

Devil Mountain Views

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Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC
May/June 2005

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SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION



Just announced!

Award of Excellence

2004–2005

STC International Newsletter

Competition

Leadership for the Emerging Future



by [Patrick Lufkin](#)
 STC Senior Member

Patrick Lufkin is a Senior STC member of both the East Bay and San Francisco chapters. He is currently co-chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship.

On March 12, about thirty STC members met to discuss the future of STC and to develop the leadership skills needed to meet today's challenges and deliver value to the STC membership. The all-day convocation was held on the Mills College campus in Oakland, and included members from five of the six Northern California STC geographical communities (Berkeley, East Bay, NorthBay, Sacramento, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley).

Members in attendance from the East Bay Chapter were: **Becky Rude** (President), **Joe Humbert** (Treasurer), **Sherry Smith** (Database Manager), **Hillary Russak** (V.P. Programs), **Gwaltney Mountford** (Hospitality, College Liaison Committee), and **Laura Phillips** (DMV Associate Editor). Also attending from the East Bay Chapter were **Patrick Lufkin**, **Guy Haas**, and **Richard Mateosian**.



Becky Rude, Joe Humbert, Sherry Smith, Patrick Lufkin, Gwaltney Mountford, Hillary Russak, Richard Mateosian, and Guy Haas at Leadership Day

Organized under the title "Leadership for the Emerging Future," the one-day conference was the third in a series of NorCal leadership days that have been held over the past several years. The first leadership day was held in December 2002, the second in April 2003.

The first two meetings found the profession coping with a deep recession, and explored such topics as "reducing volunteer burnout" and "alternative jobs for technical communicators." With the economy showing signs of recovery, and the Society in the midst of a transformation, the current meeting focused primarily on building for the future.

One Day, Many Sessions

STC NorCal Director, **Viki Maki**, welcomed everyone and got the day off to a rousing start by leading the group in singing "Happy Birthday" to Region 8 Director **Beau Cain**, who acted as Master of Ceremonies. **Marie Highby** set the tone for the day with a keynote talk on "New Definitions of Effective Leadership."

The day consisted of a series of breakout sessions. Session subjects varied from the theoretical—the qualities of great leaders—to such practical matters as developing impromptu speaking skills. Other sessions dealt with such topics as the Touchstone Competition, the Gordon Scholarship, development of an inter-chapter speaker database, and the ongoing Society Transformation.

A New Community in the Works

Over the course of the three leadership days, those who have participated have come to develop a genuine sense of community. During the present meeting, this sense of community manifested itself in a decision to explore the possibility that NorCal might become a chartered STC community that could serve STC in ways



Gwaltney leads a session

that are not really possible at the chapter level. In addition to its role as a leadership incubator, with some development, NorCal might also help with Touchstone, the Gordon Scholarship, conferences, and other regional activities.

Several factors entered into the decision:

- A great deal of leadership expertise lies in people who have held offices in the past, but who are not currently holding an STC chapter position. Among other things, NorCal could provide a venue for these people to continue to participate and share their expertise with those who are just starting their careers as STC leaders.
- The collective STC membership in Northern California has long recognized itself as a unique geographical community with a commonality of interests that extend beyond chapter boundaries, but are often narrower than the boundaries of Region 8. Over the years, the combined Northern California STC membership has repeatedly formed ad hoc committees to manage various area-wide activities, including Touchstone and NorCal itself. While these ad hoc entities have often demonstrated a great deal of creative energy, they have also been plagued with the problems that come with having to continually “reinvent the wheel.” NorCal may be able to help with such efforts by being a repository of knowledge and resources.

Whether STC NorCal can, or should, pursue certification as a recognized community, and if so, what form that community should take, are questions that will require long and thoughtful discussion. A meeting has been tentatively scheduled for June 12 to explore the issues. ▲

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College Liaison Committee: The New Kid on the Block



by [Gwaltney Mountford](#)
 STC Associate Fellow

In case you haven't noticed, there are few colleges in our area that have technical communication programs. This would lead us to believe that students in these colleges are unaware of the potential careers in technical communication. **Linda Shaltz**, President-Elect of the East Bay Chapter, would like to change that. To that end, she asked me to head the College Liaison Committee, chartered with establishing an EBSTC presence on local campuses.

Vision and Goals

Committee members **May McKoon**, **Angelina Nachimuthu**, **Roz Rogoff**, **Joy Montgomery**, **Janet Gray**, and I are hard at work to realize that vision.

