

Devil Mountain Views

Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC
January/February 2004

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How I Became a Technical Writer

Sarmistha Purkayastha recounts the journey to becoming a technical writer that took her from journalism in her native India through accounting to her chosen career in California.

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Strategies for Making Change Work

Suzanna Laurent shows us how to prepare for and cope with change, in and out of the workplace.



Seasonal Poem

To remind us of the season just past, **Adrienne Tange** brings us the holidays in verse.



Two Articles About Style

Dara Golden explains the kinds of things that every style guide should contain in [Style Guides: Basic Considerations](#). Then **Bill Dubie** and **Dave Sciuto**, from the Northern New England Chapter, identify some published style guides (with a special focus on the *Microsoft Manual of Style*) in [Style Never Goes Out of Style](#).



Ask Elaine: The Little Things

Straight versus curly—**Elaine Parrish** is not talking about hair.



Chapter Activities

Leaders Needed—Make a change that makes a difference to you and your chapter.
Autumn Literacy Outreach Update—Unexpected activities provide mixed results of fall semester.

Member Survey—Chapter survey results shed light on membership interests.



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



2002-2003 STC Newsletter Competition

Best of Show and
Award of Distinguished
Technical Communication

About Devil Mountain Views

STC Mission *Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.*

For more information about STC, go to the [Society web page](#).

DMV Basics The East Bay Chapter newsletter is named after a local landmark, Mount Diablo, in Northern California. With a few exceptions, all distances in California are measured from that point, called the Mount Diablo Meridian. The East Bay Chapter serves the cities along the 680 corridor and the east/west part of 580. City-wise it's Vallejo to Pleasanton, Tracy to Oakland and Fremont. We have members from each of those places.

PUBLICATION POLICY

We are always interested in sharing technical communication trends and information with our readers. For details, contact the Guest Managing Editor, [Gwaltney Mountford](#).

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Devil Mountain Views is published bimonthly, five times a year (September, November, January, March, May).

ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Sep/Oct 2003 issue – Aug 2, 2003

Nov/Dec 2003 issue – Oct 2, 2003

Jan/Feb 2004 issue – Dec 2, 2003

Mar/Apr 2004 issue – Feb 2, 2004

May/Jun 2004 issue – Apr 2, 2004

WRITER'S TEMPLATE

If you are submitting an article, please download our [template](#) to use as a guideline for writing your article.

REPRINT POLICY

Articles may be reprinted provided credit is given to Devil Mountain Views and the author, and two copies of the publication are mailed to [Gwaltney Mountford](#) or the mailing address listed below.

ADVERTISING POLICY

Product Types: Only advertisements for products or services related to technical communication can be placed on the EBSTC web site and Devil Mountain Views.

Format: Ads must be in either GIF or JPG format.

Dimensions & Rates: The following rates are valid for one month on the EBSTC web site or one issue of the newsletter.

336 X 280 = \$150

468 X 60 = \$120

160 X 155 = \$80
120 X 60 = \$50

Ad Location: The EBSTC webmaster and the managing editor determine the appropriate ad placement. Ads may be placed on any page in the web site or newsletter or on a sponsors page. Ads will be included in the "Printer Friendly" version of the newsletter.

Payment: Payment must be received by the [East Bay Chapter treasurer](#) before the ad is run. Payment can be made by check.

Inquiries: If you have questions or want to start your ad, please contact [Gwaltney Mountford](#).

MAILING ADDRESS

Gwaltney Mountford, Guest Managing Editor, 1486 Davis Ave. Concord, CA 94518.

Copyright Statement

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Devil Mountain Views also reserves the right to edit articles to fit its stylistic standards and space constraints. Articles are edited, copyedited, and proof-read before publication. The newsletter also reserves the right to not print articles deemed unfit for publication.

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Chapter Officers For a complete list of officers, see the EBSTC web site's [Leadership](#) page.

PRESIDENT[Susan Harlan](#), 510-797-4298**PRESIDENT ELECT**[Becky Rude](#), 925-462-1676**TREASURER**[Joseph Humbert](#), 510-638-3529**SECRETARY**[Nan Breedlove](#), 925-933-9686**DMV History**

Note: We will update this section as our chapter archives are updated. If you were a Managing Editor during a time frame that is missing from the history, please [let us know](#).

Year	Notes
2003–2004	Acting Managing Editor: Becky Rude Guest Managing Editor: Gwaltney Mountford
2002–2003	Managing Editor: Ashwini Tharval Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication awards in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2001–2002	Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format. Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1999–2001	Managing Editor: Teresa Washburn Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1997–1999	Managing Editor: Kelly Walker Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1996–1997	Managing Editor: Melody Brumis Newsletter name changed to <i>Devil Mountain Views</i> . Susan Moxley won the contest held to rename the newsletter. In July 1996, a spoof issue called <i>East Bay Flame</i> is published.
1995–1996	Managing Editor: Bruce Robinson An offshoot, the <i>Twig</i> , is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1994	Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i> .
1962	The <i>Pacifica News</i> was published in the fall in the year the <i>Pacifica</i> chapter was founded. (The chapter was renamed to <i>East Bay</i> in 1982 under President T.R. Girill.) ▲

Letters to the Editor



We'd love to hear from you with comments, suggestions, and stories we should know about. Write to [Gwaltney Mountford](#), Guest Managing Editor.

[Editor's note: The following letter is in regard to Adrienne's short story [Half Full](#).]

Adrienne, I really enjoyed this story and the others you've shared in the STC newsletter!

Liz Miller
EBSTC Member

[Editor's note: The following letter is in regard to Becky's [Editor's Message](#).]

Becky:

I stumbled upon your blurb about NotWriting.com. As the founder of NotWriting, I appreciate your positive comments on the site.

I should note that you will probably enjoy the newest piece on NotWriting: The Hershey's® Wrapper Scandal: Inside the chocolate giant's betrayal of the American people. <http://www.notwriting.com/commentary.htm>

The story is only half tongue-in-cheek. I truly believe that by changing their chocolate bar wrappers to plastic, the company has alienated many consumers.

In just the few hours since I posted the story, I've received over eighty emails from users thanking me for bringing this issue into the open. I'd appreciate it if you'd spread the word about the site and about this piece in particular; we need to bring back the old wrappers.

Thank you so much for helping the NotWriting cause.

Sincerely,
Chris Orcutt

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Editor's Message



by [Gwaltney Mountford](#)
 STC Associate Fellow, DMV Guest Managing Editor

Hello Readers!

We hadn't planned a theme for this issue, but one seems to have emerged—change. From **Suzanna Laurent's** [advice for dealing with job change](#) to **Richard Mateosian's** [review](#) of *The Humane Interface: New Directions for Designing Interactive Systems*, the underlying current is change.

And, of course, the very fact that this column is being written by someone other than **Becky Rude** is a change. As the first guest Managing Editor, my presence reflects one of the changes that **Susan Harlan** and Becky have been working on—making large volunteer jobs smaller to attract more volunteers. This change preceded the Membership Survey, but it was validated by answers to a survey question—“What is the primary reason you don't hold a volunteer position?” The majority of respondents said it was lack of time. Read Becky's [article](#) for more information about the survey and the changes planned for the chapter.

Thanks for Making the Job Easy

Being the guest Managing Editor has been easy for a number of reasons. For one thing, Becky did a lot of the groundwork for this issue, especially lining up articles. The process for publishing the newsletter is well documented, with checklists and timelines. It even has a guide, “Procedures for *Devil Mountain Views*,” written by former Managing Editor **Kelly Walker** and updated by **Ashwini Tharval** and Becky. But most importantly, the newsletter staff is experienced and dedicated. My thanks to Associate Editors **Hasmig Vasgerdsian** and **Sarmistha Purkayastha**, Copy Editor **Elaine Parrish**, and Web Designer **Angelina Nachimuthu** for making this such an enjoyable experience. A special thank you to former Associate Editor **Susan Moxley** for providing last-minute editing help. And of course, this issue would be nothing without our contributors, whose names you'll find throughout this column.

