

# Devil Mountain Views



Newsletter of the East Bay Chapter of STC  
September/October 2004

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## Top Ten Things I Wish I'd Known Sooner: Technical Writing Basics

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by [Dara Golden](#)  
DMV Contributing Editor

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

When I started out as a new technical writer, the unwritten basic rules seemed pretty straightforward:

- meet your deadlines
- write accurately and clearly
- know the key contact people for your project

While these rules are a good starting point, I quickly learned that they were not enough. After many years, jobs, co-workers, and manuals, I realized there were additional basics that, once pointed out, made me say "Of course it's so obvious; gee, I wish I'd realized that sooner." This article lists those things. So, in no particular order, here is my "top ten list" of the things I wish I'd known earlier in my career.

### **We Don't Write Science Fiction**

Technical writers write facts; we don't make things up. If you don't know how something works, ask those who do, such as the engineers, technical support, or end users. More importantly, verify that things work the way you say they do whenever possible.

### **Note Updated Features**

When updating a manual, include a list of changes for previous users—new/changed function names, keyboard commands, and new terms. You don't have to define them there, but references help users find the information quickly.

### **Write Intelligently, but Not Obtusely**

Don't show off your expansive vocabulary—or that you own a thesaurus. If readers cannot understand your writing, they'll skip it. Worse, when you use the wrong term, they will wonder what else is incorrect in the manual. Be technically accurate without being confusing.

### **Late Editing Is a Luxury—So Edit As You Go**

Even if you look at the chapter only a few hours later or first thing the next morning, edit your work. Mistakes occur more frequently when editing to meet a deadline.

### **Know Your Information Resources**

Don't go to the engineers or customer support only when you need something. You don't have to be buddies, but being acquaintances and

checking in sporadically helps the relationship.

### **A Picture Is Worth a Thousand Words—If It's the Right Picture**

Use screen shots if they help explain what you're trying to convey. Don't add screen shots "just because"; each picture must serve a specific purpose—either helping a user go from step to step or explaining a new procedure.

### **A Style Guide Is Not Written in Stone**

A style guide is a living document—if an exception needs to be made, consult the group and, if necessary, update the style guide.

### **Use the Documents Yourself**

Use the index to see if you can find information; if you can't, chances are a user cannot either. Look at the document as a user would: are the pictures clear, are step-by-step instructions accurate, and is the document easy to use?

### **Take Your Job Seriously**

Don't belittle your job. If you do, others will too and the respect for you and your group will decrease.

### **There Is Always an Opportunity to Learn**

Whether it is HTML, online help, XML, or something about the company, do not stop learning. Don't rely on the company paying for classes or teaching you. Go out and learn it on your own. You may be able to change careers or become the department expert on something, such as web page creation or editing.

**To Sum Up** Our goal as professionals is to provide information of value to our audience. Experience is the best teacher, then perhaps these additional basics will be of value to both new and seasoned technical writers. ▲

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# Literacy Project Update: Sharing Outreach More Effectively with Teachers



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.*

## Web Site Enhanced

During the summer break from school classes, the EBSTC literacy outreach project focused on sharing grade-appropriate technical writing exercises and strategy suggestions with schoolteachers through the chapter web site. Annotated exercises for learning both [instructions](#) and [descriptions](#) have been freely available on the project's branch of the EBSTC site since 2001. This summer we added two features to make those shared exercises easier for teachers to find and use.

## Three Indexes

Besides the descriptive table of contents that introduces (and links to) each set of exercises, the site now offers three interactive topical [indexes](#) to this instructional material:

- An (alphabetical) index by *thematic task* addressed. From art through iterative text revision to risk management, the exercises are listed by and linked from the (main) aspect(s) of technical writing that they explore.
- California *reading standards* supported. A brief summary of each state content standard appears in grade order (3 through 12), followed by links to the project exercises most relevant to that standard.
- California *writing standards* supported. Here too, teachers can jump from (summaries of) the graded standard that interests them to the shared exercises that most directly support it.

Because teachers plan their lessons with these content standards (and thematic tasks) in mind, the three new indexes should help them quickly find the most relevant parts of our shared cases and examples.

## Concerns Addressed

Discovering external links to our technical writing material (sometimes to the project home page; sometimes to specific exercises) from other reputable educational sites is always satisfying. (For example, we are one of only 14 "additional resources" recommended by the Alameda County Office of Education on their "[Web Sites for Administrators](#)" page.) Sometimes, however, as with the "Teacher Resources" list on the staff web site for [Dorsey High School](#) (Los Angeles County), our link wrongly implies that technical writing is (merely) vocational training. While most professional writers recognize this as a misconception, most high-school teachers do not. So this summer we added an explicit [analysis](#) of "Frequently Asked Questions About the Benefits of Technical Writing in High School" to the set of literacy background papers posted on the site.

The 16 questions addressed in this 10-page FAQ essay reflect the most common and most pressing concerns that schoolteachers have expressed (sometimes personally, sometimes by e-mail) when they consider trying

technical writing with their students. One big fear (noted above) is narrow vocationalism. So the FAQ spells out how, despite its name, technical writing really promotes liberal education by broadening (not restricting) student skills, by promoting self-awareness and intellectual rigor, and by alerting students to the social impact of what (and how) they write.

Other questions explored here include:

- Do technical writing skills have any “authentic,” real-world value (the very opposite of the vocationalism worry)?
- Is there a gender-neutral way to introduce technical writing?
- Can technical writing lessons adapt to meet the different literacy needs of such diverse groups as students who are college-bound and those who are developmentally challenged?

