

## Putting the User First in Documentation

by Steve Delaune, 2000 Graduate, Professional Writing, University of Houston–Downtown

When writing manuals or software help, you should consider many elements, such as what amount of technical detail is appropriate, what type of illustrations to include, and how that information should be presented to the audience. A good place to start is with a list of objectives that will make your documentation easier to use.

Here are some examples of what good documentation should do:

- quickly and efficiently meet the needs of the user
- be well written
- be standardized
- cover every aspect of the product

You can use testing as a tool to meet these goals. Usability testing is helpful because it creates a historical written account of usability criteria for future reference. It can minimize complaints and service calls from confused users. It can also boost business while giving your product a competitive edge. To be effective, testing should use principle-based, proven, reproducible, scientific models.

While testing can be helpful, remember that testing is a simulated process, results do not confirm product performance, and participants are unlikely to fully represent the intended audience.

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*Because the end user will be the final audience, structure every facet of the project upon a predetermined model of who that user will be.*

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With the complexities and changes that you encounter in as you develop instructional documentation, keep the end user in focus. Because the end user will be the final audience, structure every facet of the project upon a predetermined model of who that user will be.

Asking questions is the most logical way to start establishing a concrete image of your intended audience. Here are some questions that you should ask when writing software materials: How much experience have

the users had with this software? Have they had any experience with similar software? Do they know how to use a variety of tools? What motivates the users? How well do the users process information? Are the users college graduates? What kind of environment are the users working in?

By asking questions like these, you can evolve a pattern according to the users' jobs, tasks, and tools, as well as their personal, physical, cultural, and motivational differences.

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## Dateline Houston

*Dateline Houston* is the newsletter of the Houston Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Ten issues are published each year (September through June).

### Newsletter Staff

Managing Editor: Rhonda Hector  
Layout Editor: Erika Frensley  
Coordinating  
Editor: Lisa Muenchow  
Features Editor: Donna Marcotte  
Story Editors: Melanie Boston, Jamie  
Diamandopoulos, Jim  
Hunt  
Staff Writers: Heather Shelly  
Lisetta Lavy

### Submissions

Submit newsletter contributions by the first of each month for the coming month's issue. Submissions in ASCII, Microsoft Word 97, or FrameMaker 5.x format are appreciated. Send submissions to Rhonda Hector:

e-mail: rhonda@newmc.cc

phone: 832-200-9000, ext. 107

All submissions are subject to editing.

### Reprints

Articles published by *Dateline Houston* may be reprinted in other STC publications provided credit is given and a copy is sent to the managing editor for *Dateline Houston*.

### Address Changes

Send address changes to the database and directory manager:

John Reynolds  
P.O. Box 130873  
Houston, Texas 77219-0873  
jreynold@compassnet.com

### Production

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### Printing

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### Cover

The cover is based on an original photograph by Catherine Bendig. The graphic design is by Ruth Metcalf.

The membership directory password is homer+wagner.

## From the Editor . . .

### We need your input

by Rhonda Hector, President, New Millennium Communications

**T**his spring, the STC Houston communications team will be distributing a survey to obtain your feedback on a variety of communication-related issues. The purpose of the survey will be to understand how you learn about STC Houston news and events...and to discover how you want to learn about those things in the future.

From this feedback, we can thoroughly examine our current communication tools and determine how to improve things accordingly. Questions will address issues such as newsletter and Web site content, distribution methods, etc. With your input, we will be able to direct our future communication efforts in the right direction.

The chapter is also planning to perform a salary survey this spring. Given the current status of the job market, people are increasingly interested in what they can make in the technical communications profession. With the Region 5 Conference coming up this fall, the information gathered will also be of unique relevance to our out-of-town guests.

These two projects represent a great volunteer opportunity for interested members. If you would like to get involved with the communications survey, please contact George Slaughter, Director of Communications. For the salary survey, please contact Chris G. Smith.

Be on the lookout for these surveys and please be sure to send in your responses. Your input is important to us and to the future of STC Houston.

