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**Berkeley Chapter
Society for Technical
Communication**

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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 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:

Ragged Left

The newsletter for the [Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication](#)

**Spring 2012
Volume 25, Number 2**

Editor's Notes

by Gwendolynne Barr

Dear readers,

Please take a [10-question Survey](#) about Ragged Left. We are planning to make some changes and your feedback would be helpful. Thank you!

In this issue, we review Bruce Poropat's [presentation on Plain Language](#) and Nicki Davis' [presentation on Ethnographic Field Research](#). We also have [highlights of the STC summit in Chicago](#). It was an excellent conference, so consider attending next year in Atlanta. And if you haven't yet read Patrick Lufkin's [history of the Norcal STC chapters](#) in [ActiveVoice](#), be sure to read it here.

For our upcoming programs, on June 13, [Randall Bolten](#) is going to teach us how to present quantitative data *clearly*. If you are [not a numbers person](#), well, that's the whole point. I expect this to be an interesting talk. On July 11, [Andrew Davis](#) is going to reveal job trends in the Bay Area. I heard him speak about this at the East Bay chapter and learned some surprising things about the market. If you are looking for work, this one is a no-brainer.

Members, the Berkeley chapter could use more volunteers. None of these jobs is difficult and you get support from the leadership team. Of course, holding an office bears some responsibility, but there are many rewards. Getting involved expands your network, shows off your skills, and increases your market-share. It also keeps our chapter vibrant and alive. Consider running for a leadership position this fall.

President

- Provide strategic leadership for chapter
- Run monthly leadership meetings (1st Wed of month)
- Run monthly program meetings (2nd Wed of month)
- Handle legal matters (not a frequent occurrence)
- Maintain relationship with STC HQ
- Maintain ties with Northern California chapter leaders
- Participate in MySTC leadership forums, support groups, and legacy lists
- Coordinate with Touchstone competition and Gordon Scholarship

Programs

- Plan programs for the year (with help of leadership team)
- Attend monthly leadership meetings
- Contact potential speakers and arrange for them to present
- Ensure that we have a gift for each speaker
- Setup the projector before each meeting
- Introduce each speaker and present a gift at the end
- Help plan the annual Touchstone party
- [optional] Arrange an annual day-long workshop

Membership

- Actively solicit members (e.g., students, "accidental" technical writers)
- Attend monthly leadership meetings
- Think of new ways to increase membership
- Monitor membership rolls
- Send out introductory email to new members

Arrangements

- Drive to Costco (or other agreed-upon venue) before each meeting to purchase dinner
- Set up food before each meeting with the help of the president (and other early birds)
- Clean up after dinner (with the help of others)

Newsletter Editor

- Plan and publish (quarterly) issues
- Solicit volunteers to write articles (especially the monthly programs)
- Write articles (may require research and interviewing)
- Format content in tool of your choice

Public Relations

- Be a voice for the chapter to engage existing members and encourage new members to join us
- Send email blasts to members
- Use social media and website to make chapter announcements

In this issue

- [Editor's Notes](#)
- [Program Notes](#)
 - [March 2012:](#)
Plain Language
 - [April 2012:](#)
Ethnographic Field Research
- [Highlights of the 2012 STC Summit](#)
- [STC East Bay Turns 50:](#) A History of the Norcal Chapters
- [Upcoming Programs](#)
- [Meeting Logistics](#)
- [Local STC Chapters](#)
- [Other Organizations](#)

- 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

[STC Membership](#) is open to everyone. Classic membership is \$215 per year with an additional \$25 per chapter and \$10 per SIG. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, email membership@stc-berkeley.org.

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. **The 2013 STC Summit will be held in Atlanta, May 5-8, 2013.** 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 sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the 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. These and a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested are included in *Ragged Left*.

Subscriptions

This newsletter is free to the public.

Advertising rates

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 15th of the last month in each quarter (March, June, September, December).

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.