Getting Back to Change

As many of the articles in this issue show, reaction to change is mixed. My husband, Carl, and I were talking about it at dinner the other night. “What I like about a new job,” he said, “is that it wipes the slate clean. You can get out of the rut you were in and start something new.” Of course, being consultants, we experience change constantly and therefore are comfortable with it. For those of you who are more disturbed by change, [Suzanna's article](#) has some tips to make change easier to accept.

Personally, I find change exciting. It's an opportunity to explore and learn new things, and meet new people—something that **Sarmistha Purkayastha** experienced when she left India to come to America, as she

recounts in [her article](#) about starting a new career. And starting a new career is exactly what **Joe Humbert** would like to do (see [Marsha Howard's profile](#) in this issue). Even **Adrienne Tange** made a change from prose to [poetry](#) in her offering for this issue.

It Isn't All About Change

We have style. **Dara Golden** identifies the [basics for style guides](#), and **Bill Dubie** and **Dave Sciuto** of the Northern New England Chapter [review Microsoft's version](#).

We have excitement in **T.R. Girill's** [update of the Literacy Outreach Program](#).

We have information we can use now in **Nan Breedlove's** thorough [recap of the November program](#) and **Elaine Parrish's** [advice on making our documents more professional](#).

We have opportunities for leadership as explained by **Susan Phelan**. And **Susan Harlan** urges you not to change (that is, from member to non-member) in her exhortation to [renew your STC membership](#).

Ring Out the Old, Ring in the New

When I think of it, it's very appropriate that this issue is dominated by articles about change. After all, it's the New Year, with its accompanying resolutions to change our less-endearing behaviors. So, find that beverage of choice and a comfortable chair, and enjoy the newsletter.

The staff at DMV wishes you every success and happiness for the coming year.

Gwaltney ▲

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President's Message: To Renew or Not to Renew?



by [Susan Harlan](#)
EBSTC President

As we look forward to the beginning of a new year, it's a good time to think about what happened on both a personal and a professional level in 2003. Did you experience changes? If so, were they positive, such that they will contribute to your future happiness and success? If not, then what could you add to this equation—if it were as easy as a math problem—that would add another dimension or new possibilities?

Some of us found this past year challenging. Like other STC chapter members, EBSTC members were affected by globalization and employer requirements. Some members found new careers in the Bay Area or in other parts of the country. Others found contract jobs, many of them at a lower pay rate than in years past and for a shorter duration. And a few found no jobs, so the work area was quiet—and job searching was frustrating.

Membership in STC offers benefits to members of each group, from employed in our career of choice to those still looking. This means the Society must have a broad range of activities and resources.

STC Membership Benefits

STC offers a number of benefits to its members at the local and international levels. Maybe it's time to review what the Society offers and try out something that fits your current situation.

Our 2003 Chapter Survey provided information about what's important to you: meeting time, location, and program topics. We are working to make the changes that reflect members' wishes, such as shortening the meeting time, finding a less costly meeting location (with lower-cost food), and providing programs of interest. Actually, the #1 meeting topic requested, Information Mapping, was last month's excellent program, and we'll have more preferred program topics throughout the year, such as information architecture, project management, and trends in technical communication.

Those programs, as well as information on professional trends, job leads, and networking, all provide current information on technical communication, which includes writing, editing, graphics design, teaching, and all the other job titles associated with STC. It's important to note that you'll find these offerings not only at the local and regional levels but also at the national and international levels. Whether you're looking for employment opportunities or new designs in corporate user guides or intranet sites, this one group, with its one international web site—www.stc.org—and its 150 chapters around the world, links everyone together.

The opportunities provided by STC on a global level, as well as at the grass-roots level of chapter meetings and programs, make a dynamic and

progressive combination. If you want to stay on top in this era of change, I recommend that you stay with us. Think about it.

Susan ▲

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Chapter Meeting Information

Upcoming Meetings

Attending meetings is a great way to learn new things and connect with technical writers around the East Bay. For details on meeting location and reservations, see the [meetings page](#) on the chapter web site.

Date	Speaker	Topic
February 5	Beau Cain heads a panel from the Bay Area chapters: Eunice Malley (Berkeley), Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer (NorthBay), Marie Highby (Silicon Valley), Susan Becker (San Francisco).	<i>Trends in Technical Communication</i> After the life-devouring dot-com boom and the savings-devouring dot-bomb bust comes the inevitable question: can we survive whatever's next? What's happening to the tools that help us rapidly produce top-quality work? Which old skills will definitely serve us in the near and long term, and what new ones must we acquire in order to succeed? Local panelists will offer their well-studied insights. Be there to encourage the panelists to make predictions, and take full advantage of our shared knowledge
March 6	Elaine Winter	<i>Translating Documents into Foreign Languages</i>

December Program

We enjoyed an entertaining and informative presentation, "Don't Make Me Do That!", from STC Fellow Lance Gelein. You can view the slides from our [chapter web site](#).

Winners of the December Raffle



Richard Mateosian won *Don't Make Me Think* by Steve Krug (donated by Mountford Group, Inc.).

Ken Evans won a disk holder
(donated by Sapphire
Technologies).



Speaker **Lance Gelein** picks
the next ticket after winning
Robohelp Screen Capture
software (donated by eHelp).

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Chapter Activities: Congratulations to New Members



Let's welcome our new, transfer, and reinstated members!

- Joyce Edwards
- Patrick Millard
- Zenobia Redeaux
- Stacey Silva
- Cynthia Warren

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Member Spotlight: Joe Humbert



by [Marsha Howard](#)
 EBSTC Member

The walk up the narrow red steps between the shoulder-high shrubs leading to the white lattice archway gives no clue about the beehive of activity that goes on within the yellow clapboard corner house. The small porch, visible over the gate, gives nothing away. A sign over the doorbell, instructing callers not to ring between 1:00 and 3:00 P.M., offers the first hint. But it's well after 3:00 P.M. now.

When I ring the doorbell, a salt-and-pepper-bearded man swings the door wide, revealing a large country kitchen. In the center of the room are toddler-sized chairs surrounding a similarly sized table. It's snack time at the Bernice & Joe Playschool and 12 hungry preschoolers are dining on cheese and crackers.

Creating Order from Chaos

After snack time, the man who always seems ready to have an eye-level conversation with his charges escorts the children through several toy-laden rooms to the sliding glass door that leads to the backyard. Talkative toddlers prepare expectantly for the outdoors as he patiently helps them don sweaters and shoes. Soon, they are enjoying their playtime. Overseeing them all is the man who has created order from chaos here five days a week, 11 hours a day, for the past 23 years.

A Family Business



Joe Humbert at his Playschool with one of his charges.

Meet Joe Humbert, East Bay Chapter treasurer, beloved caregiver to 26 tots, and aspiring technical writer. He and Bernice, his wife of 26 years, have run a child-care business in this house since 1980. Bernice began the family daycare, licensed for 12 children, when their children were babies. Joe, who has both undergraduate and master's degrees in physics, joined her after spending a year as a data processing supervisor.

The Humberts had a banner year in 1992. They bought the house next door and obtained a preschool license permitting them to care for up to 26 children. Separate housing allowed them to convert the yellow house exclusively for child care. This meant, among other things, restructuring the existing bathroom, which now has two toilets and two tiny, toddler-sized sinks. They also added another lavatory exclusively for staff use.

STC Connection

After 23 years in child care, Humbert plans to return to his science-based roots. He hopes to move from writing marketing material for his childcare business to writing technical manuals and web site copy after earning a Certificate for Technical Communication at UC Berkeley Extension. To help the transition, Gwaltney Mountford, one of his instructors, encouraged him to join STC and run for chapter treasurer.

A towheaded girl interrupts, persistently requesting a lost item. Humbert laughs. He seems to know that he'll soon be the one asking the persistent questions. ▲

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Networking

- [Northern California STC Chapters](#)
- [Professional Development SIG](#)

Northern California STC Chapters



There are six active Northern California STC chapters. Each chapter meets on a different Wednesday or Thursday so you can attend all the meetings. Contact the respective presidents for more information or visit the chapter web site.

Wednesdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	Sacramento	Jeff Simon
Week 2	Berkeley	Joe Devney
Week 3	San Francisco	Susan Becker
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	East Bay	Susan Harlan
Week 3	North Bay	Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer
Week 4	Silicon Valley	Fred Sampson

Professional Development SIG

The EBSTC Professional Development SIG supports and encourages our personal evolutions as we transform ourselves to remain marketable.

Monthly Meetings

It's easy to remember when we meet because it's exactly a week after our chapter meeting.

What	EBSTC Professional Development SIG meeting
When	Second Thursday of the month at 11:45 A.M.
Where	Willow Tree Restaurant, 6513 Regional Street, Dublin, 925-838-9111

Join the SIG Yahoo Group

Because the group is private, you can't find it using the search function. If you'd like to join, send us an [email](#). ▲

Society News

STC Mission *Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.*

For more information about STC, go to the [Society web page](#).

STC Elections Procedures for STC's 2004 Election

The annual STC election will be held in early 2004, and only members who have paid their dues by **February 27, 2004** will be eligible to vote. An option on the dues renewal forms as well as on the new membership applications for 2004 allows members to receive their election materials via email. In March, members who selected this option will be emailed the slate, candidate biographies, and voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive these materials by first-class mail. The election closes 12 noon EDT on April 15. **Be sure to renew by February 27 to have a say in STC's future!**

Preliminary Slate of Candidates for Society Office

President* Andrea L. Ames
First Vice President* Suzanna Laurent
Second Vice President*
 Mike Bates
 Nancy J. Hoffman
Secretary
 Lori H. Fisher
 Susan Wolford
Region 8 Director-Sponsor
 Beau Cain
 Alison J. Reynolds
Nominating Committee
(Two to be elected, each for a two-year term)
 Dia H. Burroughs
 John P. Garison
 Hillary Hart
 Carolyn Kelley Klinger
 Martha K. Sippel

* The *STC Bylaws* specify that the second vice president automatically becomes first vice president the following year and president the year after that. Thus, second vice president is the highest office to which a member is routinely elected. ▲

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Educational News

STC offers a number of ways for technical communicators to further their education and expand their skill sets. One way is the [STC annual conference](#) and various regional conferences. Another is the telephone and Web-telephone seminar.

Plan Now for the 2004 Region 8 Conference

The 2004 Region 8 Conference will be held from July 25-27, 2004, at the University of California, Davis. Enjoy the collegiate atmosphere and over 300 of your fellow technical communicators as you learn about new technologies and trends in technical communication, hear fascinating keynote speakers, and shop at the Pavilion that features a trade show, career expo, and product demonstrations.

Early registration starts February 15, so plan ahead now! You can learn more about what we'll offer at the conference by visiting [STC Region 8 Conference web site](#). We look forward to seeing you in July!

Take Advantage of New Web- Telephone Seminars

New to STC is the Web-telephone seminar, which is a telephone seminar with Web-based features. In a Web-telephone seminar, participants listen to the presenter over the phone while viewing presentation materials over the Web. For both telephone seminars and Web-telephone seminars, registrants are provided with an 800 number, and for the Web-telephone seminar, they also receive a secure URL and passwords to access both the audio and online elements of the presentation. In both formats, you sit back, listen and view the presentations, and join in the lively Q&A discussion that follows.

- Benefits**
- No travel time
 - Pay per site and not per person
 - Train all your people without their leaving the office
- Cost**
- The cost is per site, not per person.
 U.S. sites: \$145.00 USD (Telephone only), \$160.00 USD (Web-Telephone)
 Canadian sites: \$160.00 USD (Telephone only), \$175.00 USD (Web-Telephone)
 All other sites: Please contact the STC office.
- Sign-up Info** [STC web site](#)

For more information on each topic as well as online registration information, click the links below. (Note that our own **Judy Herr** is conducting a telephone seminar in March.)

All seminars are from 1 to 2:30 P.M. ET.

Effective Web Sites: Structure, Navigation, and Graphics	January 14, 2004
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	<i>Speaker:</i> Jean-luc Doumont
Demonstrating the Value of Technical Communication Products and Services	January 28, 2004 <i>Speaker:</i> Saul Carliner
Don't Make Me Do That!: Making Learning Fun *	February 11, 2004 <i>Speaker:</i> Lance Gelein
Designing Web Applications*	February 26, 2004 <i>Speaker:</i> Whitney Quesenbery
Keywords for Indexing and Search*	March 10, 2004 <i>Speaker:</i> Seth Maislin
Winning New Business: Preparing and Submitting Proposals 101B*	March 24, 2004 <i>Speaker:</i> Judith Herr

* Details not available at this time. ▲

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Book Review: The Humane Interface



by [Richard Mateosian](#)
 Senior Member, Berkeley Chapter

[The Humane Interface: New Directions for Designing Interactive Systems](#)
 by Jef Raskin (Addison-Wesley, Reading MA, 2000, ISBN 0-201-37937-6, \$24.95)

Jef Raskin's best-known work is the Macintosh. That product brought about a revolution in computer interface design, but yesterday's revolutionary idea has become today's entrenched paradigm. Raskin has moved on. In this book, he shows the flaws of the desktop-and-application approach and explains how it can evolve into something much easier for humans to use.

Raskin centers his ideal system on your content—not named files in a hierarchy of directories, but just content. You can have files and directories, but only if you decide to mark their boundaries in an otherwise undifferentiated sea of content. Rather than applications to process your content, Raskin gives you individual commands. Thus, rather than buying Photoshop and Word, you buy individual (or perhaps groups of) image processing commands from Adobe and text manipulation commands from Microsoft. You can use the text commands to add text to images, and you can use the image processing commands to manipulate the images in your printed documents.



This sounds like component software or Unix filters. It's not a radically new idea, but Raskin arrives at it from a different direction.

He begins by asking how he can make interfaces that humans can learn easily and use efficiently. To answer that question, he looks at the equipment on both sides of that interface: the computer and the human.

Many people have studied human cognition, but few have applied what we know about the capabilities and limitations of humans to the problems of interface design. To do this, Raskin applies techniques and observations that the cognitive psychologist Bernard J. Baars discusses in his book *A Cognitive Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge, 1988).

Raskin takes a fundamental principle from Baars' work: Humans can accomplish many tasks in parallel, but can pay attention only to one at a time. We all know this, but many people design interfaces as if it weren't true. Raskin's examples of this error are taken from widely used software products.

The fact that we have at most one locus of attention, whereas most tasks we perform with computers require us to accomplish a variety of subtasks in parallel, leads to the principle of automaticity: The more we can do without thinking, the

more efficient we are. Anything that makes us think about what we already know how to do slows us down. This principle leads to the following conclusions:

- Interfaces should be modeless—the way to accomplish a task should be the same under all circumstances.
- Interfaces that change in an attempt to adapt to your actions can actually slow you down.

Raskin elaborates on these points with many examples. Some of the examples are surprising. They show the inefficiency of widely practiced interface design techniques.

Raskin turns a lot of attention to the problems of navigation. He likens current navigation methods in applications, operating systems, and the Web to trying to find your way around a maze with only the ground-level view of where you are and where you've been. He proposes a two-pronged approach to improving this situation: a zooming video camera metaphor for finding your way around a pictorial representation of your content, and a text-search facility that differs sharply from the most commonly used search facilities.

Raskin also applies quantitative methods to interface design. He uses the goals, objects, methods, and selection rules (GOMS) technique developed by Stuart Card, Thomas Moran, and Allen Newell to measure the relative efficiencies of alternative interfaces.

