Enlightened Web Design for Visually Impaired Users

by Kathy Graden, Documentation Program Specialist, Lucent Technologies

This article describes some of the most effective tips and techniques that have been devised for making Web sites accessible to the visually handicapped. You’ll learn how to make colors more perceptible, make text easier to read for partially sighted people, and more. If you think you’ve done everything possible to make the design of your latest Web document appealing and easy to use, you could be flying blind. Your really cool Web design and your site’s clever use of chic new technology may actually be turning away a growing community of potential users: the millions of people whose visual impairments impede their Web access.

Many people either suffer from some form of visual impairment or will at some point in their lives. By the year 2010, statisticians predict that as many as 20 million Americans may be visually impaired. Twenty million, just in this country! And the numbers continue to climb. Aging sometimes results in vision and hearing changes as well as changes in dexterity and memory. The average age of the population in the U.S. and many other countries is increasing. So, for many people over 45, age-related impairments may threaten their reliance on the Web as a key source of news, education, entertainment, and career enrichment.

To keep the Web accessible to all, the governments of the U.S., Canada, and Europe have joined forces. They are teaming with corporations, service organizations for the disabled, and universities in several countries to develop guidelines for Web site accessibility and tools for Web designs that accommodate visual and other types of impairment.

Using accessibility techniques to build Web sites contributes to better design for nonimpaired users, also. For example:

- Web pages that support visual and auditory access help users of products such as Web-TV and mobile phones that have small display screens.
- Multiple access modes improve Web site usability by reducing users’ problems with slow downloads, noisy environments, and screen glare.
- Redundant text/audio/video can support users who are non-native speakers of English or who have different learning styles or low literacy levels.

W3C Guidelines

On April 7, 1997, the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) announced the launch of their Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) to promote and achieve Web functionality for people with disabilities. Endorsed by the White House and W3C members including Adobe Systems, Microsoft, and dozens of other organizations around the world, the WAI established an International Program Office responsible for developing software continued on page 12
From the President
The Scholarly Side of STC Houston, Part 2
by George Slaughter, Technical Writer, The Integrity Group

Last month, we introduced you to the scholarly side of STC Houston as it pertained to members publishing their research findings. This month, we introduce you to STC Houstonians who participate in local technical communication programs that can help you master knowledge for success.

People
Locally, two academic programs have taken leadership roles in helping people learn technical writing skills: Community College and the University of Houston–Downtown.

You’ll find STC Houstonians at both colleges. In recent years, several chapter members were among HCC faculty, and still other members took courses there. HCC offers an associate’s degree program in technical communication.

At UHD, STC Houstonians such as Dr. Ann Jennings and Dr. Pat Golemon serve on the faculty, and members such as Melanie G. Flanders and Wayne Schmadeka also teach courses. Linda Oestreich, our director-sponsor, also taught at UHD for several years. UHD offers a bachelor’s degree program in professional writing, and the plan is to eventually have a master’s degree program in this discipline.

Members such as Lori Buffum, Jamie Diamandopoulos, Erika Frensley, and Nicole Wycislo have visited the classroom to share their perspectives with students.

Another university, Texas Tech, offers an online master’s degree in technical communication. STC Houstonians Jeff Staples, Joelle Hallowell, and your chapter president participate in this program.

This is only a partial listing, to be sure, but hopefully the example of these people will give you an idea of how our local members are reaching out to help others.

Programs
Here is contact information about these three programs in which your colleagues participate:

- Houston Community College: contact Carolyn Moseley, department secretary, at Carolyn.Moseley@hccs.edu.
- University of Houston–Downtown: contact Ann Jennings, program director, at Jenningsa@uhd.edu.
- Texas Tech University: contact Locke Carter, acting program director, at Locke.Carter@ttu.edu.

The STC web site—www.stc.org—also features a list of colleges and universities with technical communication programs.
From the Editor
Writing for STC Publications
by Rebecca Taylor, Product Marketing Analyst, Hewlett-Packard Company

Have you been bitten by the writing bug? If so, STC has several outlets for your knowledge and creativity! Becoming an established author in the STC publications is also an excellent means to gain name recognition. Read on to see how you can submit articles to your STC publications.

Dateline Houston
Your award-winning chapter newsletter encourages feature articles, as well as book and software reviews, from any STC Houston member. The newsletter is distributed to over 600 email addresses, so the exposure for your work is not insignificant! You can find guidelines for writing and submitting articles to Dateline Houston at www.stc-houston.org/newsletter/guidelines.shtml.