At our first meeting, we established these goals:

- Gain visibility in area colleges to encourage students to enter the technical communication profession and join STC.
- Bring technical communication experiences to the college curriculum.
- Broaden awareness among students and faculty of the benefits of the technical communication profession and STC.

The Master Plan

Our plan is to contact heads of departments in writing, art, and engineering and set up presentations to their students about careers in technical communication and about how STC can help them develop as technical communicators.

We have so far targeted four colleges to contact for a pilot. And we have created scripts to use when contacting the colleges and meeting with the department heads. We are currently identifying handout material for the students and creating an outline of the presentation. When the handout material is better defined, we will contact the colleges and set up our meetings.

We envision the presentations to be conducted by a panel of writers with differing experiences. We are setting up the criteria for speakers, and soon will be asking for volunteers.

Making a Difference

Everyone on the committee is very excited about this project. We see this as an opportunity to make a difference in our community, in our profession, and in STC. ▲

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Ask Elaine: Sentence's Little Helpers



by [Elaine Parrish](#)
DMV Copyeditor/EBSTC Senior Member

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

Some writers dislike having to deal with punctuation. Does that sentence require a colon or a semicolon? Should that phrase be set off with dashes or parentheses? When should single quotes be used instead of double? If one exclamation point is good, will several be even better?

Punctuation is too large a topic to be covered in this article. If you'd like to read a witty and amusing book on the subject, I recommend Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. Meanwhile, I'll present here just a few punctuation guidelines (using standard American English conventions).

Purpose Do not hate punctuation marks. They only want to help guide the reader! The poor little things have no meaning on their own—they are merely accepted conventions whose purpose is to aid clarity by indicating relationships between elements in a piece of writing. Think of punctuation marks as friendly little signposts helping the reader stay on track. Without these signposts, the reader is likely to get lost or misunderstand the meaning.

Degrees of Separation When you want to provide some kind of separation between two elements in the same sentence, use an em dash, parentheses, or a semicolon. Examples:

- *Writing well is an important skill—and an art.* The em dash (made by holding down the Alt key and typing 0151 on the keypad) is the most emphatic way to separate two related ideas in the same sentence.
- *Writing well is an important skill (and an art).* The parentheses indicate that the second idea (art) is less important than the first (skill).
- *Writing well is an important skill; it is also an art.* The semicolon indicates a strong relationship between two clauses by joining them together into one sentence. Notice that each clause can stand alone. When you use a semicolon, each element must be a complete sentence.

Colons A colon signals your reader that the material after it is an explanation or illustration of what came before it. Example:

- *There are three kinds of people: those who understand math, and those who don't.*

Quote Marks Use double quote marks around a direct quotation. Example:

- *"Time's fun when you're having flies," said Kermit.*

Use double quote marks when you want show sarcasm:

- Doing my taxes is my idea of “fun.”

Use single quote marks around a quote within a quote. Example:

- Poe wrote, “Quoth the raven, ‘Nevermore.’”

Periods, Question Marks, and Exclamation Points

Periods do double duty when they are used to end an abbreviation that also ends the sentence. The period is a loner; it doesn't like to share the end of a sentence with its own kind. So don't add a period directly after a period. Example:

- I was born and raised in the U.S. The final period serves both to end the abbreviation U.S. and to end the sentence.

On the other hand, periods used to end an abbreviation happily share the end of the sentence with a question mark or exclamation point. Example:

- Were you born and raised in the U.S.?

Question marks and exclamation points should be considered as rare jewels. Use them sparingly so they don't lose their impact. And, unless you want your serious prose to read like ad copy, don't use more than one at the end of a sentence, no matter how excited that sentence may be!!!!!! (See what I mean?????) ▲

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Literacy Project Update: How Technical Writing Supports High School Science



by [T. R. Girill](#)
STC Fellow

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

That technical writing and science classes belong together in high school might seem obvious to DMV readers...except that it is not true! In turf-conscious high school curricula, writing (even technical writing) "belongs" to the *English* department, while most *science* teachers feel unprepared for literacy development (or are too busy to try it). This spring the EBSTC literacy outreach project challenged this old pattern by bringing technical communication and high school science students together in three ways.