(In each case the answer is “yes.”) If you already have thoughtful (or just strong!) opinions on such questions, please read the FAQ essay and send me your comments. This is a work in progress, evolving in light of writer and teacher feedback. Overtly addressing these questions about technical writing’s role in high school will not help teachers *find* useful exercises (unlike the three new topical indexes), but it will help them better *appreciate* what they find.

**Volunteer** The literacy outreach project always welcomes new contributors; contact [T. R. Girill](#) for information. ▲

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## Confessions of an STC Conference Groupie



by [Judy Herr](#)  
 STC Associate Fellow

***Confession: I am an STC Conference groupie—it may be an addiction. At my first STC conference, I conscientiously attended every session, wanted to learn the jargon, master the latest tools, and be socialized into the profession—quick! After all, I was headed in my fourth career direction. At this first conference, I figured out that I had always been a technical communicator and just didn't know it—director of training, professional fund-raiser for a non-profit, public health educator, organizational development specialist/mass media coordinator. And I relish being surrounded by all those interesting communicators working in diverse disciplines and industries, all able to read, interpret design, write—and yes, spell. And the really good news is that we are attracting members from other countries, and celebrating the opportunity to interact and network with our colleagues from around the world.***

### Commentary

The 2004 STC Conference theme, *Navigating the Future of Technical Communication*, was right on this year. As an organization, as individual technical communicators, and as loyal members of STC chapters back home we came looking for hints and direction as the profession changes. We found many fervent STC leaders working on the transformation of STC; energy-charged discussions among attendees about the state of the profession; and relevant and challenging sessions that included intense, sometimes emotional dialogue.

Logistically, the Conference in Baltimore was highly successful. **Buffy Marie Bennett**, STC's staff director of special projects, reports there were 1,612 attendees (including around 200 members of the SIGs), 219 sessions, and 370 presenters for the leadership day, conference, and workshops. Bennett says, "This year's conference went very smoothly. The Baltimore convention center was a fantastic location—everything was close together and it was easy to navigate."

Among the many meetings, sessions, and workshops that I attended were:

- **Leadership Day 2004 Forum** and workshops that focused on the transformation STC is undergoing to meet the needs of members as the profession evolves. For a summary of transformation thinking, see the [Transformation conference newsletter](#) and other STC updates.
- **Special Interest Group (SIG) Managers' Meeting.** High-energy discussion revolved around how SIG managers can interact with STC chapters, lead virtual communities of practice, and facilitate active participation and support. We talked about everything from tools for effective virtual meetings to finances; about mentoring long distance, listserves, blogs, member outreach, and newsletters. We shared ideas for offering programs on our subject matter to regional meetings and local chapters. We discussed strategies ranging from supporting local SIGs to facilitating communication globally for all SIG members.

- **Panel Session: “Lessons Learned from Offshore Outsourcing.”** Several sessions at the conference focused on offshoring and outsourcing. I was invited to participate on a panel moderated by **Brenda Huettner** with **John Garison**, **Victoria Koster-Lenhardt**, and **Fred Sampson**. Members of the panel brought varied experiences and perspectives to the dialogue, including a panelist who has lived and worked in Austria for several years, an STC chapter leader, and a manager who is responsible for the efforts of a large group of technical communicators in Asia. The discussion that one often hopes will occur in a panel session actually happened! The diverse experience of the audience and the high level of interest in the topic fueled the energetic discussion. Speakers from the audience included managers of writing groups in India and the Philippines, an STC member who manages a company in India that offers technical communication services, and a manager of a large U.S. writing team that may soon be faced with reducing her staff. The dialogue was exceptional, sometimes emotional, and helpful. Maybe no conclusions, but we came closer to understanding.

As a technical communicator, I understand the frustration of some of my colleagues, particularly in areas where the information technology–related industry was the principal employer and now folks find themselves looking for work. Since I lived abroad for six years (three in Malaysia; three in Belgium) I understand the value of providing opportunities to my U.S. colleagues to work outside the U.S.—value for colleagues, corporations, and their companies. I understand the terrible frustration of blue-collar workers here in the U.S. who remained loyal to their companies throughout their working lives, but feel the companies are not reciprocating that loyalty. But I believe that the upheaval in the economy and the advantages accrued from high-tech tools may ultimately mean a better standard of life globally. And I even accept that international corporations are struggling to find solutions to business problems.

I’m hoping that many of our chapter’s members are already planning to attend the next annual conference in May 2005. It will be in Seattle, just up the road—and we will have more opportunities to learn, network, and transform into enthusiastic, interested technical communicators. ▲

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## Member Spotlight: Sherry Smith



by Melody Brumis  
 EBSTC V.P. of Programs

*The East Bay Chapter is known as the friendly chapter. What does that mean? It means you get to meet new people (and network) at every chapter event. At an Admin Council meeting, I met Sherry Smith.*

*In this online interview, you too will get to meet Sherry. She's not only an active volunteer, the Database Manager, but also a stay-at-home mom with an 11-month-old daughter. (How do you spell balance?)*

	<p><b>Sherry Smith</b></p>
<p><b>What does Sherry do as Database Manager?</b></p>	
<p>Basically, she's the data guru!</p> <p>Sherry maintains the chapter's member database, creates reports for the chapter council, helps create the member directory, and makes sure the email updates are passed on to the V.P. of Arrangements (Hillary Russak) as needed.</p>	

### **How did you get into technical communication? How long have you been in it?**

Right out of graduate school, I got a job researching and writing management consulting reports for the banking and healthcare industries. I then worked for a software company that had developed operational performance and productivity benchmarking products for hospitals and medical groups. I wrote documentation for the collection of financial data and also worked in product management doing product design. In my final two years with that company, my career took a more technical turn and I began programming in SQL as I led a project to merge benchmarking data sets from two operational databases together.

