

Ragged Left



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Book Building with Microsoft Word

by Joe Jantz, San Francisco chapter

While most technical writers would probably choose Adobe FrameMaker to create book-style publications, many clients want a writer who can work with the tool they already have: Microsoft Word. For such clients, the writer who can say, "Yes, I can develop your books in Word," is the writer most likely to get the job.

Beau Cain provided writers with a plan for creating book-style publications in Word, at the Berkeley STC Chapter meeting on July 14, 2004. He walked the audience through this process with patience, humor, and showmanship.

Beau asserted that although FrameMaker has dialogs to simplify the book-creation process, a writer can achieve similar results in Word by taking advantage of several key features. Only a few of those features are described below because a report of this length cannot document Beau's complete procedure in detail.

The goal of this process is to create a framework of Word sections in a book-level file. The framework allows insertion of constituent parts or chapters, which are separated by Word section breaks. Beau remarked that section breaks are a powerful feature and that mastering section breaks can greatly increase a writer's proficiency in Word.

He began by setting document properties that support the use of section breaks for a book-length document. In the Layout tab of the Page Setup dialog, he specified that all sections start on odd pages, and that headers and footers are different on odd and even pages. Beau placed an odd-page section break before each successive book component or chapter, so that each section would begin on the odd (right) page of the document's two-page book spread.

In the design of his demonstration book, Beau used chapter names in his odd-page running headers. To accomplish this, he formatted the title in each book component with Word's built-in "Heading 1" style. To place each chapter name into its header, he inserted a Word field containing a reference to the "Heading 1" style. Thus the book's odd-page running headers pick up their content—typically the chapter name—from their section's unique "Heading 1"-style paragraph. Each new section break, in turn, retrieves its own "Heading 1" paragraph, so that each odd-page running header correctly displays the title of the current chapter.

In FrameMaker the writer lists ".fm" files as components of an overall book file. In Word, the writer inserts other ".doc" files into sections of the Word book. Beau warned that inserted files are imbedded in the book instead of linked to it unless one uses the Insert as Link button. With files inserted as links in Word, edits made to the external linked file appear in the book, but edits made to linked text in the book are lost after the document is closed.

Joe Jantz is a technical writer, a former developer, and a member of the San Francisco Chapter of STC.

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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.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has approximately 25,000 members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and 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 \$155/year, with an additional \$15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is \$56/year. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or e-mail

- Send e-mail to membership@stc-berkeley.org
- Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE

Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES

STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conferences: Seattle, May 8-11, 2005; Las Vegas, May 14-17, 2006. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale.

STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication.

STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

- AccessAbility
- Canadian Issues
- Education and Research
- Illustrators and Visual Designers
- Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
- Consulting and Independent Contracting
- Quality
- Marketing Communication
- Scientific Communication

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES

The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 6 for contacts for these chapters. See page 7 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES

The Ragged Left is not accepting advertising at this time.

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 talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the fifteenth of the preceding month.

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.



Letter from the Editor

by Joe Devney

Welcome to the new-old Ragged Left. As most readers probably know, the STC Berkeley chapter newsletter went online last year in HTML format. Jessica Livingston, the newsletter's longtime editor, created an attractive, easy-to-use Web version of the Ragged Left that was available with a link from the chapter's site. Her work earned a "Most Improved" award for the newsletter from STC this year.

I took over editorship from Jessica with the July/August issue of the Ragged Left, and I have decided to move the newsletter back to its paper—or at least PDF—incarnation. Despite its many good points, the HTML version of the Ragged Left seemed too much like a part of the chapter Web site. I think the two publications are very different creatures, and I wanted to make a bigger distinction between them. The Web site is the face the chapter presents to the world; the newsletter is where we talk among ourselves. The first step in distinguishing them is to publish in different media.

This transition will be made easier because the Ragged Left now has an editorial staff. Three volunteers have stepped up to work on the newsletter: Anne Trumbore, Gina Blednyh, and Virginia Guest. They are bringing energy, enthusiasm, and new ideas to the effort, and I hope they can pick up some marketable skills and portfolio samples in return.

If you have comments about the Ragged Left or suggestions for improvement, please e-mail newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

Joe Devney was formerly the editor of HNC Today, the alumni magazine for Holy Names College.