Contact *Ragged Left* at newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

Secretary

- Prepare agendas for leadership meetings
- Record minutes at each leadership meeting
- Take a vote on minutes of the previous meeting
- Distribute minutes to leadership team (by email)

Sponsorship

- Solicit sponsors and prizes for the annual Touchstone party
- Seek other sponsorship opportunities

Treasurer

- Collect, track, and manage all monies
- Manage our PayPal, credit card, and bank accounts
- Submit annual budget and financial report to STC HQ
- File chapter income tax return
- Provide monthly meeting attendee list

Webmaster

- Keep website up to date with news, events, newsletter, and sponsors
- Optimize website backend as necessary
- Assist PR officer with website updates

[Top](#)

Program Notes

March 2012 Program Notes

Plain Language for Technical Writers

Presentation by Bruce Poropat

Article by Gwendolynne Barr

Introduction

Plain language is not dumbed-down writing, says Bruce Poropat; nor is it necessarily aimed at non-native speakers. To write in plain language is to practice good technical writing. The aim is to write so that readers can find what they need, understand what they find, and act as necessary.

To use plain language is to use a communication style that emphasizes "clarity, brevity and the avoidance of technical language." The Center for Plain Language (CPL) calls plain language "information that is focused on readers." By contrast, [Basic English](#) (or Simple English) is a [Controlled Natural Language](#) (CNL).

A CNL is a subset of a natural language and directed toward non-native speakers. For example, Basic English is limited to roughly 850 words and a simplified grammar. [Uwe Muegge](#) demonstrates the use of CNLs on his website by effectively translating controlled German with machine translation software. Starting with a CNL greatly limits the amount of editing necessary after an automated translation.

A [Constructed Language](#) (conlang) is a language of human design. Esperanto, Klingon, and Quenya are three such examples. Did you know that Esperanto is George Soros' first language? And an [International Auxiliary Language](#) (IAL or auxlang) can be a constructed language but is not necessarily. It is an agreed-upon second language meant to facilitate communication among people with different native tongues. French used to be one dominant IAL; English is so today.

Plain Language as Law

Bruce explained that plain language is mostly used by the government and in law. It is also used in the insurance and healthcare industries. Since President Obama signed the [Plain Writing Act](#) in 2010, each federal agency is required to "use plain writing in every covered document." Bruce outlined the history behind this act:

- 1978 – Jimmy Carter issues Presidential orders to make government regulations "cost-effective and easy-to-understand."
- 1981 – Ronald Reagan rescinds Carter's orders.
- 1998 – Bill Clinton reinstates the plain language requirement for federal regulation writers and government attorneys.
- 2010 – Barack Obama signs the Plain Writing Act, introduced by Bruce Braley (D, Iowa).

Plain Language Guidelines

The [Center for Plain Language](#) (CPL) and the [Plain Language Action and Information Network](#) (PLAIN) both provide guidelines for writing in plain language, the first one being, identify your audience. As PLAIN puts it, there is a difference between 8th graders and PhD candidates.

Once you have identified your audience, apply the other guidelines as best you can. Organize your document by stating your thesis. Use the active voice, present tense, and second person. Write in short, crisp, sentences. Avoid jargon and abbreviations. Ensure ample white space, use vertical lists, and include graphics to emphasize your message.

Bruce provided a few examples:

~~The filter shall be cleaned weekly.~~
Clean the filter weekly.

~~In order to check levels, the panel must be removed.~~
To check levels, remove the panel.

~~Conduct testing on the module before giving your sign-off.~~
Test the module before you sign off.

~~The motion was passed.~~
The motion passed.

Plain Language Conversion

Bruce explained how he generally transforms information into plain English. He starts by dividing a document into two or three columns, depending on the project. In the first column, he puts the original text. In the second column, he rewrites the original text as plain English. He uses the third column, if it exists, for notes. Once complete, his document goes through a rigorous technical editing cycle and a complex sign-off process.

5. PLANS AND SPECIFICATIONS 5.1 INTENT It is the intent of the Plans and Specifications to describe a functionally complete and operable Project (and all parts thereof) to be constructed in accordance with the requirements of the Contract Documents. Any work, materials or equipment that may reasonably be inferred from the requirements of the Contract Documents or from prevailing custom or trade usage as being required to produce this intended result shall be furnished and performed whether or not specifically called for. When words or phrases which have a well-known technical or construction industry or trade meaning are used to describe Work, materials or equipment, such words or phrases shall be interpreted in accordance with that meaning. The intent of the Plans specifically includes the intent to depict construction that complies with all applicable laws, codes and standards. The Divisions and Sections of the Specifications and the identification on the Plans shall not control the Contractor in dividing the Work among Subcontractors or suppliers or delineating the work to be performed by any specific trade.	5. Plans and Specifications 5.1 Intent The Port intends the Plans and Specifications to describe everything you need to complete the entire Project according to the Contract. You must furnish work, materials, and equipment necessary to satisfy the Contract and prevailing custom or trade practice, even if the Plans do not specify them. Interpret words and phrases in the Plans and Specifications according to standard construction industry or trade meanings. The Port intends the Plans to represent construction complying with applicable laws, codes, and standards. The Divisions and Sections of the Specification and identification on the Plans do not dictate how you divide Work among subcontractors, specific trades, or suppliers.
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In 2011, the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) won the ClearMark award for the best plain language document. You can see the result of their plain language conversion in these [before](#) and [after](#) documents.

