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Ragged Left

The newsletter for the Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication

March/April 2010
Volume 23, Number 2

In this issue

Editor's Notes

More authors, more perspectives!

We have the good fortune this issue to have not one but *two* articles on Nancy Katz Ph.D.'s talk on writing in the medical field! They are about the same presentation, but especially if you weren't there to hear the talk, I encourage you to read both, as each write-up touches on some different concepts and details. Thank you to our industrious writers who provide the content for the newsletter.

Submission Deadlines

The regular schedule is to post the PDF the first week of every even-numbered month (it's a bi-monthly newsletter), so I need content the last week of January, March, May, July, September, and November to publish the first week of February, April, June, August, October, and December.

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President's Notes

by Richard Mateosian

I have just looked at the latest membership information that STC headquarters makes available to the leaders of this chapter. It lists all STC members in Berkeley and nearby zipcodes. It lists those who are not members of our chapter as "unaffiliated." These are either members of other chapters or not members of any chapter. The report doesn't distinguish between those cases. Up until March 31 the report listed everyone who had paid through the end of 2009. As of April 1, the report lists only those members who have paid their 2010 dues.

At this time last year our chapter had 94 paid up members. This number grew to 107 by the end of 2009. As of April 10, 2010, we have 56 paid up members, down 40% from last April. Of the 107 members we had at the end of 2009, two are paid up STC members but are now listed as unaffiliated. STC has dropped the remaining 49 members from this report. Some of those members have left the area or have given up on STC. Some mean to renew but just haven't gotten around to it. Others, I suspect, would like to continue but can't afford or can't justify the dues.

STC's existence depends on renewals. Without STC we would not have a chapter, so renewal is important to us. Nonetheless, our emphasis at the local level is less on renewals and more on maintaining and serving our community. Trying financial times have led to substantially higher STC dues at the same time as many of us have seen drastic cuts in income. We don't want that situation to drive anyone away.

Our chapter meetings provide networking opportunities and information to help us all succeed as technical communicators. Our prices remain low --

with a good crowd we barely break even. If you haven't yet gotten around to renewing and you sign up at the member price, we'll take that as a sign that you're still with us, and we'll be happy to see you.

February 2010 Meeting Notes

Beyond the Practitioners' Lore: Reading the Research

Presentation by Susan Becker
Notes by Romy Sinha

In the February chapter meeting, Susan Becker gave an interesting presentation on the role of research in Technical Communication. She explained how research strengthens our argument and why we should use research to support our thinking and writing.

As technical communicators, all of us are making constant decisions about how to write a particular document, which style to adopt, and so on, in our

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 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. Classic membership is $215/year with an additional $15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, email membership@stc-berkeley.org

everyday work. Most of the time we base our decisions to adopt a particular style on corporate guidelines, departmental policies and our own education. But sometimes we base our decision on what seems right to us, and it serves us fine. However, at times, we are challenged to base our decisions on evidence. That is when research becomes important. The decisions we make based on our research strengthens our argument.

To many of us, research may bring memories of late nights and delving into myriad books, papers and endless surfing of websites. That may be true, but Susan explained how we can streamline research and make it fun and interesting.

Susan told us how she learned a lot about research while working on the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) Style Guide for Voting Systems. She, along with Dana Chisnell, did extensive research while working on developing the Voting Systems Style Guide. Basing their work on research, Susan and Dana turned the confusing reference manual that the poll workers used into a user-friendly one, with clear and easy to follow instructions.

In her presentation, Susan explained how to:

Use sources to explore a question.
First, narrow your search by refining your question. Use the internet intelligently without getting lost in the mountain of information. Use reliable websites for online research. You can also use books, professional magazines, papers on previous and current research to hunt down a question.

Read a research article.
Assess while reading the research article and note down whatever is applicable to your work.

Apply what you learn from doing the research to the job you do.