Intercom
Intercom is the Society’s trade magazine, published 10 times per year. Intercom is where you’ll find the latest in tools, applications, and trends for our industry. According to the STC web site, Intercom “provides practical examples and applications of technical communication. Intercom also includes Society news, columns edited by technical communication experts, and a calendar of industry-related events.” You can find guidelines for Intercom submissions at www.stc.org/intercom/guidelines.asp.

Technical communication
Technical communication is the Society’s journal and is published quarterly. You’ll find case studies, research, and discussions are abundant in Technical communication. One of the most popular features of the journal is the extensive book reviews section. According to the STC web site, Technical communication “includes both quantitative and qualitative research while showcasing the work of some of the field's most noteworthy writers.” You will find author guidelines for Technical communication at www.stc.org/intercom/TC_guidelines.asp.

Chapter Elections
We will be holding chapter elections, so be sure to cast your vote! The April newsletter will have candidate bios and a sample ballot.

STC Specialty Gifts
STC specialty gifts are a great way to show appreciation to Society members or professional colleagues while spreading the STC name. Specialty gifts make terrific giveaways for chapter meeting, conferences, and special events.

www.stc.org/specialty_gifts.html
Hi there! Since my last article, I have visited the Texas Tech Student Chapter, been to the January meeting or the STC Board in Austin, given a presentation at the Lone Star Chapter in Dallas, and went back to Austin on February 21 to keynote their awards banquet. Next month, I will visit the Alamo Chapter for their twentieth anniversary party; then in April, I’ll be in Utah for several days visiting the Intermountain Chapter, the Utah State Student chapter, and the BYU Student Chapter! Luckily, I’ll be home for a breather before we all meet in Dallas at the STC @50 Annual Conference! Whew! This STC job sure is exciting!

One of the presentations I give is on career management. In it, I discuss several aspects of how our careers develop and share a model of career growth with my audiences. Recently, I found some notecards from a talk I’d given many years ago on “Clues for Successful Careers.” I took the serendipitous discovery of these cards as a sign that I should reconsider them for myself and share them with you. Here are the major points:

1. **Keep Learning.** We must remember to stay current, stay dynamic, and read, read, read. Red Smith once said, “My advice to an aspiring sportswriter would be: don’t be a sportswriter. Learn what the newspaper business is about before you become a specialist.” So, my advice to you is to learn and do “core” more than “context.” The tool skills are necessary, but if you don’t know the underlying principles of why we do what we do, you might as well work in a vacuum. Learn about the business you’re in. You’ll serve it more professionally.

2. **Find a Professional Society and Be Active in It.** Hey, folks, I didn’t make this up! But the truth is out there. Being in a professional society offers you breadth of information about your work. It offers networking opportunities, and it offers growth. I received experience in STC that I was later able to use to qualify for promotions. If your professional society is for medical writers or usability experts or anime creators, that’s fine! Just join it and use its resources. Get involved. Only being a name on a membership roster won’t do you any good.

3. **Find a Mentor and Be One.** Sometimes it’s tough to be a mentor, but you absolutely should not only have one, but be one. Each of us must find one or more mentors to keep growing and succeeding. And just as importantly, we need to help others by being a mentor. Each of us needs at least one mentor, even experienced people like me! Mentoring is a supportive relationship that nurtures, informs, and smartens both parties! Make it happen!

4. **Take Risks.** Author and physician Paul Tournier said, “Tis better to make a mistake in an honest choice than never to choose at all.” We all know the story of how Edison failed hundreds of times to make the light bulb. I’m not saying we need to make hundreds of mistakes as we move forward in our careers, but I am saying that we need to try things that we’re unsure of. We need to follow that intuitive spark and open that enticing door, even if we’re scared of where they might lead. Staying in a place that’s comfortable but not quite what you want won’t help your career become truly successful. Rather, it dims your vision of what could be.

5. **Be Ethical.** To me, this clue is the most important of them all. As we move forward in our careers, we become more professional, and other people respect us for our knowledge, our path to that knowledge, and our integrity. If we can’t deliver what we have promised to do—whether it’s a proposal, a report, or a picnic table—we must face the consequences and explain our failings. The practice of delivering more than you promise is a tough one to follow, perhaps more so today than ever before in your career. However, delivering less and then covering it up, blaming it on someone else, or arguing about the original agreement are never considered honorable. Your reputation is your most important asset. Guard it with your life, and your career will show that the effort was worth the pain.

