

Devil Mountain Views

Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC

Supporting technical communication in the
San Francisco Bay Area since 1962

May/June 2008

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- The *Devil Mountain Views* won the **Award of Excellence** in this year's STC Newsletter Competition. Thanks, Dave Eicher, our editor last year, and his dedicated staff for all your hard work. It shows.
- This just in: your East Bay chapter has won the **Award of Excellence** for 2007-2008 in the STC Community Achievement Award Competition. The citation reads: "For ongoing improvement in activities and programs offered to your members; for conducting outstanding literacy projects; and for continuing interaction with the academic community." Thanks, Helen Cheung, Gwaltney Mountford, and Joe Humbert, for putting together the application. Helen will pick up the Award in Philadelphia at the Annual Conference.
- Judith Herr, chapter member and STC Fellow, has been elected as an STC director. Congratulations, Judy.
- Council Officer's Election has been postponed until October 2008 -- see Helen's explanation in her [President's Message](#).



Award of
Excellence
2008
STC
International
Newsletter
Competition

Feature Articles

[The Lone Writer as Project Manager](#)

[Laura Dahlinger](#), working in Columbus, Ohio, relates how a lone writer can be a project manager.

[Literacy Outreach by E-Mail](#)

[T.R. Girill](#) writes about using the East Bay's network group to update his work with high school students.

[TechProse Still a Resource for Bay Area Consultants and Companies](#)

[Meryl Natchez](#) on "retiring" from a business she started 26 years ago.

[Patent Careers for Technical Writers, Engineers, Scientists, and Medical](#)

Professionals - Part 1

[Steven C. Oppenheimer](#), working in Washington D.C., tells how he made a career change from a freelance technical writer to a patent agent.

Garden Solace

[Danett Weinschelbaum](#) gives us a lovely poem to remind us all to take time from our computers to smell the flowers.



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President's Message



by [Helen Cheung](#)

EBSTC president

Greetings East Bay STC Chapter members!

As I was writing my last message for the newsletter as president, STC Headquarters made an announcement regarding a change to their fiscal year. STC is moving from a July to June fiscal year to a calendar cycle that runs from January to December. To align ourselves with STC's new fiscal year cycle, all current chapter officers will remain in office until the end of December 2008.

This means that I will remain as your president until the end of December. Also, this will mean that our chapter leader elections will now occur in October instead of in May. Aside from this, nothing else will change as we will still have our summer break in July and August and our meetings will resume in September. We will have a new chapter president in January 2009.

Past Events

Now back to what I originally intended to say in my message. We continue to keep busy this year and now that we will have an additional 6 months to fulfill for the rest of the year, let's see if we can accomplish more!

I am pleased to announce that our newsletter won the STC Newsletter Competition in the Excellence category. (We won the Merit category last year.) I'd like to thank all of our volunteers for making this happen and special thanks to Dave Eicher, who was our managing editor for the issues that we submitted for the competition.

We had some great programs over the past few months.

- In March, we brought back the ever-popular topic, "Trends in Technical Communication." Our panel this year consisted of couples working together in our industry.
- For our April program, we brought in "royalty" as the Comma Queen, Robyn Brode Orsini, gave an insightful presentation on punctuation.

If you missed any of our programs, you can check out those that were recorded on our Podcast page (<http://www.ebstc.org/podcasts.html>).

Our newsletter volunteers have once again done an outstanding job putting together the newsletter. Thank you, Susan Moxley, Joe Humbert, and our new managing editor, Alliene Turner.

I hope you will find the articles in this issue useful.

Updates

The following are some updates on what's been going on with our chapter:

- Chapter elections are being moved from May to October.
- We have completed the Strategic and Rechartering Plans for our chapter. The plans are posted on our website (<http://www.ebstc.org/administration.html>) and I have submitted them to STC Headquarters. I encourage you to look at the plans. This is a huge accomplishment for our chapter as it helps remind us of the chapter's goal and direction.
- I have submitted our chapter for the STC Community of Excellence award. We will find out if we receive this Community Achievement Award at the 55th Annual STC Conference in Philadelphia. We have done so much this year, and I want us to be recognized for all of our accomplishments.
- As mentioned earlier, our newsletter won an Excellence award in the STC Newsletter Competition. Our newsletter will be on display at the annual conference.
- Congratulations to chapter member and STC Fellow, Judith Herr. She won the election as an STC director.
- Congratulations to senior member, Ashwini Tharval. She is the recipient for this year's Distinguished Chapter Service Award (DCSA).
- Our leadership team had another council meeting on April 21st. The council meeting minutes are posted on our website. They can be found at: <http://www.ebstc.org/administration.html>.
- The Webinar Committee is working out the details for a possible webinar in the months to come. So stay tuned for more information.

- We are considering partnering with the Berkeley STC Chapter (and possibly other local chapters) on such things as events, newsletter, and website. I'll keep you posted on this so watch for more details soon.

A Few Reminders

Just don't want you to forget:

- If you have any articles that you would like to contribute to our newsletter, contact our managing editor, Alliene Turner (hairston.turner@gmail.com). If we get enough articles, we will consider a July/August issue, which we have not done in the past.
- If you haven't renewed your STC membership with East Bay, we encourage you to do so.
<http://www.stc.org/membership/join01.asp>
- Don't forget the 55th Annual STC Technical Communication Summit will be in Philadelphia, PA from June 1-4.
(<http://www.stc.org/55thConf/register/index.asp>). If you are planning to attend the conference, let me know. It would be nice to see you there.
- The Yahoo! Groups discussion board is available to our members. This is a forum for you to share your ideas and concerns. To sign up, click the [East Bay STC Network](#) link in the upper right corner on the home page of the website.
- We are always looking for volunteers. Check out the openings by clicking on the [Volunteers](#) link in the left sidebar of the website's home page.

Upcoming Programs

The following programs are coming up before we take our summer break in July and August:

- **May 1** — "Taking Control of Microsoft Word" with Hilary Powers
- **June 12** — (Note date change. Due to the annual conference, our meeting will be the second Thursday of the month.) This is the last program before we take a summer break. It will be "Acknowledging our Volunteers" and reports from those that attended the conference.
- **July and August** — No meetings are scheduled. Watch for details for the September meeting.