Susan mentioned a number of sources that address the evidence basis for guidelines, including:

Problems and Joys of Reading Research Papers for Practitioner Purposes by Carolyn Jarrett
http://www.upassoc.org/upa_publications/jus/2007november/jarrett.html

Certain research–based Guidelines from Usability.gov
http://usability.gov/guidelines/index.html

Articles by Jan Spyridakis
http://www.hcde.washington.edu/navpeople/faculty/jansp

Articles by David Farkas
http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas

Official guidelines for federal government communications
http://www.plainlanguage.gov/

John M. Carroll - *Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*
http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/author/default.asp?aid=1163

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. **Annual conference: Dallas, Texas, May 2-5, 2010.** 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:

> Academic
> Lone Writer
> AccessAbility
> Management
> Canadian
> Issues
> Marketing
> Communication
> Consulting and
> Independent
> Contracting
> Online
> Emerging

Susan showed us how research helps us to write a document grounded in reality, how it helps us to defend our reasons for writing that document the way we wrote it, and how it aids us in explaining our position in committee meetings.

Romy Sinha is a technical writer and software developer with an inherent interest in the field of Technical Communication and Information Architecture. Romy has been a software developer and technical writer with Vertical Development Inc. for the last nine years. Romy is looking to leverage her software expertise and experience and transition fulltime into Information development.

March 2010 Meeting Notes

What does a medical writer do, and how can I become one?

Presentation by Nancy Katz, Ph.D.

Notes by Carole Baden

On March 10th, Dr. Nancy Katz answered these questions with an in-depth presentation on the role of the medical writer in the biopharmaceutical industry. Nancy has a PhD in English from UC Berkeley and was an educator and trainer before transitioning into the medical writing field, in which she has worked for over ten years. She is now the principal of Illyria Consulting Group, which referencing Shakespeare's Twelfth Night, "brings clarity and harmony to document confusion."

Nancy's talk began with a discussion of basic definitions, moved on to the deliverables and basic competencies that are expected from medical writers, and concluded with strategies for preparing to get a job in the field.

By way of introduction, Nancy answered the general question, *what does someone in this field do?* A common job title is "regulatory writer," and one of the main tasks of the medical writer is to create the applications for approval of new drugs that are filed with government agencies, such as the FDA. According to Nancy, biopharmaceuticals is the area within medical writing that has the most jobs and most significant income opportunities.

Medical writers provide documentation for a number of different studies. Clinical trials measure *pharmacokinetics*, how much/how long/how often a particular medication is needed, and *pharmacodynamics*, what a particular medication does in the body. Non-clinical ("pre-clinical") studies can include *in vitro* (in glass) and *in vivo* (in animals). Finally, Quality "CMC" (Chemistry, Manufacturing, and Controls) studies examine the production and chemical properties of new drug compounds.

What are the deliverables in this field? To begin with, these documents deal with data, so you should enjoy working with numbers even if you do not have mathematical/scientific expertise. The functions of the documents produced involve data collection (the study protocol) and data reporting (the final report of a clinical trial). They deal with issues of efficacy and

Technologies
Policies and
Procedures
Environmental,
Safety, and Health
Communication
Quality and Process
Improvement
Illustrators and
Visual
Designers
Scientific
Communication
Information Design
and Architecture

Single Sourcing
Instructional
Design &
Learning
Technical Editing
International
Technical
Communication

Usability & User
Experience

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.

safety. You will need to be familiar with the content of the reports you produce, even if you are not an expert.

Regulatory documentation includes study protocols; investigator brochures, which may include background on previous studies (animal or human) and information on side effects; and reports of clinical trials. The format of this documentation conforms to guidelines set by ICH (www.ich.org) a consortium of participating nations encompassing Japan, Europe, and the United States. Submissions to the ICH take the form of the Common Technical Document (CTD), a group of PDF documents organized into modules. When linked via an XML backbone, these documents are called the *eCTD*.