Blessings to you all,

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**Linda Oestreich**

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**STC Mission Statement**

The mission of the Society for Technical Communication is to improve the quality and effectiveness of technical communication for audiences worldwide.
Reshaping Technical Communication: New Directions and Challenges for the 21st Century


Ever wonder about the relationship between academia and the corporate world? Or, maybe if you are on the corporate side (as I am), have you wondered why academia operates as it does? (And vice versa.) If so, this book offers great insights that can help you gain an understanding of how each world operates, why they operate as they do, and how the two worlds affect and can alter the future of technical communication.

This book is not what I expected, based on the title. I thought the book would explore technical communication developments and prognoses in the corporate environment and offer suggestions for ways that technical communicators might align themselves to be in sync with future developments in the field. Even though I found the title to be misleading, exploring the book was a worthwhile experience.

I was pleasantly relieved that though the text was written by academics, only two chapters are written in academic prose. Most chapters are written in a very straightforward, practitioner-focused style and tone.

In the Foreword, Ginny Redish sets the tone of the book with an enticing discussion of communities. We exist in various communities such as home, work, and professional organizations, and the new century will require that we broaden our community interactions. “Isolation breeds sterility. Overlapping and intersecting communities bring new ideas” (p. x). The Preface conveys the editors’ intent in creating the book and their resource methods for acquiring the various contributions. Simply, the editors hoped to inspire change by having the book focus on a larger scale, grasping “nontraditional ideas for moving the field forward in new directions” (p. xv).

The Introduction is a brief discussion of the parts and chapters in the book. The editors provide a historical recap of technical communication: where we have come from and what lies ahead. The observations are thought provoking and will pique your interest for what lies ahead—both in the book and in the technical communication field.

Part I focuses on the relationship between academia and industry. The chapters in this part explore the gap that exists between the two environments.

Part II branches out into the practitioner’s environment, conveying the knowledge and skills that technical communicators bring to their work environments. The text in this part explains the need for technical communicators to expand out of their traditional roles of writers and editors.

Chapter 1 identifies differences between academics and practitioners. As a nonacademic, I inhaled this chapter! It provides outstanding clarity and explanation for actions and processes that I have encountered when dealing with academics, as well as why such actions and processes occur as they do.

Chapter 2 addresses the positive ties between the two groups. Deborah S. Bosley discusses commonalities between the two groups, such as use of teams and committees, administration and management, and status. Bosley recommends that academics focus on working relationships with practitioners as an outlet for getting their research efforts accessed, understood, valued, and used in the workplace structure.

Chapter 3 advocates research to identify the areas where the two fields overlap—the common ground. Ann M. Blakeslee proposes methods of research that “will help us understand better the differences and similarities between the two worlds and to develop more productive strategies for communicating across them” (p. 53).

Chapter 4 explores workplace communication and how academics can effect change in the workplace if they respect the social nature of the work environment. Anthony Paré offers information for academics on ways to improve their influence on workplace literacy, such as using a participatory approach to let workers indicate what they need.

In Chapter 5, Stephen A. Bernhardt examines cultural factors that continue to bring a separation in the two groups such as “the alignment of technical communication programs within traditional English departments” (p. 82: academics) and “the place or value of technical communication research” (p. 85: industry/practitioners).

Chapter 6 focuses on the need for professionalization of the technical communication field. Spilka advocates that, instead of trying to define the field based on a

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The Results Are In
by Paul Mueller, Senior Information Development Manager, NetIQ Corporation

One hundred eighteen members completed the STC Houston 2003 Salary and Chapter Survey. We are busy slicing and dicing the results to find better ways to serve you and meet the growing needs of our industry. Over the next few months, we will continue to analyze the survey results and create plans for this upcoming year.

Here we present a few of the results to whet your appetite. In the future, a summary report of the results will be made available.

Of the 116 members who answered the question, “What is your gender?” 84 are female (72.4%) and 32 are male (27.6%). For the highest level of formal education completed, 60.3% answered Bachelor’s (BA/BS), 26.7% answered Master’s (MA/MS), and 6.9% answered Doctorate (Phd).