See You Soon

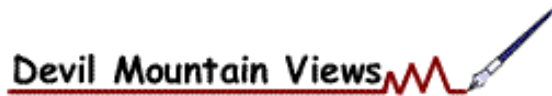
As always, if you have any questions, comments, or suggestions, I'd love to hear from you. You can drop me a note at helen_ews@yahoo.com.

I hope you will attend our June 12th meeting. It is always a memorable program as we honor our fellow volunteers. They worked hard this year keeping the chapter going strong.

Have a great summer, and I look forward to continuing as president for the rest of 2008. Let's keep the momentum going. See you at the next meeting!

Warm regards,
Helen ▲

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Editor's Message

by [Alliene Turner](#)



Alliene is a returning STC member and long-time East Bay resident..

Welcome. This is my first edition as your managing editor, and I am very pleased with the variety of articles in this edition. Here's the rundown:

First of all, let me thank associate editor, [Joe Humbert](#), and contributing editor, [Susan Moxley](#), for helping with this edition.

We have some great articles in this edition:

[Laura Dahlinger](#), Central Ohio Chapter STC member, shares with us the unique position technical writers occupy within an organization and how they must become their own project manager.

[T.R. Girill](#), East Bay STC Chapter STC Fellow, "looks back on the first year of [an] adventure in literacy outreach by e-mail" in which he joined a Yahoo e-mail list of teachers to more widely share EBSTC's technical literacy project materials and strategies.

[Meryl Natchez](#), owner of TechProse, has written us a letter of sorts that shares her "exit strategy" from the company she has built over the past 26 years.

[Stephen Oppenheimer](#) of Oppenheimer Communications in Rockville, MD, explains that after "more than fifteen years working as a freelance technical writer, I discovered another career option that draws heavily on my technical writing background and potentially offers significantly better money." His article describes everything you need to know about becoming a patent agent.

[Danett Weishhelbaum](#) shares a lovely poem she wrote that echoes the colorful springtime that is blossoming around us now. Danett is a member of the East Bay STC Chapter and a writing consultant. She specializes in documenting scientific instruments and software, and enjoys writing poetry in her spare time.

Finally, if you would like to contribute an article for a possible July/August issue (deadline June 2, mid-June at the very latest), or the for-sure September/October issue (deadline August 2, mid-August at the very latest), contact me, Alliene Turner, at hairston.turner@gmail.com. ▲

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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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Arlington, VA 22203-1822
703-522-4114
stc@stc.org

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

Sept/Oct 2007 issue – August 2, 2007
Nov/Dec 2007 issue – October 2, 2007
Jan/Feb 2008 issue – December 2, 2007
Mar/Apr 2008 issue – February 2, 2008
May/Jun 2008 issue – April 2, 2008

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 a link to the article is sent to the [managing editor](#). If the newsletter is printed, please send two copies to the mailing address listed below.

MAILING ADDRESS

Joe Humbert, 7001 Sunkist Drive, Oakland CA 94605

[ADVERTISING POLICY](#)

Copyright Statement

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

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

Unless otherwise noted, copyrights for all newsletter articles belong to the authors. The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC, 2007-2008.

DMV Staff **MANAGING EDITOR**

[Alliene Turner](#)

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Joseph Humbert

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Susan Moxley

Chapter Officers

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

PRESIDENT

[Helen Cheung](#), 510-219-0995

PRESIDENT-ELECT

Open

TREASURER

[Joseph Humbert](#), 510-638-3529

SECRETARY

Open

V.P. PROGRAMS

[Ann Adams](#)

V.P. ARRANGEMENTS

[Jeanie Egbert](#), 510-521-2601

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
2007–2008	Managing editors: David Eicher, Joseph Humbert, Alliene Turner Award of Excellence in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2006–2007	Managing editor: David Eicher Award of Merit in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
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.

<p>1995–1996</p>	<p>Managing editor: Bruce Robinson An offshoot, the <i>Twig</i>, is published by President Gwaltney Mountford to supplement the <i>East Bay Log</i>.</p>
<p>1994</p>	<p>Newsletter name changed to <i>East Bay Log</i>.</p>
<p>1962</p>	<p>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.) ▲</p> <p>%oö• Eë\$1=* L)àÕ T— fÓ¶/€ÐHB(@ Ä e;BéI),V‘i•i(—•± æær •çYáñ\$ªBÇ @Æ 4í i†ÿø ç“fB ;£óÍµ ,ç}:€JæÉsãéÖ zv fI2•@aãPrÁ´B²iµS´ Ái©Ô& ¸ªu‡.éLl2•Pj,µ0âPn ì •pªfS ê »¥0â!â0° BU,R 6 HYL9H 2´2-2• gX7Ò´2• e0e0 ÊBÊba”f”Àf:ÀÁGÓ´ 2 s•Ê U;aT ½‡±øé\$¼ ØuS¶ ØÃ• ;G »Û °-!Û y´°iE\$Hº[i J þû#KÃ¼?yvN\$V\$K-Díj—Nir@ ,• şřž< µS´ ;×¥0 ÊAi”À••¾”Æf:fšâÒ-2•7lÕ.© H:~Xj TÁÁR B« HYL âr”U1 J@a`•ÿyü ?ÿT⊗ Ê`Êa@” ,Á*Á) u,•cyúu ,ðÓ»}ã#©Ö A>©Û ä±MjN\$ñ´0o,,@.ªw@Ì,ðª ÎV~3ªRæ‡©´ ÿb•ØL,-èÛ 4%o23RÇà eÛ y•V 8—•UÚ ^;+Êjw{Àà 0]:€ÐÓ´ Ó½ ©L{¶ ðT °i” €Ê°Ê@Ê J´”À,ÊAa BVÊ JaÊCÊa·PS—S-5ú•AÐ2 GX * •:×. eÿ%°Nçf ÿÀ,§P•SÓ-] u) u%o¼\• tê N°Ú èsª u;b2,´iX*Ö*];BfÝ•Lóá°Y:•ð P †/c,ÉgS´ Ê3~â©Ö ´âø ^° £ÇR•Pgl' À.´LyHyÚ “©L P:N®°ð*”••@´ uÓ-; e)‡) u }:ÁÃ€ BU R S R R S ee0"ÊAµ0 J Ê`@” ,Á)f) fR ê ...Ó- 8ªwF d à •ÿÿÿ q, ²...Ý;A´ ·ÏNñt n; ,aÓí...•Ôâ%òðí]@`q€Æ F"@.ª@`©•:S ¨<! ë }) ÔÀãu••=))•¶U6R S ¨L0 BU R ” ,i”ÄH••y”Á³:;Ö¾•G•A© ,U u•ù</p>

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 website.