Sandra Fisher-Martins presented an excellent TED talk on the need for plain language in government and business. While literacy in her native country of Portugal might be low, it is every citizen's right to be able to understand public documents such as those by the IRS. If you don't understand your rights, how can you understand your responsibilities? Watch the video: <https://www.ted.com/talks/sandra-fisher-martins-the-right-to-understand.html>.

Summary

Plain language is not different from good technical writing. In fact, it *is* good technical writing. Its distinction is its application in government and in industries that have a reputation for highly specialized terminology and historically incomprehensible documentation.

Bruce closed his talk by emphasizing the difference between fiction and technical writing. We read fiction for the emotional experience and linger on each word; we read plain language documentation to gain knowledge and hope the language does not distract us. Whatever their differences, fiction and technical writing each have their place. Bruce tried to imagine William Shakespeare as a plain language technical writer: *I compare you to a summer's day. You're better. Bill.*

Bruce Poropat, a Bay Area-based contract technical writer, has authored online and print documentation for the University of California, Wells Fargo, Charles Schwab, Williams-Sonoma, ERG, ZipRealty.com, and many others. He has worked on plain language conversion projects for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Port of Oakland.

Gwendolynne Barr is a technical writer at Thomson Reuters in San Francisco.

[Top](#)

April 2012 Program Notes

Ethnographic Field Research: Find out what users really need

Presentation by Nicki Davis

Article by Nicole Smith-Maoz

Nicki Davis presented a case study about her success doing ethnographic field research at MDL Information Systems. MDL creates chemical drawing and database software for drug-discovery chemists. In 2005, MDL wanted to upgrade a legacy software tool, and Nicki, a former chemist, applied ethnographic field research to understand how customers used the existing tool and what upgrades they really needed.

What is it?

Ethnographic field research, field inquiry, or contextual inquiry involves observing end-users in their natural environment to learn what they do, and ultimately, what they need from a certain product. Nicki equated ethnographic field research to *Gorillas in the Mist*, the book (and eventual film) by Dian Fossey, who observed gorillas in their wild habitat. She presented a case study to highlight the process and benefits of ethnographic field research.

Case study

In 2005, MDL decided to upgrade a software tool used by a small segment of drug-discovery scientists in protein chemistry. The original product was conceived in 1994 and released in 1996. Nine years later, MDL was aware that the program was old and buggy. They were less aware of how best to improve it. Before proceeding, they sent a team, including Nicki, to analyze how their customers were actually using the tool. The team consisted of Nicki as the technical writer, a lead developer, and two marketing people.

Convincing MDL about the value of ethnographic research took some effort. Nicki was inspired by the [goal-directed design process practiced at Cooper](#): design before programming, ensure designers are not programmers, hold designers accountable for user satisfaction, employ personas, and assign design teams of two—one designer and one communicator to describe the product. Nicki was the design communicator. Cooper believes that the goal-directed design process creates software products that are easy, effective, and enjoyable to use.

Nicki and the research team conducted two one-week field studies in their customers' work environment. Their methodology was to observe the scientists using the legacy software product, record the scientists' tasks, and analyze the data to detect the frequently-performed critical tasks. What they learned was that, in this phase of the drug-design process, their customers had 27 critical tasks to perform. The legacy product allowed for 47 tasks overall, but only 18 of 27 critical tasks. Nine of the 27 critical tasks were missing from the product, and to accomplish them, the scientists had developed work-around solutions.

Return On Investment

As a result of Nicki's research, the design and development teams were able to create a product that fully met their users' needs. The first release of the new product had 44 total tasks, including 26 of the 27 critical tasks. The second release had 58 tasks, and included all 27 critical tasks. They eliminated 12 of 13 unnecessary controls as well as an entire tool, creating an uncluttered, user-friendly dialogue box.