Technical Talk Tips

In January, Granada High School (Livermore) Science Department head Frankie Tate invited me to help prepare her 21 junior and senior biology students for their project-review talks to their classmates. On January 6 I visited her class to explain and illustrate specific techniques (well known to most of us but not to her students) for designing and delivering an effective technical talk. Psychological background on the four problems that a technical talk poses for listeners (and on the difference between reading and hearing complex material), examples of good and bad slides, and a look at Edward Tufte's influential ideas on data density all formed part of this session.

Then, on January 21, I returned to join the audience and hear these biology students try out what they had learned in 15-minute formal presentations on their semester projects. The result was interesting science shared, a great feedback opportunity for all participants, and the teacher's conviction that this should be tried on a broader scale in future *science* classes.

Science Field Trip

Visiting a scientific laboratory will not teach students to write better, but it can *motivate* them to write better. Hence, on February 1, 31 grade-9 science students and two science teachers (Mr. Sunny Chan and Ms. Morgan Theis) from Oakland's Media Academy High School spent the day on a field trip to Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory. The Media Academy, our long-time literacy partner, falls in the bottom 10% of all California high schools, and most of these students had never before traveled as far as Livermore.

After an hour-long bus trip from their urban Oakland campus, the students

- toured the introductory exhibits at the LLNL "Discovery Center,"
- participated in active "Fun with Science" demonstrations (basic physics and chemistry),
- conversed with an ethnically diverse cross-section of staff members over box lunches hosted by the Computation



Science teacher **Morgan Theis** (end of table) encourages her Media Academy students as they learn how to extract their own DNA while visiting the Edward Teller Education Center in February.

- Directorate, and then extracted their own DNA in the hands-on biology classrooms of the Edward Teller Education Center.

One goal of this adventure was to stimulate student appreciation for science. A second important goal was to help the students connect their school work over the next few years with life beyond school (possible technical careers, the relevance of *literacy* to job success, and the need to persevere with hard tasks in and out of school). The teachers too departed with some new instructional techniques and classroom samples. The social highlight of the day happened as we waited for the video projector to warm up. It displayed a count-down clock, so the entire room counted down aloud with it...in Spanish.

Second-Language Science

If English is your native language, you may not realize how hard learning science is (in this country) without it, even at the high school level. Many California students, however, have trouble with science classes because they lack the nonfiction English competence that science projects presuppose. Some have picked up adequate "social English" from their friends but still lack the "academic English" needed to write about science. Others come from families unable to read or write even in the language spoken at home, so they struggle to become their first literate family member while working in English at school.

Because it is anchored in concrete science tasks and results, technical writing can give such English-language learners just the focused practice that they need to meet the literacy demands of their science classes. This works best when the usual exercises have extra scaffolding that overtly coaches students on such notorious English features as articles, irregular verbs, and common science idioms (blow up, break up, look up, etc.). *English for Science and Technology: A Handbook for Nonnative Speakers* by Thomas Hukin and Leslie Olsen is one such technical-writing text.

Throughout this spring, I have tried this approach (and this text) in continuing email exchanges with one Mandarin-speaking high school junior who recently immigrated from Shanghai to Livermore. The experience gained here suggests how we can even more effectively meet the specific writing needs of one of California's big challenge audiences, namely, Spanish-speaking science students in Oakland (and the Central Valley).

You Can Contribute

If you are interested in literacy outreach, please contact [T. R. Girill](#) to explore ways that you can contribute to this ongoing project. ▲

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Editor's Message



by [Becky Rude](#)
DMV Managing Editor

The well-known proverb, "All good things must come to an end," is pertinent to my column this month as this is my last issue with *Devil Mountain Views*. I've been involved with this newsletter for the past four years, serving as co-managing editor my first year, as web designer my second year, and as managing editor the past two years with a bit of web designer thrown in this past year.

The newsletter staff has been tremendous working together to bring high quality articles and news to our readers. We worked hard to take the newsletter from paper to online format four years ago. The result was a Best of Show award in 2003 during our second year of the online format. Many other chapters have migrated to an online format over the past two years and it's proving to be a viable, exciting, and adaptable format for chapters. I'm proud to say that EBSTC was at the forefront of that change.

I'm also proud that we've won the following awards over the past four years:

- 2004–2005: **Excellence**. Just announced!
- 2003–2004: **Excellence**
- 2002–2003: **Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication**
- 2001–2002: **Merit**

Thanks for the Memories

I'd like to thank the following people who strived to make DMV a high quality publication over the past four years.

