Calendar 1995
23–26 April
Society for Technical Communication
42nd Annual Conference
Washington Sheraton Hotel, Washington, D.C.
For information, call (703) 522-4114

6–9 May
Council of Biology Editors 39th Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency, Kansas City, Missouri
For information, call (312) 201-0101

6–9 June
43rd Technical Writers’ Institute
Remselaer Polytechnic Institute
Contact: Elizabeth Keys
Dept. of Language, Literature & Communication, Sage Labs
Remselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, NY 12180-3590
Phone: (518) 276-2828
E-mail: Elizabeth.Keyses@mts.rpi.edu

9–13 July
Eighth International Conference of the International Federation of Science Editors
School of Biology, University of Barcelona
For information: IFESE-8 Secretariat,
Apartado 16009 K–08080,
Barcelona, Spain
Phone/Fax: +34 3-448 2373
E-mail: guererro@porlos.bio.ub.es

13–15 November
FORUM 95 International Communication Conference
Dortmund, Germany
For Information: Brigitte Beutenmiiller,
Markelstrasse 34,
D–70193 Stuttgart 1, Germany
Phone: +711 65 42 55
Fax: +711 65 07 67

STP for No-Warning Presentations
by John Gear

There you are: late one Friday and you find out that there’s been another management “realignment”. The new VP wants a presentation on all pending projects so “judicious mid-course corrections can be made where appropriate.” Your boss wants you to prepare a presentation on her pet project for 11:00 a.m. Monday morning. You have plans for the weekend not involving work.

Or there you are again: you’ve been suggesting a new approach to an old problem for some time. Your boss tells you “I’m going out of town tonight. If you give me a one-page on it, I’ll read it this week, and we’ll talk about it when I get back.”

Do these situations frustrate you and leave you feeling demoralized about life, corporate dysfunction, and crisis management? Probably. Nevertheless, there is a simple scheme that can help you put together a sharp, focused presentation or proposal on very little notice. And though it is almost pathetically simple, I have used it successfully on several occasions when I did not have time to prepare a well-researched pitch.

The scheme is simple: Situation/Target/Proposal, or STP. In fact, STP is so simple that I was never actually taught to use it; I just learned it the hard way, after making a poor presentation. That presentation was typical for me then, overlong and overblown, full of details about the relative advantages and disadvantages of my pet idea and all of the competing proposals. In the aftermath of my talk, as I glumly collected my elaborate handouts (which were scattered like leaves, testimony to their impact), I saw some crabbed handwriting on one of my most detailed sheets. It said “Not clear: What is STP (Situation, Target, Proposal)?”

It was a real moment of enlightenment for me: I didn’t have to overwhelm the audience with my ideas, just explain them in a format useful for people trying to make a decision. Now I use STP as the starting point for any presentation in which I have to advance an idea for acceptance by others and I don’t have much time to prepare.

To use STP, just take a pad, divide a page into three sections, and label one with S, one with T, and one with P. Start anywhere. Just imagine yourself talking each part through, clearly explaining each concept (S, T, or P) in turn. Some introductory phrases you can use to collect your thoughts:

Situation
We have to act now because . . .
If things continue as they are now . . .
We are here: . . .
Our current results are . . .
The situation is this: . . .

Continued on page 6
FROM THE PRESIDENT
by Deborah Flabirty Kizer

PCS had many accomplishments during 1994 of which we can be proud. We successfully started our PCS chapter in Moscow, Russia. Clearly, PCS is a leader in the area of international outreach. Much thanks to Dave Kemp for his efforts.

Our Awards Committee, chaired in 1994 by Cheryl Reinold, recommended that a service award be established to recognize individuals in PCS. I'm pleased to announce that at the November TAB meeting, TAB approved our proposal to establish the PCS Emily K. Schleisenger Award. This award will recognize outstanding service to the Society by individuals who have actively furthered technical and professional communication through their continued contribution to PCS.

More information on this award will follow.

I could go on and on, but suffice it to say that these successes would not have been realized without the dedication, support, and volunteer efforts of many individuals. We all have many commitments pulling us in seemingly thousands of directions, and I am continually amazed by the support and dedication of our members. I know that 1995 will present many challenges as well, but we have a great AdCom and support team established to address them.

Looking at ETC as a whole, I'm pleased to report that in 1994 I saw a shift towards TAB aggressively working to include small societies in key decision. For example, a small society retreat was held in which issues and concerns related to small societies were surfaced and referred to the appropriate IEEE organization. Also, I was asked as a small society representative to attend the IEEE Organizational Improvement Retreat to be held in January.

Finally, I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Dr. Dan Rosich. Dan, a former president of PCS, was a great asset to our team and a wonderful mentor. He will be sorely missed.

**IEEE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY**

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Program
Forum 95 is a conference for:
- Technical communicators
- Management and executive sponsors
- Other disciplines related to technical communication
- Researchers and practitioners in the field of technical communication

The program will include traditional conference aspects:
- Keynote speakers
- Technical communications sessions and workshops, etc.
- Special sessions, etc.

Registration/Information
For further information or submission of proposal contact the Co-Chairs.

### IEEE USA/Canada

**United Kingdom**

**The Netherlands**

**Germany**
Proverbs for Proofreading
by Peggy Smith

Love is not blind. When you are the writer, editor, typist, or typesetter, proofreading your own work, you will almost surely suffer from myopia. You are too close to see all the errors. Get help.

Familiarity breeds content. When you see the same copy again and again through different stages of production and revision, you may well miss some errors. Fresh eyes are needed. If it's as plain as the nose on your face, everybody can see it but you. Where is the reader most likely to notice errors? In a headline, in a title; in the first line, first paragraph, or first page of copy; and in the top lines of a new page. These are precisely the places where editors and proofreaders are most likely to miss errors. Take extra care at every beginning.

Mistakes love company. Errors often cluster. When you find one, look hard for others nearby.

When you change horses in midstream, you can get wet. It's easy to overlook an error set in type that is different from the text face you are reading. Watch out when type changes to all caps, italics, boldface, small caps, and large sizes. Watch out when underlines appear in typeset type.

Glass houses invite stones. Beware of copy that discusses errors. When the subject is typographical quality, the copy must be typographically perfect. When the topic is errors in grammar or spelling, the copy must be error-free. Keep alert for words like typographical or proofreading. Double check and triple check.