Date	Speaker	Topic
May 1	Hilary Power	<p>Taking Control of Microsoft Word</p> <p>Using Microsoft Word for your documents? When it comes to producing and editing text, Word is often the required tool - and it's a very good and congenial tool for the purpose, too, once you have it listening to you instead of trying to think for you.</p> <p>In this session, Hilary will focus on ways to make the most of Word's useful features and get it out of the second-guessing business.</p> <p>Hilary Powers, author of "Making Word Work for You: An Editor's Intro to the Tool of the Trade," has been freelancing as a copyeditor and developmental editor since 1994. Almost all of her 450-odd projects have been onscreen, and she's used each of them to research ways to work with her computer and not just on it.</p>
June 12	Helen Cheung	<p>That's a Wrap!</p> <p>Our president, Helen, will acknowledge our volunteers and will give those who attended the Annual Conference in Philadelphia an opportunity to report on what they learned.</p> <p>NOTE: Because of the Annual Conference, this is the <u>second</u> Thursday of June.</p>



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Networking

- [Northern California STC Chapters](#)
- [East Bay STC Network \(Yahoo! Groups\)](#)
- [Professional Development SIG](#)

Northern California STC Chapters



There are five 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 website.

Wednesdays	Chapter	President
Week 2	Berkeley	Richard Mateosian
Week 3	San Francisco	Gilbert Gonzalez
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	East Bay	Helen Cheung
Week 3	North Bay	Chris Muntzer/Michael Meyer
Week 4	Silicon Valley	DJ Cline

East Bay STC Network



Connect with your fellow East Bay members by joining this Yahoo! Groups network.

Voice your opinions and your ideas for making this Chapter more responsive to your needs. The more members who sign up the greater our network will be, the better our Chapter will be.

For more information and to join, click [here](#).

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



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Congratulations to Our New and Senior Members



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

[Alane L. Alchorn](#)
[Christina Antos](#)
[Shawn DeMille](#)
[Adrienne Tange](#)

Congratulations to our newly conferred 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.

[Lindsay A. Gower](#)
[Dawn M. Escorcio](#)
[Janet Gray](#)



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The first table lists a quick index.

The second table lists the issue date, the author(s) for the featured article(s), and the article name.

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Date	Author	Article Name
Current Issue: May/June 2008	Laura Dahlinger T.R. Girill Meryl Natchez Steven Oppenheimer Danett Weinshelbaum	<i>The Lone Writer as Project Manager</i> <i>Literacy Outreach by E-Mail</i> <i>TechProse Still a Resource for Bay Area Consultants and Companies</i> <i>Patent Careers for Technical Writers, Engineers, Scientists, and Medical Professionals - Part 1</i> <i>Garden Solace</i>
March/April 2008	Laura Dahlinger and Josette Schaber Linda Cunningham Jane Olivera Andrew Davis	<i>Transitioning from Technical Communicator to Project Manager</i> <i>Gems from the Writing Boot Camp</i> <i>Windows on a Macintosh Computer</i> <i>Technical Communications Internships - What, Why, Where, and How?</i>
January/February 2008	Joseph M. Humbert Patrick Lufkin T.R. Girill Andrew Davis Joseph M. Humbert (with Gwaltney Mountford & Helen Cheung)	<i>Podcasting Speaker Programs for STC Communities</i> <i>How Suite It Is: Adobe Showcases Its New Technical Communication Suite</i> <i>Literacy Project Resource Sharing</i> <i>Popular Misperceptions About Contracting</i> <i>2007 Holiday Party</i>

September/October 2007	<p>Patrick Lufkin Andrew Davis</p> <p>Patrick Lufkin Patrick Lufkin</p> <p>Richard Mateosian</p>	<p><i>STC Board of Directors Visits Bay Area Creating Structured Documentation — Will You Lead or Follow?</i></p> <p><i>2007 Gordon Scholarship Winners Call for Entries: 2007-08 Northern California Technical Communication Competition Call for Judges: 2007-08 Northern California Technical Communication Competition</i></p>
May/June 2007	<p>Jeanie Egbert Patrick Lufkin</p> <p>Andrew Davis</p> <p>T. R. Girill</p> <p>Andrew Davis</p>	<p><i>EBSTC Wins STC Awards! STC Board to Honor Bay Area with Important Visit Volunteers Needed for the 2007 Bay Area Networking Guide (BANG) Technical Writing Returns to Oakland's Media Academy Interview Tips — DOs and DON'Ts</i></p>
March/April 2007	<p>Patrick Lufkin Andrew Davis Kathryn Munn Gwaltney Mountford</p>	<p><i>MadCap Flare and the RoboHelp Saga Synergistech's 2007 Job Market Perspective Documenting APIs: Your First Week on the Job Get in the Running</i></p>
January/February 2007	<p>T. R. Girill</p> <p>Helen Cheung Guy Ball</p>	<p><i>Building Science-Relevant Literacy With Technical Writing in High School West Meets East Creating Video / Web Seminars</i></p>
November/December 2006	<p>T. R. Girill</p> <p>Dara Golden Patrick Lufkin Patrick Lufkin</p>	<p><i>Literacy Outreach to Science Students Through Their Teachers Conducting Interviews Is Podcasting in Your Future? EBSTC Career Connection Reaches Out to Students</i></p>
September/October 2006	<p>Helen Cheung Dara Golden Melody Brumis</p>	<p><i>My Experience as Vice President of Programs Beyond the Resume Member Spotlight on Linda Cunningham</i></p>
May/June 2005	<p>Patrick Lufkin Gwaltney Mountford</p> <p>Elaine Parrish T. R. Girill</p>	<p><i>Leadership for the Emerging Future College Liaison Committee: The New Kid on the Block Sentence's Little Helpers How Technical Writing Supports High School Science</i></p>