Elaine Parrish, Copyeditor, layout, *Ask Elaine* column – Elaine has been with the newsletter since 1998 and ensures that our editing is high quality. For the past two years she also has written the *Ask Elaine* column, which contains nuggets of wisdom on editing.

Hasmig Vasgerdsian, Associate Editor – Hasmig has been on our staff for several years. Although she is semi-retired, Hasmig makes time for the newsletter despite a very busy schedule with other projects and caring for grandchildren.

Angelina Nachimuthu, Associate Editor, Web Designer – Angelina was associate editor for several years and switched to doing the web layout last year. Although she has a busy work schedule and is the mother of two small children, Angelina has carved out time for DMV.

Laura Phillips, Associate Editor – Laura joined the DMV staff this year and has fit editing into her schedule while adjusting to the demands of a new job.

Sue Phelan, Chapter Photographer – Sue has been the chapter photographer for the past two years and has added interest to DMV with her photos.

Dara Golden, Contributing Editor – Dara has written wonderful feature

articles for DMV for the past two years. She manages to find time to write even though she's the mother of a young child and busy with other projects.

Ashwini Tharval, Co-Managing Editor 2001–2002, Managing Editor 2002–2003 – Ashwini and I worked together to bring DMV online four years ago. She then carried on as the talented editor who led DMV to the Best of Show award two years ago.

Don Huntington, Layout 2001–2002 – Don was the energetic person who proposed moving DMV to an online format and worked hard to make it happen. He created the first incarnation of our online format.

Gwaltney Mountford, Guest Editor – Last year Gwaltney stepped in to help DMV as guest editor for two issues. Gwaltney did a fabulous job producing two issues that helped us to win an Award of Excellence.

And finally, thanks to all the writers who contributed over the past four years. I've tried to list everyone, but forgive me if I unintentionally omitted anyone.

Bill Ardis	Nan Breedlove	Melody Brumis
Beau Cain	Mel Cox	Sue Curtzwiler
Dan Day	Lisa Espenmiller	Ken Evans
John Gallagher	T. R. Girill	Dipali Godbole
Bonni Graham	Susan Harlan	Judy Herr
Faraz Hoodbhoy	Marsha Howard	Don Huntington
Karin Johnson	Patrick Lufkin	Richard Mateosian
Liz Miller	Joy Montgomery	Roz Rogoff
Jon Rude	Hillary Russak	June Schaefer
Linda Shaltz	Sherry Smith	Adrienne Tange
Greg Thompson	Rich Valentine	Scott Wallace
Lenore Weiss	Diana Wilcoxson	Terri Winters

A New Era Another well-known proverb, "All good things come to he who waits," could be relevant for the next DMV editor.

It's time for a new editor to step in and bring fresh ideas to keep the newsletter alive and exciting. If you've been reading DMV for the past two years, you know that we've been searching for an editor for a while. Now is the time to come forward if you've been considering this opportunity. I promise you that it's a great experience and you'll be happy you decided to take the leap.

DMV will also be looking for a new *associate editor* and *web designer*. Please contact [Linda Shaltz](#) or [me](#) for more information.

Thanks for this wonderful opportunity to learn new skills, share ideas, and build something with value for our readers.

Becky ▲

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President's Message



by [Becky Rude](#)
EBSTC President

It's nearing the end of another successful year for EBSTC, which means my tenure as president is also coming to an end. It's been an eventful and exciting year for both EBSTC and for me. Even though we're always recruiting more volunteers to help with chapter activities, we have still accomplished an amazing number of things this past year.

We have also managed to uphold our reputation as "the friendly chapter" and to have fun at meetings. We had many new visitors at chapter meetings this year and I continually heard that they enjoyed themselves and felt very comfortable in the group. Thank you to all members who opened themselves to our visitors and made them feel like part of our group.

I'm happy to say that we are applying for a Chapter of Excellence Award this year and are very hopeful that we will win the award. I'd like to share some of the activities that members completed to enable us to apply for this award.