I haven't come near to covering all the topics Raskin addresses in this marvelous book—icons, programming environments, documentation, the number of buttons on a mouse, and even cables and connectors. If you have anything to do with designing any aspect of computer systems for use by humans, you should read this book. People will be talking about it for a long time. ▲

This review originally appeared in slightly different form in the May/June 2000 issue of [IEEE Micro](#).
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How I Became a Technical Writer

by [Sarmistha Purkayastha](#)
DMV Associate Editor

When I came to this country in 1994, I left behind a promising career in journalism. I was reporting for DataQuest, a leading IT magazine in India, when I met and married my husband. At that time, he was working for Oracle in the United States and was visiting family in India. The thought of starting a brand-new life in the prosperous United States far outshone the loss of a mere reporting job.

Bumpy Road from the Start

Only two months into my new life, the rosy picture I had painted in my mind started to fade. True, the cleanliness everywhere was impressive and the malls were more beautiful than I had imagined. I could see the fastest cars zoom past me and every possible comfort could be mine for the asking, but homesickness and loneliness gripped me. I missed everything that was familiar to me. Even the thought of just having given up a much sought-after occupation in India preyed on my mind.

Needing to engage myself, I called numerous local newspapers and journals in search of openings. Before long, I realized that in the absence of a journalism degree from this country or any related work experience, my chances of finding work as a reporter were very slim. It was then that I decided to train to become a technical writer. For me, it was the closest I could get to being a writer without going back to college full time. Besides, the money didn't seem too bad.

A couple of years of basic computer skills classes, tools training, and technical writing courses later, I ventured out to find a tech writing job. It was a long and winding path. It was the late 1990s, just before the Internet boom and the start of the dot-com craze. There were a handful of jobs and very few that needed first-timers. My resume always got me interviews, but somebody else more qualified always ended up with the job.

I realized that I needed to find an internship, where I could get hands-on experience in preparation for an actual job. Again, they weren't that easy to find. Most of them had requirements—for example, U.S. citizenship—that I lacked. Finally, I saw an opening for a writing intern at Ziff-Davis Television, which was looking for somebody to write and edit information about its TV shows on technology. The work didn't seem very technical, but it did require writing skills and imagination. And I would have something to add to my resume. After all, Ziff-Davis was a pretty big name.

Detour Ahead

I got the internship at Ziff-Davis without much effort. While at Ziff-Davis, I continued interviewing for tech writing jobs, but somehow they didn't click. The companies agreed that I had done enough writing, had good communications skills, and had the right training, but I didn't know how to create a FrameMaker template, nor did I have a true technical background. Come on now! Somebody had to give me chance to learn all that. At the end of the Ziff-Davis internship I was still without a job. A friend advised me to work through a temp agency. I had taken accounting classes, so I signed up with Accountants on Call. The very next week, I was auditing employee expense reports for a small software company. Although the task was easy, my heart wasn't in it.

While still an accounting temp, I interviewed for an entry-level technical writer position at Boole & Babbage, which was looking for someone who could grow with the company. Convinced that I was a good fit, I went the extra mile at the interview. I came back from the interview content and was not surprised when I was called a week later for a second interview.

Meanwhile at my temp job, my supervisor handed me my final check. Although I really didn't want to be an accountant, I still hadn't heard from Boole & Babbage since my second interview almost one week earlier. I was beginning to feel jobless and hopeless again.

Destination in Sight

I registered with yet another temp agency for yet another accounting job, reconciled to the fact that a tech writer's job was not to be mine. But that evening, as I was listening to my saved messages at home, I stopped short at one from my interviewer at Boole & Babbage. She wanted to make me an offer for the job. I remember playing the message several times before I could believe that I indeed was going to begin a tech writing career. The long and winding path had finally brought me to my destination.

Five years later, I'm still in the profession. I have changed companies and learned a lot at each job. I have become more technical, a better writer, and an efficient communicator. Yet, when I put myself in the shoes I was in five years ago, I can still feel how it all seemed a dream then. ▲

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Strategies for Making Change Work



by [Suzanna Laurent](#)
 STC Associate Fellow, [Oklahoma Chapter](#)

I took a few days off work last month to visit and present programs for some STC chapters. When I returned to the office, I learned the company had reduced its workforce by 25%. Thankfully, I survived the layoff, but it caused me to reflect on how people are unexpectedly faced with dramatic changes in their lives—changes they must learn to manage. Even though I was not laid off, I've had to confront emotions and adjust in other ways.

Change has been a part of our lives since birth. It's that way for all of us. We are what we are because we've gone through—and survived—all kinds of change. And that change has had various effects on our lives.

Although we don't always welcome change, more times than not it is a positive force in our lives. At least that's been my experience. As I tried to understand myself and my reactions to change, I read all I could find on the subject. Over the years, I learned some strategies from experts that help me accept change and make it work in my life. Perhaps if you are going through some kind of change, using these strategies will help you make sense of it.

Anticipate Workplace Change and Be Ready for It

First, you must accept that change is with us, and it is here to stay. Once you know about and accept change, you can anticipate it, prepare for it, and make it work for you!

How can you prepare for workplace change? Reading books like *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler and *Understanding Tomorrow* by Lyle Schaller can help. Putting these strategies into action is perhaps the most important way of all. The key is that you honestly accept workplace change as a fact of life. Instead of resisting or fighting it, consciously decide to make it work for you. It's a mindset technique—an important one!

View Change as Opportunity

When faced with change, I think "CEO"—Change Equals Opportunity. If you want to be the CEO of your life, you must think like a CEO. Without change, neither you nor I would be where we are today. Change has broadened our horizons and enabled us to grow. With every change in our lives, there have been new opportunities. The same thing can happen in the workplace.

Practice Effective Stress-Management Techniques

If you are feeling stressed, you must practice good stress-management strategies. There are many good books on stress management. Briefly, you must:

- Control your emotions; don't let your emotions control you.
- Ignore rumors.
- Accept that change takes place.
- Take care of yourself physically.
- Keep from acting out of anger.

Do Your Work

Even in the midst of organizational change, it's important to keep your part of the bargain. There will be others who don't. But unless they hinder you in getting your work done, those people aren't your worry. Your concern is to be true to yourself and to do things that, over the long haul, will help. Management watches, observes, and remembers. When there's a future promotion opportunity or someone is needed for a special project, management will look to those who helped during the change—even if they didn't particularly like what took place. It's in your own best interest to continue to do your work to the best of your abilities.

Look for Ways to Do More

There are always lots of things that don't seem to get done during organizational changes. Instead of wasting energy trying to assign blame or worrying about why those things aren't getting done, step up and do more yourself! Be ready and willing to take on a new assignment, stay late so that an important project gets done on time, or take on extra responsibility. It will be noticed, because companies seek employees who look for ways to do things better, more efficiently, or with fewer resources.

Tell Others About the Results of Your Work

The best way to help managers know you are successful is to "toot your own horn." Start by making a list of the many things you do in your job. List the projects you're involved in, the teams you belong to, or any special assignments you've completed. Then list the results of those activities. For example, let's say you are the leader of a documentation team. As you analyze what you do, you begin to realize that you've had some great results, which might include reducing costs, improving processes, or saving time while producing better documentation. Why focus on results? Because the results you've achieved are a strong indicator of what you do best. Once you've identified the results of your work, tell others. You can mention your results to a supervisor during a staff meeting, make sure your written reports include statements about the results of your work, or pin up a note on the wall of your office to remind you (and others) of your success.

Be Someone Others Enjoy Working With

Nobody likes to work alongside a grouch, a complainer, or a negative person. Make it your goal to be the one who has a positive attitude, smiles, and says "please" and "thank you." There will always be some who grumble in the midst of change, who see only the drawbacks and not the opportunities. It's more important to be someone who others enjoy working with; it's not only more fun, but it's the key to making change work for you!



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Seasonal Poem

by [Adrienne Tange](#)
 DMV Contributing Editor

The turkey is gone and so is the pie which means the end of fall,
 now get out your wallets and strap on your shoes cause you're off to the
 nearest mall.



It's presents for work, CDs for your kids and goodies for your mate,
 a sweater for Suzy, black gloves for Gary who lives in another state.