In a non-writing job earlier in my career working for a U.S.-based foundation in the Philippines, I evaluated local non-profit agencies dedicated to children's welfare in Manila and made recommendations for funding.

### **What kind of work do you do? Enjoy doing?**

Right now I am a stay-at-home mother to a daughter born in September 2003. I expect to remain out of the workforce for at least the next two years. I enjoy technical writing, of course, especially for database-driven products and the healthcare industry.

### **What brought you to STC? The East Bay Chapter?**

I have been a member for three years (according to the database—I don't remember). I came to STC to give my career more direction. I have lived and worked in the East Bay for eight years, so the EBSTC was a natural choice. (I am originally from Northern Virginia.)

### **As Database Manager, what have you learned about our chapter?**

We need to recruit members with last names beginning with Q, U, X, and Y. Then we will be able to cover the alphabet, a noble recruitment goal.

### **What is the biggest challenge for technical communicators?**

The biggest challenge for technical communicators is to minimize user frustration with overly complex products and information overload.

### **What do you do in your spare time?**

I spend my time refereeing my 11-month-old daughter, Laura, as she attempts to pet our cat, crawling into hiding places so that she can find me, preparing various mushy foods, singing off-tune in futile efforts to get her to take a nap, and taking her to coffee shops so that she has the opportunity to babble at people. In my spare time, I drag my family bird-watching and wildlife-viewing. My husband puts up with attempts to go to out-of-the-way places where wildlife may or may not be at the time. Then if there is wildlife, Laura's squealing scares all of the animals away.

### **What is your favorite book? What is the last book you read?**

My favorite book of all time is a children's book called *The Secret Garden*. I re-read it when I was pregnant and realized that the scenery described in that book started my life-long love of the moors of England and Scotland. I always had a desire to see the moors (which I first achieved when I lived in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s), and now I realize where I first read about them. The last book I read is Eric Carle's picture book about endangered animals called *Panda Bear, Panda Bear, What Do You See?*

### **What is your favorite movie?**

Favorite movies are the Lord of the Rings trilogy due to the beauty of the New Zealand landscape and the compelling characters.

### **What is your best vacation?**

A week in New Mexico: sangria in Santa Fe at a restaurant in an old monastery, hotel room with kiva fireplace in Taos, petroglyph ruins on a small hill.

### **What is one thing that not too many people know about you?**

My husband is British (born in Scotland) and our daughter is half-British. Another unusual fact is that my father used to work for the CIA. ▲

## Ask Elaine: Infit(iv)e Possibilities



by [Elaine Parrish](#)  
 DMV Copyeditor

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

When language geeks start throwing around grammar jargon, like **infinitive** or **inflection**, most normal people have very strong reactions. Their eyes start to glaze over, they begin muttering under their breath about having a plane to catch, and they start looking surreptitiously for the nearest exit. I can't really blame them. For every person I've met who loved English class, there seem to be at least five who either barely tolerated it or downright hated it, and one of the main reasons seems to be the confusing terms.

However, anyone who writes for a living can benefit from brushing up on some of the common terms used to describe certain elements of the English language. After all, it's a lot easier to put together the pieces that constitute a clear, solid piece of writing when you know what those pieces are and how they best fit together.

### The Infinitive

Let's take the infinitive, for example. **Infinitive** is really just a fancy name for the uninflected (stripped-down) version of a verb; i.e., the form that can have the word **to** before it. Thus **to be** is the infinitive, and its various inflections (the forms that go with the pronouns **I**, **he**, **she**, **you**, **we**, or **they**) include **am**, **is**, and **are**.

Infinitive form	Inflected form
to <b>be</b>	I <b>am</b> , he/she <b>is</b> , you/we/they <b>are</b>
to <b>write</b>	I/you/we/they <b>write</b> , he/she <b>writes</b>
to <b>employ</b>	I/you/we/they <b>employ</b> , he/she <b>employs</b>

In most cases, one or more of the inflected forms are exactly the same as the infinitive. So, for most verbs (**be** is an exception), just remember that the infinitive is the same as the form used with **I**, **you**, **we**, and **they**. Or, you can think of the infinitive as the form of the verb that sounds right when you stick the word **to** before it.

Why does this matter? Because there are times when the infinitive is the only correct choice.

### Necessity Sentences

One situation where it is important that a writer employ the infinitive is in sentences expressing strong necessity. The previous sentence is an example; notice the infinitive verb **employ** is used rather than the inflected form **employs**. Any time you have a sentence that starts out "It is necessary that..." "They insist that..." "We urge that..." you can be sure that the verb coming after the **that** should be an infinitive.

## The Split Infinitive

When another word intrudes between the word **to** and the infinitive, it's called a **split infinitive**. An example is the famous phrase from Star Trek, **To boldly go where no man has gone before**, where the word **boldly** appears between **to** and **go**, thus "splitting" the infinitive. As James Thurber notes in *Ladies' and Gentlemen's Guide to Modern English Usage*, "Word has somehow got around that a split infinitive is always wrong." If you learned this "rule" in English class, you can feel free to utterly ignore it and to freely split infinitives as you see fit. Let's face it—**to go boldly** just doesn't have the same panache. ▲

\* From [The Owl in the Attic and Other Perplexities](#), Grosset & Dunlap, 1931.