March/April 2005	Joy Montgomery Dara Golden Elaine Parrish Sue Phelan	<i>Surviving Resume Screening, a Brutal Process!</i> <i>Volunteer Editing and Writing</i> <i>The Truth About Ampersands</i> <i>EBSTC Needs You!</i>
January/February 2005	Joy Montgomery Dara Golden T. R. Girill Elaine Parrish Beau Cain Becky Rude	<i>Accentuate the Postive; Eliminate the Negative</i> <i>Volunteer Editing and Writing</i> <i>Tech Writing Outreach Meets CAHSEE in Oakland</i> <i>New Year's Resolutions for Writers</i> <i>Director's Report</i> <i>Annual Member Survey</i>
November/December 2004	Laura Phillips Joy Montgomery Elaine Parrish Charleen Earley Elaine Parrish Suzanna Laurent	<i>Transition, Change, A Rose by Any Other Name...</i> <i>Psst—Wanna Know a Secret?</i> <i>On Becoming a "Senior"</i> <i>Member Spotlight: Liz Miller</i> <i>Confounding Compounds</i> <i>TRAF Technique Saves Time</i>
September/October 2004	Dara Golden T. R. Girill Judy Herr Melody Brumis Elaine Parrish June Schaefer	<i>Top Ten Things I Wish I'd Known Sooner</i> <i>Sharing Outreach More Effectively</i> <i>Confessions of an STC Conference Groupie</i> <i>Member Spotlight: Sherry Smith</i> <i>Infini(iv)e Possibilities</i> <i>Keeping Our Archive Updated</i>
May/June 2004	Dara Golden T. R. Girill Gwaltney Mountford Elaine Parrish	<i>Marketing Your Non-Writing Skills</i> <i>An Outreach Theme with Five Variations</i> <i>STC Transformation Project</i> <i>Quick and Dirty Copyediting</i>
March/April 2004	Jon Rude David Dick & Kathy Bine Vesa Purho Dara Golden Elaine Parrish	<i>Helping Make Projects Work</i> <i>Documentation Management for Dummies</i> <i>Well Planned Is Half Done</i> <i>First Impressions: Resume Tips</i> <i>Ask Elaine: Double Trouble</i>
January/February 2004	Sarmistha Purkayastha Suzanna Laurent Adrienne Tange Dara Golden Elaine Parrish T. R. Girill Marsha Howard	<i>How I Became a Technical Writer</i> <i>Strategies for Making Change Work</i> <i>Seasonal Poem</i> <i>Style Guides: Basic Considerations</i> <i>Ask Elaine: The Little Things</i> <i>Autumn Literacy Outreach Update</i> <i>Member Spotlight: Joe Humbert</i>

November/December 2003	Dara Golden Suzanna Laurent Adrienne Tange Melody Brumis Elaine Parrish	<i>What's in a Mark?</i> <i>What do I Get for Belonging to STC?</i> <i>Short Story: Half-Full</i> <i>Spotlight on Hillary Russak</i> <i>Ask Elaine: A Matter of Style</i>
September/October 2003	Susan Harlan T. R. Girill Susan Harlan Adrienne Tange Elaine Parrish Becky Rude	<i>Notes on the 2003 Annual STC Conference</i> <i>How Literacy Outreach Spent Summer Vacation</i> <i>STC as a Volunteer Organization</i> <i>Short Story: Lethal Pen</i> <i>Ask Elaine: Reining in Apostrophilia</i> <i>Spotlight on Elaine Parrish</i>
May/June 2003	Don Huntington Kristine Hahn Rusty Jorgensen T. R. Girill	<i>An Online Project Info Solution (Part 2)</i> <i>Single-Sourcing, XML, Alphabet Soup</i> <i>Dare to Be Dumb</i> <i>Acting Locally, Thinking Globally in Literacy Outreach Project</i>
March/April 2003	Elaine Parrish Don Huntington Scott Wallace Linda Shaltz Susan Harlan	<i>Copyediting—Who Needs It?</i> <i>An Online Project Information Solution</i> <i>Style Guides to the Rescue</i> <i>What Does Video Capture Have to Do With Writing?</i> <i>Alternative Jobs or Alternative Job Search Methods?</i>
January/February 2003	Gwaltney Mountford Melody Brumis Don Huntington Scott Wallace	<i>Contracting: Is It for You?</i> <i>You Have a Contract—Now What?</i> <i>A Plan for Creating Internal Newsletters</i> <i>Taming the Tech-Neologism</i>
November/December 2002	Don Huntington Adrienne Tange Don Huntington	<i>Responding to the Changing Face of the Tech Writer's Role</i> <i>Terminal Contract</i> <i>Staying Busy in a Slumping Economy</i>
September/October 2002	Gwaltney Mountford Susan Harlan Scott Wallace	<i>Nashville Nuggets</i> <i>Trends in Technical Writing</i> <i>The Great "Web" vs. "web" Debate</i>

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<p>September/October 1999 (1.3 MB PDF - Not available)</p>	<p>Jane C. Frazier</p>	<p><i>Employees and Business Process: The Point of the Shared View</i></p>
<p>July/August 1999 (583 KB PDF)</p>	<p>Lu Rehling Lenore Weiss Alice Gallagher Rosalind Rogoff Anahita Wager Smith</p>	<p><i>It's Our Future, So Let's Make the Most of It</i> <i>Creating Partner Documentation</i> <i>Today's Technical Communications Job Market --</i> <i>Answers to Some Frequently Asked Questions</i> <i>Technical Training: Help Authoring Tools</i> <i>Using Knowledge Management to Organize and Deliver Information</i></p>



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The Lone Writer as Project Manager



by [Laura Dahlinger](#)

Laura has been PMP certified for eight years in Columbus, Ohio.

Editor's note: This is a companion piece to an article in the [Mar/Apr 2008 issue](#).

Lone writers occupy a unique position within an organization. Generally, lone writers have their "hands" in much of what is happening within the organization and can anticipate a need for their services in a variety of departments. However, this can lead to over-scheduling of the lone writer.

So lone writers must also become their own project managers, managing the documentation demands of the organization by using the basic principles of project management.

Five Main Stages There are five main "stages" of a project: initializing, planning, executing, controlling/monitoring, and closing. I have found that I am more involved in the initialization process as a lone writer because I know what's happening around the organization. Most writers are assigned a documentation project in the planning or executing phase because they are part of a team of writers and their manager performs the initiating and planning phases.