Best regards,

Rhonda

## New Member News

by Lisetta Lavy, Manager, Documentation, Aspen Technology

### William D. Rizer

William D. (Bill) Rizer recently retired from the oil and gas industry, where he was a research geologist for 25 years. Bill has chosen technical communication as a second career and is earning a certificate at Houston Community College. Bill's primary interest is technical writing, but he is also interested in all aspects of online documentation. Bill holds an M.S. in Geophysics and a B.S. in Geology from Boston College.

*The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.*

# From the President . . .

## What's Next?

by Deborah Long, Strategic Communications, Enron Net Works

**C**ongratulations to all STC Houston competitions award winners!

Now that the judging is over and our annual awards banquet is a fond memory, it's business as usual for STC Houston—or is it? Hardly! The next item of importance is the nomination and election of new chapter officers and directors for the coming year.



Deborah Long

Deborah Silvi and her committee of senior members will be scouting for prospective candidates. Experience counts, of course, but as I have found out it is possible to learn by doing (with a little help from other members). What is required is guts and gusto, and a passion for technical communication. So, if you are asked to run for a chapter position, I recommend that you seize the opportunity and jump into the race with an open mind. There's no telling what wonderful things might happen to you and your career as a result.

Personally, I would not trade the chance to serve STC for anything. The lives you touch, the new members you inspire, the changes you implement, and the thrill of knowing you have helped things continue to run smoothly for another year make all the hard work worthwhile.

For questions or to suggest a candidate to fill the roles of chapter president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, or director, contact Deborah Silvi (Deborah\_Silvi@bmc.com).

Society-level elections are also held in the spring, so watch for your packet in the mail sometime in March and be sure to cast a vote for our own Jeff Staples as Nominating committee member. In addition to the traditional hardcopy voting brochure, an online voting ballot is available this year on the STC website, <http://www.stc-va.org>. To make your voice heard, your STC membership must be renewed by February 28, 2001.

As plans continue to be made for hosting the Region 5 conference this October (yes, this year!), I am happy to report that great progress has been made by the members involved. Many arrangements are already in place; however, all great events require much behind-the-scenes effort that is essential to ensure success, yet often goes unnoticed. Let's not hold back any helping hands at this key time when we, as a chapter, can really make a difference to the entire region. The positions left to fill are probably some of the more exciting roles to play: liaison for corporate sponsorship, liaison to coordinate with other Region 5 chapters, and Registration Committee manager.

To offer your assistance, contact Melanie Flanders (melanie\_flanders@hotmail.com) or Nicole Smart-Wycislo (nicole@verbl.com). And keep an eye on the STC Houston website (<http://www.stc-houston.org>) for Region 5 conference news as it unfolds.

Deborah

### Chapter Contacts

#### Administrative Council

President, Deborah Long  
713-853-7087 deborah.long@enron.com

Vice President, Jocelyn Williams  
713-918-2489 jocelyn\_williams@bmc.com

Treasurer, Zach Moring  
281-856-0315 zmoring@hotmail.com

Secretary, Carolyn Kelly  
713-963-1774 ccksam@juno.com

Past President, Janette Sexton-Shahout  
281-479-0934 jsexton19@aol.com

Director of Satellites, Pat Bishop  
713-260-1718 patbush@earthlink.net

Director of Programs, Dorothy Murray  
713-688-1890 dorothy\_murray@msn.com

Director of Planning, Jim Hunt  
713-918-4640 jim\_hunt@bmc.com

Director of Memberhip, Lisetta Lavy  
281-584-1852 lisetta.lavy@aspen.com

Director of Volunteer Resources,  
John Reynolds  
713-861-3334 jreynold@compassnet.com

Director of Communications,  
George Slaughter  
713-830-0000 gslaughter@flex.net

Director of Competitions, Heather Shelly  
713-918-5216 heather\_shelly@bmc.com

#### Chapter Resources

Employment, Chris G. Smith  
713-907-8823 chrissmi@ix.netcom.com

Membership, Ron Hartberger  
713-784-9286 ronhmath@pdq.net

Information line: 713-796-3303  
Web site: www.stc-houston.org

#### Special Interest Groups

Consultants/Independent Contractors  
Gaynell Doehne  
713-524-5401 gdoehne@words-work.com

Kim Shaw  
281-367-1202 kim@twowriters.com

Information Mapping  
Helen Shoup  
713-728-4316 shoup@flash.net

Online Documentation  
Larry Dybala  
713-215-4259 lwd@hal-pc.org

#### Satellite Group

Louisiana/Gulf Coast  
Jim Brown jim@xentech.com

# Louisiana Satellite Plans Workshop

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The Louisiana satellite of STC Houston is sponsoring a one-day professional development workshop, “Technical Document Excellence: Enhancing Curb Appeal,” on Saturday, March 10. The workshop will focus on technical document editing and presentation.