The footnote connects to the kneebone! Numerical and alphabetical sequences often go awry. Check for omissions and duplications in page numbers, footnote numbers, or notations in outlines and lists. Check any numeration, anything in alphabetical order, and everything sequential (such as the path of arrows in a flowchart). It takes two to boogie. An opening parenthesis needs a closing parenthesis. Paragraphs, quotation marks, and sometimes colons belong in pairs. Catch the bachelors.

Every yoooho deserves a yoooho back. A footnote reference may or first reference to a table or an illustration is termed a callout. Be sure that a footnote begins on the same page as its callout. Ensure that a table or illustration follows its callout as soon as possible.

Numbers can speak louder than words. Misprints in numerals (figures) can be catastrophic. Take extraordinary care with dollar figures and numbers in data, statistics, tables, or technical text. Read all numerals character by character; for example, read “1979” as “one nine seven nine”. Be sure anything your figures in your handwriting are unmistakable.

Two plus two is twenty-two. The simplest math can go wrong. Do not trust figures giving percentages and fractions or the “total” lines in tables. Watch for misplaced decimal points. Use your calculator.

Above all, never assume that all is well. As the saying goes, a superego makes an ass out of u and me. Reprinted with permission of The Editorial Eye, 66 Canal Center 19105 S. Ste. 200, Alexandria, VA 22314.

Quality Control
From a facsimile cover page (names changed to protect them and us):

SMITTECKS, INC.
FORMALLY BUILDATRON
No, they don't have a casual and a formal name; they just used to be called “Buildatron” – D.E.N.

Tools of the Trade
by Cheryl Raimond

A - C - T - N - O - W
A Six-Step Response to Disaster (Continued)

Step 4: Note Your Next Steps
The crisis has occurred. You have taken the necessary immediate actions—caring for the injured and their families and telling the press and public what you know. Now, you can move backstage to prepare for the upcoming, perhaps longlasting, dialogue with the world.

Organize centers of information. People will not hold their calls until you are ready to answer them. Remember, if you don't provide the answers, rumors will rush in to fill the vacuum. Therefore, your first step must be to arrange for centers of information.

You will need one central crisis information manager. This person will seek to get all updated information possible and route it to the centers of information. The centers will also give the crisis information manager any news they receive, for relay to the other centers.

How you organize your centers of information depends on the size of:

a) your scope of responsibility,
b) the company, and c) the crisis.

The centers may be single people or groups. Ideally, you should have an information center for each group affected by the crisis. These might include a technical center to give technical details and updates, a public relations center to give information to the media, a center in personnel to answer employees' questions, a financial information center for anxious investors, and a customer service center to keep customers informed of the status of the product and their orders.

You may also decide to set up a special “800” number to answer crisis-related calls.

However you arrange your centers, remember two key points:

All centers must give the same message. To this end, as soon as one center gets new information, that information must immediately be relayed to the crisis information manager for relay to the other centers.

The people staffing the centers must be proactive, not just reactive. Their job is both to say and to disseminate information.

If you don't provide the answers, rumors will rush in.

Get expert information and advice, that is of course. Success of this act depends a great deal on effective anticipation of a crisis (step 1 for A - C - T - N - O - W). When a specific disaster hits, you should know whom to call.

Your experts must include a wide range of respected, objective professionals from outside the corporation. Depending on the problem, they may be physicians, scientists, engineers, financial people, or other specialists. Different specialists may give you different opinions to the problem; to avoid serious errors in judgment, you must consider all possible viewpoints.

Witness Dow Corning's public image problems with the silicone-gel breast implants. Some crisis management experts say a contributing factor may have been the company's over-reliance on the analyses of plastic surgeons, who wanted the implants to be declared safe.

Give the experts all your information and get their analyses and advice. Their input may well be the most useful and credible information you can secure.

Form a crisis team. The members of the team will depend on the nature of the crisis. In addition to the crisis information manager, you will usually want representatives of senior management, finance, the legal department, public relations, human resources, and the technical areas affected. The team must meet frequently; at each member's request, to review developments and respond effectively as a group.

Plan for interviews and press releases. As you prepare to present your position to the public, keep in mind three essential rules:

1. Public perception is your reality. Determine your company's future.
2. The public will not forgive insensitivity, evasion, or irresponsibility.
3. The public will listen to experts' opinions—whenever they report.

Next time, we will see how to prepare specifically for different types of crisis communication. Any questions?

Cheryl Raimond is a member of the PEC administrative Committee and the author of more than 200 articles and several books, including How to Write a Million-Dollar Memo, Being a Boss, and The Language of Business. She is President of PEC Communications, 64 Dickson Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583; (914) 722-0700, which offers business-to-business workshops and courses in writing, presentations, and on-the-job communication skills.
Photo Bits
From Banff,
IPCC 1994

LETTER TO
THE EDITOR

Your Newsletter comes to my atten-
tion regularly. I once served as the
Chairman of the Administrative
Committee back when the group
was first founded. We were having
fun planning symposia for Boston,
Washington, and even Lansing,
Michigan. Then, one day we
planned a dual symposium on the
East and West coast simultaneously.
AND NOW, you are even in Russia!
Your request for a new name has
been a perennial one. We argued
THAT issue back in the 50's when
we first began. I have always
believed that the mission of the PCS
is different from that of the other
such groups of IEEE. Whereas the
other groups are largely sharing
specific technical information to a
group already "in-the-know", the
PCS group is for all comers and is
not so much a body of technical
information as a guiding force on
how to present information. In
other words, every other group can
use these services including the
group itself. Sort of introspection
squared.

But I send you another idea. I hap-
pen to be an organbuilder. We have
a society, the International Society
of Organbuilders. The ISO has been
issuing technical journals for many
years in multilingual form. I
close two pages from an issue of
1987 [not reproduced here; Ed.]
Notice that we have it in German
and English. If you had written your
paper in Spanish, French, Italian,
Dutch, Swedish, or any other lan-
guage, there would have been three
columns with the original language
in the center and the German and
English version on each side.
What I am asking is, if such a small
and close-knit society as organ-
builders can offer their technical
publications in a multilingual for-
mate, why can't the bigger and much
more significant technologies also
provide multilanguage publications?
Physics, mathematics, electrical
engineering, chemistry!!