I can suggest where I can help out in new projects or wherever I see a need for a process to be documented. I can then be involved in all of the remaining stages as I'm doing the writing and discussing it with my subject-matter experts (SMEs).

Nine Knowledge Areas There are nine knowledge areas that a project manager must be able to use as well: integration, scope, time, cost, quality, human resources, communications, risk, and procurement. A basic explanation of each knowledge area is included in the table below. These stages, described in the *2004 Project Management Book of Knowledge*, play a part throughout all stages of the documentation project. Each document I create has its own time frame, varying from long-term maintenance and upgrading of the user help manual to the quick editing of the marketing department's news releases.

Knowledge Area	Definition
Integration	Make choices about where to focus the work on a given day of the project and coordinating the work on the project. Used when various knowledge area processes interact.
Scope	Verify that only the processes required to complete the work for the project are completed. Used to define what is included in the project.
Time	Scheduling of resources and the time it will take to complete the various pieces of the project. Used to keep the project on track for the deadlines.
Cost	Budgeting of resources and time required to complete a project and the future maintenance of the finished product. Used to determine the cost of resources.
Quality	Identify and assign processes to assure that the level of quality expected of the completed project is satisfied. Used to address the quality of the end product.
Human Resources	Assign and manage the staff necessary to complete the project. Used to develop and coordinate the project team members.

Communication	Plans for how all communication about the project will be handled, including distributing information about the project, progress reports, and employee performance reviews. Used to coordinate all communication between project staff, management, and stakeholders in the project. Project stakeholders are people or an organization actively involved in a project so the lone writer and the developers of software, for example, are stakeholders.
Risk	Plans for dealing with any uncertain event that could impact the project (risk) positively or negatively, including identifying, planning for, and monitoring factors that make risks occur. Used to plan for the risks associated with a project, whether their impact is positive or negative.
Procurement	Processes used to acquire services or goods from outside of the project and/or project staff to complete the project. Used to get the extra assistance required to complete the project, whether by contracting another writer or buying additional tools to accomplish the project tasks.

Initializing The initializing phase can begin with a new software release or a change in equipment at a plant. New instructions must be created and old ones updated. So the managers in charge must see the need for a change. I start my initializing stage when I find out about a new release date for a software update. I start by talking to my manager about when the release will occur and what the release number is.

At the initializing stage, communication, time, risk, and integration management are the key knowledge areas I utilize. In general, the only risks I deal with are time consumption by other projects — if another document project must be completed within the same time frame, for example. This can easily be dealt with by carefully planning the communication with all parties involved about the deadlines, determining the quality of the documentation I will produce so I don't spend too much time on something that is supposed to be a brief overview, and making sure the scope of the documentation does not expand beyond what is intended. This limits the time spent, the risk of not completing my documents on schedule, and the cost of my time to the company.

As a lone writer, the cost, human resources, and procurement knowledge areas are less relevant but still play a part in my job. There is the cost of overtime if I work over the 40 hours a week, the cost of delays in releasing software if I cannot meet my time deadlines for the associated documentation, the possibility of outsourcing or bringing in a second writer if my workload gets too heavy. Will that second writer be hired on a permanent basis or just for the length of the project that must be completed? I am the main project team member, but I also take up the time of the SME that I speak to, whether it's for five minutes or three hours. The cost of completing documentation is inherent in my salary but it extends to using the time and resources of other people in the organization. So I need to be sure of my own questions to SMEs and minimize the costs and risks of spending too much time

documenting something that is only a very small portion of the whole.

Planning I begin the planning phase by looking at the implementation plan created. If there is a new piece of software the customer requested, this plan includes the details of what change must be made to the software. If it is just company-driven changes such as fixing issues, I may need to speak to the person who discovered the issue, reference the case opened about this issue, and speak to the developer, who is my SME.

I begin to use integration management skills to coordinate my need to ask questions into the time and resources of my SMEs. I am dealing with the scope of the document to be sure I am not documenting extraneous information, but I also have to explore the updated software to make sure I'm not missing anything. If I forget to document something, the help desk will be sure to get calls about the problem or instruction I missed, adding costs in that department and lowering the quality of my document in general.

If I find issues to document, I can also gather those and forward them to the help desk as part of my communication with other employees who are affected by the new release. And I can give these issues to the development team to be fixed in future releases, so the steps I used to cause the issue must be documented adequately as well.

Executing Then I begin writing the release document, using my own testing of the new release, if available, and my research so far to write what I can. This part of the execution phase overlaps with planning as I also map out what needs to be changed in the related user help manual. I also plan out how much time I think it will take me to complete the new release upgrade document, which is a cost to the organization.

If multiple documentation projects are ongoing, which they usually are, I must organize the projects by priority, communicating any changes in completion date to the right people. I always need to return to the scope of the project to make sure I'm completing my documents within the plan I created.

As I test the new release to confirm how users will use it, I must always write with the scope, cost, time, and quality of the document in mind. Too much testing can lead me down the path of all testing and no writing, which is the job of a quality assurance (QA) tester. I actually am part of the QA team, but I have to keep the document I'm writing for users of the software foremost in my schedule to make sure I write the best document I can for them. My ability to work on different aspects of the software, from testing to answering support questions, also makes my documentation much better because I understand the software better. But it also can make prioritizing what to do first a big task!

Monitoring / Controlling

As I test and write, I am also performing the monitoring process. Planning, executing, and monitoring all fall into the same process for the lone writer. I have to stay on my toes, keeping track of what I've completed and what I have yet to document. I need to communicate any software issues with the SMEs and possibly managers if I run across any issues with the software that are big enough to be a problem for the release. I am constantly keeping track of my schedule as well, making sure that I'll be able to complete the changes in related documents, such as the user manual that accompanies the release, and the new release document on time.

Closing

And once the documents are complete and heading out the door to customers, I find that the closure part of the process can be either very helpful or very tedious. Since I am a lone writer, I generally have a short meeting with my manager to talk over any issues that come up with the writing process and get ideas for improving the documentation process.

For example, I can begin to add some small icons to the new release document to help visually categorize what information is useful for an administrator, someone installing/setting up the software, and an everyday user. This stage is generally short and just gives me some time to review the documenting process and see where I can improve the way I do things. This can improve the entire process, from the cost of my time spent to the quality of the documentation produced.