Nicki concluded that the return on investment (ROI) was 300% for the documentation alone. Without the field studies, Nicki estimates that 30 weeks would have been needed to document product features. In fact, it took the team 17 weeks from start to finish: 2 weeks in field research, 2 weeks in transcribing field notes, and 13 weeks documenting product features.

The true ROI was probably much higher (possibly 900%) as it did not account for the saved development and testing time. By watching their customers work with their product, and understanding their needs, MDL delivered an upgrade that end-users found easy to use, efficient, and enjoyable.

Recommended books:

- [The Inmates Are Running the Asylum](#), Alan Cooper
- [About Face: Essential Interaction Design](#), Alan Cooper
- [Ethnographer's Tool Kit](#), Margaret Diane LeCompte

Nicki Davis is a user interface writer with a strong technical background and experience in user experience design. She works at OSISoft, LLC in San Leandro and is the treasurer of the Berkeley Chapter of STC.

Nicole Smith-Maoz is a pilates instructor in the San Francisco Bay Area.

[Top](#)

Highlights of the 2012 STC Summit

by Gwendolynne Barr

The summit in Chicago this year was excellent. To share what I learned, I distilled the arguments of some of the sessions I attended. You can also view the [slides](#) of each session, or read the [summaries](#) and [proceedings](#). For a more light-hearted view, visit the [#stc12 twitter feed](#).

Taxonomy: Do I Need One? [Leigh White]

Yes, you need one, says Leigh White. Metadata might describe your content but they do not capture content relationships. You need both metadata and a taxonomy to optimally search and index your content.

A taxonomy is an information plan. For example, the Linnaean taxonomy classifies living organisms into kingdoms, orders, genera, and species. When the pilgrims first landed at Plymouth, they encountered many things they had never seen before. They could either adopt native names for these new and strange objects or else create names from things they already knew--things that were "like" the new objects.

Leigh mentioned the Dutch word, "aardappel" or potato. Literally, the word means "earth apple" and originated from the "like" object, apple. But a potato is not an apple and this is where we need a taxonomy to inform our metadata. The Linnean taxonomy tells us that apples and potatoes are not related:

Taxonomy	Apple	Potato
Kingdom	Plantae	Plantae
Phylum	Anthophyta	Anthophyta
Class	Eudicots	Eudicots
Order	Rosales	Solanales

There are different kinds of taxonomies. A hierarchical taxonomy describes parent-child relationships where one thing is "a kind of" other thing. But how would you classify a Cockapoo which is a hybrid of a Cocker Spaniel and a Poodle? Check out Leigh's slides on [slideshare](#) to find out.

Getting Started with HTML5 [Peter Lubbers]

Peter took us through the HTML5 weeds a bit, but the big lessons were that HTML5: 1) is the [#1 job trend](#) according to indeed.com, 2) is a cleaned-up and more powerful version of HTML4, 3) mainly supports web applications which are basically like desktop apps but online, and 4) is going to surpass but not necessarily replace DITA--they can work together. Another big plus is that HTML5 fully supports web accessibility for those of us who rely on [assistive technology](#) (AT).

For details on the features of HTML5, see Peter's slides on [slideshare](#).

Delivering Accessible Content with WCAG 2.0 [Mike Paciello]

Mike Paciello's talk on [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) made a big impression on me. You might think that an increasingly digital world would be good for those with disabilities. On the contrary, the disabled are being caught in what Mike referred to as an accessibility gap whereby "emerging technology grows at faster rates and more powerfully than personal assistive technology."

Accessible content is perceivable, operable, understandable, and robust. **Perceivable** content has text alternatives for non-text content, captions for video and audio, and sufficient color contrast. **Operable** content is accessible from a keyboard, gives users enough time to process, doesn't cause seizures (as some video games can), and is well-structured for easy navigation. **Understandable** content is clear and predictable. **Robust** content is compatible with current and future technologies.

For content that meets the above standards, Assistive Technologies (AT) such as screen readers and voice dictation software can help close the accessibility gap. To my surprise, less than 2% actually use AT. This takes us into moral territory. Why should we build a website that is AT-friendly if we can't be sure the disabled will use it? There are plenty of reasons, but if you need urging, perhaps the law will help: <http://www.section508.gov/index.cfm?fuseAction=Laws>.