Maybe, the PCS should do some
encouraging along these lines to
promote greater interchange among
the several language groups.
Best wishes for your continued
success.

Joe Chapline
Newbury, New Hampshire

Technical Writing Course Offered via Satellite

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
is offering the third course in its
series on technical writing leading
towards a certificate for the pack-
age of four courses. The courses
are all delivered via satellite with
both video and audio return via
telephone lines. Video compression
allows students at distant sites to
see one another during classes.
The first two courses were Com-
munication Research 1 (usability
testing) and Typography and
Document Layout. The fall '94
course is User Documentation and
Interface Design. The course
scheduled for spring '95 is the
Document Production Process.

This fall students are enrolled from
IBM at sites in the United States
and Canada and from Perkins-Hiller
in Connecticut. Though students
are separated by distance, inter-
national borders and several time
zones, class discussion is lively.
Students are able to show their
class work to others either via
compressed video or by faxing
work to Rensselaer for display via
satellite. Students are also able to
communicate with professors by
e-mail and will be able to corre-
spond with each other by e-mail
once the class directory of student
e-mail addresses is complete.

Students on- and off-campus are
able to review course material
prior to examinations by watching
videotapes of classes. This is of
particular benefit to off-campus
students who would not have this
resource with typical classes.
Professors are supported in their
instruction by a staff which runs
video cameras and generates high-
quality graphics and, in some
cases, animated illustrations of
course concepts.

Rensselaer is considering expand-
ing its course offerings to support
a full satellite-delivered master's in
technical communication and to
offer courses in conjunction with
other universities. The satellite
technical communications certifi-
cate is one of several educational
programs offered by Rensselaer.
Rensselaer also offers graduate
degrees in engineering and man-
agement by satellite.

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e-mail: robert_krull@mts.rpi.edu

Say Again?
This headline caught my eye in
Nature just after I returned from
Banff.
Discord over IPCC meeting
reopens climate dispute
Nature, 371: 467
(6 October 1994)
It took me a few seconds to real-
zize that others use "IPCC" besides
PCS. In this case, the Intergov-
ernmental Panel on Climate
Change.
—D.E.N.
Engineering-Writing Contest Winner Repeats in 1994

The third annual Engineering-Writing Contest for IEEE Students in the Philadelphia section had nine papers entered (three in 1992 and eight in 1993). The First Place winner was Marc Jeffrey of Swarthmore College, for "An Inexpensive virtual reality system"; Marc was the First Place winner in 1992 and 1993. Andrew S. Brown of Swarthmore took Second Place for "Techniques for optical character recognition". Tied for third were Ann U. Tran of Swarthmore for "Specially resolved characteristics of semiconductor lasers" and Joseph H. Shroyer, David I. Armor, and Christopher J. Matarazzo of Temple University for "Structure and implementation of an automatic facial identification and recovery control system". All six authors received framed certificates and cash prizes ($150 for first, $100 for second, and a total of $50 for third) at the annual Student Night Dinner held at Drexel University on 12 April 1994. The keynote speaker at that dinner was William St. J. Kelly, the 1992 IEEE President and a Philadelphia section stalwart. All awards were contributed by the IEEE Professional Communication Society.

Two of the six judged were the co-chairmen of the Student Activities Committee: Dr. Barney Adler and Dr. Dritpal Singh. The other four were from the Professional Communications Conference: Edward J. Podell (Chairman), Jack Friedman, Janet Rochester, and John Schanely.

The abstract of the first-place paper is as follows: "This paper describes a virtual reality (VR) system that was designed and built from scratch by students, and was assembled from readily available parts, the total cost of which is only a few hundred dollars (excluding computers). The design incorporates an ultrasonic tracking system to determine, with sub-centimeter accuracy, the three-dimensional position and orientation of a helmet, [and] possesses an update rate of better than 15 Hz. The graphics portion of the project uses PIX/Wi- dows on a UNIX workstation, and should prove sufficient for interesting demonstrations and future student research."

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER

by Joan G. Nagle
The Editor as Curmudgeon

Let's clean off the desk here, as a start for the new year.

What has been making such a mess (along with Christmas cookie recipes, medical insurance claim forms, shopping lists, and reminders for the car's booster shots) is a collection of things saved for future curmudgeonly columns. If there is a common theme among them there is, it is curmudgeonlyness itself, so that's the sermon topic for the day.

Speaking of sermon topics, a seminary class was told by their homiletic professor that a good sermon title was one which, viewed on the church's outdoor sign, would make people want to get off a passing bus. For his next assign- ment, one student turned in the following title: "Your Bus Is on Fire."

Now down to business. A recent Reader's Digest humor column reported that the 8-year-old daughter of two professional writers was hugely afflicted by a friend. Searching for an appropri- ate opprobrium, she finally came up with, "You...you...you editor!"

If you have ever been edited yourself, you can appreciate this. It can only be compared with events such as being measured for a custom-made suit ("Is your left shoulder always this droopy?"); or sending your child to dancing class ("I'm afraid Asthia is deficient in gross motor skills. Also, social skills, if the truth were known.") or inviting an interior designer to one's house for tea. Don't do any of these things if you can help it. Being edited, unfortunately, is not always preventable.

But editors have a few things to say about, if not often to, writers. In Language on a Leash, (Editorial Experts, Inc., Alexandria, Virginia, 1985), Bruce Boston says that he doesn't know very many editors, if any, who have what you would call a sweet disposition. I called a few of them to check this out and was mostly rewarded with either 'Are you crazy? In this business?' or 'Don't have anything better to do than bother me? Get a job!'

'Editors are drawn to the curmudgeonly way of life, I think, because it suits not their personalities but the profession...' Editors get that way because they are mostly paid stripers. They are in the business of assuming that there is something wrong with what they're looking at, and it is their job to find it. If not, they see too much pomposity, hypocrisy, and double-dealing to remain trusting—or peace- tempered—long. They are real masters, the clock and calen- dar, are absolutely heartless, and the editors respond in kind.

"Becoming a curmudgeon is simple, it is a way of coping, a way of making the editorial bed of thorns a little easier to lie on."

And speaking of pomposity provides a slot for the following quotation from George Bernard Shaw: "In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language; the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it." Amen from the technical editing department.