For the number of hours per week worked in technical communication, 55.7% answered 41 to 50, 27.8% answered 31 to 40, 8.7% answered 51 or more, and 7.8% answered 30 or fewer.

When considering commute time (one way) to their current and primary work location, the answers were:
- less than 15 minutes: 28.9%
- 16 to 30 minutes: 25.4%
- 31 to 45 minutes: 24.6%
- 46 to 60 minutes: 17.5%
- 61 minutes or more: 3.5%

About STC activities, members were asked to answer Yes or No to indicate whether they were satisfied with the following STC activities:
- Tuesday evening as a meeting day and time
  - Yes: 82.2%
  - No: 17.8%
- Westchase Hilton as a meeting location
  - Yes: 79.6%
  - No: 20.4%

Volunteer of the Month—Steve Shriver
by Dorothy Murray, Senior Technical Writer, Sercel, Inc.

Steve Shriver is STC Houston Volunteer of the Month for March for his work on the Employment Share-the-Knowledge (STK) session. Gary Foster, chairman of the Employment Committee, went to Oklahoma for the Christmas holidays, expecting to return to Houston in time to finalize arrangements for the STK session. For personal reasons, he was unable to return as planned. Gary telephoned Steve, a new committee member, and asked him to complete the arrangements. With so many STC members unemployed, interest in the event was expected to be high.

Steve contacted the four presenters to determine their needs for space and audiovisual equipment. He persuaded 13 leaders from the technical communications industry, human resources departments, and staffing agencies to review résumés and conduct mock interviews. On Saturday, January 10, he ensured that room arrangements at the Westchase Hilton Hotel were satisfactory, welcomed the STK participants, settled them into their stations, and then greeted STC members and guests as they arrived for the event. He even wrote an article about the event for the February issue of Dateline Houston.

According to George Slaughter, president, “Steve picked up the ball and ran with it on one of our major chapter activities. His attention to detail, his compassion for his fellow STC members and our guests, and his enthusiasm made the event an unquestioned, absolute triumph for STC Houston.” Gary Foster agreed: “His attention for detail and his methodical way of conducting business made him a natural … Steve and I share the same passion. We both like to help people. What other way to help people best? Help keep them employed.”

Steve has a BS degree in News-Editorial Journalism from the University of Kansas, and he is accredited by Information Mapping® Inc. He works as a contract consultant for Baker Hughes.

STC Houston is pleased to honor Steve Shriver as March 2003 Volunteer of the Month.
STC Telephone Seminar
Evaluating an Index (Even if You Have Only Five Minutes)
Speaker: Seth Maislin

Evaluating and editing an index requires careful consideration of all its clues. In this seminar we will discuss how to measure the effectiveness and accuracy of an index by looking at it whole, in select parts, and in the context of the documentation itself.

Specifically, we will look at:

- **Inclusion.** Indexers can make opposite mistakes: they can overlook important concepts while also indexing indiscriminately. Learn how to find these errors quickly, and to estimate how much editing work might be required.

- **Depth.** Subentries help readers distinguish similar concepts and connect related topics. When misused, however, they obscure the authors’ message. Inappropriate structure is easily corrected, if you know what you’re looking for.

- **Connectivity.** Readers benefit from the connections between topics, such as subentries and cross-references. The best conceptual associations can transcend the documentation and help an index to truly shine.

- **Format.** Layouts and styles affect usability, of course, and consistency is important. But with indexes, blind obedience to a style sheet can get you into trouble. Know when to avoid certain formats, and how to make exceptions.

- **Language.** Good authors choose their words carefully, but from an indexing perspective, the vocabularies of readers matter more. Try to think outside the authoring box, using cross-references and modifiers to control the language.

**What Is a Telephone Seminar?**
A telephone seminar is much like a large conference call, during which the speaker makes his or her presentation over the phone. You simply dial the 800 number from your phone, enter your personal identification number, and you’re connected! You then sit back and listen to the presentations and join in the lively Q&A discussion.

**Benefits**
- No travel is necessary.
- Pay per site and not per person.
- Train within your office.

**Cost**
- U.S. sites: $145.00 USD
- An additional $10 will be charged for registrations received less than five business days before the seminar.

Sign up today at [www.stc.org/seminars.asp](http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp).