Tall candles for Kathy, special soaps for Sally, and necklaces for your niece
 Then hop in your car and jet back to work and edit the last release.

After work come home and wrap them all up then rush to the grocery store,
 Get food for the party, cookies for the kids, and a wreath for your door.

Make lists in your head of the things you must do before that important day,
 like shopping and wrapping, cooking and cleaning, and watching your
 children's play.



You shop and you wrap and you cook and you clean and finally the big day
 is here,
 now rest and relax and put up your feet until Christmas time next year! ▲

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Style Guides: Basic Considerations

by [Dara Golden](#)
DMV Contributing Editor

Dara Golden is the former Interim Editor of [Connection](#), the Silicon Valley Chapter's newsletter.

Many people think that only documentation groups need style guides, as they “write” the documentation. But the documentation group receives information from other groups as well. Should those groups also have writing guidelines? This article poses questions to consider when creating style guides both for documentation writers and writers in other groups.

First and foremost, keep in mind that style guides must

- Be usable—If writers cannot find the information they need quickly, they won't use the guide.
- Be consistent—If the guide suggests a specific style, ensure that it is followed by the guide itself.
- Not talk down to users—The guide should help, not discourage, writers.

Answering the following questions will help make the style guide more usable and functional for all users.

Who?

- Is the guide just for documentation writers or does it include other groups, such as engineering, marketing, legal, and editing?
- Is the intended audience near (same building) or far (different state, foreign country)?
- Is the guide to be used outside of the company, such as by translators, printers, or graphic artists?

What?

- What is the objective of the guide?
- What is important?
- What basic information is needed? For example:
 - Trademark notations
 - Spelling conventions (e-mail/email)
 - Formatting conventions (Is it **NOTE**, **NOTE:**, or **Note**?)
 - Grammar reminders (must/should/may/can)

- Exceptions to standard writing rules (bulleted list punctuation)
- Is the guide a stand-alone document or should it refer to outside sources, such as *The Chicago Manual of Style* or *Microsoft Manual of Style*?

Where?

- Where will the guide be read: at a computer, offline, or both?
- Are different versions necessary for the different groups that will use the style guide?

When?

- When will the manual be updated?
 - Include changes made between versions.

Why?

- Why have a style guide?
 - Stress the importance to groups who need but do not necessarily want to use a style guide.
 - Hold style guide meetings to get people used to the idea and to solicit feedback.

How?

- How will decisions be made about the guide?
- How will the guide be organized?
- How will readers find information quickly? For example, include an index or a well-structured table of contents.
- How can the guide be improved?

Your planning can make the difference in terms of the usability and acceptance of your company's style guide. ▲

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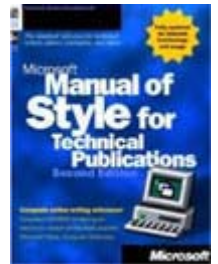
Style Never Goes Out of Style

by Bill Dubie and Dave Sciuto, Northern New England Chapter

This article is reprinted from the July/August 2003 issue of [The Nor'easter](#), Northern New England Chapter.

We've often been accused of lacking style, and we readily admit to a fashion faux pas or three, but when it comes to creating documentation, we like to have every fashion accessory available. You have your basic *Strunk and White*, your *Words into Type*, and your *AP Stylebook* and *Libel Manual* (Dave has dog-eared the Libel part). For technical writers, editors, engineers, and developers, there's the *Microsoft Manual of Style*, now available in Help format.

Having a style manual available on the desktop becomes more than a convenience for us: A quick look in the Appendix can give us a list of acronyms and abbreviations. Does "KB" stand for "kilobyte" or "kilobit"? Is "debug" a viable substitute for "troubleshooting"? In a white paper, should we leave our modifiers dangling en flagrante?



We dispute some tenets ("The meeting is at 12:00 noon" and "The date changes at exactly 12:00 midnight" are, as every editor knows, redundant), but we like having a reference available with a click. Of course, you might not wish Mr. Gates and company to dictate how your document should sound; however, there's very little "Microsoftese" in the style guide. Most of it is basic style sense.

The file is a downloadable executable that you can open and save on your hard disk, then place a shortcut to it on your desktop. The style guide is simply a Help file with a .CHM extension, and you navigate it as you would any Help file.

Now, when we send our technical documents into the world, we fully accessorize and wear our words with panache.

Where to get it:	Download the Microsoft Manual of Style from the Microsoft web site
Price:	Free
Requirements:	PC running Windows; 2MB disk space

Listen to *The Computer Report with Bill Dubie and Dave Sciuto* Sundays at noon on WOTW in Nashua, New Hampshire and WGAW in Gardner, Massachusetts.
 Contact [Bill and Dave](#). ▲

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Ask Elaine: The Little Things



by [Elaine Parrish](#)
 DMV Copyeditor

If you have an editing question you'd like to see addressed in a future column, please submit it to [Ask Elaine](#).

An earworm has been running through my head lately. Years ago, I participated in a college musical production that included the following lyrics:

“It’s the little things,
 tiny incidental things,
 that need caring the most.”

Ignore the awkward grammar; the message is valuable. Little things mean a lot. With our hectic schedules, it’s easy to pour all of our energy into the content that we are trying to communicate, and skip little niceties that could distinguish our message in the reader’s mind from the dozens of others that bombard them.

To technical communicators, conveying the content—the what—to the reader is the primary goal. But our method of communicating—the how—can be almost as important as the what, because it can make or break the reader’s positive reception of the message. Two classic typographical conventions often neglected in a deadline crunch—dashes and curly quotes—can add (to quote the Cowardly Lion), “that soittain air of savoir-faire” to your text. These “tiny incidental things,” when used, might not necessarily impress your readers, but if they’re overlooked, your readers may very well get a nagging suspicion that they can’t quite pin down, that there is something not quite up to par with what they’re reading.

Curly quotes and apostrophes

Curly quotes and apostrophes differ from the plain old straight-up-and-down variety like a fine Merlot differs from a jug red. There’s nothing wrong with jug red, but you’ll probably choose the Merlot if you want to impress your dinner guests. In the same way, the elegant curvature of curly quotes and apostrophes, also called “typeset” or “smart” quotes, adds a touch of class to your text.

Dashes

Nothing seems to subtly whisper “amateur” in the reader’s ear more than the use of hyphens when dashes are called for. Just because the hyphen has a place of honor on the keyboard doesn’t mean it should be used in situations where a traditional typesetter would break out the special dash characters. Two types of dashes have specific uses where hyphens just won’t do. Use the shorter of the two, the en dash, to separate a range of numbers, or in a compound word in which one of the elements is more than one word. Use the longer dash, the em dash, to separate elements of a sentence in a more emphatic way than with parentheses or other punctuation marks.

Examples

The table below illustrates these little typographical tricks, including how to create them.

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Character	Illustration	Use instead of	Usage and Examples	ANSI code (use number pad)	MS Word shortcut (use number pad)	HTML code
Curly apostrophe	'	'	In contractions and possessives: The Tin Man's chest was empty because he didn't have a heart.	Alt 0146	(see note below)	’
Curly quotes	“and”	”	In quotes and certain types of emphasis: “Oil can what?” asked the Scarecrow. The two-year-old liked to “help” his parents cook dinner.	Alt 0147 and Alt 0148	(see note below)	“ and ”
Em dash	—	--	To separate elements in a sentence: Dashes— not hyphens— should be used in this example.	Alt 0151	Ctrl + Alt + minus	—
En dash	-	-	In a range of numbers: 2-4 hours	Alt 0150	Ctrl + minus	–

Note: To set the options in MS Word to automatically create curly quotes and apostrophes, from the Tools menu, choose AutoCorrect Options and check the boxes to replace straight quotes with smart quotes. Uncheck these boxes when you deliberately want to type a straight apostrophe or quote to indicate feet and inches.