"It is a strange thing," Turgevend said. "A composer studies harmony and theory of musical forms; a painter doesn't paint a picture without knowing something about colors and design; architecture requires basic schooling. Only when someone makes a decision to start writing, he believes that he doesn't need to learn anything and that anybody who has learned to put words on paper can be a writer."

Are these two positions contra- dictory? I think not. The need to, and ways, to get rid of literary language is part of what good writers learn when they learn their trade. Good—that is, trained—editors learn to recognize it when they see it and replace it with the simple and direct... while cussing profanely in the mode Boston called 'Low Grant as an H.L. Mencken knockoff.'

Mencken described his editorial philosophy at The Smart Set as 'nothing uplifting.' (Hey, guys, if you haven't read anything by Mencken, please do. Anyone who has come this far down the road with an amateur curmudgeon will adore him.)

And speaking of clocks and calendars, you'll love this. Forbes magazine recently published a survey results showing the professions which were most sought-after by college students. Technical writing/editing came in 17th! (When I was a college student, I didn't even know there were such jobs. Of course there weren't then, not very many.) But the kicker is why they wanted to get into this mess: because it's a job where there isn't any pressure.

Final quote: "The demarcation of young people is a necessary part of the byline of older people and greatly assists in the circulation of the blood." (Logan Pearsall Smith)
No—Warning Presentations
(continued from page 1)

Target
Our goal is to . . . We'd like to be . . .

Our mission is . . .
The four-year plan requires . . .

However, the customer demands . . .

We are committed to . . .

Proposal
Therefore, . . .

Therefore is the only word that makes sense to me for the proposal section. This section is the point of the presentation.

If you've done your job well in the first two steps, this is what the audience expects and wants to know: how you think "newreality" can be changed to the desired reality.

When you get the internal monologue going. Just that. Do not write about bullies or other non-hierarchi-cal symbol to separate the points. (Numbers and letters seem to impose a rank on your thoughts that can be impossible to remove, even though the first thing you thought you had was just the most obvious, not necessarily the best or most important.)

Refine the list only after you run dry. Combine similar ideas and split out different ones that ran together. You will probably have a reasonable number of entries for each key section, each entry being the kernel of a presentation idea or a sentence in a memo. At this point, you can polish to your heart's content . . . or, more likely, until your time's up. My experience is that you are best off not polishing at this point. Get the thing into whatever basic form you will finally present it (slides or memo) and stop. If you understand the proposal and believe in it, your unpolished responses to the STP prompts are probably as

The Taste of PBJs and Technical Writing by Nancy Shepard

Last year I had an opportunity to speak to my son's first grade class about my job. It was Career Week at the elementary school and several parents had volunteered to talk about what we do for a living.

Knowing that technical writing for a first grader could bring yawns and sighs, I tried to perk up my presentation with lots of show-and-tell. After all, I was up against a police detective and fireman in the next room. I brought the fanciest-looking books that I had written, especially the ones with pictures. I also brought my portable PC to show them some desktop publishing.

When I "magically" changed a word from 12 points to 48 points, they were appropriately impressed. But my books were greeted with "Where are the colored pictures?" and "What else do you have to show?" It was then that I decided to give them a taste of the real thing.

I divided the class into two teams and gave each a jar of peanut butter, a jar of grape jelly, two slices of bread, and a knife. Their assignment: "An alien has landed on Earth who knows nothing about what PB&J sandwiches eat. Your job as a team of technical writers is to write the directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich so that the alien will know exactly how to make one himself."

With squeals of excitement the teams dove in. Nothing like a hand-on challenge to wake up the doubtful, I thought. I watched as they appointed specialists: "The first step is to grab the jar of peanut butter."

"What if an alien doesn't know what a jar is?" and "What if he doesn't have hands and can't hold it?"

And so it went for half an hour. When the young authors finished, we did some sophisticated usability testing. Each team exchanged directions with the other team and tried to follow the instructions. As the sandwiches were built, there was plenty of laughter and poking fun at each team's set of instructions. The tests ended with the test by product promptely eaten. (Don't ask how eight kids divided one PB&J sandwich.)

As I drove out of the school parking lot, I received an unexpected bonus from my presentation.

Having reduced my entire job of task analysis, planning, negotiating, custom design, writing, rewriting, editing, desktop publishing, and printing everything down to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, I saw my work through the eyes of a first grader. My work had been distilled to a level of simplicity I had somehow lost sight of. Simple communication. Team-work. Having a good time. All the options staff scooped so is significant. It was the closest I've ever come to having a spiritual experience with my career.

Take advantage of the opportunities to share your work with young people. I can't guarantee any mystic revelations, but who knows, you might help to elevate our profession to another level, that of the commonly known: fireman, doctor, technical communicator. Nancy Shepard is President of the Rocky Mountain chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. This article was reprinted, with permission, from Technicalities, the chapter newsletter.

Newsletter Schedule
The Newsletter publication and deadline schedule is:

Issue Deadline
March/April 3 February 1995
May/June 7 April 1995
July/August 2 June 1995

Contributions are welcome; ASCII e-mail and ASCII IBM-compatible diskettes are preferred. Please send to:

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Fax: (708) 252-3357

Worth Reading
Miller, M.J. Editors in an Electronic World. PC Magazine 13(15):79-80 (13 September 1994). A brief treatment of basic typographic choices and their conse-quences, including bold vs. italic, the use of hyphens and dashes, indentation, and headings. In a slender, the author questions the wisdom of equal interword and intersentence spacing.

Boschman, M.C. and Roufs, J.A.J. Reading and Screen Flicker. Nature 327:157 (10 November 1994). A note reporting no difference between 100-Hz and 50-Hz displays in terms of hamstring the reading process on a video screen. However, subjects preferred the quality of the 100-Hz display.

No—Warning Presentations

Target

Our goal is to . . .
Our mission is . . .
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However, the customer demands . . .
We are committed to . . .

Proposal

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When you get the internal monologue going, just try to use bullet points or any other non-hierarchical symbol to separate the points. (Numbers and letters simply to impose a rank on your thoughts that can be impossible to remove, even though the first thought you had was just the most obvious, not necessarily the best or most important.)