To be held at the National Wetlands Research Center in Lafayette, Louisiana, the workshop will include a round-table discussion on “curb appeal” (a marketing term for *making your product immediately attractive to the target audience*) and speakers on professional presentations, graphics, and editing. A tour of the center (which has produced STC award-winning science documents) is also on the agenda. A working lunch will focus on technical communication educational resources in Louisiana.

Until February 16, registration is \$50 for STC members, \$60 for non-members, and \$35 for students. Lunch is included. A \$10 late fee will be added after February 16.

Lafayette is located in the western part of Louisiana on Interstate 10, about four hours from Houston. The National Wetlands Research Center is adjacent to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette and is close to several reasonably priced hotels and motels. Take the weekend and visit the cultural attractions in this unique city.

For complete details about the workshop (and registration), visit the Louisiana satellite website at <http://www.stc-houston.org/~stcla> or contact Marilyn O’Leary (225-578-6349 or [moleary@lsu.edu](mailto:moleary@lsu.edu)).

# Judges Sought for Science Writing Contest

by Ann Jennings, Professional Writing Program, University of Houston-Downtown

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Twenty judges are needed to evaluate entries in the Science Writing Contest of the 2001 Science Engineering Fair of Houston. STC Houston sponsors the writing contest and awards prizes to a dozen students in grades 7 through 12 from a multiple-county area.

Annually, three of the winning essays are forwarded to STC’s International Student Technical Writing Contest. Houston’s entries have previously taken top awards at the international level.

Judging will take place on Saturday, March 3, 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the University of Houston–Downtown.

Morning refreshments, lunch, and parking will be provided.

Essay subject matter is broadly varied and typically includes biology, botany, chemistry, computer science, geology, mathematics, and physics.

To volunteer, contact Science Writing Contest chair and STC Houston member Ann Jennings by telephone at 713-221-8453 or by e-mail at [jennings@dt.uh.edu](mailto:jennings@dt.uh.edu).

To learn more about the Science Engineering Fair of Houston, visit <http://www.dt.uh.edu/academic/colleges/sciences/naturalscience/SEFH/>.

# Putting the User First in Documentation

by Steve Delaune

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On February 13, at the first chapter program meeting of the year, Andrea L. Ames will discuss user and task analysis.

Ms. Ames owns verbal imagery (a communication consulting company), is a Region 8 director-sponsor, and is a member of the STC board of directors.

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*You can evolve a pattern according to the users’ jobs, tasks, and tools, as well as their personal, physical, cultural, and motivational differences.*

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Her presentation will include an outline of questions to consider before you begin the documentation process. The following areas will be covered:

- basic document (and product) quality, usability, and user analysis concepts
- techniques of user and task analysis
- designing according to user and task analysis
- politics of user and task analysis (and usability)

The presentation is aimed at intermediate and experienced technical writers who have experienced the documentation development process. Project managers, interested in implementing user and task analysis into their projects, will also benefit from the discussion.

# 2001 STC Technical Publications, Art, and Online Competitions Winners

The following awards were presented to winners of the 2001 STC Houston Technical Publications, Art and Online Competitions.

## TECHNICAL PUBLICATIONS COMPETITION

### Best of Show!

#### *Style Standards for Printed Documents*

— Information Development Team (Landata Systems, Inc.)