There are a number of competencies required in this field. A medical writer should be familiar with the standard structure for final reports of clinical trials (known as IMMRAD format), and also be familiar with the various elements of the eCTD. There are also standards for the tables and figures which present study results. In reviewing the final report, the writer should be familiar enough with the material to be able to point out inconsistencies between the results of a study and the conclusions drawn from that data. (In response to a question about the ethical implications of this, Nancy said that she has never had a researcher disregard her feedback about these kinds of issues.) The writer should also have a familiarity with biostatistics, processes and requirements for quality assurance, and regulations covering drug development.

Finally, the medical writer needs to have competencies applicable to technical communicators in general: flexibility, good project management skills, the ability to work effectively with a team, and being able to adapt to the in-house style and templates of various sponsors.

Nancy concluded with guidance for those wanting to transition into the field of medical writing. First, begin by identifying transferable skills, such as writing, editing, and software expertise. Next identify and plug the gaps in your knowledge. Additional competencies can be acquired via various professional organizations. AMWA (American Medical Writer's Association) has information about drug development and gives certification. Other organizations to explore are PERI (Pharmaceutical Education and Research Institute) and RAPS (Regulatory Affairs Professionals Society). Finally, and most importantly, be very straightforward when representing your skills and abilities to a potential employer.

Unsurprisingly, a key element of success in this field is networking. Resources include BABCN (Bay Area Biomedical Consultants Network) and AMWA (American Medical Writer's Association.) The DIA (Drug Information Association) has a Medical Writing Special Interest Area Community which offers information and classes. An informational interview with the medical writing director at a biopharmaceutical company could also be helpful.

Our speaker presented a lively and information-packed overview of the field that should provide useful guidance for anyone interested in taking the leap into medical writing.

Carole Baden is enrolled in the Professional Sequence in Technical Communication at the UC Berkeley Extension. She is learning to identify examples of great documentation wherever she finds them.

What Medical Writers Do

Presentation by Nancy Katz, Ph.D.

Notes by Jana Rollo-Fennick

Despite these times of economic uncertainty, forecasters say that medical and health care jobs are on the rise. For technical communicators, this could mean increased openings for medical writers. The medical writing field has many types of writing under its umbrella, including regulatory, medical education, marketing communications, policy and public health, medical and healthcare journalism, technical instructions, and grant writing.

Technical communicators interested in becoming part of this expanding field, or at least curious to learn more about it, gathered at the Highlands Country Club in March to hear Nancy Katz describe the regulatory aspect of this industry. According to Katz, regulatory writers are in demand even in these difficult times, and salaries are competitive.

In her presentation "What Medical Writers Do", Katz defined what a "regulatory writer" is, explained the expected deliverables, discussed the basic competencies necessary to be successful as a regulatory writer, and recommended strategies for breaking into the field.

The main job of regulatory writers is to produce documents about new drugs that will be submitted to regulatory agencies for approval. This will include such documents as protocols, amendments, study reports, integrated summaries, briefing packages, investigator brochures, and high-level summaries of the quality, nonclinical, and clinical documents submitted in a drug application.

Katz described the various facets that are studied in clinical trials, such as:

> Efficacy and Safety
>
> Pharmacokinetics (PK) - what does the body do to the drug?
>
>> Absorption / Distribution – does the drug get to where it's supposed to go?
>>
>> Metabolism / Elimination – how long does the drug stay in the body?
>
> Pharmacodynamics (PD) – does the drug do to the body what it is supposed to do? For example, if the purpose of the drug is to reduce bacteria count, does it? If the purpose is to shrink a tumor, does the drug do this?
>
> Immunogenicity – does the drug produce any allergic reactions?
>
> Special assessments – for example, how does the drug affect quality of life?

The goal of the clinical trials is to determine the least amount of the drug needed to produce the desired result with the least amount of side effects.