Refine the list only after you run dry. Combine similar ideas and split out distinct ones that ran together. You will probably have a reasonable number of entries for each key section. Each point should be a kernel of a presentation idea or a sentence in a memo. At this point, you can polish your heart’s content . . . or, more likely, until your time’s up. My experience is that you are best off not polishing at this point. Get the thing into whatever basic form you will finally present it (slides or memo) and stop. If you understand the proposal and believe in it, your unpolluted responses to the STP prompts are probably as strong as any. Quit now and let it go for at least a night; your subconscious will work on the problem for you. Your editing will be much more perceptive the next day or Monday morning.

That’s it. It’s not the key to wealth, fame, or instant promotion, but it is a usable heuristic for generating focused presentations quickly. Like all heuristics, STP has limitations. Compared to a crafted, rehearsed, and revised presentation, an STP presentation or memo almost certainly lacks some grace, and if your audience needs and expects a review of all options, STP just doesn’t deliver.

STP: Situation, Target, Proposal

Yet within its domain, STP works well enough because it makes you address three important issues that management wants answers to when faced with a proposal to do something:

1. Even if we’re gonna do something, do we have to do it now?
2. Okay, we have to do something soon. Do you understand our (any) goals?
3. Okay, we have to do something soon and you seem to understand where we should go.

How do we get there?

Each of these questions, expressed or not, is a powerful idea-slayer in its own right. In combination they can be overwhelming. (While managers rarely verbalize these, whenever I bring them out in the open there is enough nervous laughter to convince me that they hold true in many organizations.)

Given a high-pressure, short-deadline environment, the best way to deal with these questions is to face them head on. The standard formats for presentations and proposals:

Here are the alternatives we considered, the pros and cons of each, and our recommendation, along with forecast return time.

It may be better . . . if you have the time. But if you don’t, and you want a high-probability technique for preparing a presentation that can influence the decision-making process positively, try STP sometime.

John Gear, principal of Catalyst Communications in Lanikai, Washington, founder Catalyst to help business and government agencies get results through decisive management and communications.

Newsletter Schedule

The Newsletter publication and deadline schedule is:

Issue Deadline
March/April 3 February 1995
May/June 7 April 1995
July/August 2 June 1995

Contributions are welcome; ASCII e-mail and ASCII IBM-compatible diskettes are preferred. Please send them to:

David E. Nadziejla
6009 Osage Avenue
Downers Grove, IL 60516
Tel: (708) 252-5019
Facs: (708) 252-3357

Only ambitious nonmonists and hearty materialists exhibit their rough drafts. It is like passing around samples of one’s spawn.

Vladimir Nabokov

as quoted in The Macmillan Treasury of Revoltil Quotations; E.P. Murphy, 1970.

Worth Reading

Miller, M.J. Editors in an
Electronic World. PC Magazine 13(15): 79-80 (15 September 1994). A brief treatment of basic typographic choices and their conse-
quences, including bold vs. italic, the use of hyphens and dashes, indentation, and headings. In a sidebar, the author questions the wisdom of equal interword and intersentence spacing.

Boschman, M.C. and Roush, J.A.
Reading and screen flicker.
Nature 372: 157 (10 November 1994). A note reporting no difference between 100-Hz and 50-Hz displays in terms of ham-
pering the reading process on a video screen. However, subjects preferred the quality of the 100-Hz display.

Levine, A. The great debate re-

The Taste of PBJs and Technical Writing

by Nancy Shepard

Last year I had an opportunity to speak to my son’s first-grade class about my job. It was Career Week at the elementary school and several parents had volunteered to talk about what we do for a living.

Knowing that technical writing for a first grader could bring yawns and sighs, I tried to perk up my presentation with lots of show-and-tell. After all, I was up against a police detective and fireman in the next room. I brought the fanciest-looking books that I had written, especially the ones with pictures. I also brought my portable PC to show them some desktop publishing.

When I “magically” changed a word from 12 points to 48 points, they were appropriately impressed. But my books were greeted with “Where are the colored pictures?” and “What else do you have to show?” It was then that I decided to give them a taste of the real thing.

I divided the class into two teams and gave each a jar of peanut butter, a jar of grape jelly, two slices of bread, and a knife. Their assignment: “An alien has landed on Earth who knows nothing about what PB&J sandwiches are. Your job as a technical writer is to write the directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich so that the alien will know exactly how to make one himself.”

With squeals of excitement the teams dove in. Nothing like a hand-on challenge to wake up the doubtful, I thought. I watched as they appointed specialists and shouted, “The first step is to grab the jar of peanut butter” and “What if an alien doesn’t know what a jar is?” and “What if he doesn’t have hands and can’t hold it?”

And so it went for half an hour. When the young authors finished, we did some sophisticated usability testing. Each team exchanged directions with the other team and test to follow the instructions. As the sandwiches were built, there was plenty of laughter and poking fun at each team’s set of instructions. The tests ended with the test by-product promptly eaten. (Don’t ask how eight kids divided one PB&J sandwich.

As I drove out of the school parking lot, I received an unexpected bonus from my present job. Having reduced my entire job of task analysis, planning, negotiating, designing, writing, rewriting, editing, desktop publishing, and printing everything down to a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, I saw my work through the eyes of a first grader. My work had been distilled to a level of simplicity I had somehow lost sight of. Simple communication. Teamwork. Having a good time. All the options stuff seemed so significant. It was the closest I’ve ever come to having a spiritual experience with my career.

Take advantage of the opportunities to share your work with young people. I can’t guarantee any mystic revelations, but who knows, you may help to elevate our profession to another level, that of the commonly known: fireman, doctor, technical communicator.
Engineering-Writing Contest Winner
Repeats in 1994

The third annual Engineering-Writing Contest for IEEE Students in the Philadelphia section had nine papers submitted (there were three in 1992 and eight in 1993). The First Place winner was Marc Neffel of Swarthmore College, for "An inexpensive virtual reality system"; Marc was the First Place winner in 1992 and 1993. Andrew S. Brown of Swarthmore took Second Place for "Techniques for optical character recognition". Tied for third were Ann U. Yan of Swarthmore for "Specially resolved characteristics of semiconductor lasers" and Joseph B. Shroyer, David L. Armor, and Christopher J. Matarazzo of Temple University for "Structure and implementation of an automatic face identification and recovery control system".