### CATEGORY 1, Promotional Materials

#### Award of Excellence

##### *Compaq ProLiant DL360 Server Technology*

— Linda S. King (Compaq Computer Corporation)

##### *Kitba Promotional Collateral 2000*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### Award of Merit

##### *Business Profile in The Business Guide, Houston 2000 Edition*

— Aesbus Knowledge Solutions (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

##### *PATROL for Microsoft Exchange Mailer*

— Julie Moranski, Kenneth Zambo, and Tusha Shaw (BMC Software, Inc.)

##### *Service Assurance for Fast Path General Information*

— Bradley Clark (BMC Software, Inc.)

### CATEGORY 2, Informational Materials

#### Award of Distinguished Technical Communication

##### *Compaq TaskSmart N2400 Quick Initialization and Quick Reference Poster*

— Tanya K. LaBorde and Shawn Haworth (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

##### *Compaq TaskSmart N2400 Rack Installation and Connection Card*

— Douglas Warren (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

##### *Dynegy Counterparty System User Guide*

— Gina Waterman and Dynegy Technical Communication (Dynegy, Inc.)

#### Award of Merit

##### *Compaq Remote Insight Lights-Out Technology*

— Linda S. King (Compaq Computer Corporation)

##### *Migrating from EA to the NetIQ Administration Products*

— Christina Lee (NetIQ Corporation)

##### *PCI Bus Numbering in a Microsoft Windows NT Environment*

— Crystal Rawls (Compaq Computer Corporation)

##### *User Analysis Process Guide*

— Information Development Team (Landata Systems, Inc.)

##### *Warranty Statement for Presario Notebook Products*

— Marketing Services, Consumer Mobile Products Division (Compaq Computer Corporation)

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

### CATEGORY 3, Quick Reference Guides

#### Award of Merit

##### *Presario 1700/1700T/1700XL Series Notebook Computer: End-User-Replaceable-Parts*

— Marketing Services, Consumer Mobile Products Division (Compaq Computer Corporation)

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

##### *Replacing the Microprocessor/Heatsink Assembly 5000 and 7000 Series*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

### CATEGORY 4, Software Guides

#### Award of Excellence

##### *Documentum Workspace Technical Publications User Guide*

— Kim Sharp (BMC Software, Inc.)

##### *PATROL for Tuxedo User Guide*

— Mark Stevens (BMC Software, Inc.)

#### Award of Merit

##### *OnePoint Operations Manager Installation Guide*

— Michael A. Torok and Eric Mallory (NetIQ Corporation)

##### *PATROL for Microsoft Exchange Server Getting Started*

— Bill Hunter and Mary Elaine Lora (BMC Software, Inc.)

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*PATROL for MQ – Administrator Message Management User Guide*

— Terry Lambert (BMC Software, Inc.)

*PATROL Knowledge Module for Oracle Parallel Server User Guide*

— Erika Frensley (BMC Software, Inc.)

## **CATEGORY 5, Hardware/Software Combination Guides**

### **Award of Merit**

*Compaq TaskSmart N2400 Administration Guide*

— Tamara J. Williams (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

*Home Internet Appliance – Getting Started*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

*iPAQ Home Internet Appliance IA-2 – Getting Started*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

## **CATEGORY 6, Computer Hardware Guides**

### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

*Home Internet Appliance Quick Setup Poster*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

### **Award of Excellence**

*Compaq ProLiant DL360 Setup and Installation Guide*

— Rob Weaver (PSINet Consulting Solutions)

*Compaq ProLiant ML530 Servers Maintenance and Service Guide*

— Donna M. Hollas, Jason Graesser, and Linda Branam (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

*Compaq ProLiant ML570 Maintenance and Service Guide*

— Daniel D. Garza and Peter Vogel (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

*Compaq TaskSmart C600 and C900 Servers Maintenance and Service Guide*

— Lorrie Chambers, Anne Cain, and Sara Jasinski (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

### **Award of Merit**

*Compaq Quick Troubleshooting Guide*

— Jacob Schulzinger and Sandra Hardy (Compaq Computer Corporation)

*My Presario–DSL Quick Setup Booklet*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

## **CATEGORY 8, Organizational Manuals**

### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

*Style Standards for Printed Documents*

— Information Development Team (Landata Systems, Inc.)