Article

The Creativity of Technical Writing

By Anne Trumbore

You've seen the ads. Copywriter needed. Creative experience required. You've probably passed them by. Maybe you've done so wistfully. After all, you're a technical writer. Creativity is something other writers do.

The good news is, you couldn't be more wrong. All effective writing, from award-winning prose to soft-

ware manuals, utilizes the same elements of craft. Technical writers often overlook this aspect of their job experience. Potential employers and technical writers themselves tend to focus on the specialized aspects of the job - the writer's ability to understand extraordinarily intricate and, in some cases, arcane, subject matter.

But writers are writers. And a good technical writer employs the same tools of craft a creative writer does. Every potent piece of technical writing contains a distinct voice, a clear vision and a compelling narrative. The problem is, the subject matter of most technical writing is so abstruse, it often eclipses the writing skills of the author.

Don't think you have a voice? Look to see how your explanations are worded differently from others in your market. Focus on word choice and examine how you work with the language. There, you'll find your voice. Vision translates most simply into your organization of information - something at which most technical writers excel and many creative writers do not. And narrative is what keeps the engine of the story running. From personal experience, I can tell you that writing body copy for consumer ads which makes a series of B-movies released on DVD sound like the must-own titles of the year is just as much of a narrative challenge as creating white papers.

Good technical writing and good creative writing differ only in terms of audience, and sometimes, not even then. End-user documentation, specifically, has more in common with copywriting than you might think. Both target a specific demographic. Both must be compelling and clear. Both must demonstrate the value and desirability of a product. Remember, your employer is using your documentation as a marketing tool. So why shouldn't you?

Too often, technical writers are defined by their great talent for understanding and deciphering complex systems. But many will find, tucked away in the preface or introduction to a software manual, or hidden in a blizzard of white papers, or buried in a wormhole of FAQ's, solid, marketable examples of strong creative writing. What you do with them is up to you.

Anne Trumbore works primarily as a copywriter and writing teacher and looks forward to more technical writing.



President's Column

by Joe Devney

The Region 8 Conference

Visitors to the Berkeley STC Web site, attendees at chapter meetings, and people on our e-mail announcement lists have been hearing for the last few months about the STC Region 8 conference in Davis. The conference promised to be a major event for technical communicators, with dozens of presentations about the field, and guest speakers who are well-known in the industry and in the Society. Some fun things were planned as well, including a river cruise.

The promise was not kept. The conference was canceled only days before it was set to begin. Instead of a regional event that could have provided educational and networking opportunities to attendees, presenters, and volunteers, the conference committee ended up with only a large debt.

The full story of what went wrong with this particular conference is still unfolding, and the full tally of the conference's loss is not yet available. The conference director said in a letter that the problems started with him, and he has resigned his post. Beau Cain, the Region 8 Director, and Mike Bates, STC's Second Vice President, have become involved in the effort to understand and resolve the situation. Many of the Region 8 chapter presidents engaged in a conference call on August 9 to discuss what to do about the financial troubles left over from the failed conference.

There is no doubt that the failed conference is a major issue for the region. The financial fallout may threaten the well-being of some of our chapters, and the ability of the region to put on future events. The regional leadership has some difficult decisions ahead. I will update the situation for readers of the Ragged Left in upcoming letters.

If you would like more information or would like to join the ongoing discussions about the conference, please contact me by e-mail (president@stc-berkeley.org), and copy Beau Cain, the Region 8 director (ds8@stc-org).

Other Chapter News

One potentially positive outcome from the cancellation of the Region 8 conference is that some of the speakers who were ready to make presentations in

Davis may now be available to be guest speakers at our chapter meetings. Our new VP of Programs, Valerie Steele, is contacting the people whose talks seemed to be most appropriate for our chapter members, and we will probably see them in the coming months.

Valerie's post is one of two elected positions that were filled by vote of the chapter's leadership board recently. The other one is that of Secretary. Long-time chapter member Eunice Malley has taken over that post. In both cases, there were no candidates for these positions in our annual elections. Valerie's and Eunice's predecessors chose not to run for reelection.

Many of our readers will remember those predecessors. I want to take this opportunity to thank "the two Davids"—Secretary David McCoard and VP of Programs David Alt—for their long service to the chapter. David McCoard is taking a new career direction, and David Alt has become more involved in other volunteer projects. We value the service they gave to the chapter, and wish them both the best in their future endeavors.