All six authors received framed certificates and cash prizes ($150 for first, $100 for second, and a total of $50 for third) at the annual Student Night Dinner held at Drexel University on 12 April 1994. The keynote speaker at that dinner was Dr. William A. Burdick, Jr., the 1992 IEEE President and a Philadelphia Section stalwart. All awards were contributed by the IEEE Professional Communication Society.

Two of the six judges were the co-chairmen of the Student Activities Committee: Dr. Barney Altieri and Dr. Pritpal Singh. The other four were from the Professional Communications Committee: Dr. Edward J. Podell (Chairman), Jack Friedman, Janet Rochester, and John Schanely.

The abstract of the first-place paper is as follows: "This paper describes a virtual reality (VR) system that was designed and built from scratch by students, and was assembled from readily available parts, the total cost of which is only a few hundred dollars (excluding computers). The design incorporates an ultrasonic tracking system to determine, with sub-centimeter accuracy, the three-dimensional position and orientation of a helmet, and possesses an update rate of better than 15 Hz. The graphics portion of the project uses PIX/X-Windows on a UNIX workstation, and should prove sufficient for interesting demonstrations and future student research."

Crumudgeon's Corner

by Joan G. Nagle
The Editor as Crumudgeon

Let's clean off the desk here, as a start for the new year.

What has been making such a mess (along with Christmas cookies recipes, medical insurance claim forms, shopping lists, and reminders for the car's booster shots) is a collection of trash saved for future crumudgeonly columns. If there is a common theme among them, it is crumudgeonlyness itself, so that's the sermon topic for the day.

Speaking of sermon topics, a semi-nary class was told by their homi-letics professor that a good ser-mon title was one which, viewed on the church's outdoor sign, would make people want to get off a passing bus. For his next assignment, one student turned in the following title: "Your Bus Is On Fire."

Now down to business. A recent Reader's Digest humor column reported that the 8-year-old daughter of two professional writers was hugely affluent by a friend. Searching for an appropri-ate opporrtunity, she finally came up with, "You...you...you editor!"

If you have ever been edited yourself, you can appreciate this. It can only be compared with events like being measured for a custom-made suit ("Is your left shoulder always this droopy?"") or sending your child to dancing class ("I'm afraid Anita is deficient in gross motor skills. Also, social skills, if the truth were known.") or inviting an interior designer to one's house for tea. Don't do any of these things if you can help it. Being edited, unfortunately, is not always preventable.

But editors have a few things to say about, if not often to, writers. In Language on a leash, (Editorial Experts, Inc., Alexandria, Virginia, 1985), Bruce Barton says that he doesn't know very many editors, if any, who have what you would call a sweet disposition.

"I called a few of them to check this out and was mostly rewarded with either 'Are you crazy? In this business?' or 'Don't you have anything better to do than bother me? Get a job!'" Editors are drawn to the crumudgeonly way of life, I think, because it suits not their personalities but the profession. . . . Editors get that way because they are mostly paid skeptics. They are in the business of assuming that there is something wrong with what they're looking at, and it is their job to find it. IEEE members see too much pomp, posty, hypocrisy, and double-deal-ing to remain trusting—or sweet-tempered—for long. Their real masters, the clock and calend-ar, are absolutely heartless, and the editors respond in kind.

"Becoming a professional crumudgeon is simply a way of coping, a way of making the editorial bed of thorns a little easier to lie on."

And speaking of pomposity provides a slot for the following quo-tation from George Bernard Shaw: "In literature the ambition of the novice is to acquire the literary language; the struggle of the adept is to get rid of it." Amen from the technical editing department.

"It is a strange thing," Turgeniev said. "A composer studies harmony and theory of musical forms; a painter doesn't paint a picture without knowing something about colors and design; architecture requires basic schooling. Only when somebody makes a decision to start writing, he believes that he doesn't need to learn anything and that anybody who has learned to put words on paper can be a writer."

Are these two positions contra-dictory? I think not. The need to, and ways to, get rid of literary language is part of what good writers learn when they learn their trade. Good— that is, trained—editors learn to recognize it when they see it and replace it with the simple and direct . . . while cussing profoundly in the mode Boston called 'Low Grant as an H.L. Mencken knockoff.'

Mencken described his editorial philosophy at The Smart Set as "nothing uplifting". (Hey, guys, if you haven't read anything by Mencken, please do. Anyone who has come this far down the road with an amateur crumudgeon will adore him.)

And speaking of clocks and calendars, you'll love this. Forbes maga-zine recently published survey results showing the professions which were most sought-after by college students. Technical writing/editing came in 17th! (When I was a college student, I didn't even know there were such jobs. Of course there weren't then, not very many.) But the kicker is why they wanted to get into this mess: because it's a job where there isn't any pressure.

Final quote: The denunciation of young people is a necessary part of the hygiene of older people and greatly assists in the circulation of the blood." (Logan Pearsall Smith)
LETTER TO
THE EDITOR

Your Newsletter comes to my atten-
tion regularly. I once served as the
Chairman of the Administrative
Committee back when the group
was first founded. We were having
eering committee for Boston,
Washington, and even Lansing,
Michigan. Then, one day we
planned a dual symposium on the
East and West coast simultaneously
AND NOW, you are even in Russia!
Your request for a new name has
been a perennial one. We argued
THAT issue back in the 50's when
we first began. I have always
believed that the mission of the PCS
is different from that of the other
such groups of IEEE. Whereas the
other groups are largely sharing
specific technical information to a
group already "in-the-know", the
PCS group is for all comers and is
not so much a body of technical
information as a guiding force on
how to present information. In
other words, every other group can
use these services including the
group itself. Sort of introspection
squashed.

But I send you another idea. I hap-
pen to be an organbuilder. We have
a society, the International Society
of Organbuilders. The ISO has been
issuing technical journals for many
years in multilanguage form. I
enclose two pages from an issue of
1987 [not reproduced here, Ed.]
Notice that we have it in German
and English. If you had written your
paper in Spanish, French, Italian,
Dutch, Swedish, or any other lan-
guage, there would have been three
columns with the original language
in the center and the German and
English version on each side.

What I am asking is, if such a small
and close-knit society as organ-
builders can offer their technical
publications in a multilingual for-
mation, why can't the bigger and much
more significant technologies also
provide multilanguage publications?
Physics, mathematics, electrical
engineering, chemistry??