## **CATEGORY 9, Training Materials**

### **Award of Merit**

*Marine Fire Fighting (1st Edition) and Study Guide*

— Barbara Adams and the FPP Graphics Team (Fire Protection Publications)

*Pumping Apparatus Driver/Operator Handbook (1st Edition) and Study Guide*

— Michael A. Wieder, Cindy Pickering, and Ben Brock (Fire Protection Publications)

*The Sourcebook for Fire Company Training Evolutions (2nd Edition)*

— Michael A. Wieder (Fire Protection Publications)

*Fire and Emergency Services Instructor (6th Edition) and Study Guide*

— Barbara Adams, Cindy Pickering, and the FPP Graphics Team (Fire Protection Publications)

*Learning FrameMaker 6.0: Advanced Skills*

— Vince E. Yokom (Instrux)

## **CATEGORY 13, Technical Reports**

### **Award of Excellence**

*History of Innovation and Value-Add in Compaq x86 Server Families*

— Mary DiFiore Crowe (The Integrity Group)

*Toxicology and Carcinogenesis Studies of Glutaraldehyde*

— Susan R. Gunnels, John P. Hogan, and Lynn M. Harper (Biotechnical Service, Inc.)

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#### **CATEGORY 14, Trade/News Articles**

##### **Award of Excellence**

*New Trends in Gaming*

— Jan Harris, Brian Dillon, and Heidi Littenberg  
(International Game Technology)

#### **CATEGORY 17, Books**

##### **Award of Excellence**

*Reservoir Stimulation, Third Ed.*

— Robert Thrasher, Elsa Kapitan-White, and Martha Dutton (Schlumberger OMC)

##### **Award of Merit**

*Prelude to Merger: A History of Amoco Corporation, 1973–1998*

— Joseph A. Pratt and Martha Dutton (Wakan Grafix)

#### **TECHNICAL ART COMPETITION**

##### **Best of Show!**

*Kitba Promotional Materials Folder Cover Art*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **CATEGORY 4, Interpretative Illustration, Tone**

##### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

*Compaq Net Companion Illustrations*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **CATEGORY 10, Cover Design**

##### **Award of Merit**

*The Business Guide, Houston 2000 Edition*

— Aesbus Knowledge Solutions (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

*Exxon Cover*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **CATEGORY 11, Poster Design**

##### **Award of Merit**

*Next Generation Poster*

— Strategic Communications (Enron Net Works)

#### **CATEGORY 12, Packaging Design**

##### **Award of Merit**

*Kitba Electronic Media in CD Case*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **CATEGORY 13, Promotional Materials Design**

##### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

*Kitba CD Face*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

*Kitba Promotional Materials Folder Cover Art*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

*PATROL 2000 3-D Mailer*

— Julie Moranski and Dana Farver (BMC Software, Inc.)

##### **Award of Excellence**

*Aesbus Knowledge Solutions Marketing Collateral*

— Aesbus Knowledge Solutions (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

##### **Award of Merit**

*Kitba Promotional 2000 Collateral*

— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **ONLINE COMMUNICATION COMPETITION**

#### **CATEGORY 1, Help**

##### **Award of Excellence**

*Windows Remote Monitoring Services*

— Canice Goloby (BMC Software, Inc.)

##### **Award of Merit**

*Aspen Process Order Help*

— Lisetta Lavy (Aspen Technology)

*Aspen Process Recipe and Aspen Transition Manager Help*

— Rick Sanchez (Aspen Technology)

*Compaq Intelligent Rack Manager Lite*

— John Turner (The Integrity Group)

*Schlumberger Craft Standard and References CD-ROMs*

— Mary Church and Krystal Williams (The Integrity Group)

— Paige Dean (Schlumberger)

#### **CATEGORY 2, Demonstrations**

##### **Award of Merit**

*Remote ROMFlash Utility from Compaq Video*

— Nathan A. Taylor and Gerry Antonini (Compaq Computer Corporation)

— Daniel E. Lyons (The Integrity Group)

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### **CATEGORY 3, Technical Marketing**

#### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

##### *ENN Intranet Site*

— Strategic Communications (Enron Net Works)

##### *Gateway E-Services Web Site*

— Ryan Bernard and Heather McLatchie (WordMark Associates, Inc.)