New Initiatives

Following is a summary of our initiatives this year:

- **New Reservation System**
We implemented PayPal to serve as our reservation and payment system for chapter meetings. Thanks to **Hillary Russak, Janet Bran, and Joe Humbert**.
- **College Liaison Committee**
The mission of the committee is to "speak to student and faculty audiences in selected local colleges for the purpose of promoting the technical communication profession and STC, influencing and contributing to the content of technical communication curriculum, and developing an ongoing relationship that will benefit the schools and EBSTC." Thanks to **Gwaltney Mountford, Linda Shaltz, Angelina Nachimuthu, Joy Montgomery, Janet Gray, Roz Rogoff, and May McKoon**.
- **Administration Web Page**
Our chapter web master created a new [Administration web page](#) with links to all our administrative documents (strategic plan, budget, meeting minutes, process documents, bylaws, and other documents). Thanks to **Joe Humbert**.
- **Member Survey**
This is the second year we have conducted a member survey to find out about our members' needs. The participation rate was the same as last year, about 28%. Thanks to the **EBSTC council**.

The List Goes On

Following is a partial list of other activities the chapter completed to apply for the award:

- Held a membership drive with meeting specials and other activities.
- **Linda Shaltz** and council members set up new member orientation.
- **Melody Brumis** arranged excellent monthly programs.
- **Liz Miller** and **Sherry Smith** created a member directory.

- Conducted Leadership Day with other NorCal chapters. Thanks to **Gwaltney Mountford** and **Hillary Russak** for planning the day. Thanks to **Joe Humbert**, **Sherry Smith**, **Laura Phillips**, **Gwaltney Mountford**, **Patrick Lufkin**, and **Richard Mateosian** for attending the event.
- Held a panel discussion on "Trends in Technical Communication" with the NorCal chapter presidents.
- The chapter newsletter, *Devil Mountain Views*, won the Award of Excellence in 2004 and 2005.
- **Angelina Nachimuthu** served as a judge in the international STC newsletter competition.
- **Mel Cox** and **Joy Montgomery** served on the Gordon Scholarship committee.
- **Judy Herr** and **Gwaltney Mountford** gave presentations at the annual STC conference.
- **T. R. Girill** heads the Technical Literacy Project, which provides both classroom teaching and materials for teachers of middle and high school students.
- **Gwaltney Mountford** participated in San Francisco State University's annual career workshop for the Technical & Professional Writing Program.
- **Judy Herr** is manager of the STC's Management SIG; **Gwaltney Mountford** is on the STC's Transformation Committee.

Many Thanks

I'd also like to thank our chapter council and program leaders for their dedication this year. They are a great group of people to work with.

Transformation Complete?

In the September issue of the newsletter, in my [first column](#) as president, I shared how STC was helping me to undergo a personal transformation similar to the transformation the Society and EBSTC were undergoing. At the end of my presidency, can I say that the transformation is complete?

I can definitely say that the Society and EBSTC transformations are not complete and are indeed just beginning. **Andrea Ames** and the board have put committees into place and started discussions with members about what we value and need from STC. There is still a lot of work to do to transform STC into the organization that will meet our needs as we change to meet the demands of a changing economy. Similarly, there will be changes in the future for EBSTC as we adapt to the new STC structure, which most likely will mean a smaller chapter membership and a smaller budget. But, I know that the incoming President, **Linda Shaltz**, is up for the challenge and will be an effective leader.

Is my personal transformation complete? As a technical communicator, I know that I must never stop transforming in a field where information and technology are constantly changing. My tenures as president-elect and president have given me new skills that I am using in my job every day: confidence in my abilities, confidence to speak up about problems and issues, an understanding of current events in technical communication, project management skills, a network of professionals to contact for assistance, and people management skills.

This is just a partial list of the things I've learned while being president. I urge you to consider how getting involved with EBSTC could help you with your own personal transformation.

Thank you for the last two years and the chance to serve the chapter and its members. It's been a great ride!


Becky ▲

Chapter Meeting Information

Upcoming Meetings

Attending meetings is a great way to learn new things and connect with technical writers around the East Bay.

East Bay programs are usually held at Crow Canyon Country Club in San Ramon. For details on meeting location and reservations, see the [meetings page](#) on the chapter web site.