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Hard-Boiled Heroes and Cozy Cats: A Panel Discussion

**Topic:** What’s It Like To Cross The Line? First-time novelists discuss what to expect when your book is published.

**Panelists**
- Mystery Writers of America, Southwest Chapter members Kay Finch, Leann Sweeney, Rosemary Poole-Carter, Barbara Colley, and Edgar-nominated Ben Rehder. Moderated by Julie Herman.

**Speakers**
- Rick Riordan, Edgar-winning author from San Antonio
- Jane Friedman, managing editor of *Writer’s Digest* magazine
- Nancy Love, New York literary agent
- Barbara Burnett Smith, Agatha-nominated author from Austin
- Deborah Elliott-Upton, writing instructor at Amarillo College; short story and features author

**Contest**
Eager to test your skills at writing the dreaded synopsis? Enter our synopsis contest, open only to conference participants. Author of the best 5-to-7 page synopsis of a mystery novel will win a $100 prize.

**When**
Saturday, June 21, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. with coffee and danish. Program starts at 9 a.m. To keep you going through the day, there’s a full lunch.

**Where**
Holiday Inn–Katy Freeway (I-10), Houston (just west of the 610 Loop, between Silber and Antoine)
Employment Committee News
by Gary Foster, Project Manager, Kitba Consulting Services, L.P.

The Employment Committee welcomes a newcomer to our group, Angela Livingston. Angela has been browsing through many web sites and forwarding her findings to Steve Shriver and me. She has shown me what a reliable person she can be for outside information (that is, outside of the STC loop).

What happened? All of a sudden, there are jobs out there. At present, there are more job postings this month than for all of last year. Quick, go to the STC Bulletin Board, MSN, Monster.com and CareerBuilder.com. The STC Employment Committee can’t list them all. (Well, there may not be that many, but there are a lot more listings than usual.)

Also, we have the raw results from the Chapter Survey and the Salary Survey. All we have to do now is tabulate them. We plan to publish the results in next month’s newsletter and post them on the Employment web page. Good hunting, and if you need our help, we are here.

STC Announces Fellows and Associate Fellows for 2003

The highest rank that the Society for Technical Communication can confer upon a member is that of fellow. Those who become fellows are associate fellows who have attained such eminence in the arts and sciences of technical communication that they are designated among the select few whose service has distinguished both the Society and the profession.

Fellows
Paula R. Berger—TransAlpine Chapter
Ann Wilson Buttram—East Tennessee Chapter
Donald H. Cunningham—Birmingham Chapter
Lance R. Gelein—Sacramento Chapter
Marguerite Krupp—Boston Chapter
Lynnette R. Porter—SpaceTech Chapter
Donna M. Sakson—Puget Sound Chapter
Daniel E. Wise—Birmingham Chapter

Associate Fellows
Thomas Barker—Texas Tech University Student Chapter
Deborah S. Bosley—Metrolina Chapter
Rebecca E. Burnett—Iowa State University Student Chapter
Martha D. Collins—Suncoast Chapter
Marjorie T. Davis—Mercer University Student Chapter
Charles D. Fisher—Washington, DC Chapter
Douglas Florzak—Chicago Chapter
Jean C. Gabriel—Orange County Chapter
Mark Hanigan—Suncoast Chapter
Hillary Hart—Austin Chapter
Brenda P. Huettner—Southern Arizona Chapter
Michael A. Hughes—Atlanta Chapter
Norman Lambert—St. Louis Chapter
Eugene S. Larson—Atlanta Chapter
Suzanna Laurent—Oklahoma Chapter
Betsy M. Maaks—Chicago Chapter
Mary Sue MacNealy—Mid-South Chapter
Betty M. Montgomery—Washington, DC Chapter
Neil E. Perlin—Boston Chapter
Michelle Ratcliffe—Suncoast Chapter
Kay Robart—Austin Chapter
Jerilyne V. Sander—Hoosier Chapter

STC recognizes and honors deserving senior members by conferring upon them the rank of associate fellow. Those selected as associate fellows are exceptional individuals who have demonstrated a consistent pattern of meaningful contributions to the Society and to the profession over a period of years.

STC’s new fellows and associate fellows will be honored at STC’s 50th Annual Conference, May 18–21, 2003, in Dallas, Texas. An honors banquet will be held on Tuesday, May 20. (An honors reception will precede the banquet at 6 PM.) Tickets for the banquet and reception are $40 and can be purchased using the conference registration form included in the Preliminary Program, which was mailed with the February issue of Intercom, or online at www.stc.org/50thConf.

