President's Column

BY KATHRYN MUNN

The reviews about our new venue in Oakland, Vo's Restaurant, have been very positive. If you haven't attended one of the monthly meetings in our new location, join us for good food, great networking, and exceptional presentations. We are finalizing the schedule now for the next three months. Watch your announcements for the dates of a presentation

about Touchstone, the Northern California Technical Communication Competition, featuring the traveling show of winning entries; a visit and presentation from our Region 8 Director/Sponsor, Bonni Graham; and a presentation by Charlene Alexander about the world of creating documentation for distribution on CD/ROM. STC Berkeley meetings are always held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Wednesday of the month.

This year the Executive Committee has made a commitment to support a Northern California Leadership Day with funds traditionally used to support the President's attendance at the National STC conference Leadership Day. This decision will provide an opportunity to all the officers and managers of the chapter to network with the leaders of nearby chapters and enhance their chapter management skills. Developing leadership skills can help you move up in the ranks of your company or grow your business. Have you considered becoming a leader in the Berkeley Chapter? The election of officers and new initiatives in need of managers are coming up for the next fiscal year. Contact our elections manager, Richard Mateosian at [xrm@pacbell.net](mailto:xrm@pacbell.net) to let him know of your interest.

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# Ragged Left

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# 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.

## 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 a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

## STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, April 10.

Vo's Restaurant in downtown Oakland, is within easy walking distance to BART, is wheelchair accessible, and has both street and nearby garage parking.

Networking and conversation start at 6:00 P.M., and dinner at 6:30 P.M. If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and *must* be received no later than 12:00 NOON the Monday before the meeting (April 8). Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do *not* contact the restaurant.

Send checks to Berkeley STC, P.O. Box 1007, Berkeley, 94701.



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

The meeting fee with dinner is \$18 for members, \$15 for student members, and \$21 for nonmembers. If you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 P.M., the fee is \$12 for members and non-members, and \$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.

## A Recap of the March Meeting: When Good Projects Go Bad

BY PATRICK LUFKIN

In two decades of involvement in technical communication and training development projects, Meryl Natchez has seen many successes and the occasional nightmare. That experience has taught her that sometimes projects can go bad “despite years of experience, the best of intentions, strong talent, and a proven project methodology.”

At the Berkeley STC chapter’s March meeting Meryl shared what she has learned about why projects fail. She also covered strategies for avoiding the major causes of failure, for recognizing the warning signs of impending trouble, and for proactively protecting the project and your reputation.

Active in technical communications since 1978, Meryl is CEO of TechProse, a company that focuses on online and paper-based technical writing, training, and IT solutions. She is a well known speaker and industry leader; a Past-President of the Northern California Chapter, National Association of Computer Consultant Businesses (NACCB); and a two-term Past-President of the San Francisco Chapter of STC.

### Why Projects Fail

In her experience, Meryl said that about eighty percent of project problems stem from unclear expectations, unrealistic expectations, and poor communication. The rest usually stem from a variety of political, personnel, and product issues. Each of these problem areas is expanded upon below:

**Unclear expectations.** A project that moves forward without a clear idea of exactly what needs to be produced, on what schedule, and on what budget, invites failure. Written detailed documentation plans can help clarify expectations, but they are not fool-proof since words—such as “tutorial” —can mean different things to different people.

**Unreal expectations.** Expectations—especially about deadlines and costs—can be clear, but unreal. A request to produce a 500-page manual in two weeks is clear but undoable. Agreeing to meet unreal expectations makes a lose/lose situation for both you and your client.

**Poor communication.** Projects can be plagued by poor communication. People don’t keep each other informed. Email and phone calls aren’t returned. Meetings get postponed or canceled. Feedback and review comments on deliverables never arrive. Information, when it does arrive, comes from second-hand sources.

**Personnel and product changes.** Personnel and product changes “come with the territory,” but when excessive, they can sabotage a project by necessitating cascading changes that are costly in time and money.