The ANSI codes in the table above are only four in the large collection of special codes adopted by the [American National Standards Institute](#) organization. To learn more, go to this helpful site on [ANSI character sets](#). ▲

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Chapter Activities: Leaders Needed

by [Susan Phelan](#)
 EBSTC Nominating Committee Manager

Mission The mission of the East Bay Chapter is to provide a forum for members to network, build professional skills, and stay current in the field of technical communication.

Calling All Leaders!



Candidates are needed for the following positions. What do you gain by participating in the leadership of EBSTC? Creating or maintaining visibility, shaping our chapter's direction and goals, and (last but not least) having fun.

Position	Responsibilities	Benefits
President-Elect	Assumes the duties of the President if the President is incapacitated, oversees SIGs, maintains the Bylaws, encourages special projects, and becomes President the following year.	Honing management and organizational skills.
Vice President — Arrangements	Oversees arrangements for meetings, accepts reservations, and coordinates with the restaurant to be sure chapter needs are met.	Developing negotiating skills; improving interpersonal and organizational skills.
Vice President — Programs	Manages the Program Committee, including planning chapter meetings, finding speakers, and working with speakers to be sure presentation needs are met.	Meeting interesting leaders in the profession; developing organizational and scheduling skills.
Secretary	Records minutes of all board meetings, handles official correspondence, sends thank you notes to speakers and VIP visitors, and acts as liaison to newsletter editor, Web weaver, and database manager.	Perfecting organizational and report-writing skills.
Treasurer	Keeps the books, prepares and monitors the budget, makes deposits and	If you like numbers and money, this is the job for you.

	payments, and prepares the (very simple) Annual Fiscal Report.	
Nominating Committee Member	Selects qualified candidates for the annual election, prepares and distributes the ballot, validates and counts the votes, and notifies board and chapter of election results.	Sharpening persuasion and interpersonal skills; really shaping the chapter's direction and goals; having way too much fun. ▲

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Chapter Activities: Autumn Literacy Outreach Update



by [T. R. Girill](#)
 STC Fellow, East Bay Chapter

T. R. Girill currently manages the East Bay STC's Technical Literacy Project. For more details about this initiative, check the [EBSTC](#) web site.

From October 16th through November 20th, 2003, EBSTC and the Computation Directorate of Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory continued their jointly sponsored literacy outreach project. On every Thursday, basic technical writing techniques were introduced to a new class of grade 10 students at Oakland's Fremont High School (FHS). Fremont's schoolwide [Academic Performance Index \(API\)](#) for October 2003 was 439, a discouraging 45 points lower than the previous year and well below the "similar schools median" API of 541.

Classroom Adventures

This fall saw our most ambitious start in the literacy program's five-year run. Fifty five minute technical writing classes were offered to over 110 students. The students were split across four classes. Six lessons were offered on a weekly basis. Once again, I used the customized, instruction-writing [guidelines and exercises](#) developed for underperforming students in the previous years. These guidelines included links to Eric Schlosser's *Fast Food Nation*.

Because of persistent poor API and low performance in state tests, FHS is gradually splitting into half a dozen "coordinated, small, autonomous schools" with separate principals, teachers, and even separate plots of campus real estate. The Media Academy High School, where I teach, now owns portable classrooms that clog the parking lot.

Each of these small schools has also inherited its share of grief in the form of severe staff shortage, class sizes up from about 22 last year to 30 this year, and chronic violence.

Halfway through the fall session, one of the two teachers with whom I was working asked me to cancel further lessons. It seems that although we were well past the semester midpoint, new students continually arrived in her class "directly after release from county jail" (in her words). These new arrivals regularly provoked classroom fights. Nothing happened while I was present, but this mature teaching veteran feared that she could not maintain order given the size and membership of the troublesome classes.

This was the first time that the literacy outreach project had to be curtailed because of violence—a disappointing concession to school needs even more urgent than learning to read and write. Plans to offer descriptive writing classes this spring are not being negotiated either.

The Broader Framework

On the positive side, fall 2003 also offered an unusual chance to discuss the framework of this project with a multidisciplinary group of interested

professionals. From October 12th to 15th, 2003, the Association for Computing Machinery's Special Interest Group on Design of Communication (SIGDOC) held a rare West Coast conference in San Francisco. As part of the SIGDOC technical sessions, I presented a 2-hour workshop on "Documentation as Problem Solving for K-12 Literacy Programs" (introduced on the [conference web site](#)).

The workshop explored the relevance of documentation theory and practice in improving pre-college, nonfiction writing on four levels:

- Providing an "authentic," professional model besides journalism.
- Providing a broader strategic approach than literature alone.
- Guiding classroom tactical exercises with the psychological, linguistic, and engineering principles of effective text design.
- Confronting persistent literacy pitfalls in new ways.

This session placed the daily work of literacy improvement into a broader intellectual context on which both industry practitioners and academic scholars could comment.

SIGDOC participants from Ireland and Canada added an international perspective to the conference. Attendees were pleasantly surprised by the good fit between grade-school literacy problems and technical-writing responses.

The literacy outreach project always welcomes new contributors; contact [T. R. Girill](#) to explore the possibilities. ▲

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Chapter Activities: Member Survey



by [Becky Rude](#)
 EBSTC President-Elect

In September 2003, the EBSTC council conducted a Web-based survey of its members. Essentially, we wanted hard data with which to make decisions affecting the chapter. Among other issues, we wanted to learn about preferences for program topics and dinner meeting costs, demographics, what keeps members away from meetings, and what motivates members to become involved in the chapter.

The survey was designed using the free services of [Zoomerang](#). We received positive feedback that people enjoyed taking the survey because it was easy and fast. An invitation to complete the survey was sent to all emailable members. Hard copies were mailed to members without an email address.

View the complete [survey results](#) (PDF).

Everyone's a Winner

We had a whopping 27% response rate. Thank you to everyone who completed the survey. You helped shape our chapter for the coming year. The lucky winner of our drawing of survey participants is **Colleen Goya**, whose prize is a \$25 gift certificate to [Amazon.com](#).

What We're Changing

Here are some of the immediate changes planned for the coming year:

- **New meeting facility**—Although members seem to like meeting at the Crow Canyon Country Club, it is expensive. We're looking for a different meeting facility that can offer less expensive meals.
- **Programs that you want**—We are trying to find speakers for the following top-ranked programs for the remainder of the council's term (February to June). (Note: There were several ties.)
 - Trends in technical communication
 - Project management
 - Information mapping (this program was held in November 2003)
 - Information architecture
 - Online training
 - Editing
 - Proposal or grant writing
 - Web design
 - Magazine writing
- **Shorter meetings**—Effective February 2004, meetings will be 30 minutes shorter. Networking occurs from 5:30 to 6:00 P.M., dinner starts at 6:15 P.M., and the meeting ends at 8:30 P.M.
- **Rides board**—We're starting a "rides board" to connect those members who need a ride with those who can drive them to meetings. Look on the [Chapter web site](#) for more information.

What We're Doing Right The survey showed that we're doing many things right. Here are some examples:

- 20% of the respondents said they attend 9 to 11 meetings a year. On the other hand, 24% never attend meetings because of time constraints or lack of interest; no matter what actions we take, we realize that we cannot change their attitudes.
- 40% said their favorite meeting format is *lectures*, which is generally our meeting format.
- 58% said they don't volunteer due to time constraints. We've already begun to break our volunteer jobs into smaller duties to lessen the time needed to get involved.
- Although members live and work all over the East Bay, 39% prefer that we hold chapter meetings in the *Danville/Dublin/San Ramon* area. This means we're holding meetings in the correct location!

Who Are the EBSTC Members? Here's a quick snapshot of the members who completed the survey:

- 51% are employed full time.
- 18% are unemployed; 44% of those members have been unemployed for 4–6 months.
- 44% hold a bachelor's degree; 38% hold a master's degree.
- 62% have worked in the technical communication field for 11 or more years.
- 72% are female.
- 52% are over the age of 50.

Again, thank you to everyone who completed the survey. ▲

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Survey Results (Included Responses)

EBSTC Member Preferences Survey

The results of your survey are displayed below. If your survey includes text responses, click the "View" button to read individual results.