Maybe, the PCS should do some
encouraging along these lines to
promote greater interchange among
the several language groups.

Best wishes for your continued
success.

Joe Chapline
Newbury, New Hampshire

Technical Writing Course Offered via Satellite

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute is
offering the third course in its
series on technical writing leading
towards a certificate for the pack-
age of four courses. The courses
are all delivered via satellite with
both video and audio return via
telephone lines. Video compression
allows students at distant sites to
see one another during classes.

The first two courses were
Communication Research 1 (usability
testing) and Typography and
Document Layout. The fall '94
course is User Documentation and
Interface Design. The course
scheduled for spring '95 is the
Document Production Process.

This fall students are enrolled from
IBM at sites in the United States
and Canada and from Perkin-Elmer
in Connecticut. Though students
are separated by distance, interna-
tional borders and several time
zones, class discussion is lively.
Students are able to show their
class work to others either via
compressed video or by faxing
work to Rensselaer for display via
satellite. Students are also able to
communicate with professors by
e-mail and will be able to corre-
spond with each other by e-mail
once the class directory of student
e-mail addresses is complete.

Students on- and off-campus are
able to review course material
prior to examinations by watching
videotapes of classes. This is of
particular benefit to on-campus
students who would not have this
resource with typical classes.

Professors are supported in their
instruction by a staff which runs
video cameras and generates high-
quality graphics and, in some
cases, animated illustrations of
course concepts.

Rensselaer is considering expand-
ing its course offerings to support a
full satellite-delivered master's in
technical communication and to
offer courses in conjunction with
other universities. The satellite
technical communications certifi-
cate is one of several educational
programs offered by Rensselaer.

Rensselaer also offers graduate
degrees in engineering and man-
agement by satellite.

Robert Krull
Technical Communication Satellite
Coordinator
4502 Sage Building
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, New York 12180-3590

e-mail: robert_krull@rpi.edu

Say Again?
This headline caught my eye in
Nature just after I returned from
Banff.

Discord over IPCC meeting
reopens climate dispute

Nature, 371: 467
(6 October 1994)

It took me a few seconds to real-
ize that others use "IPCC" besides
PCS, in this case, the Intergov-
ernmental Panel on Climate
Change.

—D.E.N.
Proverbs for Proofreading
by Peggy Smith

Love is nourished. When you are the writer, editor, typist, or typesetter, proofreading your own work, you will almost surely suffer from myopia. You are too close to see all the errors. Get help.

Familiarity breeds content. When you see the same copy again and again through different stages of production and revision, you may want to overlook some errors. Fresh eyes are needed.

If it's as plain as the nose on your face, everybody can see it but you. Where is the reader most likely to notice errors? In a headline, in a title; in the first line, first paragraph, or first page of copy; and in the top lines of a new page. These are precisely the places where editors and proofreaders are most likely to miss errors. Take extra care at every beginning.

Mistakery loves company. Errors often cluster. When you find one, look hard for others nearby.

When you change horses in midstream, you can get wet. It's easy to overlook an error set in type that is different from the text face you are reading. Watch out when type changes to all caps, italics, boldface, small caps, or large sizes. Watch out when underlines appear in typewritten copy.

Glass houses invite stones. Beware of copy that discusses errors. When the subject is typographical quality, the copy must be typographically perfect. When the topic is errors in grammar or spelling, the copy must be error-free. Keep alert for words like typographical or proofreading. Double check and triple check.

The footnote connects to the kneecap? Numerical and alphabetical sequences often go awry. Check for omissions and duplications in page numbers, footnote numbers, or notations in outlines and lists. Check any numeration, anything in alphabetical order, and everything sequential (such as the path of arrows in a flowchart).

It takes two to boogie. An open parenthesis needs a closing parenthesis. Brackets, quotation marks, and sometimes parentheses belong in pairs. Catch the bachelors.

Every yoochoo deserves a yoochoo back. A footnote reference note or a first reference to a table or an illustration is termed a callout. Be sure a footnote begins on the same page as its callout. If a sure table or illustration follows its callout as soon as possible.

Numbers can speak louder than words. Misprints in numerals (figures) can be catastrophic. Take extraordinary care with dollar figures and numbers in dates, statistics, tables, or technical text. Read all numerals character by character; for example, read "1979" as "one nine seven nine". Be sure any figures in your handwriting are unmistakable.

Two plus two is twenty-two. The simplest math can go wrong. Do not trust figures giving percentages and fractions or the "total" lines in tables. Watch for misplaced decimal points. Use your calculator.

Above all, never assume that all is well. As the saying goes, ass-a-makes an ass out of u and me.

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Quality Control
From a facsimile cover page (names changed to protect them and us):

SMITTECKS, INC.
FORMALLY BUILDATRON
No, they don't have a casual and a formal name; they just used to be called "Buildatron" — D.E.N.

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Tools of the Trade
by Cheryl Reimold
A - C - T - N - O - W,
A Six-Step Response to Disaster (Continued)

Step 4: Note Your Next Steps
The crisis has occurred. You have taken the necessary immediate actions—causing for the injured and their families and telling the press and public what you know. Now, you can move backstake to prepare for the upcoming, perhaps longlasting, dialogue with the world.

Organize centers of information. People will hold not their calls until you are ready to answer them. Remember, if you don't provide the answers, rumors will rush in to fill the vacuum. Therefore, your first step must be to arrange for centers of information. What you will need one central crisis information manager. This person will seek to get all updated information possible and route it to the centers of information. The centers will also give the crisis information manager any news they receive, for relay to the other centers.

How you organize your centers of information depends on the size of a) your scope of responsibility, b) the company, and c) the crisis. The centers may be single people or groups. Ideally, you should have an information center for each group affected by the crisis. These might include a technical center to give technical details and updates, a public relations center to give information to the media, a center in personnel to answer employees' questions, a financial information center for anxious investors, and a customer service center to keep customers informed of the status of the product and their orders. You may also decide to set up a special "800" number to answer crisis-related calls.

However you arrange your centers, remember two key points:

• All centers must give the same message. To this end, as soon as one center gets new information, that information is passed along to the crisis information manager for relay to the other centers.