Date	Speaker	Topic
May 5	Linda Urban 	<p><i>What's New in Online Help</i></p> <p>If you're asked to develop "online help" today, what will you create, and how will you create it? The possibilities are broader than they used to be. The help deliverable itself can vary, from a standard Windows help file (.chm or .hlp), to an html-based solution that works on multiple platforms, to help text that's embedded right in the user interface, to interactive demos and simulations.</p> <p>This presentation provides an overview of what it's like being a help author today, and what skills and knowledge you should develop to stay current in the profession.</p> <p>About Our Presenter</p> <p>Linda has been an independent technical communicator for over 20 years, and has been developing help systems since 1989. She also teaches in the Technical Communication program at UC Berkeley Extension, where her classes include "Developing Online Help," "Principles of Information Architecture," "Usability Testing for Technical Communicators," and "Technical Communication I." She has presented at the WritersUA (WinWriters) conference several times.</p> <p>Linda also works on product usability and user interface design through her company, Linda Urban Creations.</p>
June 2	Becky Rude, Linda Shaltz	<p><i>Changing of the Guard</i></p> <p>Join us for a party to honor our volunteers and swear in our new officers. There will be lots of fun, games, and prizes.</p> <p>Linda will also lead a discussion about members' wishes for next year and how the chapter will function. ▲</p>

Meeting Report: March 2005



by [Patrick Lufkin](#)
STC Senior Member

Patrick Lufkin is a Senior STC member of both the East Bay and San Francisco chapters. He is currently co-chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship.

“How to Use a Portfolio to Ace a Job Interview”



Jack Molisani

Many technical communicators treat portfolios simply as collections of their work. If they have produced it, they include it. Such an approach fattens a portfolio, and may alleviate anxieties about not having something on hand when needed, but it does little to make you stand out from the crowd. In early March, **Jack Molisani** visited the East Bay Chapter to discuss another approach.

Molisani is the founder and president of ProSpring, Inc., a technical placement agency, and LavaCon, Inc., an international conference for technical project management. He is a very active member of STC, and was chair of the 2000 STC Pan-Pacific Conference in Hawaii.

Rather than using the portfolio as a sample collection to be scanned by the client or dipped into at opportune moments, Molisani suggests using the portfolio to control the interview.

Because people respond to stories, and tend to believe what they are shown even more than what they are told, he carefully arranges his portfolio to tell the story that sells the idea that he is right for the job.

Portfolio Arrangement

Molisani arranges his portfolio to:

- Establish that he is an expert
- Show that he has really done what he claims to have done
- Make the interviewers see that he has already solved the kind of problems they are having and can do the same for them

Molisani carefully selects material for his portfolio to support each of these points. Specifically he suggests using the following arrangement:

- Project plan
- The results of the plan
- Samples tailored to the client
- Awards and recognitions (PR stuff)
- Statistics
- A radical before-and-after sample

Project Plan

A good plan gives you a chance to show that you have “been there,” and that you understand the development or documentation process.

If you have done a plan for a project you have worked on, use it. If you haven't, Molisani suggests that, for portfolio purposes, you can do a plan in reverse: think of a project you have worked on and record how it should have been planned. You can even mention what you have done in the interview—while pointing out how much better the project would

have gone if it had been so planned from the beginning. The important thing is that, as a portfolio piece, the project plan gives you a chance to discuss what you know about managing a project, which goes a long way toward establishing your expertise.

Results of the Plan

Next, Molisani suggests, show the results of the plan. This can be the manual you produced, but it can also be advertisements for the product, data sheets, product reviews, or anything else that shows that the project was a success.

As an example, Molisani showed a review that was published in *PC Magazine* that stated that a product he had worked on was easy to install because of the excellent documentation. A review like that, Molisani suggested, may go a lot further than showing the documentation itself.

Sample Collection Suggestions

Speaking of samples, Molisani made a number of points:

- Tailor the samples to the client.
- Be proactive. Get permission to show work while you are still working on a project, and get it in writing. If there are confidentiality issues, see if there are parts of the work that you can show.
- You don't have to wait to have a job to create samples. He suggests creating as many samples as you can with as many authoring tools as possible.
- Find something that is really bad and rewrite it; then use it as a before-and-after sample.

Achievements

If you have awards and recognitions, include them. They serve to bolster your standing as an expert. If you have statistics, include them; they are useful in demonstrating that hiring you would give the client a good return on their investment. An example would be a testimonial saying that calls to the support center had decreased as a result of the *Getting Started* guide you produced.

Before-and-After Sample

Finally, Molisani suggests ending with a radical before-and-after sample.

Molisani showed a chart that had been scribbled on a napkin, followed by a neat, well organized chart that had been made using a graphics program. A radical sample drives home the idea that you can bring order out of the usual workplace chaos, and reinforces the idea that you are an expert who can produce.