My personal opinion is that we all have a responsibility to make our content truly user-friendly, and once we do, the disabled will come. Besides, the disabled include more of us than you would think--the blind, the deaf, the mobility impaired, veterans, seniors, the lady in the next cube with carpal tunnel syndrome, you with broken arm and a deadline. We are all going to need AT-accessible content someday.

You can see a modified version of [Mike's slides](#) at the [Global Initiative for Inclusive ICTs](#).

Improving the User Experience by Applying Progressive Information Disclosure [Andrea Ames]

If you have never heard Andrea Ames present a talk, you really need to make a point of it at your next summit. She is an excellent speaker. The gist of her talk on progressive disclosure (PD) was that we need to think more, write less. We, as technical communicators, need to get involved with our projects as early as possible and advocate for good product design rather than solve problems in the Help. Know your users and work hard to push for their needs in the *product*.

Ames outlined the priorities of the average user: 1) solve a problem, 2) use a tool to solve a problem, 3) read a doc on how to use a tool that solves a problem, 4) read a doc on how to use the Help about how to use a tool that solves a problem. High-level content solves user problems. Low-level content teaches users how to use the tool, the Help, etc. Embed low-level content within the product--that is, make using the tool intuitive, for example, by using clear labels. You want to keep the user in his or her task. For high-level content, disclose each level of complexity in layers so as to not overwhelm the average, non-expert, user.

For a more, see Andrea's [proceedings paper](#) that incorporates both this talk and her morning talk on the use model.

Pattern Recognition for Technical Communicators [Kai Weber]

This was a cool talk. Kai Weber's argument was simple: we humans look for patterns in order to make sense of the world. We are [addicted to patternicity](#). As technical writers, then, we should "make patterns easy and obvious to recognize for users." The cool part was Weber's description of how pattern recognition works.

We either recognize patterns in space and time, or if the objects of our perceptions are not near one another, we use a shared context. For example, when we see cows and horses in a field, we compare them in space and time to discern which is which. Sometimes, however, we need to compare and contrast objects that are apart. To make sense of things, we use a shared context. For example, our users understand the terms "mouse" and "window" because they share our understanding of computer hardware and software.

At the biological level, after we sense and perceive an object, we apply either bottom-up or top-down [information processing](#). Top-down processing entails deducing patterns from a prior knowledge of concepts and rules. Bottom-up processing entails inducing patterns from empirical evidence, without any prior knowledge. Kai opened his talk by asking us what we prefer, an example set or a set of rules? The implication was that if you prefer to learn by

example, you might be more of a bottom-up thinker; if you prefer a rule set, you might be more of a top-down thinker.

Kai likened top-down processing to using a table of contents and bottom-up processing to searching or using an index. We need to ensure that our content is accessible to both user types. By understanding the psychology behind pattern recognition, we can better understand task-orientation, topic-based authoring, and parallelism in order to create effective content.

Take a look at [Kai's proceeding's paper](#).

Technical Communication Training in China Today [Philippa Benson]

Philippa Benson was hired by STC to research the possibility of creating an STC chapter in China. Her talk was a portion of the report she submitted to the board. The gist of her message was that setting up shop in China is complicated. She recommends doing so near a reputable university and strongly selling the STC brand. In China, if your brand is not strong, you won't attract anyone. Someone in the audience added that organizations with individual membership are a foreign concept.

The most startling part of her talk, however, was that the head of the [China Association for Standardization](#) (CAS) stated that China would not adopt U.S. technical writing standards--that they would invent their own. She also noted a [paper by the Royal Society](#) that found that "China has increased its publications to the extent that it is now the second highest producer of research output in the world." Philippa talks about this deluge in her paper on [managing submissions from Chinese authors](#). If you put these two facts together, China may be the one setting global standards and we'll need an STC chapter there simply to prevent our falling behind. It's food for thought.

[Top](#)

STC East Bay Turns 50

A History of the Northern California STC Chapters

By Patrick Lufkin

This June, STC East Bay celebrated its 50th anniversary. The East Bay chapter is the Bay Area's second oldest chapter (Silicon Valley is older), and, as such, helped spin off other Bay Area chapters. Its history is part of our history.