Summary

The biggest difference between me as a lone writer/project manager and a full-time project manager is the amount of paperwork! I do not necessarily write a work breakdown structure (WBS) for each document I work on. I create a plan that is my own version of a WBS, but it isn't as detailed as it would be if I were working with an entire project-specific team. I don't need to include actual cost totals and a detailed process for making changes to the scope or schedule.

With my manager's input, I worked out a general game plan for completing new documentation and updating old documentation, and I use the game plan for most documentation projects. I use all nine of the knowledge areas and go through the five stages of a project every time I write documentation, giving me the experience of a writer and a project manager all wrapped up in one job.

Laura Dahlinger is a technical communicator/project manager at the Ohio Department of Transportation for Quick Solutions, Inc. in Columbus, Ohio. Laura earned her PMP certification and has been a technical communicator/project manager for eight years.



Literacy Outreach by E-Mail



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

T. R. currently manages the East Bay STC's [Technical Literacy Project](#).

The Plan In March 2007, I joined a Yahoo! Groups (e-mail list) of teachers to more widely share EBSTC's technical literacy project materials and strategies. This article looks back on the first year of that adventure in literacy outreach by e-mail.

The launch of EBSTC's own e-mail list for chapter members in August 2006 introduced me to the idea of using Yahoo groups as a way to alert more teachers about technical writing possibilities for their classes. A search of available groups turned up one founded in 2003 by science teacher and educational consultant John Brishcar. It is called High School Science Teachers (or HSST for convenience).

When I joined HSST it had 175 members; subscribership grew steadily to over 240 today (about five times as many participants as EBSTC's own group). List members teach science (often biology) in high schools across the United States; a few teach in English-language schools abroad. HSST is also affiliated with a 1000-member Yahoo group focused on middle school science teachers. Some members and postings overlap among these two mailing lists. In 2007, HSST saw 300 messages posted (averaging 25 postings/month, but rising and falling with the seasonal demands of the school year). Most posted messages address common problems, such as finding lab work that students with very different abilities can handle or how to teach from a cart if you have no permanent science classroom. HSST's official theme is "we can't go on teaching in isolation."

The Postings Because the technical literacy project adapts practical, real-life, technical writing cases into scaffolded, age-appropriate classroom activities (especially helpful for underperforming students), sharing these ideas on HSST could greatly broaden our professional development reach. So my postings (roughly once a month) to this group/list summarized highlights from those activities (and pointed out how each reflects what scientists have discovered about effective nonfiction communication).

During 2007-2008, these "technical writing in science class" postings fell into three thematic clusters:

- Theme 1: Cognitive Apprenticeship
Cognitive apprenticeship builds writing skills in science class in the same reliable way (scaffolds, iterative refinement, and externalizing hidden techniques) that traditional apprenticeship builds trade skills.
 - April 2007: Using explicit guidelines promotes and enables writing/editing practice.
 - September 2007: Text revisions have a place in science class because they have a place in real-life science.

- November 2007: Revealing the method(s) behind stage illusion parallels revealing the methods behind effective technical writing.
- December 2007 : Mapquest driving directions can show good instruction-design features even for developmentally disabled students.
- Theme 2: Lessons from Linguistics
Text linguists have made empirical discoveries about technical prose that can help students improve how they write about science.
 - June 2007: Students can learn to draft better instructions by treating text as a matrix of actions and items.
 - October 2007: Rebuilding big, complex descriptions from their randomized text chunks can provide guided practice in text design.
 - January 2008: Paying extra attention to proleptic and connective words disproportionately improves technical text.
- Theme 3: The CSI Connection
The real-life role of good communication in successful crime scene investigation can both motivate and guide building writing skills in the classroom.
 - July 2007: DNA extraction from human cheek cells nicely models strengths and weaknesses in instruction design.
 - August 2007: A CDC reporting form for sudden unexplained infant death (SUID) nicely models strengths and weaknesses in description design.
 - February 2008: CSI court testimony nicely models techniques by which students can improve their classroom science talks.

Assessment As someone who enjoys the intensity of working directly in a classroom setting, I find offering professional development by e-mail tame by comparison. But as a publisher I can't ignore the serious advantages of such online education: low personal cost, stunningly wide reach, and time flexibility that benefits the poster and the readers alike. Active high-school teachers can read and return to the HSST technical-writing posts whenever their busy schedules allow.

And although I have summarized much the same material in person every July since 2006 for teachers attending a week-long on-site "academy" hosted by U.C. Davis's Edward Teller Education Center in Livermore, I would have to present more than a decade of those annual sessions to come close to influencing the many science teachers that have read the HSST list in just one year.

An Invitation To learn more about the literacy outreach project, to suggest a teacher who might want to host future technical writing workshops for their classes, or to participate yourself, please contact [T.R.Girill](mailto:trgirill@acm.org) (trgirill@acm.org). ▲

TechProse Still a Resource for Bay Area Consultants and Companies



by Meryl Natchez

Meryl is CEO of [TechProse](#).

Editor's note: Meryl has a [podcast](#) on the EBSTC website.

Gina Gotsill, who works with me at TechProse, mentioned to me that several of you wanted to know if I am retiring from TechProse. The short answer is no. But the longer answer is more complex. I started TechProse 26 years ago, after I left my full-time writing job for my first technical writing contract with Chris England, who was the owner of Writers Inc.

TechProse

TechProse grew because I had four young children, and my husband, Larry, was making a career change and had to go back to school for a few years. We were living paycheck to paycheck, and I was terrified of being out of work. So I never turned work down. I said yes to every offer, and soon had more work than I could do myself.

Prior to AB1706 (the legislation that made it so difficult to be an independent consultant), we were all independents. So it was easy to have others working with me on projects as independent contractors, and we formed a little team with varied skills. Some of the people I worked with in the 90s still work with TechProse today. Linda Fogel (one of the best editors I've ever worked with), and Kate Rogge (who moved to Kansas several years ago but worked with me until she took a library sciences job this year), are two.

Exit Strategy

In 2004, I started thinking about my "exit strategy," as they call it for people who own their own business. Over the years I had come to know a number of small business owners who had sold their businesses, Chris England among them. The universal story was unhappiness and frustration at seeing something that they had created over many years fall apart after they sold it. Chris actually lost her voice for six months. So even if I could find a buyer, this didn't seem like a good idea. I thought about some kind of orderly shutdown, but that wasn't very appealing either.