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## Chapter News: Keeping Our Archive Updated

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by [June Schaefer](#)  
EBSTC Archivist

Do you have any copies of old (or recent, for that matter) chapter newsletters, membership lists, programs, published articles by (or about) any of our members (past or present), or anything else relating to the East Bay Chapter's activities and achievements? If you do, please consider donating these items to our chapter's archive.

To establish an ongoing history of our chapter, including the achievements and recognitions of many of our members, it is important to add these documents to our chapter's archive. Please email or phone me if you have documents to contribute. I will be happy to meet you at a time and place convenient for both of us. Or you may bring your contribution to a chapter meeting; be sure to contact me first, though, to confirm that I will be attending the meeting.

### Contact Information

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## Editor's Message

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by [Becky Rude](#)  
 DMV Managing Editor

Welcome back! After a break for the summer we're ready to start another year of DMV news.

As you can see, I'm still here as editor, but we are searching for candidates to fill the position. Ideally, we'd like two people to share the job so that it's manageable. **Ashwini Tharval** and I did this a couple years ago and it worked out very well. So, if you're interested, please contact me.

At popular request, I'm revising my top 10 reasons you should be editor.

### Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Be the Managing Editor

10.	Your friends can <a href="#">Google</a> your name and get lots of hits.
9.	You'll learn valuable project management and people management skills.
8.	You'll correspond with world-famous writers and other talented people such as <a href="#">Steve Krug</a> ( <i>Don't Make Me Think</i> ) and <a href="#">Chris Orcutt</a> ( <a href="#">NotWriting.com</a> ).
7.	You'll develop a network of fabulous EBSTC members.
6.	You can brag in your holiday letter that you're a Managing Editor with a <i>staff</i> and point your friends and family to a cool web page with your picture.
5.	You'll work with a great staff of editors and designers who make your job easy.
4.	You'll be an honored guest in the closing ceremonies of the <a href="#">Olympics</a> in Athens. (You can dream, right?)
3.	You'll wow managers when your resume says "Managing Editor of <i>Devil Mountain Views</i> , which won the Award of [Merit, Excellence, Best of Show] during my tenure."
2.	Even if you're out of work, you'll stay active in technical communication, showing potential employers your initiative and work ethic.
1.	When you're an old woman or man you shall <a href="#">wear purple</a> and reminisce about the old days when you were an editor on a great newsletter in "the friendly chapter."

Enjoy this issue, which is full of excellent articles.

Becky ▲

## President's Message: Transformations Abound



by [Becky Rude](#)  
EBSTC President

I've written many articles in this newsletter, but this is my first as EBSTC President! I'm excited about my new position and working with all of you in the coming year. I'm looking forward to being another Chapter of Excellence (or Distinction) in 2005! If you have comments, concerns, or just want to say hello, please contact me by [email](#) or phone (925-462-1676).

### STC Transformation

As we all know, the past couple of years have turned the technical communication industry upside down. This year you'll hear a lot of talk about the STC transformation that is occurring in an effort to understand what members want and need from STC. In this newsletter, you can read about the transformation from STC President, **Andrea Ames** ([Transformation Update](#)); Region 8 Director, **Beau Cain** ([Director's Report](#)); and STC Fellow, **Judy Herr** ([Confessions of an STC Conference Groupie](#)). I highly recommend that you read their articles to gain an understanding of what is happening with our organization.

### EBSTC Transformation

I believe that EBSTC is also undergoing a transformation as we lost about 50 members this year when people did not renew their memberships. The good news is that this is a trend internationally, not just for EBSTC. The bad news is that we are left with fewer members for volunteer positions and we will receive fewer dollars from the Society with which to run the chapter.

This means that we must transform into a self-sustaining chapter if we are to continue to have quality speakers at a quality venue. We may need to start running ads in the newsletter and on the web site or come up with ways to make extra money to subsidize chapter meetings such as holding weekend seminars on relevant topics. We also need members to show their support by attending chapter meetings. If you've never attended a meeting, I encourage you to attend one this year.

### Your Transformation

Now that we've talked about how STC and the chapter are undergoing transformation, I want to talk about *your* transformation. You *can* be transformed by becoming involved with EBSTC. You might ask, "How can getting involved in the chapter transform me?" I would like to briefly share my story to describe how volunteering for EBSTC has transformed me.

#### Have Your Say in the Member Survey

Watch your email! EBSTC's second annual member survey will be sent soon via email.

When I joined EBSTC four years ago, I was nervous to come to the first meeting by myself. Like many other technical communicators, I'm an introvert and it's hard to join a new group. But when I arrived at my first meeting, people actually talked to me and made me feel welcome. About a year after joining EBSTC, I volunteered to work on the newsletter. I met many wonderful people as the newsletter editor. It gave me a reason to approach people and to break the ice. I quickly realized that being a chapter volunteer is an invaluable tool for introverts

- ✓ Chapter leadership will make decisions based on the survey; it is important that every member complete it.
- ✓ The survey is online and takes less than 10 minutes to complete.
- ✓ Last year many members said that it was *fun* and easy to complete.

as it gives you confidence in approaching people to start a conversation.