**Politics, warring interests and hidden agendas.** Some of the most vexing problems are political. Different managers have different expectations for the project and issue conflicting orders. A project can also be impacted by hidden agendas, that is, aims for the project other than its simple success. In a worse case, someone wants a project to fail and has selected you as a scapegoat. Daily changes of direction, lack of information, and rampant misunderstanding may all be signs of a political battle. Hidden agendas are signaled by “things that don’t make sense” in terms of the agreed upon agenda.

### Avoiding Trouble

A certain amount of confusion is to be expected as part of the development process. Time for handling changes should be built into the schedule. This said, as professional communicators we should use our skills to help minimize the confusion and keep projects on the rails. Meryl suggested many strategies for doing so; the major ones are summarized below:

**Clarify expectations early.** Clarify expectations as early as possible so everyone agrees on deliverables and schedules. You can avoid many communications problems by building a communication structure into the project, by instituting a system of reviews and signoffs, and by establishing a schedule for such things as meetings and progress reports.

**Know when to say “no.”** When faced with unrealistic expectations, you should politely say “no,” and then negotiate. Explain that you can’t give them the kind of quality they expect in the time allotted. Get agreement on the client’s most important deliverables and on what can be allowed to slip. If need be, ask for time to put together a realistic proposal.

**Continually clarify expectations.** Take the initiative throughout the project and continually clarify expectations. As samples or templates become available, circulate them for sign off. This simplifies the development process, and confirms that everyone is in agreement. If there are problems, it is much easier to correct them before a lot of content has been added. Document any change orders. Use confirmation memos or email to document verbal agreements and what was said in meetings. Keep copies of review comments. Build a paper trail you can use to defend yourself if you should need to do so. If you receive conflicting directions, schedule meetings with those involved, clarifying priorities, then documenting what was agreed to.

**Watch for signs of trouble.** Stay alert for warning signs of impending problems. Memos or comments that don’t make sense, requests for reviews and sign-offs that don’t get returned, orders, priorities, project plans and personnel that constantly change, meetings that get cancelled, impossible schedules, and people who don’t have time for you or who

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The Berkeley Biotech SIG is taking a hiatus. In lieu of meetings, STC Berkeley offers a monthly column. If you would like to ask a question or make a comment, please contact Ruth Wright at [membership@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:membership@stc-berkeley.org).

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## Biotechnology Products You Can Buy Today

BY RUTH A. WRIGHT

Progresso canned soups. Knorr powdered soups. Close to all nachos and corn chips not specifically labeled organic. Much of the Tofu sold in the U.S. What do these products have in common? They contain GMFs – genetically modified foods.

Surprised? Because they haven't been proven harmful, the FDA currently doesn't require food producers to state that their products contain genetically modified foods. At this point in time, it's considered irrelevant information, since their nutritional value is judged to be equivalent to non-modified foods.

A genetically modified tomato, the "Flavr-Savr", was put on the market in the 1990's, the first product of its kind. It was labeled as being genetically modified, and it drove the company that developed it to the brink of financial failure. Rightly or wrongly, no one wanted to buy a product that had been dubbed "Frankenfood." Hence, the missing information on food labels today.

Whatever your point of view about the current regulatory policy, there are ways to satisfy your curiosity about what you're putting on your dinner table. An excellent third-party source of information about specific brands of food products is the Greenpeace Website: [www.greenpeace.org](http://www.greenpeace.org). It lists specific products, lists the genetically modified ingredients present in the products, and keeps a running log of government approvals of new genetically modified food plants. New information is added to the site frequently, making it a useful resource.

## When Good Projects Go Bad

refuse to acknowledge problems, are all signs of trouble ahead.

**Handle immediately.** If problems start to develop, handle them at your first inkling that something is wrong. This is hard, because most of us don't like confrontation. But unhandled problems don't go away; they just get worse. Handling problems immediately may be the single best thing you can do to keep a project on track.