• The people staffing the centers must be proactive, not just reactive. Their job is both to sell and to disseminate information.

If you don't provide the answers, rumors will rush in.

Get expert information and advice, that's the secret of this act depends a great deal on effective anticipation of a crisis (step 1 for A - C - T - N - O - W). While a specific disaster hits, you should know whom to call.

Your experts must include a wide range of respected, objective professionals from outside the corporation. Depending on the problem, they may be physicians, scientists, engineers, financial people, or other specialists. Different specialists may give you different opinions on a problem; to avoid serious errors in judgment, you must consider all possible viewpoints. Witness Dow Corning's public image problems with the silicone-gel breast implants. Some crisis management experts say a contributing factor may have been the company's over-reliance on the analyses of plastic surgeons, who wanted the implants to be declared safe.

Give the experts all your information and get their analyses and advice. Their input may well be the most useful and credible information you can secure.

Form a crisis team. The members of the team will depend on the nature of the crisis. In addition to the crisis information manager, you will usually want representatives of senior management, finance, the legal department, public relations, human resources, and the technical area(s) affected. The team must meet frequently, at any member's request, to review developments and respond effectively as a group.

Plan for interviews and press releases. As you prepare to present your position to the public, keep in mind three essential rules:

1. Public perception is your reality; determine your company's future.

2. The public will not forgive insensitivity, evasion, or irresponsibility.

3. The public will listen to experts' opinions—whenever they report them.

Next time, we will see how to prepare specifically for different types of questions and the media contact.

Cheryl Reimold is a member of the PSCA's Public Relations and Communications Committee and the author of more than 200 articles and several books, including How to Write a Million-Dollar Memo, Being a Boss, and The Language of Business. She is President of PECO's Communications 64 diced Road, Scahome, NY 11083; (914) 275-7540, which offers institute in House workshops and courses in writing, presentations, and on-the-job communication skills.
More information on this award will follow. I could go on and on, but suffice it to say that these successes would not have been realized without the dedication, support, and volunteer efforts of many individuals. We have all made commitments pulling us in seemingly thousands of directions, and I am continually amazed by the support and dedication of our members. I know that 1995 will present many challenges as well, but we have a great AdCom and support team established to address them.

Looking at EEC as a whole, I’m pleased to report that in 1994 I saw a shift towards TAB aggressively working to include small societies in key decision. For example, a small society retreat was held in which issues and concerns related to small societies were surfaced and referred to the appropriate EEC organization. Also, I was selected as a small society representative to attend the IEEE Organizational Improvement Retreat to be held in January.

Finally, I was deeply saddened to hear of the death of Dr. Dan Rosich. Dan, a former president of EEC, was a great asset to our team and a wonderful mentor. He will be sorely missed.

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**Disappearing Borders**

International conference for technical communicators

To be held
November 13–15, 1995
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1. Companies in technical communication show their services. This exhibition gives the opportunity to be informed about the market situation, to establish contacts, and to get advice.

2. Products in software and hardware related to technical communication show. This exhibition presents products and services that can be used in the field of technical communication. For more information, please contact the Forum 95 office at 312-668-7200.

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Calendar 1995

23–26 April
Society for Technical Communication
42nd Annual Conference
Washington Sheraton Hotel, Washington, D.C.
For information, call (703) 522-4414

9–13 July
Eighth International Conference of the International Federation of Science Editors
School of Biology, University of Barcelona
For information: IFSE-8 Secretariat, Apartado 16009 – 08080, Barcelona, Spain
Phone/Fax: + 34-3-448 2373
E-mail: guerrero@porfolios.bio.ub.es

9–13 July
Council of Biology Editors 39th Annual Meeting
Hyatt Regency, Kansas City, Missouri
For information, call (312) 201-0101

6–9 June
43rd Technical Writers’ Institute
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Contact: Elizabeth Keyes
Dept. of Language, Literature & Communication, Sage Labs
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute
Troy, NY 12180-3590
Phone: (518) 276-2828
E-mail: Elizabeth.Keyes@mts.rpi.edu

13–15 November
FORUM 95 International Communication Conference
Dortmund, Germany
For Information: Brigitte Beuttenmuller, Markelstrasse 34, D-70193 Stuttgart 1, Germany
Phone: +49-711 65 42 55
Fax: +49-711 65 07 67

STP for No-Warning Presentations
by John Gear

There you are: late one Friday and you find out that there's been another management "realignment". The new VP wants a presentation on all pending projects so "judicious mid-course corrections can be made where appropriate." Your boss wants you to prepare a presentation on her pet project for 11:00 a.m. Monday morning. You have plans for the weekend not involving work.

Or there you are again: you've been suggesting a new approach to an old problem for some time. Your boss tells you "I'm going out of town tonight. If you give me a one-page on it, I'll read it this week, and we'll talk about it when I get back."

Do these situations frustrate you and leave you feeling demoralized about life, corporate dysfunction, and crisis management? Probably. Nevertheless, there is a simple scheme that can help you put together a sharp, focused presentation or proposal on very little notice. And though it is almost pathetically simple, I have used it successfully on several occasions when I did not have time to prepare a well-researched pitch.

The scheme is simple: Situation/Target/Proposal, or STP. In fact, STP is so simple that I was never actually taught to use it; I just learned it the hard way, after making a poor presentation. That presentation was typical for me then, overlong and overwritten, full of details about the relative advantages and disadvantages of my pet idea and all of the competing proposals. In the aftermath of my talk, I glumly collected my elaborate handouts (which were scattered like leaves, testimony to their impact); I saw some crabbled handwriting on one of my most detailed sheets. It said "Not clear: What is STP (Situation, Target, Proposal)?"

It was a real moment of enlightenment for me: I didn't have to overwhelm the audience with my ideas, just explain them in a format useful for people trying to make a decision. Now I use STP as the starting point for any presentation in which I have to advance an idea for acceptance by others and I don't have much time to prepare.

To use STP, just take a pad, divide a page into three sections, and label one with S, one with T, and one with P. Start anywhere. Just imagine yourself talking each part through, clearly explaining each concept (S, T, or P) in turn. Some introductory phrases you can use to collect your thoughts:

**Situation**
We have to act now because...
If things continue as they are now...
We are here...
Our current results are...
The situation is this...

**Continued on page 6**