As a reminder, survey results are maintained for a period of 10 days after launch. You may view reporting on a maximum of 100 responses per survey. To view reporting on more than 100 responses or to increase your storage time, become a zPro member. **ZPRO**

Or [click here](#) for more options.

Go to Individual Responses:

INCLUDED RESPONSES →

Launch Date: 9/29/2003

Close Date:

Total Invitations: 172

Total Respondents: 45

Included Respondents: 45

Excluded Respondents: 0

- Cross Tabulate **ZPRO**
Cross-reference two different questions
- Results via Email **ZPRO**
Receive results in spreadsheet format
- See Who's Responded
See who has and hasn't responded to your survey

1. How often do you attend STC chapter meetings?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Never		11	24%
1-2 meetings a year		13	29%
3-5 meetings a year		7	16%
6-8 meetings a year		5	11%
9-11 meetings a year		9	20%
Total		45	100%

2. If you do not attend chapter meetings, what is the primary reason?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Location		4	11%
Time of day		1	3%
Cost		1	3%
Meetings are too long		3	8%
Food is not to my liking		0	0%
Not interested in programs offered		7	19%
No reason, I'm just happy being an STC member		8	22%
Other, Please Specify	1 Work obligations make it difficult to attend. 2 No work for 19 months & no cash. I just came back. 3 scheduling conflicts or emergencies 4 Day/time conflict with another commitment. 5 Conflicts - church and my child's sports 6 conflicts with my usual commute 7 I skip mtgs. due to topic, weather, or my schedule 8 Spouse in college and taking care of child - busy 9 busy 10 Young child at home 11 I'm sick or still at work 12 I'm a new member within the last four months. 13 Now I am a new Mom so my schedule is crazy	13	35%
Total		37	100%

What factor would cause you to attend more meetings? ***NOTE: 3. You may select more than one answer.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Different location		9	26%
Different time		6	17%
Less cost		10	29%
Shorter meetings		6	17%
Better or different food		3	9%
Different programs		13	37%
Other, Please Specify	1 Find out about meetings. I don't receive any info. 2 Location closer to freeway or public transit 3 Different Day of the Week 4 I can't drive at night. Might go if I had ride. 5 Work! 6 More community involvement 7 Going with a friend 8 long commute always works against meetings 9 I like the time, place, food, cost, and most topic 10 Find the time in my schedule / vegan food helps 11 find time / vegan food would help 12 I moved to Oakland, so I need to switch chapters 13 I always attend when I can 14 I live closer to the Silicon Vally STC Chapter.	15	43%

4. If you could change one thing about monthly meetings, what would it be?

VIEW

29 Responses

- 1 Do away with the long break between the meal and the program. The program should start soon after the meal so we can get home earlier.
- 2 Closer to home! I live in Livermore, and it makes for a very long day to work, then attend the functions. Also, starting earlier (less networking) would help.
- 3 Skip the networking & dinner. Or maybe do dinner while the presentation is going on.
- 4 Day of the week - I would choose a non-work/non-school night.
- 5 More programing - perhaps a pre-meeting facilitated forum to encourage discussion on a current topic.
- 6 It has been a fairly well-run meeting in the past. I could provide a better answer to be four months from now after I've attended a couple new meetings.
- 7 I like them. I like the location. I like the topics. I like the socializing. Maybe more networking time, a drink after to carry on the theme a bit longer?
- 8 Have the main speaker speak earlier.
- 9 Having a dinner buffet means paying for more food than I eat, and I cannot take the rest home. So I'd like an option for a smaller dinner at a lower price.
- 10 the dinner is too pricey
- 11 They are fine. I like them.
- 12 Make them shorter and end on time. It's nearly half a day by the time I leave work early and get home.
- 13 I would put the "network" time at the end of the program. I feel like I have to attend the dinner in order to network with people.
- 14 2 things: NOT meeting on Thursday. Service orientation -- Consult on projects for community organizations
- 15 Occasional closer location to me.
- 16 I am satisfied with the monthly meetings as they are.
- 17 That the audience does not take over the presentation by interrupting the speaker.
- 18 Make them shorter
- 19 Put it back in the quieter, cosier space of the room at the end of the hall, which we used for the first half year or so of our meetings at the CCCC. Don't raise the cost.
- 20 It would be nice if there were more programs targeted toward indepenent contractors.
- 21 I would like the meetings to end by 8:30.
- 22 Topics of more interest to me
- 23 Start around 6:30 to make it easier to commute there on time.
- 24 I'm a new member - I'm not sure yet.
- 25 start later - 5:30pm is too early - I work in SF
- 26 I don't attend, so I can't address this.
- 27 More interesting programs
- 28 More variety with the meals. It's usually the same menu with either salmon or chicken.
- 29 I cannot comment on your format at this time.

5. What is your favorite meeting format?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Demonstration (hands on demo, for example, tool demo)		10	23%
Lecture		17	40%
Panel discussion (4-5 different people discussing an issue)		6	14%
Progression (participants move to different topic tables)		1	2%
Workshop (participants do some hands on work)		7	16%
Other, Please Specify	 -I like demos, lectures, and panel discussions -I like a mix of all these options.	2	5%
Total		43	100%

6. How long should chapter meetings be? ***NOTE: Current meeting schedule is: 5:30 (networking), 6:30 (dinner), 7:00-9:00 (business and presenter) = 3.5 hours.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
1 hour		0	0%
1.5 hours		0	0%
2 hours		12	28%
2.5 hours		14	33%
3 hours		11	26%
3.5 hours		6	14%
Total		43	100%

7. What time do you prefer that we start chapter meetings?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Noon (lunch)		4	9%
5:30 p.m.		8	19%
6:00 p.m.		15	35%
6:30 p.m.		8	19%
7:00 p.m.		8	19%
Other, Please Specify		0	0%
Total		43	100%

8. How much are you willing to spend for dinner meetings?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
\$1-9		2	5%
\$10-15		11	26%
\$16-20		18	42%
\$21-25		11	26%
\$26-30		1	2%
Total		43	100%

What are the top three (3) program topics would you like to see this year? ***NOTE: Although the survey will let you select more than 9. three answers, please select only three.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Project management		13	30%
Information Mapping		13	30%
Information architecture		13	30%
Online training		8	18%
Translation issues		0	0%
Portfolio and resume review		5	11%
Managing people		3	7%
Editing		9	20%
Marketing or corporate communications		3	7%
Magazine writing		6	14%
Proposal or grant writing		6	14%
Creative writing		2	5%
Animation, multimedia, or video production		3	7%
Graphic design		6	14%
Web design		7	16%
XML		6	14%
Single sourcing		6	14%
Balancing work and life		0	0%
Job hunting techniques		5	11%
Trends in technical communication		14	32%
Learning a specific technology or tool such as FrameMaker (please list in the 'Other' box below)		2	5%
Other, Please Specify	 1 Project sizing (various techniques for estimating) 2 Quality metrics 3 Acrobat 4 Futurist Predictions 5 Meet the "stars" in our field 6 I'm interested in more than these 3	8	18%

Which length of time would be best for you if EBSTC holds a 10. weekend training session on a topic voted on by the chapter?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Half-day		29	67%
Full day		12	28%
Not interested		2	5%
VIEW Other, Please Specify		0	0%
Total		43	100%

11. If EBSTC holds a day or half-day training, what three (3) topics would interest you the most? ***NOTE: Although the survey will let you select more than three answers, please select only three.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
FrameMaker		10	23%
RoboHelp		8	19%
RoboDemo		4	9%
Dreamweaver		10	23%
Human Factors		9	21%
Usability		12	28%
Metrics		4	9%
Project management		12	28%
Web design		9	21%
Online help design		8	19%
Information Mapping		14	33%
Document/information design		11	26%
Proposal or grant writing		7	16%
Other, Please Specify	 1 Project sizing (various techniques for estimating) 2 Acrobat 3 I would like advanced topics, such as table design 4 Technical and scientific editing 5 Graphics tool (such as Photoshop or Fireworks) 6 Single Sourcing	6	14%