#### **Award of Excellence**

##### *Compaq Knowledge Center Virtual Tour Video*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba (dot) Media (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

##### *Diagnostic Clinic Website*

— Ryan Bernard and Matt Gragg (WordMark Associates, Inc.)

##### *Remote Insight Lights Out Edition Video*

— Nathan A. Taylor and Gerry Antonini (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Daniel E. Lyons (The Integrity Group)

#### **Award of Merit**

##### *Gateway At Work Website*

— Ryan Bernard and Heather McLatchie (WordMark Associates, Inc.)

### **CATEGORY 4, Tutorials/Training**

#### **Award of Excellence**

##### *Dynegydirect Training*

— Joanne Wheeler, Chris Smith, Dynegy Technical Communication, and Dynegydirect (Dynegy, Inc.)  
— Omar Esquivel (Idea Integration)

### **CATEGORY 5, Books**

#### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

##### *Maintenance and Service Guide: Presario 1700 Series*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

##### *Maintenance and Service Guide: Presario 1800/1800T Series*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **Award of Excellence**

##### *Maintenance and Service Guide: Presario 1200 Series*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **Award of Merit**

##### *Compaq Deskpro Reference Library CD*

— Holly Jahangiri, Martha Rockecharlie, and Jake Schulzinger (Compaq)

##### *Maintenance and Service Guide: Presario 1400 Series*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

##### *Maintenance and Service Guide: Presario 7500 Series*

— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)  
— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)

### **CATEGORY 6, Reference Material**

#### **Award of Distinguished Technical Communication**

##### *My Presario—Learning More CD*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

#### **Award of Excellence**

##### *Abacus Gas Deal Entry*

— Timothy Notzon and Dynegy Technical Communication (Dynegy, Inc.)

##### *Documentation Launch Pad (DLP)*

— Inbox Marketing Communications Team, Consumer Products Group (Compaq Computer Corporation)  
— Kitba Documentation Solutions (Kitba Consulting Services, Inc.)

### **CATEGORY 7, User Support Tools**

#### **Award of Excellence**

##### *PATROL for Internet Services Installation Planner*

— Melody Locke, Michelle Moody, and Melanie Boston (BMC Software, Inc.)

#### **Award of Merit**

##### *Compaq QuickFind-Library Reference CD*

— Aesbus Knowledge Solutions (Aesbus Knowledge Solutions)

One *Best of Show* winner may be selected for each competition from entries that earned an award of Distinguished Technical Communication.

Distinguished Technical Communication winners are also entered in the STC international competition. Winners of the international competition will be announced at the STC 48th Annual Conference in Chicago, May 13–16.



### February Volunteer of the Month

by Peggy Head, Technical Writer, Schlumberger Infosec

The Houston chapter is fortunate to have many members who are ready to provide timely assistance at a moment's notice.

An outstanding example of this type of member is the STC Houston volunteer of the month for February, Lisa Muenchow.

Lisa joined BMC Software last July after spending several years with Universal Computer Systems. As an information developer, Lisa creates documentation for BMC Software Network Performance products.

Lisa is an active STC volunteer in many capacities. Her most praiseworthy contribution for this year is her

work on the newsletter. As newsletter transition editor, Lisa coordinates the delivery of draft articles to the editors and facilitates a prompt turnaround of the revisions.

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*Friends and co-workers have this to say about Lisa: "She's always helpful, friendly—and professional."*

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For the last couple of years, Lisa has donated her time and talent by creating numerous flyers for STC Houston workshops and other special events.

This year we're looking forward to her creative contributions to the 2001 Region 5 Conference, which will be hosted by our chapter in October.

Friends and co-workers have this to say about Lisa: "She's always helpful, friendly—and professional." What a great endorsement for giving Lisa the recognition she deserves as volunteer of the month.

Thanks, Lisa, for your many months of hard work and enthusiastic participation in STC!