Incidentally, before he became VP of Programs, David Alt was the chapter's Webmaster, a post he continued to fill even after his election. David was finally able to hand over those duties when Jim Dexter stepped forward earlier this year to volunteer as Webmaster.

Another longtime volunteer has also made a transition recently. Jessica Livingston was the editor of the Ragged Left for four years. To her great credit, the newsletter earned two STC awards in its last two years. As both chapter president and as the new Ragged Left editor, I want to express my appreciation for the work that Jessica has done on the newsletter. Jessica is not leaving us: she is now the chapter's Public Relations Manager.



My Thanks, and Charting a Different Course

by Beau Cain, Region 8 Director

In this, my first article to STC's Region 8 newsletters, I offer my thanks for your support, and I ask for your involvement for changing our Society at the chapter and SIG levels. Along with this, I'll offer a brief explanation of things that have happened, and how those happenings will affect your participation in the Society for the next three years.

Thanks!

First, I thank each of you who voted for me in the Society's election. I expected my remarkably accomplished opponent, Alison Reynolds of Christchurch Polytechnic in Wellington, New Zealand, to win the election. The best I was hoping for was that the vote might be close, and that her supporters wouldn't trounce me! The vote was very close, but in my favor. I thank Alison for being an affable opponent, and particularly I thank her for the help she's already given me in office. Thanks, Alison!

As well, I thank Paul Sinasohn for asking me to run for office. One never knows what might happen at the Society's annual conference! Thanks, Paul!

Charting a Different Course

Now for the business part of my message.

Our Society is undergoing a deliberate transformation in order to better serve our members and the profession. This was prompted by a large drop in Society membership, the consequent decrease in income, and subsequent surveys that revealed that members were not renewing their membership because they didn't perceive value for their money. The Transformation Initiatives are all aimed at making Society membership more valuable, and the Transformation Team has done an admirable job of allaying members' fears about the changes, while deftly designing the transformation as it happens.

Now this need to re-assess the value of what we offer to our colleagues has hit home. This year's Region 8 conference, Charting a Bold Course,

cancelled just a week before the opening keynote speakers presentations. One week after this expensive cancellation, the 2005 Region 8 conference team withdrew from producing the conference also.

An admittedly small survey of a tightly targeted group revealed that they didn't register for the conference because their employer didn't pay for it, and they didn't see the value of paying for it themselves.

There's that word "value" again. The Universe is trying to tell us something.

I believe that in order to find value at the local level, we should question the efficacy of our chapters' and SIGs' operations, and imagine ways to make them more attractive to a wider audience.

With reduced dues rebates returning to our chapters' coffers this year, it may prove important to examine all chapter expenses and imagine ways to reduce them, while trying to improve the service to our members and colleagues. Does the chapter subsidize dinners at monthly meetings? Might that be changed? Does the chapter lose money on seminars and workshops? Can we adopt a more profitable model? Does the chapter buy services that might be donated instead?

The same frugal perspective can help us avoid planning events that cost more than they earn. It seems that the old model of conferences—a big welcoming event with famous speakers, followed by a day or two of educational sessions, all laced with dedicated networking events and corporate promotional events—may not be the draw that it used to be. Attendance at COMDEX is down, and the Content World conference was, euphemistically, "postponed indefinitely". And our own Region 8 conference has become an object lesson for future conference management teams.

Further, I've received reports from colleagues that their employers aren't spending money to send them to conferences. And if the colleagues themselves don't see enough value in the event to pay for it themselves, then the problem is clear: we're not offering value to our colleagues.

So, I encourage everyone in Region 8 to rethink how your chapter and SIGs offer value, both to our Society's members and to our non-member colleagues. Are you getting the best return you can

Continued on page 6



Director's Letter *continued*

for what you spend? Are you getting a return at all?

Please join me in imagining ways to offer more of what we join STC for. Think about the resources we enjoy in our Society, and think of how they might be improved to serve you better. I invite you to e-mail me with your ideas, which are likely the most valuable resource we share.

