

# Sections Congress '93 Strengthens IEEE Volunteers

by David Kemp

IEEE volunteers rely heavily on readily available and effective training and resource materials. The Sections Congress, a triennial IEEE event, provides a key element in assisting volunteers in designing and delivering their programs. In July, Puerto Rico, with its wealth of culture, history, and recreational facilities, provided a magnificent backdrop for Sections Congress '93.

Sections are the primary interface to members in responding to needs and concerns and in delivering local programs. The discussion topics, from plenary to breakout sessions, were determined by local IEEE leaders from a 1991 survey of Section chairs. Thus, the grassroots-oriented theme, "Empowering Sections to Serve Members," was designed around the goal of improving service to IEEE members.

*... Puerto Rico, with its wealth of culture, history, and recreational facilities, provided a magnificent backdrop for Sections Congress '93.*

The program offered a rich variety of topics and session approaches. Plenary sessions with a general focus were attended by large audiences. Tutorial speakers disseminated information on specific topics while workshops featured case-study presenters and interaction with the audience to collect feedback and specific recommendations for consideration by primary delegates in plenary sessions.

Discussion topics were divided into three tracks: Section Management/Operation; Section Management/Activities; and Section/Societies, Technology, and Professional Concerns. Scheduling also allowed delegates to meet in regional caucuses to formulate recommendations unique to their experiences and priorities.

At the conclusion, each delegate assigned priorities to 33 recommendations and a consensus was developed in the final session. The top-ranked priority was that the IEEE should increase support to the Sections in the form of rebates. In addition, the rebate formula should include (1) a higher percentage of members dues and (2) a proportion to acknowledge meeting activity. This recommendation, along with the many others, will be delegated to various IEEE groups to consider action plans or policy changes.

Several PCS members took an active role in the Congress:

*Cecilia Jankowski* chaired the extensive Section Management/Activities series of programs.

*David Kemp*, Chapter coordinator,

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## FROM THE EDITOR

by Rudy Joenk

As interim editor for a couple of issues, I'm happy to announce that David Nadziejka will become editor of this *Newsletter* effective with the November/December issue.

David is a scientific and engineering editor at Argonne National Laboratory, where he also supervises other editors and teaches technical writing to the research staff. He has a B.A. degree in geology and an M.S. degree in biochemistry. He is on the advisory council of the technical and professional communication program at Illinois Institute of Technology. In addition to his Argonne classes, David teaches verbal and visual communication and technical editing at IIT, and has taught oral communication and technical writing at the Institute of Paper Chemistry.

He writes the "Term Talk" column for STC's *Technical Communication* and has numerous other publications and presentations to his credit. David knows from experience and observation that technical professionals spend a surprisingly large fraction of their time communicating, so he wants the PCS *Newsletter* to serve engineers and scientists in their capacity as communicators.

Meanwhile, we apologize for the late issues. We expect to have the *Newsletter* back on track for 1994.

Rudy Joenk

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

Euclid Patin's erudite comments in the May/June 1993 *Newsletter* were, as always, fascinating. One could take Corollary 4, Compound Modifiers, a step farther for the really advanced professionals. In Example 2, paragraph 2, Patin discusses the use of a hyphen in creating a compound modifier. When one speaks of a "high-speed train" one uses the hyphen to clarify that "high," an adjective which *could* modify the noun train, is here meant to modify the word "speed." Where no confusion would be inferred because of common use, the hyphen is not necessary; for example, "real estate broker."

Where the first modifier is an *adverb*, however, and therefore could not possibly modify the noun, the hyphen is unnecessary and wrong.

A couple of good examples can be found in Patin's column: "critically-acclaimed GPOSM" and "equally-clear written description." In no case could the adverb "critically" be mistaken as a modifier for the noun "GPOSM," nor could the adverb "equally" be seen as a modifier for the noun "description." Hence, the over-used hyphen is superfluous and wrong.

Cordially,

Allan Wittman  
Publisher, IEEE Magazines and Newsletters

## Future IPCCs

Locations have been chosen for the following International Professional Communication Conferences (IPCCs):

- 1994 Banff, Alberta, Canada
- 1995 Savannah, Georgia
- 1996 Los Angeles, California

See "IPCC 94" on the back cover of this *Newsletter* for more information about the Banff conference. ◀

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# Candidates for the AdCom

by Roger Grice

Terms of office for seven Administrative Committee (AdCom) positions expire at the end of the year. This October, at IPCC 93 in Philadelphia, seven people will be elected to fill those positions. The PCS Nominating Committee has put together a slate of 11 candidates to stand for election for the seven vacancies. The candidates are:

**Carolyn Boiarsky**, Effective Communication Associates, Peoria, Illinois

Dr. Boiarsky is role proprietor of Effective Communication Associates, which provides consulting services in strategic communication and training programs in effective writing techniques for business and industry.