What more could the client want? ▲

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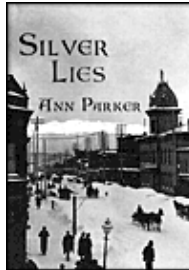
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Meeting Report: April 2005



by [Patrick Lufkin](#)
STC Senior Member

Patrick Lufkin is a Senior STC member of both the East Bay and San Francisco chapters. He is currently co-chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Scholarship.



Silver Lies

Author: Ann Parker
Poisoned Pen Press
650 pages
ISBN: 1-59058-084-2
\$22.95 Suggested List Price

“It’s a Mystery... The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly of Getting Published”

If you have ever wondered if there is life after technical writing, take heart from **Ann Parker**. A science writer with Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory for the past 27 years, she has just published a novel she wrote in her spare time.



Ann Parker

In April she attended the monthly meeting of EBSTC to tell us how she did it.

By day she writes for the Laboratory’s *Science and Technology Review*, which has often received awards in STC technical publication competitions. (If you’d care to see her work, free subscriptions are available at the [Lab’s web site](#).)

Parker said she began entertaining the idea of writing a novel when a friend at the Lab launched a successful sideline writing mysteries about a female physicist who solves crimes.

Family Intrigue

What started as a vague intention took on life when she attended a family reunion in Colorado. There she learned that her maternal grandmother had been raised not in Denver, as she had thought, but in [Leadville, Colorado](#).

Grabbing a guidebook, Parker learned that in the late 1800s Leadville, then in the midst of a silver boom, was as wild a town as any in the West. Like Deadwood, Tombstone, and many another boomtown, Leadville was awash in saloons, brothels, guns, and greed. At 10,000 feet, monumentally harsh winters added to the mix.

Against this background, Parker crafted *Silver Lies*, a Western/murder mystery that critics are calling a superb debut novel. When a popular ore assayer is found murdered in the snow behind a saloon, the saloon keeper, a strong-minded woman, takes it upon herself to find out what happened, only to—well, you get the idea.

Parker recommends the mystery form for those who are attempting to break into fiction. There is a ready readership, and the form comes with a tried and true structure. "You've got a body at the beginning, clues along the way, and it all wraps up at the end and justice is done."

To date *Silver Lies* has won a Willa Literary Award from Women Writing the West, and was named a Spur Award Finalist by the Western Writers of America.

The Road to Leadville

In preparation for the actual writing, Parker took a class from a local mystery author, **Penny Warner**. What became the novel's prologue was first written for the class. She also joined a critique group for additional feedback.

For authenticity, she did a great deal of historical research, haunting libraries, bookstores, and even eBay in search of information on Leadville, mining, and frontier culture. It soon became evident that Leadville had so much history—gold in the 1860s, silver in the 1880s, followed by a succession of other mining ventures and finally tourism—she decided to focus her study on just three months, December 1879 to February 1880.

Finally she took a trip to Leadville, and was glad she did. Even though she had seen lots of photographs, she says she still got some of the topography wrong. (She had imagined a deep valley, where there is actually a broad plain between two ranges.) This led to some quick rewriting. There is no substitute for actual observation and primary sources, she says.

The trip also led to a string of fortuitous events. Using the interviewing skills she had cultivated over the years as a science writer, she began going places and asking questions. Her search led her to a long-time resident named **Bob Elder**. After answering her questions on mining and assaying techniques, Elder told her that his grandfather had arrived in Leadville as a young man in his twenties, at just the time period Parker was interested in. Not only that, Elder volunteered to share a large collection of letters the young man had written home to his mother—letters chock-full of authentic details on what life was like at the time.

When she was done, she had a 600-page book, 160,000 words—way too long. (For publication, Parker says a mystery should be 80,000 to 100,000 words.) This led to several rounds of cutting before her book was finally accepted by [Poisoned Pen Press](#).

If you write genre fiction, Parker says there are many support communities you can join. Of these, [Mystery Writers of America](#), [Western Writers of America](#), [Sisters in Crime](#), and [Women Writing the West](#) are among the better known. There are also online critiquing groups, such as [American Night Writers Association \(ANWA\)](#). Joining groups is a great way to stay abreast of what is going on in the industry, Parker says.

The Waiting Game

The work doesn't end with the writing. You can expect to spend a year or so working with agents and waiting for publishers' reviewers to make up their minds. Even after acceptance and publication, the work doesn't end. You will be expected to do promotional book tours on your own nickel, which can also be time consuming.

"Writing fiction probably won't pay the mortgage," she says, "but it is great fun."