What I came up with, with the collaboration of my husband who has been working with me for the past 17 years, was the concept of selling TechProse to our employees. We formed an Employee Stock Ownership Program (ESOP) in January 2005, and have already sold 30 percent of the company to it. What this means is that any long-term employee, whether full time or hourly, who works at least 1,000 hours a year from 2005 onward has a percentage ownership in TechProse.

Finding Good Managers

This year, if all goes well, I plan to sell my remaining ownership interest to the ESOP trust for the benefit of the employees. By the end of the year, I plan to do a lot less of the daily work, but remain on the Board of Directors, helping out when needed, speaking, writing, and remaining involved but not coming to work on a daily basis. So this is a sort of retirement, but hopefully one that will enable TechProse to continue to grow and be a force for thoughtful, valued technical communications in the Bay Area. One key to this has been finding good managers to take over the daily operations.

Steven Laine, who has worked with us since 1999, has already been working for the last year as TechProse president. He came from a background with Systems Partners, and knows consulting inside and out. I admire Steven for his ethical and pragmatic approach to business and his understanding of the importance of adding value on each engagement. His attention to detail and his ability to actually run the business is far superior to mine.

Many of you know **Lynette Phillips** (who used to be Lynette Smith). She's someone who was working on contract when I was consulting at Safeway in 1987, and joined TechProse 14 years ago. She has become manager of the team that finds the right person for the engagements we have. The team now includes **Rose Healy** (who used to work for Grace Gentry) and **Bob Lewis**. **Jennifer Riebli** (who used to be Jennifer Moore) started work with TechProse when still a senior in college. She is now the TechProse team's expert project manager focused on e-learning projects.

Diane Mesisca led the account management team at TechProse for nine years, and with her move to Phoenix, she has taken on the role of coach and mentor to the more recent sales team, **Sharon Hutchins**, **Ken Ball**, **Deb Bonner**, and **Michele Lee**. Each of these great people has had to learn what we do — which isn't easy. To understand our services, you have to really know not just what technical writing, instructional design, and change management mean, but how these skills fit into the corporate world, and what problems we can solve for clients. This is not only writing manuals and developing e-learning or online help. It may be anything from helping implement a major software initiative with the right introduction, training, and documentation, to analyzing the business impact of a shift in corporate focus and helping to plan for its success.

Carla Galinat and **Jim Sherwood** are the back office of TechProse. They're the ones you hardly ever see but make sure you are paid on time every time, that you get your tax forms, and that when you need some special help for something, some change in standard procedures - like an early check, or an advance - that it happens. They've both been with TechProse for more than nine years.

Joe Jorgensen is the man behind the scenes who makes everything work, from the website and FTP sites to all of our systems and our clients varied technology needs. We're lucky he's a lot younger than me, because while I'm not needed on a daily basis, we really couldn't do without Joe.

Shari McAneney, the office manager, came to TechProse from Steven's former company, Systems Partners. In addition to managing all the thousands of details of the daily workflow at TechProse, she's become an excellent desktop publisher and editor, working in FrameMaker, InDesign, Illustrator, and AutoCAD on many TechProse projects.

Tonia Thompson is a senior technical writer who has been focusing on writing for our transit and manufacturing projects for the past six years. She lives in upstate New York, and she, Jennifer (who moved to Los Angeles), Michele in New Jersey, and Diane in Phoenix, not to mention dozens of out-of-state consultants prove that we've become a truly virtual workplace, with flexible, work-from-home policies.

Lynette, Jennifer, Steven, Shari, Carla, Joe, Jim and Tonia are the long-term team members at TechProse. But we've also been so lucky to hire some expert resources in the last two years. **Ken Kozak** does excellent behind-the-scenes research for everyone on the team. **Dawn Clark, Vicky Passion, and Evey Braga** from Crawford International have joined TechProse, and we were so lucky to get them. Dawn has been with us almost two years, and her project management skills have helped us expand the number of fixed price projects we can take on successfully. Vic and Evey are in their first year with us. Vic's expertise in training, change management, and corporate communications fills a hole I was really concerned about, and I'll be transitioning management in those areas to her over the next eight months.

And last but not least, **Gina Gotsill**, who has been with TechProse a year and a half, has been able to come in and take over the complex proposal writing and editing part of the work, which is deadline-oriented and so important, because every project we take on is unique and requires a truly customized proposal. She also has been writing articles and becoming engaged in the community of technical communications. I hope sometime, 20 years down the road, when someone comes to an STC meeting after having taken on this role from Gina, everyone will ask, "Is Gina retiring?"

Summary

So, all this is simply to amplify the answer to that question about me. I have built an organization that truly expresses my sense of right livelihood. I'm proud of it, and want it to continue for years to come. It has been my guru, teaching me so much about life and business without having to travel to India to do it. STC has been a big part of this. But I am slowly transitioning out of the management role I've had for so long to more of a supportive role. It's been a great ride, and now I'm ready to start coaching from the sidelines. Thanks for asking!

***Meryl Natchez** has been CEO of TechProse since 1982. TechProse places technical writers, instructional designers, project managers, and business analysts on a contract basis. TechProse also provides turnkey solutions to clients for entire corporate communication projects.*

An alumna of Harvard University, Natchez has received numerous awards for business development and community service. She is a co-founder of OPTIC, a nonprofit organization sponsored and incubated by the Contra Costa Council, which provides low-income Contra Costa residents with technology, literacy, and life skills to become economically self-sufficient.

Natchez has taught courses at San Francisco State University, California State Sacramento, and the University of California Berkeley Extension. She is past president of The San Francisco Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, and former chair of the Contra Costa Council Technology Task Force.



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Patent Careers for Technical Writers, Engineers, Scientists, and Medical Professionals - Part 1



by [Steven Oppenheimer](#)

Steven is currently working as a patent agent in Washington D.C.

Editor's note: This article was originally published in [Oppenheimer Communications](#) in six parts. We present the first two parts in this edition and will publish the other four parts in future issues.

After working more than fifteen years as a freelance technical writer, I discovered another career option that draws heavily on my technical writing background and potentially offers significantly better remuneration.