Last year I was asked to consider running for office, and before I knew it, I was running for President-Elect. I will confess that it was a big stretch for me to do this. Not because I lacked confidence in my leadership abilities, but because I really try to avoid public speaking! (You've probably heard that most people would rather die than give a speech; this is according to a survey reported in *The Book of Lists*.) But I knew that this challenge would be good for my professional life and decided to go for it. Now after leading a few meetings, I am very comfortable speaking in front of the group and am glad I met this personal challenge. If a fortune teller had told me a couple years ago that I would say I'm comfortable speaking in front of a group, I never would have believed it. But EBSTC has provided a safe place for me to learn to do this and helped me to undergo a transformation in this regard.

I encourage all of you to consider getting more involved in the chapter in some way: attend meetings, volunteer for a small job, write for the newsletter, or even run for office. I promise you that you will reap many more benefits than you know!

## Public Speaking and Your Career—Attend September 2 Meeting

Concidentally, our first speaker this year is talking about public speaking and how doing it well can help your career. Please join the other introverts at this meeting (OK, there are some extroverts in our group too) and see how you can improve your professional life.

Here's to a transformed Society, chapter, and you!

Becky ▲

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## Chapter Meeting Information

### Upcoming Meetings


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

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.



**Note:** Future program topics will be determined by the upcoming member survey.

Please complete the survey, which will arrive in your email inbox soon!

Date	Speaker	Topic
September 2	<b>Marianne Fleischer</b> 	<p><i>Don't Be a Schmoe with SMEs—and Other Tales of How Becoming a Better Speaker Will Make You a Better Writer</i></p> <p>Don't think we are judged only by what we write. Our skill at speaking in a lucid, articulate manner can be critical to our success as technical communicators. Our ability to strategically spot communication needs, instead of waiting for assignments, can propel our careers. Don't overlook this critical aspect of your job. Come find out how you can be a better technical communicator through better speaking.</p> <p><b>About the Speaker</b></p> <p><b>Marianne Fleischer</b> is a senior communication strategist and writer-producer. She specializes in news, marketing communications, and corporate communications. After receiving a master's degree in communications from the University of Massachusetts on a full fellowship, Ms. Fleischer began her career as a newscaster back east. She then became a documentary and talk show producer for KRON-TV, KPIX-TV, and PBS in the Bay Area.</p> <p>Based in San Francisco for 20 years, Ms. Fleischer helps firms (Hewlett-Packard, Sony, Apple, Schwab, etc.) tell their stories better in speeches, corporate events, PR, video, online content, and print. Her specialty as a speechwriter, speech coach, and media trainer grew out of her academic and media career.</p>
October 7	<b>Bryan Allo</b>	<p><i>Web Skills You Need to Know</i></p> <p>Join us for a discussion of Internet</p>

		technologies needed to create a sharper image on your resume. Bryan worked with Sacramento Past President, Jeff Simon, at Boeing before the company shut down its Sacramento operation. Bryan founded his Web consulting firm Blaxpear soon after he was displaced. ▲
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## Meeting Report: June 2004



by [Becky Rude](#)  
 EBSTC President



Beau Cain swearing in the new officers

The chapter's last meeting for the fiscal year was well attended with over 20 people joining in the festivities and the changing of the chapter leadership. We also had a special guest: **Beau Cain**, the newly elected Region 8 Director.

Beau's talk was very relevant as he announced all the awards the chapter and individual members won as well as the contributions of our volunteers. He talked about how each member can contribute their special talents to the chapter and encouraged us all to consider what we can do for the chapter. Beau is known in his chapter, Silicon Valley, as the "idea hamster" and said he has a talent for churning out ideas to help with problem solving. He hopes to use this talent in the coming two years to help chapters overcome any difficulties they're facing.

### Outstanding Chapter

For the second year in a row, EBSTC won a chapter achievement award. This year we won the **Chapter of Excellence** award! The award recognizes a professional chapter's outstanding accomplishments in achieving the Society's goals through a wide range of programs and activities. Thank you to all volunteers who contributed to the award.

We will have on display a book documenting our efforts to win the award at monthly meetings this fall. Take a look to see what you and your fellow members have done to make this an excellent chapter.

### Outstanding Members

Several chapter members received awards this year for their outstanding contributions to the chapter and to the Society.



Joe Humbert

#### Volunteer of the Year: Joe Humbert

As our hard-working treasurer and web weaver, Joe was elected our Volunteer of the Year. Joe helped keep the chapter on track financially, helped to update our web site regularly, and was proactive in solving chapter issues. We are lucky to have him continue as a volunteer next year! Read more about Joe in the [Member Spotlight](#). **Congratulations Joe!**



Janet Bran

#### Distinguished Chapter Service Award: Janet Bran

The Distinguished Chapter Service Award acknowledges the work of chapter members who provide exemplary service to the Society through their dedication to the chapter and its activities.

EBSTC and the [San Francisco](#) chapter jointly nominated Janet for this award as she has done fantastic work re-designing the web sites for both chapters. Janet has also provided training on maintaining the web sites and has performed troubleshooting duties as needed. Last year she was

instrumental in organizing the Dreamweaver class sponsored by EBSTC.  
**Thank you Janet!**



Judy Herr

### Associate Fellow: Judy Herr

The Society recognizes and honors deserving senior members by conferring upon them the rank of associate fellow. STC's associate fellows have earned this honor through their dedicated work for the technical communication profession and the Society. Less than 1% of STC members achieve the grade of associate fellow.