Parker is currently working on a sequel to *Silver Lies*, which she expects to finish by June. ▲

Congratulations to New and Senior Members

Welcome to our new, transfer, and reinstated members! We hope you can come meet us at a chapter meeting.



- J Abbiati
- Madelaine Burgess
- Diana Burke
- Janet Collins
- Ami Echeverri
- Warren Franklin
- Michael Hopstone
- Deborah Neft
- Adrienne Radzvickas
- David Schleicher
- Tracy Taylor
- Joia Turner
- Marianne Walter

Congratulations to senior members! According to the STC bylaws, the grade of senior member is conferred upon those who have held the grade of member in STC for five years.

- Sherry Burnham
- Gary Estee
- Elaine Parrish

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- [Northern California STC Chapters](#)
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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	Cindy Kite
Week 2	Berkeley	Joe Devney
Week 3	San Francisco	Susan Becker
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	East Bay	Becky Rude
Week 3	North Bay	Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer
Week 4	Silicon Valley	Marie Highby

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](#). ▲

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Book Review: *Google Hacks*

by [Dara Golden](#)
 DMV Contributing Editor

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



[Google Hacks](#)

Tara Calishain and Rael Dornfest
 Copyright 2005, ISBN 0596008570

Overview *Google Hacks* provides information about implementing “quick and dirty” solutions to programming problems with the Google search engine. The information in this book covers a wide range: improving general searches, integrating Google into a word processor, and improving your web page ranking.

Audience This book is part of O'Reilly's “Hacks” series, designed to bring hacking down to the consumer level. While I use Google, I am not a programmer and I found that the coding, mainly using CGI and Perl, was beyond my knowledge. O'Reilly does have the scripts available from their web site, which is helpful for those with programming experience.

Content The book is divided into different sections: web, images, news and groups, add-ons, Gmail, ads, webmastering, and programming. Hacks are scattered throughout the sections, usually related to the topic area. In the web section, there are many hints for improving your web searching, such as the Google ten-word search limit, wildcards, date ranges, and searching within certain web sites. Some of the hacks reference pages outside of Google, although they use the Google search engine.

Don't forget, as an EBSTC member of the O'Reilly User Group Program, you can buy any of this publisher's books at 20% off. Just enter the code DSUG when ordering online at [O'Reilly](#).

Some of the hacks seem more amusing than useful. One hack that consumes ten pages is the Search Engine Belt Buckle made from a PDA that displays a scrolling list of searches performed on Google.

As a Mac user, I liked that directions for running the hacks were provided for Mac, UNIX, Linux, and Windows users. Additionally, if a hack could only be run on one platform, such as the Word add-on, it was noted. The authors have notes and warnings throughout the book and they provide very helpful tips, such as the version of Java required to run the hack, or hacks that run well together.

Usability As a former editor, I had many problems with the writing style of this book. There are multiple authors and each has their own voice. One author clearly listed step-by-step instructions, while another made assumptions of knowledge. There are forward references without page numbers, which I found frustrating to follow. There is even one hack that references itself! On the positive side, the table of contents and index are well laid out.

Conclusion This book was written by geeks for geeks. It was also written for people comfortable with hacks and coding. The book looks promising in those areas, but I do not have the expertise to know that for certain. For general Google users wanting to improve their searches, the first 30 pages provide excellent instructions. The rest of the book is mostly focused on solutions relying on coding, so I suggest you look through the book before purchasing it. It may also help to know a programmer who can help explain some of the coding if you want to try any of the examples.

Sample hacks and all code examples from the book are downloadable from the [O'Reilly web site](#). ▲

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About Devil Mountain Views

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

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

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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 [Managing Editor](#).

PUBLICATION SCHEDULE

Devil Mountain Views is published bimonthly, five times a year (September, November, January, March, May) with occasional e-news.

ARTICLE SUBMISSION DEADLINES

Sep/Oct 2004 issue – Aug 2, 2004
Nov/Dec 2004 issue – Oct 2, 2004
Jan/Feb 2005 issue – Dec 2, 2004
Mar/Apr 2005 issue – Feb 2, 2005
May/Jun 2005 issue – Apr 2, 2005

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Becky Rude, Managing Editor, 665 Oak Circle, Pleasanton, CA 94566.

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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
2004–2005	Managing Editor: Becky Rude Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2003–2004	Managing Editor: Becky Rude Guest Managing Editor: Gwaltney Mountford Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
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.) ▲

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