**Note:** Thanks to George Slaughter and Heather Shelly for contributing to this article.

### STC Houston Job Bank

by Lisetta Lavy, Manager, Documentation, Aspen Technology

Years ago, when I was considering changing careers, I joined STC primarily to take advantage of the STC Houston job bank. In those days, job searches began with the newspaper, not the Internet. In fact, most people didn't have e-mail yet. So, I mailed printed copies of my resume to STC Houston, and the Employment committee mailed them on to prospective employers who requested them.

Until recently, a variation of that process has been in effect; however, with the proliferation of job sites on the Web, the process of finding employment has changed dramatically. The STC Houston job bank is no longer necessarily the best way for our mem-

bers to find out about job opportunities.

Despite having made changes so that member profiles are transferred electronically, the process is no longer time effective. By the time an employer requests the list, receives it, and calls a prospective employee (who filled out a profile sometime in the past), often the member has already found employment.

In my current job (I've had a few positions since I found that first job with STC's assistance), I now hire technical writers. I'm still getting assistance from STC, but in a very different way.

Now when I have an open position, I post it to the STC-HOU listserv and

within hours, I'm receiving resumes by e-mail from qualified prospective employees. No hassle, immediate results—it's great!

The listserv is open to the public—anyone can register to be a member and any member of the listserv can post job openings. In fact, employers who wish to advertise for positions online are encouraged to use it.

This gives members of the listserv immediate access to the latest information about open positions and saves the employer from calling members who are no longer looking for work.

You can find directions for joining and using the listserv on the chapter website, [www.stc-houston.org](http://www.stc-houston.org), under Mailing List.



# Region 5 Director-Sponsor Report: Leaders Light the Way Effective Listening Pays Big Dividends!

by Suzanna Laurent, Region 5 Director-Sponsor

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A really good listener is a rare and priceless commodity!

That's because effective listening skills do not come naturally. Few of us have ever been taught the value or the process of active listening, and those who have are the ones getting the results they want. They make it to the top of their professions, enjoy rich and fulfilling personal relationships, and suffer less from stress and worry.

The good news is that anyone can become a good listener. All it takes is the desire to learn the techniques that work. Listening is one thing that most people wish they could improve. Yet many people overlook the simple and obvious ways they can instantly improve their listening skills. Here are five guidelines that should help you improve your listening skills.

## Use Your Mind

Being a good listener requires a conscious effort. You must listen with your mind completely engaged. Try listening for accuracy and inaccuracy—it helps keep your mind alert. Listen as if you are hearing the information for the first time.

## Listen for the Whole Message

Many people tune in to only the words of a speaker, not the body language or tone of voice, so they do not listen to the whole message. In understanding a message, both the verbal and nonverbal parts of the message are important. The purpose of good listening is to get the best

understanding. You cannot do that if you listen to only part of the message.

## Control Your Environment

Distractions can destroy listening ability. We are surrounded by noise in the office and at home. We can be distracted by physical barriers, such as the placement of a desk or a seating arrangement in a group meeting, or internal distractions. You can be a much more effective listener if you can control both your external and internal environments. If you can't control the environment, reschedule or move to another environment.

## Take the Initiative

To make better listening a way of life, you have to learn new skills and rid yourself of "bad" listening habits. This takes time and practice. You can become a better listener just by learning and practicing one new listening skill every week.

## Use Active and Reflective Listening

Both active and reflective listening use the same principles, but their purposes are different. In active listening, the listener responds to the speaker based on the listener's understanding of the message that was communicated. This person is part of an ongoing conversation, a give and take of ideas. Active listening is used in group problem-solving situations.

In reflective listening, the listener is primarily a sounding board for the

speaker. The listener helps the speaker come to grips with the problem being communicated. Reflective listening is used primarily in one-on-one conversations when the speaker needs a listener, not advice.

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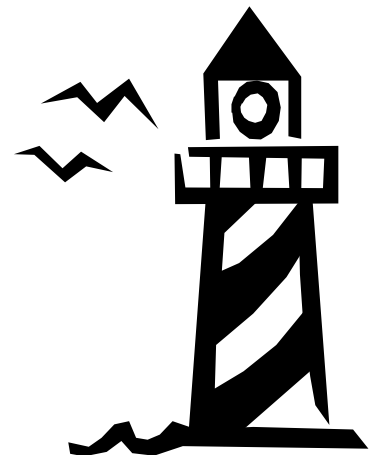
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*Listening is one thing that most people wish they could improve. Yet many people overlook the simple and obvious ways they can instantly improve their listening skills.*

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You can find dozens of good books about becoming a better listener, and they'll give you many techniques. If you are a bit short of time, apply just these five guidelines and you will be better able to "listen up" and hear what's really being said.