Judy was cited "For her leadership contributions and achievements with the East Bay Chapter STC, including expanding community outreach; serving as Director of Touchstone, regional communication competition; and serving as the manager of STC's Management special interest group." Read her article, [Trends in Management](#), published in the January 2004 issue of *Intercom*. **Congratulations Judy!**

### Lucky Member

**Mel Cox** won the drawing for a free one-year STC membership. Each time members attended a meeting from September 2003 to May 2004, they were entered into the drawing. Mel was very happy to be the lucky winner. He was so happy that he volunteered to be the Employment Co-Manager for this year! **Congratulations and welcome Mel!** ▲



Mel Cox



EBSTC meeting attendees



Becky Rude wrestling the gavel from Susan Harlan

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## Congratulations to New Members

The new EBSTC officers welcome our new, transfer, and reinstated members! We hope you can come meet us at a chapter meeting.



- Kimberly Bostrom
- Sara Bush
- Carolyn Busing
- Robert DeMartini
- Traci Evans
- Kevin Evert
- K Fillette
- Virginia Guest
- Stephanie Hebert
- Ranoo Khare
- Joshua Kim
- Ernest Mikulic
- Pamela Randle
- Paul Riva
- Thomas Sandy
- Kristen Sloneker
- Todd Smith
- Linda Stewart
- Shuba Subramaniam
- Ashwini Tharval



EBSTC officers from left to right: **Joe Humbert** (Treasurer), **Becky Rude** (President), **Linda Shaltz** (back, President-Elect), **Melody Brumis** (V.P. of Programs), **Joy Montgomery** (Nominations Committee Chair)

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## Networking

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

### Northern California STC Chapters



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

Wednesdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	<a href="#">Sacramento</a>	<a href="#">Eric Butow</a>
Week 2	<a href="#">Berkeley</a>	<a href="#">Joe Devney</a>
Week 3	<a href="#">San Francisco</a>	<a href="#">Susan Becker</a>
Thursdays	Chapter	President
Week 1	<a href="#">East Bay</a>	<a href="#">Becky Rude</a>
Week 3	<a href="#">North Bay</a>	<a href="#">Rolfe Dlugy-Hegwer</a>
Week 4	<a href="#">Silicon Valley</a>	<a href="#">Marie Highby</a>

### 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.

<b>What</b>	EBSTC Professional Development SIG meeting
<b>When</b>	Second Thursday of the month at 11:45 A.M.
<b>Where</b>	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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## Director's Report: August 2004 My Thanks, and Charting a Different Course



by [Beau Cain](#)  
 Region 8 Director

In this, my first article for STC's Region 8 newsletters, I offer my thanks for your support, and I ask for your involvement for changing our Society at the chapter and SIG levels. Along with this, I'll offer a brief explanation of things that have happened, and how those happenings will affect your participation in the Society for the next three years.

### Thanks!

First, I thank each of you who voted for me in the Society's election. I expected my remarkably accomplished opponent, **Alison Reynolds** of Christchurch Polytechnic in Wellington, New Zealand, to win the election. The best I was hoping for was a close vote, and that her supporters wouldn't trounce me! The vote was very close, but in my favor. I thank Alison for being an affable opponent, and particularly I thank her for the help she's already given me in office. Thanks, Alison!

As well, I thank **Paul Sinasohn** for asking me to run for office. One never knows what might happen at the Society's annual conference! Thanks, Paul!

### Charting a Different Course

Now for the business part of my message:

Our Society is undergoing a deliberate transformation in order to better serve our members and the profession. This was prompted by a large drop in Society membership, the consequent decrease in income, and subsequent surveys that revealed that members were not renewing their memberships because they didn't perceive **value** for their money. The Transformation Initiatives are all aimed at making Society membership more **valuable**, and the Transformation Team has done an admirable job of allaying members' fears about the changes, while deftly designing the transformation as it happens.

Now this need to re-assess the value of what we offer to our colleagues has hit home. This year's Region 8 conference, *Charting a Bold Course*, was cancelled just a week before the opening keynote speakers' presentations. One week after this expensive cancellation, the 2005 Region 8 conference team withdrew from producing that conference also.

An admittedly small survey of a tightly targeted group revealed that they didn't register for the conference because their employer didn't pay for it, and they didn't see the **value** of paying for it themselves.

There's that word "**value**" again. The universe is trying to tell us something.

I believe that in order to find **value** at the local level, we should question the efficacy of our chapters' and SIGs' operations, and imagine ways to make them more attractive to a wider audience.

With reduced dues rebates returning to our chapters' coffers this year, it may prove important to examine all chapter expenses and imagine ways to reduce them, while trying to improve the service to our members and colleagues. Does the chapter subsidize dinners at monthly meetings? Might that be changed? Does the chapter lose money on seminars and workshops? Can we adopt a more profitable model? Does the chapter buy services that might be donated instead?

The same frugal perspective can help us avoid planning events that cost more than they earn. It seems that the old model of conferences—a big welcoming event with famous speakers, followed by a day or two of educational sessions, all laced with dedicated networking events and corporate promotional events—may not be the draw that it used to be. Attendance at COMDEX is down, and the Content World conference was, euphemistically, “postponed indefinitely.” And our own Region 8 conference has become an object lesson for future conference management teams.

Further, I've received reports from colleagues that their employers aren't spending money to send them to conferences. And if the colleagues themselves don't see enough **value** in the event to pay for it themselves, then the problem is clear: we're not offering **value** to our colleagues.

So, I encourage everyone in Region 8 to rethink how your chapter and SIGs offer **value**, both to our Society's members and to our non-member colleagues. Are you getting the best return you can for what you spend? Are you getting a return at all?