Other STC chapters
in Northern California

East Bay

<http://www.ebstc.org/>

North Bay

www.stc-northbay.org

Sacramento

www.stcsacramento.org

San Francisco

www.stc-sf.org

Silicon Valley

www.stc-siliconvalley.org/

Upcoming Meetings

How Becoming a Better
Speaker Will Make You a
Better Writer

Speaker: Mariann Fleisher

September 8th, 2004

Fitting WebWorks Publisher
into a Publications Workflow

Speaker: Steve Homer

October 13th, 2004

If I Only Had Two More
Weeks..."

Speaker: Jane Bratun

November 10th, 2004

SEE THE CHAPTER WEB SITE FOR MORE
DETAILS.

WWW.STC-BERKELEY.ORG

Meetings

STC local chapters hold monthly meetings, which normally feature some combination of eating, job networking, and listening to speakers. S

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month at the Shattuck Plaza Hotel, 2086 Allston Way, just west of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. The Hotel is across the street from the BART station at Allston and Shattuck. The cost for dinner and meeting is \$18 for members, \$15 for student members and \$21 for non-members. For those attending the meeting only, the cost is \$12 for members and non-members, \$10 for students.

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|------|---|
| 6:00 | Check-in, conversation, no-host beer, wine, soft drinks. |
| 6:30 | Dinner. |
| 7:15 | Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.* |
| 7:39 | Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication. |
| 9:00 | Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements |
| 9:30 | Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk. |
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*Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

The Splice of Life

Biotechnology introduces a new challenge in communication. Writers with years of experience documenting software, medical devices, and government research find themselves daunted by the seemingly random pool of knowledge encompassing biotechnology. Short of spending two or more years in college, how does an experienced technical communicator convince a biotechnology firm to hire her for their documentation needs? She picks up a copy of the *Ragged Left*. "The Splice of Life" is a column on biotechnology useful for technical communicators. Members of the Berkeley STC who read the newsletter will steadily find themselves gaining ground in discussions with life scientists, and will increase their contribution to our field proportionately.

"The Splice of Life will begin with the next issue of the *Ragged Left*.

The Ten Biggest Mistakes

Gina Blednyh

At some point, most of us apply for a job and fail to receive a response; we often don't know why someone chooses another candidate over us. On August 11th, Jack Molisani of ProSpring Inc. explained "The Ten Biggest Mistakes Technical Communicators Make in Job Hunting" to the Berkeley STC chapter so we can avoid unwittingly making common errors. Molisani began with a disclaimer—don't take his advice as the gospel truth—and a ground rule—audience members should participate and expect chocolate as a reward for questions. By the end of the evening, the STC Berkeley chapter members and visitors faithfully fulfilled their end of the bargain. Following are Molisani's list and some of the evening's highlights.

1. Not Following Submission Directions . Do what the directions say. Additionally, Molisani suggests that applicants obtain names of hiring managers so that you can send a resume to an individual rather than to a generic jobs@company.com-type e-mail address. Call your target company and ask if you may survey the documentation manager for an article, or network to obtain names of hiring managers. These suggestions led to a question: What constitutes "overly aggressive" behavior when searching for work? Molisani recommends an approach in which job hunters show initiative, yet avoid behaving in too forceful a manner.

2. Not Building Personal Relationships . People will work harder for you if they know you and like you! Molisani suggests calling hiring managers to request informational interviews. An audience member said that she recently landed a job through networking.

3. Bad Manners. Don't send a resume

openly to several recruiters. And keep track of not only where you forward your resume, but where recruiters send it; doing so will help avoid an HR representative receiving your resume from two people—you and the recruiter—a mistake that could lead to your disqualification.

Somebody shared that an agency he worked with altered his resume without prior approval; Molisani suggests pasting your resume into a document as an object so that a recruiter cannot modify it.

Molisani also offered audience members examples of insulting correspondence sent to him by job seekers. Though hilarious to the audience, the antagonistic e-mails failed to elicit assistance from Molisani in placing these job seekers.

4. Applying When You Are not Even Remotely Qualified. Though you can apply for positions when you don't possess every skill desired as outlined in a job listing, don't apply for positions when you don't have the required qualifications.

Molisani also suggests making sure that your resume's objective matches that of the job for which you apply.

5. Not Summarizing Skills vs. Requirements. Help people help you by outlining the job requirements and how your skills fulfill them.

6. Misnaming Your Resume. Ensure that a recruiter can find your resume by avoiding file names such as the ubiquitous "resume.doc."