**Develop a support network.** As a technical communicator—especially if you are an outside contractor—you make a perfect scapegoat. To lessen your vulnerability, develop an informal network of support. You should strive to build rapport, not just with the people who hired you, but also with subject matter experts and anyone else who can be called upon to help you get the attention and the information you need. Work to build alliances, be a good communicator, and be the person that "everybody loves to love." Then, if people start being uncooperative or the politics get ugly, you will have resources *continued on page 5*

**Adopt a "no surprises" strategy.** Remember that the people you report to, report to others. You can help everyone by adopting a "no surprises" strategy. If there is going to be a delay, let people know as soon as possible. Also give them a good reason for the delay so they can explain it to the people *they* report to. It is also wise "to under promise, and over deliver." If you think it can be done Wednesday, promise it Friday; then if you finish it Thursday, you are a day early, not a day late. Management's ability to rely on your predictions is key to earning their respect and trust.

**In politicized situations, don't act alone.** When something is politically sensitive, don't act alone. Wherever possible, share responsibility for decisions. Listen to people. Discuss options and be willing to compromise. Agree on a strategy as a team. An important part of this is to avoid insisting on being right. Negotiating and offering alternatives for the sake of the project is more professional—and better for your reputation in the long run.

## Going—Going—Gone...

The *Ragged Left* is going HTML. Beginning with the July, 2002 edition, the *Ragged Left* will no longer be a printed newsletter mailed to members and interested subscribers. An HTML version of the *Ragged Left* will be available on the chapter Website at [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org). The use of an online medium to deliver the newsletter will save the chapter printing and mailing costs while increasing our capacity to provide you with current and relevant information.

For those of you who use the newsletter to prompt you about the monthly meeting, we suggest subscribing to the chapter announcement list. Each month an email message about the upcoming monthly meeting along with links to the online version of the newsletter and reservations page on the chapter Website will be sent to you. Through the summer months of 2002, we will also send a postcard reminder about where the *Ragged Left* has moved.

## Touchstone Holds 2001 Awards Banquet

A sumptuous buffet, a witty keynote address, and a display of exceptional technical communication winning entries headlined the Touchstone 2001 Awards Banquet held in San Ramon on March 9, 2002.

Touchstone is the annual Northern California Technical Communication Competition, sponsored by the northern California chapters. The competition invites technical communication entries in technical publication categories including software guides, quick reference guides, training materials, non-computer equipment guides, hardware/software combination guides, books, organizational manuals, informational materials, computer hardware guides, annual reports, newsletters, magazines, scholarly/professional articles, and documentation sets. Online communication categories include books, online help, reference materials, tutorials/training, demos, technical marketing, and user support. Teams of volunteer judges using a standard review and consensus process review entries and provide feedback. Proceeds from Touchstone support the Dr. Kenneth M. Gordon technical communication scholarships.

Winning entries receive recognition for Distinguished, Excellence, Merit, or Achievement awards. Distinguished winners are submitted to the STC International Competition. The Best of Show winners for Touchstone 2001 are Orbit, submitted by the Bently Nevada Corporation, in the Magazine category of the Technical Publications Competition, and Epson Printer Information Center, submitted by Epson America, Inc., in the Tutorials/Training category of

the Online Communications Competition. Winners received an engraved crystal award for the corporate trophy case.

Keynote speaker John Hedtke, an award-winning author of technical books, gave an interesting and funny talk on "How to be Famous in Your Profession." Emphasizing the career development and business advantages of fame, Mr. Hedtke included participating and volunteering in professional organizations such as STC and Touchstone as a valuable tool. Following the banquet Mr. Hedtke presented a workshop on *Keeping the Cash Rolling In: Financial Survival in Tough Times*.

Want to get involved with an excellent opportunity to enhance your skills, increase your fame, and contribute to the profession of technical communication? Volunteer for Touchstone 2002. Bookmark [www.stc-touchstone.org](http://www.stc-touchstone.org) and watch for information about the 2002 competition coming soon

Touchstone 2001 wrapped up March 9 with an elegant awards banquet. Photos of some award winners and volunteers are now available at the Touchstone Website, <http://www.stc-touchstone.org/2001/2001awards.htm>, or from the download photos link on the home page at <http://www.stc-touchstone.org/2001/>.