**Michael Goodman**, Department of English/Communication, Fairleigh Dickinson University, Madison, New Jersey

Dr. Goodman is a current member of the AdCom and general chair for IPCC 93. He is director of Fairleigh Dickinson's M.A. degree program in Corporate and Organizational Communication. He has published widely, including four books and many articles, and is associate editor for corporate and organizational communication of the *Transactions*.

**Laurel Kay Grove**, Battelle Pacific Northwest Laboratories, Richland, Washington

Ms. Grove is a technical communicator at Battelle Pacific Northwest Laboratory. She is a frequent presenter at PCS conferences and is program co-chair for IPCC 94.

**George F. Hayhoe**, Westinghouse Savannah River Company, Aiken, South Carolina

Dr. Hayhoe is project leader of a software documentation team for

Westinghouse Savannah River Company in Aiken, South Carolina. He received the best paper award at IPCC 89 and is general chair for IPCC 95.

**Rudy Joenk**, technical writer and editor, Boulder, Colorado

Dr. Joenk is a current member of the AdCom and a recipient of the Alfred N. Goldsmith Award. He retired recently after 30 years with IBM and is now doing contract writing and editing. He was editor of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* (1977-84) and our *Newsletter* (1983-84). He has been a member of AdCom since 1985, was vice president in 1988 and 1989, and president in 1990 and 1991. He received a PCS service award in 1991.

**William Kehoe**, The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland

Mr. Kehoe is a current member of the AdCom and PCS's treasurer; he is a recipient of the Alfred N. Goldsmith Award. He is a member of the senior staff at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory where he handles the administrative, manpower, and fiscal affairs within the Aeronautics department.

**David J. Kemp**, Manitoba Telephone System, Winnipeg, MB, Canada

Mr. Kemp is a current member of the AdCom and a leader in many areas of IEEE activities: students, Section, Western Canada Council, regional, Chapter, and conferences, as well as PCS. He is the recipient of several IEEE awards.

**Robert Krull**, Department of Language, Literature, and Communication, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York

Dr. Krull is a current member of the AdCom and was program co-chair for IPCC 89. He is associate dean for graduate research in Rensselaer's School of Humanities and

Social Sciences and professor in the Department of Language, Literature, and Communication.

**Herbert Michaelson**, technical communication consultant, Jackson Heights, New York

Mr. Michaelson is a past member of the AdCom and a recipient of the Alfred N. Goldsmith Award. He is the author of *How to Write and Publish Engineering Papers* and of numerous reports and articles.

**Marvin Neiditz**, technical writer, Greensboro, North Carolina

Mr. Neiditz is currently a senior writer under contract to AT&T in Greensboro, North Carolina. He has served as editor of IEEE's North Carolina Council Bulletin for ten years and as local Section chairman and North Carolina PACE chairman, and is currently North Carolina Council vice chairman. He received two outstanding service awards from the North Carolina Council.

**Cheryl Reimold**, PERC Communications, Scarsdale, New York

Ms. Reimold is a current member of the AdCom and co-director of PERC Communications, a consulting firm that performs writing services and teaches writing, public speaking, and general communication skills to business and other associations. She is the author of a syndicated column, "The Language of Business," four books, more than 100 articles, and a mystery story.

*Dr. Grice is chair of the PCS Nominating Committee; Roger Grice Associates, 52 Doris Lane, Lake Katrine, NY 12449; (914) 382-2015; roger\_grice@mts.rpi.edu.* ◀

*The relationship of the toastmaster to the speaker should be the same as that of the fan to the fan dancer. It should call attention to the subject without making any particular attempt to cover it.*

Adlai Stevenson

## Sections Congress '93

(continued from page 1)

presented a Chapter Development and Support tutorial and facilitated two workshops on creating and expanding Chapters as well as enhancing their effectiveness.

*Debby Flaberty Kizer*, vice president, facilitated the Section Newsletter workshop.

*Brian Harrington*, Chapter chair—United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland, presented an Employment Concerns tutorial.