Please join me in imagining ways to offer more of what we join STC for. Think about the resources we enjoy in our Society, and think of how they might be improved to serve you better. I invite you to email me with your ideas, which are likely the most **valuable** resource we share. ▲

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## Society News: Transformation Update



by [Andrea Ames](#)  
 STC President

Are you a chapter or SIG leader? If so, chances are you've heard of the STC transformation. If not, there's a good chance you haven't heard of the transformation. The following few paragraphs will provide a brief introduction to the transformation work, and the following resources will provide you with more details and updates:

- **Email** ([transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org)): Get answers to questions or provide suggestions, comments, etc., and you will get an answer or a response within two business days.
- **Listserv** ([transform@lists.stc.org](mailto:transform@lists.stc.org)): Opt in and receive updates and news about the transformation, status/progress updates, notifications of web site updates, etc. (Sign-ups via the transformation web page, below, began on Thursday, July 15.)
- **Web site** ([www.stc.org/transformation](http://www.stc.org/transformation)): Visit often to see the main repository of transformation information, and sign up for the Transformation News listserv (above) for update information.

### What Started All This? And What's It Really All About?

Frankly, the economy started all this. STC income—both membership dues income and conference income that underwrites the cost of memberships (you might not realize that your dues don't cover the actual costs of your membership)—began to drop a few years ago, and the STC Board of Directors' efforts to cut costs did not solve our problem. When we dug into the cause of our drop in income, we found that many former members, for example, were unwilling to renew, because it meant paying for memberships that their companies had formerly covered. In short, although the economy moved the Board to act, what we found was that finances were merely a symptom of a greater problem—perceived member value. That's what the transformation is really about: providing value that members want and need to develop professionally.

During our research, we confirmed something we already knew: Our industry and our members are incredibly diverse, with interests ranging from usability to editing, with skills and experience ranging from entry-level to senior, working in industries from financial to scientific, etc. We asked ourselves, "Can one organization really meet the needs, and provide significant professional-development value in all of these areas and industries, to this entire range of people?" In answering this question, we confirmed something else we already knew: Our strength is in our "communities"—what we currently call "chapters" and "SIGs." The Society does not provide direct value to members in any or all of these areas; instead, the Society provides infrastructure, mentoring, financial and administrative support, policy, etc., for those communities to exist and flourish, providing member value indirectly through those communities. Unfortunately, the Society support for and representation of communities today—and the members' experience across communities—is inconsistent.

**The Bottom Line** Members want value, and value means something different to each of us. For the Society to rebuild—and increase—its membership ranks, we need to provide (among other things):

- **Communities:** Consistent, equitably supported and represented communities from which members will derive their personalized professional development value (through the Communities, Finance, and Governance initiatives).
- **Flexible membership:** A flexible membership model enabling members to opt in and out of various services and community memberships to customize their professional development experience.
- **Rich content:** Education, knowledge base, research, and intellectual property of all types, that provides depth of practice in member-identified practice areas and is readily accessed.
- **Networking:** Richer opportunities to network within and beyond geographies.

And we need to communicate information about the transformation, its initiatives, the changes and status of those, as well as solicit feedback from members and leaders around the Society, to ensure that we all understand our options, make informed choices and decisions, and implement the appropriate changes during the transformation process.

## What We're Doing About It: The Transformation

Some of these needs are met through today's community success stories—of which there are many! In our efforts to improve consistency and equality of support and experiences across communities, we're not losing sight of those that are working; instead, we're building on the foundation of their successes...and planning to go a step further to provide even more to those communities to enhance their successes. For communities that are struggling, the support we will provide is designed to help, not hinder, their progress toward providing as much member value as possible.

The work to meet all of these needs is complex. As we change our community support model to be more consistent, many changes are required—in the financial, governance, and technology (infrastructure) areas, as well as the expected community policy changes.

We have a high-level roadmap that we're following, outlining what we need to do at a very high level similar to the bulleted items above. We don't have all the answers. We still need your input and your help. Contact us at [transform@stc.org](mailto:transform@stc.org) to contribute to the transformation.

## Myths and Misinformation Abound!

If you have heard of the transformation, you might be concerned about some misinformation circulating. Here are a few of the most tenacious myths...debunked.

- STC is not a chapter-based organization; it is a member-based organization, according to our Bylaws.
- The transformation is not about finances; it's about member value. Although the economic environment and STC's financial situation in that environment was a symptom that alerted us to the problem, the real issue was members' perception of the value of STC membership.
- The transformation is not about marginalizing, de-emphasizing, or eliminating chapters—large or small. Chapters are communities, just as SIGs are. The goal of the transformation is to equally support and represent all communities—chapters, SIGs, and new, currently undefined communities.
- We are not taking away any chapters' money. At a Transformation Q&A session on Leadership Day at the STC conference in May,

**John Nardone**, our Transformation Consultant, mentioned the well-known fact that STC's chapters have a greater net worth than the Society, and he suggested that chapters with large reserves might want to volunteer to donate some of those reserves to the transformation effort. (Interesting tidbit: Some chapters have contacted me to volunteer to support the transformation financially.)