In conjunction with a filing team, regulatory writers gather documentation for approval of a new drug into a template known as the CTD (Common

containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

Technical Document), which consists of 5 modules, and submit it to a regulatory agency. The CTD is a collection of PDF documents linked together by an XML backbone. Electronic CTD submission (eCTD) is now the preferred submission method by the FDA, the U.S. regulatory agency, because it provides reviewers instant access to all supporting documents, allows transparency and traceability, and facilitates review.

Basic competencies for writers in the medical field

In order to produce the deliverables, there are some basic competencies that a regulatory writer must possess.

Data immersion

You must be comfortable working with a lot of numerical data ("TFLs" – tables, figures, listings). You need to have a good "feel" for the data, and be able to translate the data into a message – an accurate qualitative statement. Katz provided examples of both "good" and "bad" messages to illustrate her point. She also pointed out that you must have an intuitive awareness if a message or statement provided to you is correct.

Biostatistics

You must have a working knowledge of statistical tests used in clinical trials.

Regulations and guidelines

You must be familiar with relevant sections of:

> the CFR (Code of Federal Regulations),

> the guidelines of the ICH (International Conference on Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Registration of Pharmaceuticals for Human Use),

> the guidelines for integrated summaries, and

> the guidelines for CSRs (clinical study reports).

Standards

You must have knowledge of the standards contained in:

> the MedDRA (Medical Dictionary of Regulatory Activities),

> the WHO (World Health Organization) Drug Dictionary, and

> the CDISC (Clinical Data Interchange Standards Consortium) database.

Formats and templates

You must be able to write documents, often based on sponsor-approved templates, which are in accordance with the CTD format.

Develop case for drug

You must be able to write the report that builds the case for the drug. In addition to writing the introduction, describing the methods and materials, presenting the results, and discussing the conclusions, you will need to deal with any weaknesses of the drug and emphasize its strengths.

Project management

You must be able to manage multiple projects and timelines, and be good at troubleshooting.

Documentation reuse

You must be able to effectively reuse or "repurpose" documents.

In-house style

You must have the flexibility to be able to adhere to style manuals (e.g. the AMA Style Guide or the Chicago Manual of Style) while also conforming to the eccentricities of your sponsor's style.

Teamwork

You must be proficient at teamwork. It is essential to work closely with key team members such as physicians, biostatisticians, personnel from Clinical Operations and Regulatory Affairs, as well as nonclinical people. Strong interviewing skills is essential.

Quality Assurance

You must understand and anticipate Quality Assurance processes and requirements.

Conclusion

For those who have the desire to pursue a career as a Regulatory Medical Writer, Katz offered several strategies. First, learn about drug development. The American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) offers education and certificate programs. Next, understand the structure, content, and regulations of the CTD (and eCTD). Then begin the transition – but only if you are committed to this work! This is not something you can just do on the side.

To begin the transition, identify your transferrable skills such as writing, editing, software expertise, and Quality Assurance experience. Identify and plug the education gaps. Once you have done this, start networking by attending professional meetings, arranging for informational interviews, and taking advantage of online networking via Linked In, Plaxo, or BABCN (Bay Area Biomedical Consultants Network).

According to Katz, there is a real need for good Regulatory Medical Writers.

She acknowledges that breaking into the field is tough, but if you are committed to it and willing to prepare yourself, it IS possible!

Nancy Katz, Ph.D., is President and Principal Medical Writing Consultant of Illyria Consulting Group, Inc. (www.illyriaconsulting.com). Illyria provides writing services for the biopharmaceutical industry, specializing in documents for eCTD-based submissions.

Nancy recently completed a 4-year term as a core committee member of the DIA (Drug Information Association) Medical Writing SIAC (Special Interest Area Community) and now serves on that SIAC's E3 task force. She is a member of the pharmaceutical content subcommittee of OASIS (Organization for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) and mentors writers through AuthorAid, an organization that helps researchers in developing countries publish their work.

Slides from Nancy Katz's March talk are available on the STC Berkeley Past Meetings page.