STC@50

STC’s 50th Annual Conference
May 18–21, 2003
Dallas, Texas

Join the Society for Technical Communication in Dallas, Texas, for STC’s 50th Annual Conference, the largest gathering of technical communicators in the world! For more information and a detailed brochure, contact the Society office.
RoboHelp is the leading Help authoring tool for easily developing professional Help systems for Windows and Web-based applications, including .NET.

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- Generate Help systems in any popular Help format, plus professional-quality printed documentation, all from one source project
- Use WebHelp format to create Help systems that run on any browser and any platform
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Craig Clarke, Technical Writer Help Solutions, Ltd.
Society News

STC holds its elections every spring and allows candidates to submit position statements to chapter newsletters. Dateline Houston does not endorse any candidates but encourages all STC Houston members to read the statements and participate in the elections.

Suzanna Laurent Runs for Second Vice President

While visiting Detroit’s Henry Ford Museum, I learned about Ford and the automobile he made so successful. Many people have the mistaken idea that Henry Ford was an inventor, but Ford did not invent the automobile. He didn’t even “invent” the assembly line.

So what did Henry Ford do? He learned from other people’s experiences as well as his own. He took risks. He saw failure as a lesson, and he applied everything he learned to improve the product, the process, and the policies that shaped the American automobile industry. In short, he was a great innovator. And because he was so willing to share the lessons he learned, he became an inspiration to many others.

I am running for second vice president because, in my own way, I want to do as Henry Ford did—learn from other people’s experiences as well as his own. I want to use the lessons that I have learned in 25 years of management and leadership positions to create solutions that will ensure that STC becomes an organization that is vital to the diverse careers of technical communicators.

One innovative thing I did as a director-sponsor (1999–2002) was to attend conferences and give chapter programs in every region to meet our members and listen to their ideas. As a result, I have presented 103 conference sessions, leadership workshops, and chapter programs in locations from Toronto to Hawaii. In addition, I have written 30 articles that have been published over 500 times in continued on page 11

Deborah Sauer Runs for Second Vice President

I started in this profession 20 years ago, and I still write user manuals. However, now I also develop Help systems, design user interfaces (UIs), and perform usability tests. I also provide training in skills (such as technical writing and editing) and tools (such as FrameMaker and RoboHelp) in public workshops, customized courses, and at universities. In addition, as an independent consultant, I make business decisions on a daily basis.

I have been an independent consultant for five years. I decided that to be successful, I needed to diversify in terms of clients, the technologies that they represented, and the tools that I used in my work. As a result, my work is far more interesting and rewarding than it was five years ago.

To research potential clients, I worked on the local STC chapter competitions and perused the winning entries at the awards banquet. I focused on companies taking new approaches to delivering content and developing innovative products. I actively pursued those companies as clients, many of whom I could connect with through STC relationships.

Now, my clients represent a variety of industries from computer chip manufacturers to consumer electronics companies. They range in size from 20 to 200,000 employees. Working with such varied clients has given me the opportunity to learn a broad range of business practices.

I can also directly attribute my business skills to my work for the STC. As president of the Boston chapter, I managed teams and budgets, made cold calls, and initiated the development of a chapter’s strategic plan. I then became involved in the STC annual conference—first as a stem manager, later as a program continued on page 11
Suzanna Laurent Runs for Second Vice President

continued from page 10

STC newsletters. This “listening tour” instilled a greater understanding of the unique challenges facing us, some of which are addressed in my articles. While serving as director-sponsor, I gained a thorough understanding of the issues and concerns about STC at many levels. Working individually with leaders and other members is an invaluable experience that is crucial to being the most effective leader in the “presidential chain of offices.”

Ford also took risks. Failing to be innovative and leaving the status quo is a risky business for STC and technical communicators. We must, as part of our role as technical communicators, show the value we add. We must continue to learn more, do more, and be more. It is important that STC become the premier organization for technical communicators. One way we can do that is by listening to what our members want, because the organization that best meets the needs of its members is the one that retains its members and attracts new ones.

Ford saw failure as a lesson, and he applied what he learned to make improvements. During the process of defining STC’s brand, we discovered where we were making our mistakes and that we were not being perceived as we wanted to be, so we’ve made changes to correct some of those mistakes and misperceptions. As we seek new ways to prosper, we must improve our processes and the quality of our member services.