12. If you do NOT currently hold a volunteer position with the East Bay chapter, what is the PRIMARY reason?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
I haven't heard about openings		2	6%
Not enough time		19	58%
No interest in giving free time		2	6%
No one asked me		0	0%
Positions don't fit my interests		4	12%
I don't see the benefit to me		0	0%
Other, Please Specify	 1 So much time looking for work & other commitments. 2 I have already been a volunteer for several years. 3 I DO! 4 Commitments - church & child's sports 5 Would like email notice of volunteer opening. 6 too busy	6	18%
Total		33	100%

13. If you do NOT currently hold a volunteer position with the East Bay chapter, what PRIMARY factor would cause you to volunteer?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Smaller time commitment		9	29%
Mentoring from an experienced person		1	3%
Volunteer recognition		0	0%
Learning specific skills (resume material)		6	19%
I'm not interested in volunteering		13	42%
Other, Please Specify	 1 Working less hours at my job 2 no time currently available to volunteer	2	6%
Total		31	100%

14. How would you like to be recognized as a volunteer? ***NOTE: You may select more than one answer.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Recognition at chapter meetings		16	42%
Gift certificate		12	32%
Special gift chosen for me		3	8%
Certificate of recognition from chapter		15	39%
Personal thank you from the council		4	11%
Volunteer of the Year/Month award		7	18%
Other, Please Specify	<p></p> <p>1 Opportunity to tell what I get from volunteering 2 Maybe a volunteer of the year could get free dues. 3 any/all of the above are great! 4 Anything I can list on the resume 5 no need; but others might like thank you 6 Sponsorship for STC Annual Conf./Region 8/ events</p>	8	21%






15. In what general area do you live?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Concord/Pittsburg		7	16%
Danville/Dublin/San Ramon		4	9%
San Francisco		1	2%
San Jose		0	0%
Silicon Valley		1	2%
Livermore		5	11%
Oakland		5	11%
Pleasanton		4	9%
Stockton/Modesto		0	0%
Vallejo/Fairfield		0	0%
Walnut Creek		7	16%
Other, Please Specify	<p></p> <p>1 Discovery Bay 2 Crockett 3 Hayward/Castro Valley 4 Fremont 5 Pleasant Hill 6 Orinda 7 Hayward 8 Hayward 9 Discovery Bay/Brentwood 10 Fremont/Milpitas 11 Hayward</p>	11	24%
Total		45	100%




16. In what general area do you work?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Concord/Pittsburg		4	9%
Danville/Dublin/San Ramon		6	13%
San Francisco		4	9%
San Jose		1	2%
Silicon Valley		3	7%
Livermore		6	13%




Oakland		2	4%
Pleasanton		4	9%
Stockton/Modesto		0	0%
Vallejo/Fairfield		0	0%
Walnut Creek		3	7%
Unemployed		5	11%
Other, Please Specify	1 From home full-time for a Silicon Valley company 2 Crockett 3 Hayward/Castro Valley 4 Semi-retired; freelance 5 Retired 6 My contracts have ranged from SF, SJ, and Mt View 7 Fremont	7	16%
Total		45	100%



17. Where do you prefer that we hold chapter meetings?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Concord/Pittsburg		2	5%
Danville/Dublin/San Ramon		17	39%
San Francisco		0	0%
San Jose		1	2%
Silicon Valley		0	0%
Livermore		3	7%
Oakland		2	5%
Pleasanton		4	9%
Stockton/Modesto		0	0%
Vallejo/Fairfield		0	0%
Walnut Creek		9	20%
Other, Please Specify	1 I think the place you are having them is perfect. 2 Walnut Creek, Concord, Pleasant Hill 3 Don't care 4 East Bay - along 580, 680 or 24 5 you might want to consider rotating locations 6 Hayward/Castro Valley /TD>	6	14%
Total		44	100%




18. What is your employment status?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Full-time		23	51%
Part-time		4	9%
Contract		10	22%
Unemployed		8	18%
Total		45	100%

19. If you are unemployed, how long have you been unemployed?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
0–3 months		1	11%
4–6 months		4	44%
7–11 months		1	11%
1–2 years		2	22%
More than 2 years		1	11%
Total		9	100%

20. What is your educational level?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
High school		2	4%
Bachelor's degree		20	44%
Master's degree		17	38%
PhD		2	4%
Some post-graduate work		4	9%
Total		45	100%

21. How long have you worked in the field of technical communication?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
0–2 years		1	2%
2–5 years		6	13%
6–10 years		10	22%
11 or more years		28	62%
Total		45	100%

22. What is your gender?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Female		31	72%
Male		12	28%
Total		43	100%

23. What is your age group?		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
20–29 years		0	0%
30–39 years		9	21%
40–49 years		11	26%
50 years and over		22	52%
Total		42	100%

24. Which of the following best describes your current or most recent job function? ***NOTE: You may select more than one answer.		Number of Responses	Response Ratio
Writer		19	42%
Editor		7	16%
Illustrator/graphic designer		0	0%
Planner		0	0%
Human factors specialist		0	0%
Manager		5	11%
Instructor		0	0%
Researcher		1	2%
Web designer/writer		2	4%
Business analyst		1	2%
Student		0	0%
Other, Please Specify	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Proposal Manager 2 Instructional Design 3 won't allow choice of more than one; I have many 4 Manager - online help/user manuals 5 Writer, graphics, web, business analysis 6 Ooops, the survey only let me select one 7 Web writer/producer 8 Requirements Manager 9 Instructional Design Specialist 10 Scientist (Technical Support/Marketing) 	10	22%
Total		45	100%

25. Please add any other concerns or comments you would like the council to know about. This is the last question!

21 Responses

- 1 I would attend if the meetings started and ended earlier. I have found the topics listed each month ARE interesting, it's just hard to be a parent, work full-time, and be involved in STC.
- 2 I do look at the newsletter but I have never attended a meeting. I am visually impaired and don't drive at night. I also have two children and other volunteer activities that are higher priority for me than STC. So I might not attend mtgs no matter what you do. (I am an independent contractor in marketing communications.)
- 3 I'd like us to become a tighter, more communal chapter. Announce job seekers, introduce visitors, etc.
- 4 If attendance is your concern, try a telephone tree.
- 5 Thanks for asking!
- 6 I'm concerned that we aren't getting volunteers to fill positions this year. When we do get them, volunteers seem to burn out and leave the chapter.
- 7 No concerns at this time.
- 8 I would really rather participate in projects that have a "service" element than in professional development.
- 9 STC is made up of dedicated professionals. I'm proud to be a member. I'm glad you're looking at other options than computer documentation, since tech writing encompasses more than the dot.coms.
- 10 More discussion re: software writers as full participants in the development cycle as members of the development team.
- 11 I think you guys are doing a very good job.
- 12 I think the Council is doing a great job but hope we find a Managing Editor for our newsletter.
- 13 On Question 24 you couldn't select more than one answer. I am also an editor.
- 14 My current job is as a writer, editor, project manager, and researcher
- 15 Skip the gender and age data.
- 16 Attract younger members to the mtgs.; right now membership seems to be predominantly older and change-resistant.
- 17 I'd like some focus on the market issues relating to Tech Comm in general in the Bay Area regarding employment, hiring, etc. Also, we should discuss the alarming rate of offshoring in the industry as we see the great exodus of jobs to India and China. How do we stay competitive and what can we expect in terms of salaries with this type of competition?
- 18 I'd like to hear some discussion about trends in the tech field related to the movement of jobs offshore and the possible effects on salary and our changing jobs. How are different companies dealing with this? What are different people's experiences? How do writers interact with engineers in other countries to write doc? What can we expect in our field and changing jobs?
- 19 Some of the presenters are forced to drag out their presentation when everyone is exhausted because of a few people who can't seem to listen and save their comments or questions until the end.
- 20 I could not select more than one answer for question 24.
- 21 good survey