Jana Rollo-Fennick has over 10 years of Technical Writing experience as part of the Pharmacy Systems IT team at Longs Drugstores Corporate Office. Recently, Longs was bought by another company and all the Corporate Office jobs were eliminated, so she is actively seeking work elsewhere as a Technical Writer. She has developed a variety of documentation for multiple audiences, and is trained in Information Mapping concepts and formats. She is also a community volunteer and a trained Disaster Service Worker with CORE (Communities of Oakland Respond to Emergencies). For more information about Jana, please visit her VisualCV website, http://www.visualcv.com/hdjohkp.

Web usability column

Thinking about the usability of a CMS

by Eric Hughes

Most of the usability work I've done has been for customer-facing sites. But behind those sites can be sophisticated systems for authoring, editing, approving, publishing, and security. Recently, I've been working on a project to test how well a rather complex content management system (CMS) works. It is interesting how different this analysis is from your typical customer-facing site, where the first thing you do is develop audience personas. On customer-facing sites, nothing can be measured or analyzed without understanding audience characteristics and their business, but on CMSs, everything is much more task-driven and less influenced by audience needs. This is not a good thing, it is just the way the priorities fall.

The audience for the CMS I am evaluating are content authors and editors, content approvers, and publishers; this is pretty typical. Some are business people and some are technical; again, pretty standard. The CMS is used not

only to create and publish content, but to assign and manage who is authorized to access certain areas and applications on the client's extensive and mission-critical web presence.

Content management systems work the same way as any other web site: there are interfaces, applications, content, and performance concerns. But CMSs are different in these very important areas:

1. their audience is smaller; they are always seekers (not wanderers); and you typically know them and can talk with them whenever you want.

2. training can be focused and readily available.

3. they are used by middlemen - they have internal customers for whom they are enabling publishing functions.

4. the impact of making a mistake can be quite serious, sometimes unpredictable, and occasionally hard to find.

There are challenges to testing an environment like this:

Developers usually have enough to do just to install and customize the CMS, and the priority is that they concentrate on what will be used, not how well it will be used. This means that when testing, you have to focus on tasks first and usability second. In my experience, it is very difficult to analyze both at once. They just seem to use a different part of the brain that likes to operate serially, not in parallel.

It is not always clear what impact changing anything in the interface will have. This means that many times, you have to plan time to search for and find the problems.

It is easier to write off interface problems and turn them over to trainers since the audience is known, small, and typically more easily communicated with.

Labeling problems are rampant and ubiquitous. In fact, since these are top-of-mind, here are the most common labeling mistakes in content management systems:

a. **Update** - It can mean click to start updating a page, or click to finish updating a page. Typically, real estate is not a problem with content management system interfaces, so it is important to be specific with the action that will happen.

b. **Properties or settings** - do they apply to a whole page? A site? A user ID? And how extensively does each change have to be tested? Sometimes one change impacts another, too.

c. **Use of Capital letters** - there is no need to capitalize the first letter of the words "required" or "visible"....or most other modifiers, nouns or verbs, for that matter! But For Some Reason Lots of Words Get Capitalized on Content Management System Screens.

Continued next page…

d. **The screen** - as in "if you do this it will impact the layout of the items on the screen." Which screen? This screen? The screen that gets updated as a result of the action you are taking? As noted above, sometimes it can take a lot of time to find these screens, and it isn't always clear whether the screen being referred to is the CMS or the user screen.

e. **Cancel** - in fact, there is one screen on the system I am reviewing that has two cancel buttons; one right next to the other. One of them clears the screen of input that has been made - perhaps that should be called "clear"?? I still can't figure out what the other one does.

f. **Site** - sometimes called a portal, sometimes called a page, sometimes an application. Having a glossary available is always a good idea, but rarely done.

g. **Current level** - As in "move page down in current level." Sometimes called a hierarchy. I guess this make sense, now that I see it written here...but the label "level" isn't always intuitively obvious.

h. Navigational items seemingly always appear in more than one place and will be called something different in each of the two places: "Users" and "User Accounts" is an example. So is "Roles" and "Security Roles." It is not always obvious that they are the same thing, so just refer to them with the same label!

i. And finally, there are always more transactions on any page than are needed. They get left there because rarely does anyone do enough research into the audience and their needs to know for certain whether the specific transactions are needed: "Payment settings" on a site that doesn't accept payment transactions is an example.