7. Poorly Writing or Formatting Your Resume. Molisani shared a resume with us in which the candidate used the space bar to align columns. Using tools ineffectively on your resume can disqualify you for a job. Additionally, technical writers' resumes should never contain spelling errors or inconsistent formatting.

8. Mis-evaluation of Importances. Look at your resume with a critical eye and have someone you trust look at it. Should you place more emphasis on a standout quality and play down a less important item?

On a funnier note, Molisani showed the audience some e-mail addresses job seekers used when sending resumes to

him. One included the word "cranky" and another "chic." When sending professional documents, avoid using e-mail addresses that may seem inappropriate to a potential employer.

9. Not Anticipating and Answering Questions. For example, have you lead a peripatetic life? If so, an employer may wonder if you can legally work in the United States; indicate that you possess citizenship or work visa papers if you have them to alleviate questions and uncertainty.

10. Not Keeping Your Skills Current . Given myriad opportunities available to learn new skills today, not knowing how to use a tool common in the industry reflects poorly on you.

For more detail and tips from Molisani, see:

http://www.prospring.net/Resource/10_Mistakes/10_mistakes.html

Gina Blednyh is a member of the Berkeley STC chapter.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. <http://www.amwancal.org>

American Society for Training and Development, Mount Diablo Chapter. Meets monthly in Danville. <http://mtdiabloastd.org/>.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. <http://www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden>

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter <http://www.awc-sf.org/>

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management <http://sf.iabc.com/>

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. <http://www.nwu.org>

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings and other events. <http://www.ncswa.org>

Ragged Left

Berkeley Chapter
The Society for Technical Communication
P.O. Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701

How Becoming a Better Speaker Will Make You a Better Writer

Wednesday, September 8, 2004

Location
Shattuck Plaza Hotel
Allston Way at Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley

Agenda
Networking 6:00 Dinner 6:30 Program 7:45

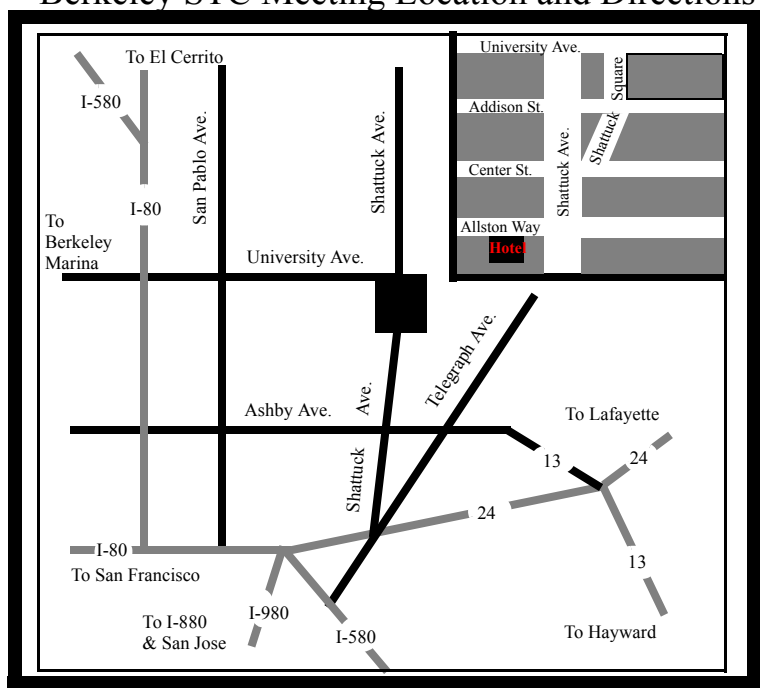
First class mail
Please return to sender if not deliverable as addressed

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

By BART:
Get off at the downtown Berkeley station (Richmond line) and walk south to Allston Way, the first street. Cross the street and turn right.

By Car:
From north of Berkeley on I-80, take the University Avenue exit (east). Turn right on Shattuck Avenue. Allston Way is three blocks south.

From south of Berkeley, take 880 north from San Jose. Continue through Oakland on 880. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges in) and becomes 980. Continue on 980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st and make an immediate left onto Shattuck. Proceed north on Shattuck 2.3 miles to downtown Berkeley. Allston Way is immediately before the BART station.



▲ *Walking to your car or BART?
We can't guarantee you an escort, but we'll try.*