If you were not able to join the party, you will soon be able to find [photos of the celebration](#) on the East Bay STC website. Gwaltney Mountford spearheaded the arrangements and as expected, it was a great success.

Let's look back at the early development of the profession and the founding of each of the Northern California STC chapters.

The Rise of Technical Communication

The rise of technical communication as a specialty with its own skills and body of knowledge can be traced back to World War II, and the productivity revolution that came in its aftermath. The war brought the need to quickly and efficiently train thousands of new recruits on complex procedures and equipment. Young men were needed to fly planes, young women to build ships; and they needed to be trained in weeks, not years.

The need for training materials was met by writers and engineers who developed new and more efficient ways of conveying technical information. I still have samples of the kind of material they produced in the form of my father's Navigators Information File from when he served in the Army Air Corps. It's a binder of three-hole punched inserts, each dedicated to a different subject such as operating a piece of equipment, or estimating altitude by observing clouds. The material is procedure-based, well illustrated, dated and numbered for version control, and so on. While the look and feel of technical communication has come a long way since then, many of the principles we still use were developed in those early years.

The Birth of the STC

In the post-war years, many of the writers who had crafted those technical materials entered civilian life and joined together to launch technical communication as a profession. In the early 1950s, three distinct technical communication associations were formed, two on the East Coast and one on the West Coast. After several mergers and name changes, things settled down and the combined associations became the Society for Technical Communication in 1971.

Silicon Valley

The [Silicon Valley STC](#) is Northern California's oldest chapter. It began in early 1958 as the Golden Gate chapter of the Technical Publishing Society with around 35 members. Early speakers included Anthony Boucher, noted Science Fiction writer, editor, and book reviewer, and Dr. William Pemberton, who along with S. I. Hayakawa, was an early proponent of General Semantics. The name was changed to the El Camino chapter in November 1976, and finally to the Silicon Valley chapter in June 1983. For much of the 1990s, with well over a 1000 members, it was the largest chapter in the world. During its heyday, it met monthly in both San Jose and Santa Cruz, to better serve members on both sides of the Santa Cruz Mountains. Today, it alternates meetings between several locations on the peninsula.

East Bay

The [East Bay chapter](#) started as the Pacifica chapter (named for the Ocean, not the town). It held its first organizational meeting at the Lawrence Radiation Laboratory at UC Berkeley in February 1962, and was recognized in Society records in June 1962. In November 1982, the name was changed to the East Bay chapter to better reflect the chapter's area of service.

In the early days, the chapter had about 35 members, mostly connected with Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. Chapter dinner meetings cost \$4.25 and alternated between the east and west sides of the Caldecott tunnel. In fact the chapter held meetings all over the East Bay: Hayward, Castro Valley, Newark, Oakland, Berkeley, Walnut Creek,

Livermore, Dublin, Lafayette, and Concord. Today the chapter has settled down, and usually meets at the elegant Crow Canyon Country Club in Danville.

The early chapter appears to have been very eclectic in its interests. It sponsored field trips to visit air traffic controllers in Hayward and the west coast production facilities of the Wall Street Journal. On other occasions, it listened to cartoonist Charles Schultz (Peanuts), and held a slide show of an African Safari. It also occasionally held joint meetings with the Society for General Semantics

Today the East Bay chapter primarily serves members living or working in the corridors of the 580 and 680 freeways in the eastern Bay Area. Given its large service area, it is not surprising that the East Bay chapter has helped spin off several other chapters.

San Francisco

The [San Francisco chapter](#) was started 1980-81 by members of other chapters who felt that it would be more convenient to meet in San Francisco. The founding members included Louis Perica, Mary V. Wildensten, and Paul Libeu. Perica is credited with naming the chapter newsletter Active Voice.

In the late-1980s and early 1990s, the chapter published networking guides, a job search manual, and several regional salary surveys. It was also the first STC chapter to establish an Internet presence.

In the 1980s, the chapter met at the Engineers Club in San Francisco's financial district. Over the years, the chapter has met at the Wells Fargo building on Montgomery Street, the London Wine Bar on Sansome, and the Elephant and Castle on Clay. The chapter currently meets at the San Francisco State University Downtown Center, a leading venue for technical and graphics arts training.