I get questions quite often from cohorts about content management systems. The most common question is: "so is there one of these things the non-savvy user can figure out easily?" And the answer is always: "well, not really, but there certainly could be if someone were willing to split up the toolbox into individual tools!"

Eric Hughes has been an STC member since 2004. Things that don't work the way they should drive him crazy. You can reach him at hughesearthur@gmail.com; or on Twitter, FaceBook, LinkedIn, and delicious at /hughese

Meetings

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month. In addition to listing upcoming meetings, this section includes:

> Meeting/Dinner prices

> Meeting Agenda

> Location and Directions

Upcoming Meetings

Developing and Delivering Documentation in a Wiki

by Dee Elling

Wednesday, April 14, 2010, 6-9:30pm

Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

Over the last 2 years, Embarcadero Technologies went through the transition from authoring their developer documentation in XML/DITA and publishing to Microsoft Help2, to writing and publishing their content using MediaWiki. Dee Elling will talk with us about what led to that decision, and what their experience has been. She will talk with us about:

> Why traditional pubs tools don't "scale down" well

> Why Execs think wikis are the best thing since tax writeoffs

> What works and doesn't work out-of-the-box

> What skillsets you need

> Why they dropped XML/DITA

Speaker

Dee Elling is perpetually curious. She is always looking for new ways to meet the changing needs of web-centric customers. She is interested in lean development, rapid iteration, customer engagement and collaboration, and in growing self-motivated and technically-savvy teams.

Dee led the pioneering team at BEA WebLogic in bringing high-quality and highly relevant technical documentation to the internet. WebLogic writers applied an automated continuous-improvement update cycle to what used to be static information.

Dee raised quite a few eyebrows by insisting that a writer's first duty was to

the customer who just found an issue in a "released" document, and that the writer should and could update that documentation right away.

She also pushed the writers to prioritize examples as their most-effective deliverable.

As a result of this focus on quality, the WebLogic documentation website became a go-to site for Java developers, and was copied and emulated by other companies.

Dedicated to bringing the customer even closer to the content, Dee is now deploying wiki solutions throughout the technical information development cycle at Embarcadero Technologies.

Design to Read: Designing for People Who Do Not Read Easily (a report from the CHI 2010 workshop)

by Kath Straub

Wednesday, May 12, 2010, 6-9:30pm

Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

Program

This year at CHI 2010, Kath Straub is participating in the workshop *Design to Read: Designing for People Who Do Not Ready Easily.* She will report on her experience and the ideas generated in this day-long workshop.

If you are not familiar with CHI workshops, they provide a venue where professionals with common interests can discuss and explore a particular area of interest. Workshops often move an area of study forward, and can result in additional research or writings. For more about CHI workshops, see http://www.chi2010.org/authors/cfp-workshop-participants.html.

Speaker

Kath Straub works with organizations and agencies to create, integrate, and evaluate interactions and content. Usability and Content strategy are both key elements of this effort. To ensure that sites are both usable and useful, Kath also focuses on how to create meaningful small talk that engages users via readable and persuasive content to drive behavioral change.

Kath is an energetic and entertaining speaker who presents frequently at conferences and workshops around the world. Recently, she has presented in Atlanta (CHI), Berlin (UPA), London (TecCom), and Austin, TX (GTC). She's currently the Principal of Usability.org. Prior to that, she spent 9 years as the Chief Scientist at Human Factors International. Kath holds a Ph.D. in Brain and Cognitive Science from the University of Rochester.

Meeting/Dinner Prices

Advance Reservations

Reserved on the [Chapter's website](#) by the day prior to meeting.