The purpose of this article is to help technical writers, engineers, scientists (physical, chemical, and biological sciences), and medical professionals decide if they want to explore this option.

What Is a Patent Agent? Let's start by defining patent and patent agent.

A patent is a legal document that describes a new invention. It characterizes those aspects of the invention that are "new" or "inventive." A patent has several parts, but the crucial parts are the detailed discussion of the invention (sometimes informally called "the disclosure") and the claims.

- The disclosure gives a description of the invention in sufficient detail that someone who is well versed in the field could build the invention based on the disclosure.
- The claims are a section of the patent that, through specific, structured legal language and conventions, precisely indicates the aspects of the technology that the inventor asserts are original, and that should therefore be protected by law as a unique invention.

In the United States, inventors are legally permitted to draft patent

applications for their own inventions. Most inventors, however, recognize that an effective patent requires specialized training. As such, they turn to patent attorneys or patent agents, who are licensed to draft, file, and prosecute patents on behalf of inventors.

Drafting a patent application entails gathering necessary information from the inventors and writing the patent application. Patent prosecution entails a legal dance between the patent applicant and the United States Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO). The USPTO typically initially rejects all or most of the claims in a patent application. The typical reason is a prior public disclosure, in the form of a prior patent or other publication that the patent examiner considers to anticipate the claimed invention. In other words, patent examiners argue that someone else got there first. The patent applicants-typically represented by their attorney or agent-may then either amend the patent claims or present factual arguments that the claims are not actually anticipated by prior inventions. Sometimes the attorney/agent does a combination of both, amending some claims while trying to argue around other rejections. This dance can go through one or more rounds, and sometimes goes through administrative appeals within the USPTO.

Both patent agents and patent attorneys are licensed to fully represent inventors in all respects before the USPTO. From the standpoint of patent prosecution, there is no practical difference between a patent agent and a patent attorney. However, a patent attorney can represent an inventor in legal proceedings, which may take place in courts beyond the jurisdiction of the USPTO. Attorneys can also advise inventors about contractual and licensing issues and other legal matters that are beyond the strict scope of patent filing and prosecution. Still, there is a lot of work to be done just in the realm of patent filing and prosecution- more than enough to keep a patent agent very busy.

A patent agent, under the supervision of a licensed patent attorney, may also engage in "opinion" work, giving legal advice to clients about whether their inventions violate a patent claim of another patent (usually from another company or inventor) or whether a competing product violates one of their patents.

How To Become a Patent Agent

Drafting and prosecuting patent applications is not exactly the same as technical writing, but there is significant overlap in the skills. Certainly, it is crucial to be able to work with subject-matter experts (such as engineers or biologists) to gather technical information and to document the information in clear language. Drafting the patent claims also involves legal skills that technical writers must learn.

The United States has strict qualifying limits for patent agents. Although a law degree is not required, you must take a licensing exam administered by the USPTO. To qualify for the exam, you must have significant technical training in a field such as electrical engineering, mechanical engineering, chemistry, biology, physics, or medicine. Studies in mathematics are not acceptable, but computer science is. (A complete list of the allowed technical backgrounds is on the USPTO Web site.)

As such, the patent agent field is wide open to technical writers with the necessary academic training and to engineers, scientists, and medical professionals who want to make a switch and who enjoy working with the written word.

At a minimum, you must have an undergraduate degree or the equivalent in an appropriate field. My college degree was for a self-designed program of study; however, I provided the USPTO with documentation showing that I had essentially completed all coursework for a physics major. That was enough to qualify for the test. For all requirements for the test, go to

<http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/dcom/olia/oed/examregist.htm>

and click the "General Requirements Bulletin" link.

The test consists of one hundred multiple choice questions. (Ninety questions are actually graded, and the other ten are "questions under development.") Studying for the test is an art form. In essence, the licensing test is not technical. If you qualified to take the test, it is assumed that you know something about technology or science. Instead, it is a test on law and administrative issues related to patents. It is very detailed, and the pass rate is not high. In other words, you really need to study for it.

Everything you need to know about patent law and regulations is in a book titled Manual of Patent Examining Procedure (MPEP), which you can download from the USPTO Web site. Unfortunately, it is about 3,000 pages long (really), and it is hard to know exactly what to study. When I took the test, I was able to study old tests, which you can also download from the USPTO Web site:

<http://www.uspto.gov/web/offices/dcom/olia/oed/pastexams.htm>

In 2005, the USPTO switched to an electronic testing system. It no longer publishes recent test questions, and the existing tests (2003 and earlier) become progressively more out of date as the patent law and regulations evolve over time. However, I would not completely ignore those old tests. Although the questions and answers may become dated over time, the types of questions still reflect, at least in a broad sense, the kinds of issues likely to be raised in the future.

You can enroll in patent prep courses or you can mail order them. They are not cheap (expect to spend anywhere from \$1,000 to \$5,000), but the prep courses may help you pass the test if you are determined to make a career transition. For what it's worth, I passed the test the first time by studying patent law books and old tests. Here is a link to a site for more advice about studying for the patent agent/attorney licensing exam:

<http://www.intelproplaw.com/>

(Go to the "forums" and find the discussions on patent careers.)

You can also get advice about patent law from discussion groups on Usenet. (See the newsgroup misc.int-prop.) Here is one site for course materials for the patent bar:

<http://www.patentpublishing.com/index.html>

Legal Notices At the time of Internet publication of this article (January 13, 2008), Steven Oppenheimer is a patent agent at a boutique law firm specializing in intellectual property. Mr. Oppenheimer specializes in electronics, software, mechanical, and business method patents. He may be reached at steveqdr@yahoo.com.

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Garden Solace, a poem



by [Danett Weinschelbaum](#)

Danett is an STC member and writing consultant. She specializes in documenting scientific instruments and software.



Ruby-red roses in full bloom drip in voluptuous bouquets from the rosebush.
Their sweet smell and sensual color fills me with pure joy.

Twittering birds fly from tree to tree, bringing insects and worms to their nests
full of fledglings. Their bustling activity fill me with hope.

Pink calla lilies peek up through spikes of green, and blue allium blossoms
burst
forth like fireworks. Their delicate beauty fills me with wonder.

Gentle breezes swirl through the garden, whispering through the trees and
ringing
the wind chimes. Their musical sound fills me with peace.

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