STC members work in more diversified environments than ever before, with experience, skills, and talents that vary widely. Nevertheless, we share the desire to be recognized for our contributions to the workplace. By more proactively promoting technical communication, I believe that STC can make a difference in the careers of our members.

Deborah Sauer Runs for Second Vice President

continued from page 10

There are other important strategies to consider as we seek to progress. To learn more about my experience and what I have contributed pertaining to these strategies, read the expanded version of this article at pages.prodigy.net/slaurent or contact me at slaurent@prodigy.net.

With experienced leadership and guidance, STC can become the catalyst that enables technical communicators to achieve the professional status they have earned. When that is accomplished, we will have fulfilled my vision for STC to become an organization to which technical communicators feel membership is essential to their careers.

I would sincerely appreciate your vote for me as the next second vice president, because I firmly believe that when a collection of minds, hearts, and talents work together, great things can happen!

Dateline Houston
protocols and technologies, creating guidelines for the use of technologies, educating the industry, and conducting research and development.

The WAI’s accomplishments to date include the development of the following resources for building accessible Web sites:

- Guidelines for and examples of accessible Web designs
- Repair tools for inaccessible Web sites
- Techniques for evaluating Web site accessibility, including a Web site checklist

The WAI’s body of work is available to you through links at www.w3.org/WAI.

The WAI’s checklist for building Web sites friendly to visually impaired users includes three levels of guidelines: musts, shoulds, and “may do’s.” Here is their list of musts:

1. Provide a text equivalent for every non-text element, whether visual or audible.
2. Make all information conveyed with color also available without color.
3. Use tools such as captions to clearly identify changes in the natural language of a document’s text.
4. Be sure to update equivalents for dynamic content when the dynamic content changes.
5. Avoid causing the screen to flicker.
6. Use the clearest and simplest language appropriate for a site’s content.
7. If you use images and image maps, provide redundant text links.
8. If you use tables, identify row and column headers.
9. If you use frames, title each frame to help users identify and navigate between frames.
10. If you use applets and scripts, ensure that pages are usable when the programs are turned off or not supported.
11. If you use multimedia, provide an auditory description of the highlights from the visual track of a multimedia presentation.
12. If you can’t create an accessible Web page despite your best efforts, provide a link to an alternative page that is accessible and has equivalent information or functionality.

Effective Color Contrast

Lighthouse International, a New York-based nonprofit organization, has been doing pioneering work in vision rehabilitation services, education, research, and advocacy for the visually impaired since 1905. Their Web site, www.lighthouse.org, offers the following advice for choosing Web design colors that work for nearly everyone:

- Impaired vision and color blindness reduce the effectiveness of certain color combinations. Where a person with normal vision sees a sharp contrast between two colors, the colors may look alike to someone with a visual disorder. Exaggerate lightness differences between foreground and background colors and avoid using colors of similar lightness next to each other, even if they have different hues. Example: Black shapes and text on a pastel background are easy to distinguish. The same items in green fade when presented on a red background.
- Choose dark colors with blue, violet, purple, or red hues rather than light colors with blue-green, green, yellow, or orange hues.
- Avoid contrasting similar hues. Yellow contrasted with violet works; red contrasted with orange doesn’t.
- Avoid similar saturation. Saturation is the degree of intensity that differentiates a color from white, black, or gray of equal lightness. People with impaired color vision find it hard to discriminate between colors with similar saturation.

Creating Readable Text

Visual impairments can make reading difficult by blurring images, reducing the amount of light entering the eye, or damaging the central portion of the retina that is best suited to reading.

To make text more readable to almost everyone:

- Print text with the highest possible contrast. White letters on a dark background are more legible than blue-green letters on the same background.
- Text is most readable in black and white. If you use color, reserve it to call attention to headlines, titles, and other special text.
- Use large type, preferably 16 to 18 points.
- Use spacing between text lines that is at least 25 to 30 percent of the point size. This helps people with partial sight to find the start of the next line while reading.
- Avoid complex, decorative, or curved fonts. If you must use them, do so for emphasis only.
- Some research shows that a Roman typeface using upper and lower cases is more readable than italics, oblique, or condensed type.
Enlightened Web Design for Visually Impaired Users

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• Close letter spacing causes problems for visually impaired readers, especially those with central visual field defects. Use wide spacing, mono-spaced fonts, or both.