Meeting and dinner
>Members: $10
>Non-members: $18
>Student members: $10

Program only
>Members: $5
>Non-STC-Members: $15
>Students: $5

At the door (no reservation)

Meeting and dinner
>Members: $15
>Non-members: $21
>Student members: $15

Note: If you do not reserve dinner in advance, dinner may or may not be available on a walk-in basis. We order dinner for the number of reservations plus a few walk-ins.

Program only
>Members: $10
>Non-STC-Members: $15
>Students: $10

Special cost notes
>Non-members are always welcome to STC meetings at the non-member rates.
>All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the member price by midnight on the day before the meeting.

Meeting Agenda

6:00-7:00pm	Check-in, networking, conversation, and dinner.
7:00 -7:15pm	Chapter business, announcements, and introductions. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
7:15 - 8:30pm	Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication.
8:30 - 9pm	Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements
9:00	Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk.

* Attendees, please announce open positions, and bring job listings for distribution.

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.

Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

Highlands Country Club
110 Hiller Drive
Oakland, California

Information at http://www.stc-berkeley.org/MonthlyMeeting/directions.shtml

Note: If you need a ride from BART, contact Richard Mateosian (President@stc-berkeley.org) at least one day prior to the meeting.

View from the Highlands Country Club
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

Driving directions

From San Francisco

Cross the Bay Bridge to I-580 Eastbound. Remain in the right lane, until Highway 24 Eastbound (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Continue eastbound until the Tunnel Road off-ramp. Exit will loop around to the west, crossing back over Highway 24. Turn left at the stop sign. Follow Tunnel Road/Caldecott Lane to traffic signal. Veer to the right, and follow Hiller Drive halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Walnut Creek

Take Highway 24 Westbound through the Caldecott Tunnel. Stay in the right-hand lane, taking the first exit after the tunnel ends, the Tunnel Road exit, going towards Berkeley. Follow Tunnel Road to the complex intersection and stop light, at Tunnel Drive, Hiller Drive, and Highway 13. Veer to the right, and continue halfway up the hill on Hiller Drive. Highlands Country Club is on the right-hand side of the street.

From I-80 and Berkeley

Take Ashby Avenue to the Highway 13 exit. Ashby becomes Tunnel Road at the Claremont Hotel. Continue on Tunnel Road (through the split-level section) to the stoplight just before the Highway 24 overcrossing. Remain in the left lane and make a sharp left U-turn around the Firestorm Memorial Garden, on to Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

From Hayward

Take I-580 Westbound to Highway 13 north. Continue on Highway 13 past the over-crossing of Highway 24. At the stoplight, turn right, then left, onto Hiller Drive. Continue halfway up the hill. Highlands Country Club will be on the right-hand side of the street.

Parking

Please park on the street. The club's parking lot is for members only.

Public Transit

Prefer to take BART? The Rockridge station is closest. Send email to president@stc-berkeley.orgto ask about transportation from BART to the meeting.

AC Transit bus E from SF via MacArthur then Rockridge takes you as far as Tunnel Road & Roble Road, with a half mile walk uphill on Hiller Drive to the Hillside Country Club.

STC News

Increase your network and net worth—join STC today!

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and all media. For more information about STC, send an e-mail to stc@stc.org or visit www.stc.org.

Chapter News

Leadership Positions Available

We are looking to fill several leadership positions! Contact Richard Mateosian if you are interested. See http://www.stc-berkeley.org/VolunteerOpportunities/volunteer.shtml for a list of open positions.

Regional STC News

T. R. Girill gave a talk to our chapter in December (see write-up in the Jan/Feb 2010 *Ragged Left*) on some literacy outreach activities.

A year-long usage analysis of the underlying (web-based) material for that work in now up on the East Bay STC site at http://www.ebstc.org/newsletter/0310/Article_4.htm.