## Calendar of Upcoming Events

<b>Date</b>	<b>Time</b>	<b>Event/Topic</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact</b>
<b>Feb. 13</b>	6:30 p.m.	General Meeting Speaker: Andrea Ames	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Dorothy Murray dorothy_murray@msn.com
<b>Feb. 13</b>	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston admin council meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long deborah.long@enron.com.
<b>Feb. 19</b>	6:30 p.m.– 7:30 p.m.	Online Documentation SIG meeting	HAL-PC Headquarters 4543 Post Oak Place Drive, Suite 200	Larry Dybala lwd@hal-pc.org
<b>Mar. 1</b>	EBD*	deadline for April newsletter		Rhonda Hector rhonda@newmc.cc
<b>Mar. 13</b>	6:30 p.m.	General Meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Dorothy Murray dorothy_murray@msn.com
<b>Mar. 13</b>	8:00 p.m.	STC Houston admin council meeting	Westchase Hilton 9999 Westheimer	Deborah Long deborah.long@enron.com.
<b>Mar. 19</b>	6:30 p.m.– 7:30 p.m.	Online Documentation SIG meeting	HAL-PC Headquarters 4543 Post Oak Place Drive, Suite 200	Larry Dybala lwd@hal-pc.org

\*End of business day

## February 13, 2001 Program

### Users First: An Introduction to a User-Centered Development Process for Technical Information and Products

presented by  
**Andrea Ames**

Andrea Ames, M.S., STC Region 8 director-sponsor, is an international speaker with more than 16 years of experience in all facets of print and online technical and scientific communication, information architecture and design, interaction design, instructional design, and technical marketing communication.

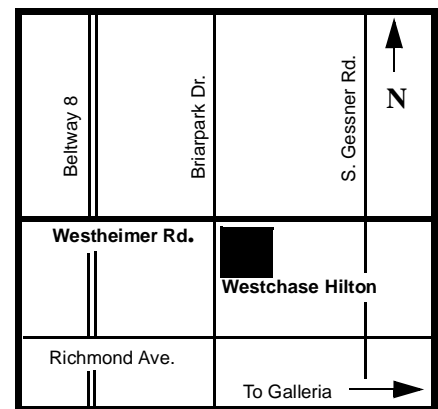
Andrea owns verbal imagery (a communication consulting company), is a member of the STC Board of Directors, and is a principal technical writer at Vertical Networks. As a Junior Fellow of the San Diego Supercomputer Center, she studies and practices the use of new media for communication. Andrea teaches in three university technical communication programs, and she is a consultant and freelance author. She is the principal coauthor of two award-winning technical trade books: *VRML Sourcebook* and *VRML 2.0 Sourcebook*, second edition. As a *Web Techniques* magazine contributing editor, Andrea writes articles about Web content development and Web technologies.

Andrea is making a return visit to Houston. She presented "Know Your Users and Their Tasks" at the May 2000 STC Houston meeting.

For more information on Andrea, visit her website at <http://www.verbalimagery.com>. For more information about STC Houston, visit the chapter website at <http://www.stc-houston.org>.

## Meeting Basics

**Place:** Westchase Hilton Hotel  
9999 Westheimer Road  
(at Briarpark, between  
S.Gessner and Beltway 8)



**Date:** Tuesday, February 13, 2001

**Time:** 5:30 p.m. networking  
(hors d'oeuvres)  
6:20 p.m. announcements  
6:30 p.m. program

**Cost:** \$10 (members)  
\$13 (non-members)  
\$3 (student and unemployed  
members)  
\$6 (student non-members)

### Monthly Drawing

A drawing for various prizes is held at the end of each general meeting. Tickets for the drawing can be purchased at the registration desk. Proceeds benefit the Marx Isaacs Student Scholarship Fund.