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## President's Message

As always, we want to hear about what the Chapter can do to support you in your professional goals as a technical communicator. Email [president@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:president@stc-berkeley.org) with your ideas, suggestions, and especially any ways you might be willing to contribute your own talent and time.

See you soon at one of our meetings.



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).

## Transitioning Into a Technical Writing Career

BY CECILIA WELLS

Did someone say career change? Well, I can share information about this topic since my life seems to be consumed by this quest. Technical writing has been one of my interests for quite some time, however I postponed pursuing it since I was gainfully employed as a technical recruiter. After my layoff in December, I knew that my current field was in decline. In pursuit of a career change I found that [www.techwriters.com](http://www.techwriters.com) provides information on job opportunities, writing tips, and upcoming seminars.

Still in need of information on technical writing courses, I decided to handle this as a technical recruiter, searching technical writers' resumes posted online. From the resumes, I found that many technical writers were affiliated with STC. The STC Website presented a tremendous amount of information on schools that offer courses in technical writing, including California State University Hayward, University California Berkeley, and San Francisco State University.

In researching the closest schools, I found that most of the program information is now available online. Many of the courses are offered either online or in a classroom setting. Having heard arguments for both, I'm going to pursue the classes that fit best with my life style.

Because the programs can be costly, I wanted to speak with other technical writers about their experiences, so I visited my local STC chapter meeting. I know that in this job market, the best way to get job information is to network with the professionals already working in the field. At the meeting I received very useful information on courses and heard about some of the challenges of working in the field, which really helped me to select a program to gain the necessary skills to begin my career in technical writing.

## Free Subscriptions

Did you know that STC Berkeley maintains an email distribution system for announcements of meetings and special events, jobs posting or listing, and special issue discussions? It is easy to subscribe to these lists, it's free, and you can easily unsubscribe whenever you want.

To receive emails about the monthly meetings and other special events or announcements subscribe to the announcements list by clicking the *About the Berkeley Chapter* link on the STC Berkeley Website and use the subscription tool. You can also send an email message to [stcbky-l-request@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:stcbky-l-request@stc-berkeley.org) with a single word in the body of the message: subscribe.

To receive emails about job leads subscribe to the announcement list by sending an email message to [stcjobs-l-request@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:stcjobs-l-request@stc-berkeley.org) with a single word in the body of the message: subscribe. In addition to this list, the Berkeley chapter maintains a list for those who have job leads to post. Find information about this list by clicking the *Jobs Search Resources* link on the STC Berkeley Website.

To receive email messages in the discussion about changing the name of the STC Berkeley Chapter click the *What's in a Name?* link on the STC Berkeley Website home page and use the subscription tool. You can also send an email message to [appellation-request@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:appellation-request@stc-berkeley.org) with a single word in the body of the message: subscribe.

## Indexing Conference Comes to Bay Area

The American Society of Indexers-Golden Gate Chapter will hold its 19<sup>th</sup> annual conference, *Index Usability--What Is It? Who Needs It? How Can We Use It?* from 8:15 a.m. to 4:15 p.m. on April 27, 2002 at the Network Meeting Center in the TechMart in Santa Clara.

## 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, May 1, 2002  
Program: *New Technologies*

## STC East Bay Chapter

FIRST 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, April 4, 2002  
Program: *Developing Your Own Professional Website* with Susan Becker

## 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)  
Wednesday, April 17, 2002  
Program: *Usability Methods to Empower Technical Communicators* with Dana E. Chisnell

## STC North Bay Chapter

THIRD THURSDAY OF EACH MONTH  
TRUETIME, INC., 3750 WESTWIND BLVD., SANTA ROSA  
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/)  
Thursday, April 18, 2002  
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/)  
Thursday, April 25, 2002  
*Making Feedback Meaningful* with Paul Sinasohn  
May 30: *Indexing with a Vengeance* with Bonni Graham