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Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay: 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

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. 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. www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter — 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. — www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings & other events. www.ncswa.org

Tips & Tidbits

Seven tips to improve your writing

WRITER'S WEB WATCH, Issue No. 114, March 2nd, 2010, http://www.WritersWebWatch.com

Writers must keep pushing to improve and to stay interested. Here are some ways to do both.

1. Read about writing. Look at many new books and buy the 10 to 12 a year that seem to offer at least two or three ideas or to reinforce the basics.

2. Attend writing seminars. At least once every other year attend a writing seminar to get reinforcement and hear others' points of view.

3. Soak in good writing. Read such publications as Wall Street Journal, Sports Illustrated and Vanity Fair. Read what you like and admire. Read as a writer; when you read something really good, go back and analyze it. Look for techniques you can use.

4. Notice how broadcast interviewers work. For example, Bill Moyers does extensive homework and shows intense interest in his subjects. Watch for questions and techniques you can use.

5. Don't try to perfect everything at once. Work on different elements on different pieces. For instance, on your next piece focus on writing great verbs.

6. Edit a paragraph or two of someone else's writing each day. Select a paragraph, perhaps from a newspaper, and improve it.

7. Talk shop. Keep your batteries charged by talking to other writers, whether in monthly departmental meetings or in groups writing completely different material.

SOURCE: WRITING THAT WORKS, our print-only, bimonthly newsletter. Nonsubscribers may sign up online for a free trial subscription at: http://www.writingthatworks.com/freetrialsubscription.htm

Web writing advice

WRITER'S WEB WATCH, Issue No. 114, March 2nd, 2010,
http://www.WritersWebWatch.com

The Web requires better, different writing.

Attracting readers to narrative nonfiction online is even harder on the Web than in print, according to Stephen G. Bloom. They go online expecting to find information and move on.

To hold their attention, you have to write even better than you do for print, and you have to be right on target.

Web publications, the new alternative press, have niches, and they present opportunities for writers who can write for those niches.

Writers need to make some adjustments, Bloom says. The tone must be much more informal, conversational, colloquial. Often you write in first person rather than third and provide links to additional information.

What you can't do is dump print online.
SOURCE: Stephen G. Bloom, University of Iowa School of Journalism and Mass Communication. He is the author of Inside the Writer's Mind: Writing Narrative Journalism (http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Writers-Mind-Narrative-Journalism/dp/081381779X).

Copyright your web site

From the WRITER'S WEB WATCH, Issue No. 115, March 10th, 2010,
http://www.WritersWebWatch.com

When you put original content in print or on the Web, you automatically have a copyright that is protectable, but don't expect to win damages for copyright infringement if you haven't filed with the Library of Congress, says Harvey Jacobs.

On the other hand, expect to be sued if you use a downloaded image from someone else's site even if it doesn't carry the copyright symbol.

The main thing you want to protect is your creative work.

Jacobs says trademarking is often a better choice than copyrighting the words because trademarking protects distinctive features. It also protects your domain name against cybersquatters.

More people violate copyright of Web than of printed material. That's partly because it's so easy to download, say, a captivating image and put it on your site. Even some who know that's illegal do it because they don't expect to get caught. Others don't see a copyright symbol so consider the image fair game.

Jacobs reminds communicators that trademark, copyright and patent laws apply in cyberspace just as they do in print. If you want to use anything from a site not clearly labeled public domain, get permission and, if required, pay a fee.

To test your knowledge of intellectual property, take his IP Quiz at http://www.internet-law-firm.com/pub_ipquiz.htm.

The site also features a useful Consumer Online Privacy Guide which might be helpful for your family's Web browsing: http://www.internet-law-firm.com/pub_P3P.htm

While visiting his site, note his handling of copyright and terms of use.

To read the full article, originally published in Writing That Works: http://www.internet-law-firm.com/pub_websites.htm

WRITING THAT WORKS is our print-only, bimonthly newsletter. Nonsubscribers may sign up online for a free trial subscription at: http://www.writingthatworks.com/freetrialsubscription.htm.

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