Berkeley

The [Berkeley chapter](#) was started in 1987 as an offshoot of the East Bay chapter. Then East Bay chapter president, Dr. C. J. Wallia, saw the need for a new chapter to better serve the membership living west of the Berkeley Hills. First classed as a "subsidiary chapter," with 19 members, Berkeley held its first meeting September 1, 1987, at Spats, a popular Pub in downtown Berkeley. By December 1987, it had grown to 42 members. It became a full fledged chapter in June of 1988.

From the beginning, the Berkeley chapter received terrific support from the other chapters in the Bay Area, which at that time included East Bay, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley. Each provided the new chapter with grant money to keep it afloat until the chapter rebates arrived in August.

Over the years, the Berkeley chapter has met at several locations in Oakland and Berkeley. It currently meets at the Hiller Highlands Country Club in the Berkeley Hills. In recent years, it has served as the host chapter for Touchstone, the Northern California technical communication competition.

NorthBay

Paul Libeu, a San Francisco chapter founder, is believed to have hosted STC meetings in the North Bay for a time after he moved there in the 1980s. This start-up chapter appears to have been short lived. In 1994, the [NorthBay chapter](#) was restarted by Glenn Shapley, a Technical Writer at Hewlett Packard in Santa Rosa. The NorthBay chapter serves technical communicators in Telecom Valley and includes Sonoma, Marin, Napa, and other counties in Northern California.

Sacramento Metro

The [Sacramento Metro chapter](#) was started in November, 1985, with 30 members, including Ellen Ashcraft, President and Lorna LaVerne, Vice President/Newsletter. The chapter held its first meeting December 5, 1985, in a conference room at Hewlett Packard in Roseville, California. The chapter quickly mailed a newsletter to all unaffiliated STC members who lived near Sacramento. That first newsletter talked about all the decisions that needed to be made to get the chapter going and the fact that the new chapter would "...need to lay the groundwork for activities..." and entice people into taking advantage of all the opportunities that STC had to offer.

The chapter thrived for some 20 years, offering many innovative services to the community including free meetings, free job lines, online newsletters, and sophisticated career/resume counseling. For many years, the chapter joined with American River College to co-sponsor an annual Writer-in-the Workplace day of presentations and workshops.

In the long aftermath of the dotcom bust, with membership numbers down, the chapter went inactive for a few years. But in recent years, under the able leadership of Prescott Williams, it has come roaring back. In 2011 it did a stellar job as the host chapter for the annual STC convention.

Group Cooperation

The Northern California STC chapters also have a long history of cooperation, jointly sponsoring the annual [Touchstone technical communication competition](#), and the [Kenneth Gordon Scholarship](#) for technical communication. For many years, the combined chapters also sponsored regional conventions.

As you can see, there are strong historic ties between the local STC chapters. I hope you were able to go to the [East Bay's 50th anniversary celebration](#).

***Patrick Lufkin** is an STC Associate Fellow. He is Past-President of the San Francisco chapter, is current VP for Membership of the Berkeley chapter, and is on the leadership Board of the East Bay chapter.*

[Top](#)

Upcoming Programs

June

Speaker: Randall Bolten

Program: Painting With Numbers: Presenting Numbers as a Communication Skill, Not a Math Skill

There's more to presenting numbers than just making sure they're right. The information also needs to be clear and meaningful to the audience. Come hear from a former CFO with a useful, refreshing perspective on this all-important skill.

For so many presentations of technical information, numbers are a critical component. In truth, presenting numbers is a communication skill, and not a black art practiced only by the "numbers guys." Moreover, practicing this skill effectively is subject to rules and best practices much like the grammar, vocabulary, spelling, and sentence structure we spend years learning. Randall Bolten's new book, *Painting with Numbers: Presenting Financials and Other Numbers So People Will Understand You*, is the first book to look at the art of presenting numbers from this perspective.

Join us for an informative and entertaining discussion, where Randall will discuss:

- How the way in which numbers are organized and laid out on the page can make a huge difference in comprehensibility
- Using key indicators to add meaning and context to the raw numbers
- The three levels of mastery critical to being an effective communicator of numbers

Date: Wednesday, June 13, 2012, 7:00-8:30pm

Location: Highlands Country Club, 110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California



Randall Bolten runs Lucidity, a consulting practice in Menlo Park, California focused on short engagements with specific deliverables, including business models, reporting packages, and incentive compensation packages. His 30-year career as a financial executive in Silicon Valley includes nearly 20 years as chief financial officer for both public companies (BroadVision and Phoenix Technologies) and startups. He has also held senior financial management positions at Oracle and Tandem Computers. He received his AB degree from Princeton University and his MBA from Stanford University.