## East Bay Editors Guild

ROCKRIDGE LIBRARY  
5366 COLLEGE AVENUE (AT MANILA),  
OAKLAND  
7:00 P.M. - PROGRAM  
UPCOMING MEETING DATES:  
Monday, May 6, 2002  
Monday, June 17, 2002

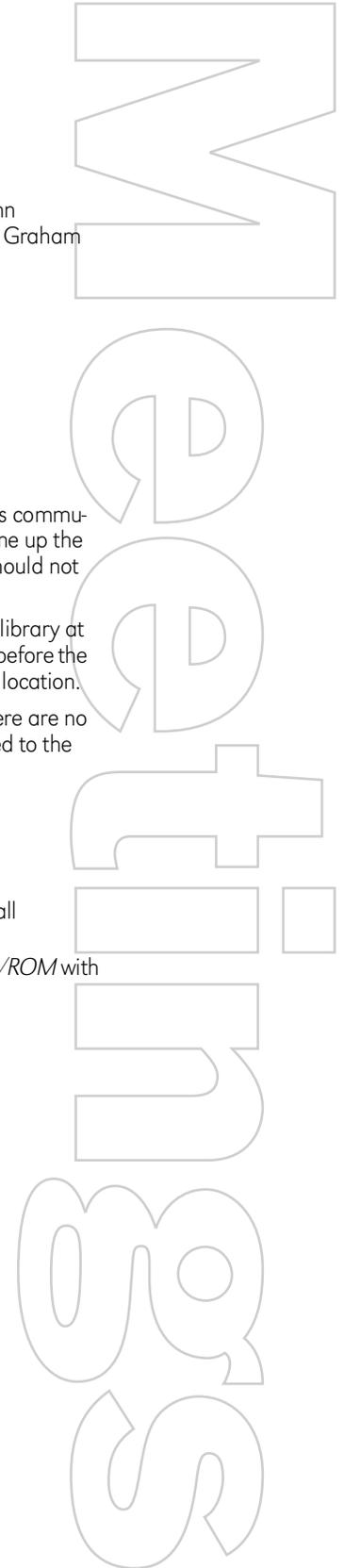
The meetings are held in the Rockridge Library's community room. Enter through the front door and come up the stairs. The front door may appear closed, but should not be locked; slide it open by hand.

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

APRIL 10, 2002  
*Writing for Training Programs* with Linda Stoneall  
MAY 8, 2002  
*Creating Documentation for Distribution on CD/ROM* with Charlene Alexander



WWW.STC-BERKELEY.ORG

# Ragged Left

**Next Meeting:**

# Wednesday

**April 10:**

**Writing for Training Programs**

**with Linda Stoneall**

Meal reservations deadline: Monday, April 8.  
*See page 2 for costs and meeting details.*

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

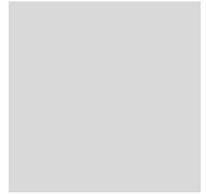
Vo's Vietnamese Restaurant:  
59 Grand Avenue in Oakland

Dinner	6:30 - 7:30
Announcements and Program	7:30 - 9:00

Please do *not* call the restaurant!

P.O. Box 1007  
Berkeley, CA  
94701

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Guaranteed



## STC-BERKELEY MEETING DIRECTIONS

From north of Oakland: Take the I-80 West/I-580 East. Merge onto the I-580 East ramp towards downtown Oakland. Merge onto I-980 W. Take the 27th street exit towards West Grand Avenue. Merge onto Northgate Avenue. Turn left onto West Grand Avenue.

From south of Oakland: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Take the Broadway exit towards downtown. Keep right at the fork in the ramp and merge onto Broadway. Turn right onto Grand Avenue.

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 27th street exit towards West Grand Avenue. Merge onto Northgate Avenue. Turn left onto West Grand Avenue.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel. Highway 24 west becomes I-980 west. Take the 27th street exit towards West Grand Avenue. Merge onto Northgate Avenue. Turn left onto West Grand Avenue.

By BART: Exit the 19th Street Oakland station. Walk NE for four blocks, to Grand Avenue.