- The transformation was not instigated by STC's Washington, D.C.-based organization. STC's decision-making, policy-setting body is the Board of Directors, your elected representatives, who are volunteers and live and work around the world. STC's implementation and operations body is the paid staff at the STC Office, located in northern Virginia. Your elected Board of Directors voted to engage the transformation consultant (in May 2003) and to adopt the transformation roadmap (in January 2004) that the consultant and the initial transformation team proposed. The STC Office in northern Virginia does not determine how money is spent; they implement disbursements based on STC Board decisions.
- The current dues rebates that fund chapters are not part of the transformed financial model. The new financial model has not yet been developed. Until it is, the Board of Directors will continue with the chapter dues rebate process: According to STC Bylaws, each year the Board analyzes the current financial situation—including the budget, membership renewals, conference income, etc.—and determines an amount to rebate to chapters. ▲

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## Web Site Review: Internet 101

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by [Kumar Dhanagopal](#)

*Kumar is a technical writer with Intel, India.*

*This article is reprinted from [Indus](#), the newsletter from the India Chapter of STC. Check out this award-winning newsletter, which won a well-deserved Award of Distinguished Technical Communication this year and is packed with content on current issues in our field.*

Have you ever stopped to wonder how the Internet works? Or did you have to, at some point in your professional or personal life, build up a Website from scratch? You needn't look far for answers and help.

[STIMULUS Internet 101](#) is a well organized and easy-to-understand online resource for beginners, as well as those who need refreshers on the basics of the Internet. The site consists of three main sections: Introduction, HTML, and CGI. The challenge of covering as vast a subject as the Internet is addressed by clustering the topics in neat little lesson-modules. The key points are crisply recapped at the end of each module.

The information within each lesson module is organized under a series of questions such as, How to build a form, How to write a Perl script, and How to get the values from the FORM.

The **Introduction** section contains four lessons—Preface, Terminology, Connectivity, and Getting Started.

- **Preface**: This lesson provides an overview of the Internet, covering the origin and growth of the Internet and TCP/IP.
- **Terminology**: This lesson contains definitions of the technical terms typically associated with the Internet—from protocols and languages to Internet services such as email.
- **Connectivity**: This lesson explains how individual computers/servers connect to the Internet, and the various methods available for users to log on to the Internet (ISDN, Broadband, DSL, Cable, and so on).
- **Getting Started**: This lesson is aimed at first-time users of the Internet. It is essentially a collection of search and e-commerce sites. If your goal is to learn more about the Internet and possibly build your own site, skip this lesson.

The **HTML** section is divided into six lessons—HTML Basics, Advanced HTML, Frames, Optimizing Web Pages, Web Design, and Marketing.

- **HTML Basics**: This lesson explains the concept and purpose of HTML, lists the common HTML tags, and provides usage examples for each HTML tag.
- **Advanced HTML**: This lesson covers changing font name, size, and color, and also creating tables.
- **Frames**: This lesson defines frames, analyzes the advantages and drawbacks of using frames in Web pages, and describes ways to create frames and framesets.
- **Optimizing Web Pages**: This lesson provides some background information on how a Web page is loaded/retrieved, and then

explains how the height and width tags, tables, and image formats (GIF, JPEG, and so on) influence page-download speeds.

- [Web Design](#): This lesson provides useful tips and techniques for Web page layout—maintaining context, concealing magnitude, using sub-pages, using frames wisely, using the appropriate typefaces, and so on. The most valuable tip in this lesson is this: *"Don't let your brain stop with what you see on the Internet. Invent new ways of using the same technology to present information in a way that is easy for the user to understand. If you don't succeed in your first try, continue trying."*
- [Marketing](#): This lesson is a refreshing change from most other 'tech-knowledge' sites, which concentrate on teaching the core technical stuff and ignore the business side of the Internet. This lesson teaches the basics of Internet marketing.

The **CGI** section consists of two lessons: Preface and Process.

- [Preface](#): This lesson introduces students to the basic elements of FORM objects in HTML. It addresses questions such as *What is a form object and How do you lay out a form object*.
- [Process](#): This lesson uses one example as a common thread throughout the lesson and takes students on a step-by-step journey of building an HTML FORM that can talk to and get responses from a Perl script. Besides explaining how to build a form and write a Perl script, the lesson also tackles questions about how information fed into the form is processed and how e-mails are sent using Perl.

The content is simple and to-the-point. The site is almost devoid of graphics. While this makes reading a bit monotonous, it does help when you are forced to live with slow connections. Numerous references to related books on [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) are included throughout the site. Had it been supplemented with generous reference links to other sites, and had the Webmaster thrown in even a basic search capability, the site could be a one-stop shop for anyone wanting to learn about the Internet. The Clip of the Day features a clip that is usually relevant to the day as far as possible. I found an Easter Egg during Easter.

The next time you feel the itch to find out more about MIME, POP, cookies, sockets, etc., simply 'google' for 'Internet 101'; this site is listed among the top five hits. ▲

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## About Devil Mountain Views

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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

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

### 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

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

### ADVERTISING POLICY

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

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

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

336 X 280 = \$150

468 X 60 = \$120

160 X 155 = \$80

120 X 60 = \$50

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

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

**Inquiries:** If you have questions or want to start your ad, please contact the [Managing Editor](#).

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## Chapter Officers

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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
2003–2004	Acting Managing Editor: Becky Rude Guest Managing Editor: Gwaltney Mountford <b>Award of Excellence</b> in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2002–2003	Managing Editor: Ashwini Tharval <b>Best of Show, Most Improved, Distinguished Technical Communication</b> awards in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
2001–2002	Managing Editors: Ashwini Tharval and Becky Rude. The newsletter is launched online in Web format. <b>Award of Merit</b> in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1999–2001	Managing Editor: Teresa Washburn <b>Award of Excellence</b> in the STC International Newsletter Competition.
1997–1999	Managing Editor: Kelly Walker <b>Award of Excellence</b> 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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468 X 60 = \$120

160 X 155 = \$80

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