Special needs of dyslexics
Dyslexics—people whose perception of words and letters is distorted—often find it hard to navigate Web pages that have not been designed with their limitations in mind. Some dyslexics even rely on computers and speech-synthesizing software to read the text to them. Some tips:
• To reach dyslexics who rely on computerized speech recognition, convey all important information in text. (Computers cannot read or interpret graphic images.)
• To help dyslexics who will read your site on their own, use clear, simple, and consistent graphic navigational icons. Steer clear of distractions such as flashing text, variations in fonts, sounds or animations, and textured or patterned backgrounds.
• Keep paragraphs short. For long articles, place a topic index at the beginning so that the reader can quickly zero in on the topics of most interest.
• Use default font settings so that users can select the font they prefer via their browser.
• Keep text left-justified, and use a consistent layout and format.
• Provide a no-frames alternative if your site uses frames. Some text-to-speech software cannot read text on framed pages.
• Instead of including links within the general text, list one below the other after the related topic or paragraph.
• Avoid using background images behind text.
• Do not set up background music to play automatically unless your site lets the user turn it off.
• End all sentences, headers, and list items with some form of punctuation. A text-to-speech tool may run unpunctuated text together, making it hard for listeners to understand. Bulleted lists may also confuse a sight-impaired user.

Designing Web sites for impaired users is a big job, but the number of resources available to help you is vast. Start with these tips—you’ll find plenty more out there!

This article originally appeared in Rough Draft, the newsletter of the Phoenix Chapter of STC.

Book Review

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commonality of its representation, we should embrace the diversity that exists and grasp that diversity as a strength for fostering a defined vision and goal.

In Chapter 7, Karen Schriver questions whether existing research, specifically in the information design field, has been effectively conveyed to practitioners. Why else would practitioners view the research as unresponsive to their needs? She advocates that better conveyance of research findings might lead to more organizational awareness and thus may propel organizations to put more focus and priority on writing and design.

Chapter 8 confronts the realm of globalization and the global effects on technical communications on both growing and struggling economies. Brenton Faber and Johndan Johnson-Eilola “urge us to envision ourselves as ‘hybrid professionals’ who combine product knowledge and strategic design and business knowledge” (p. 95).

Chapter 9 presents several case histories of individuals who began in technical communication in the traditional roles of writers and editors and then expanded their professional scope into other areas such as usability manager and web content writer.

In Chapter 10, Mirel continues the theme of technical communicators advancing out of traditional roles into roles of influence in software design and production. By assuming leadership roles in design and production, technical communicators will be positioned to build usability into the software at inception.

In Chapter 11, Russell Borland implores that the technical communication focus conveyed by academics and employed by practitioners be more in the role of a product author developing documentation rather than the current role of documentation developer interpreting the developers’ intent/product functionality. According to Borland, without changes “technical communicators are likely to devolve into obsolete appendages to high technology, consumer devices, and software” (p. 194).

Many thanks to Mirel and Spilka for an enlightening and fascinating look into the future of technical communication. They provide an experience in which both academics and practitioners can find thought-provoking data to help them shape the direction and grasp the challenges that face technical communication in the 21st century.
Photos from the January Program Meeting

Left and below: Visitors at Deborah Silvi, Susan Stotzer, and Jamie West’s session, “Nonmanagement Career Path for Technical Communicators.”

Right and above: Joan Bolmer and visitors at her session, “How to Write a Dynamite Resume.”

Left: Ryan Bernard and Melanie G. Flanders, “Independent Contracting: Another Option for Career Growth.”
Calendar of Upcoming Events

<table>
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<th>Dates</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Event/Topic</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Contact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 25</td>
<td>EBD</td>
<td>deadline for May newsletter</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Rebecca Taylor (<a href="mailto:newsletter@stc-houston.org">newsletter@stc-houston.org</a>)</td>
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<td>Apr. 8</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>chapter elections</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Suzanne Stuckly-Taboada suzanne_stuckly- (<a href="mailto:taboada@bmc.com">taboada@bmc.com</a>)</td>
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<td>Apr. 8</td>
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<td>Westchase Hilton</td>
<td>Cindy Pao (<a href="mailto:cindypao@earthlink.net">cindypao@earthlink.net</a>)</td>
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<td>Westchase Hilton</td>
<td>George Slaughter (<a href="mailto:gslaughter@flex.net">gslaughter@flex.net</a>)</td>
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