July

Speaker: Andrew Davis

Program: Emerging Roles and Hot Markets for Tomorrow's Tech Writers

Do you wonder where your skills have most value? Have you overlooked entire markets based on misperceptions? Can you really upsell yourself and live at peace in a globalized economy? Are you still looking for professional stability? What's the upside to all this change?

Come hear Andrew's insights on which niches and roles pay best, and why. Get his help mapping your cultural and location preferences to today's demand and tomorrow's prospects. And listen to his provocative suggestions for achieving success (aka resilient demand) in your content development career.

Andrew hears from a broad cross-section of Bay Area technical communicators and hiring managers. His role as a recruiter specifically for our niche lets him aggregate anecdotes, and his input can help you more consciously steer your career--or at least bypass expensive dead ends.

Andrew will highlight myriad new variants on your core skills, discuss who's securing these roles, and speculate about where it all will lead. This won't be a talk about the job search, but rather about what to expect from the new opportunities that already abound. And yes, it really is possible to transition, upgrade, or even just coexist in this increasingly 'exciting' marketplace.

There'll be a lively Q&A after the presentation; Andrew promises to be the last person to leave the room.

Date: Wednesday, June 11, 2012, 7:00-8:30pm

Location: Highlands Country Club, 110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California



Andrew Davis has recruited technical communicators in Silicon Valley since 1995, first for Synergistech Communications and now for Content Rules (formerly Oak Hill Corporation). He is a former software industry Tech Writer and is well-known for both understanding and championing the role of content development. At Content Rules he recruits all kinds of technical and marketing communicators as well as training and globalization professionals. Andrew enjoys helping those who communicate complex information get ahead by recognizing and refining their value to technology companies. He's candid and connected and, more importantly, he cares.

[Top](#)

Meeting Logistics

The Berkeley STC meets the second Wednesday of every month. Each meeting consists of an optional dinner, short business discussion, and an hour-long program on a topic of interest to technical communicators. All are welcome.

3-Tiered Pricing

- **Lowest prices:** Anyone for whom the higher prices are a hardship--students, unemployed, underemployed. This appears on our website as "student/low income." Anyone can choose to pay this price. We trust that nobody will abuse the privilege.
- **Discounted prices:** STC members.
- **Regular prices:** Non-members (except those who choose the student/low income price).

Former STC members who intend to renew when their finances improve can choose whichever of the three rates they feel most comfortable paying. We do not want anyone to feel shut out of the STC Berkeley community.

[Reservations](#) must be made at least one day prior to the meeting. Walk-ins also welcome, however, dinner may or may not be available. We order dinner for the number of reservations plus a few for walk-ins.

Program and Dinner (Reservation / Walk-in)

- Students/Low Income: \$6/\$10
- Members: \$12/\$16
- Non-members: \$20/\$24

Program Only (Reservation / Walk-in)

- Students/Low Income: \$3/\$10
- Members: \$6/\$10
- Non-STC-Members: \$10/\$14

Special cost notes

Non-member students are welcome at the *member* student rates.

Non-members are always welcome to STC meetings at non-member rates.

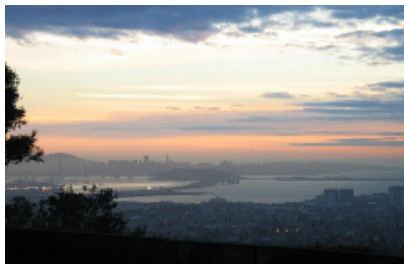
All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the member price by midnight on the day before the meeting.

Location and Directions

Highlands Country Club 110 Hiller Drive Oakland, California. [\[Google Maps\]](#)

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

If you need a ride from BART, email rides@stc-berkeley.org at least one day prior to the meeting.



View from the Highlands Country Club
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey

[Top](#)

Local STC Chapters

Berkeley: www.stc-berkeley.org

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

[Top](#)

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. <http://www.asindexing.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3616#golden>

Association for Computing Machinery. <http://www.acm.org>

Association for Women in Computing. <http://www.awc-hq.org>

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. <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

Writer's UA. <http://www.writersua.com>

[Top](#)

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[Top](#)