*Dave McKown*, Membership chair, participated in Membership Development session.

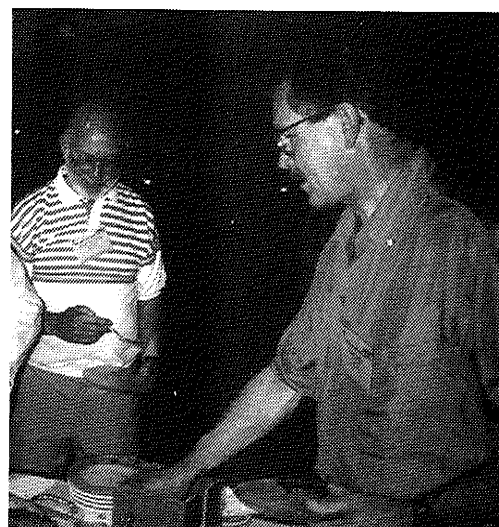
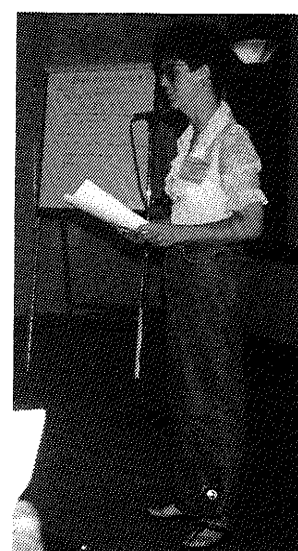
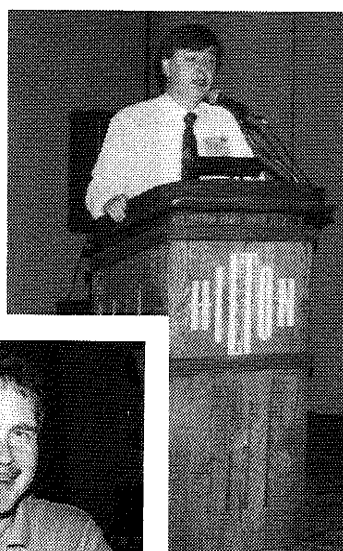
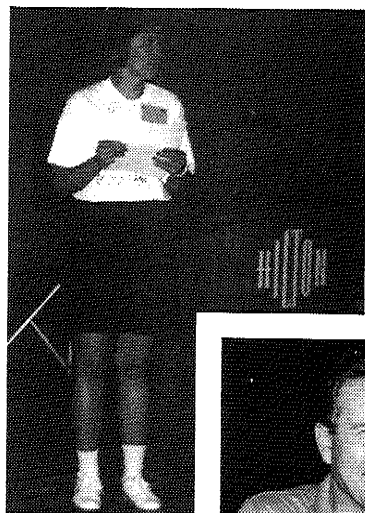
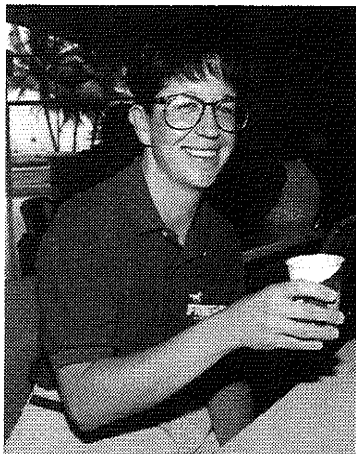
*Richard Robinson*, president, participated in the Technical Activities Board meetings prior to the Congress.

Improving our own Chapter operations was the focus of an informal caucus of AdCom members Robinson, Kizer, and Kemp with Chapter chairs Ed Podell, Philadelphia; Joe Feitler, Chicago; and Brian Harrington, United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland. Several ideas were sug-

gested to improve interaction between PCS and our Chapters as well as to enhance Chapter support.

Participants also were exposed to a wide array of exhibits and general interest programs. A large exhibit hall featured IEEE support materials, sample publications, merchandise, and literature. Volunteer effectiveness sessions covered topics such as IEEE strategic directions, e-mail communication, the membership data diskette program, and two "hot" new software items for IEEE officers: ROOT—Resource

**Top row, left to right:** Vice president Debby Kizer performs quality check at the Bicardi Brewery; PCS member Cecilia Jankowski served on Sections Congress Organizing Committee and was chair of the Gold Stem; UK and Republic of Ireland Chapter chairman Brian Harrington was featured speaker at the Sections Congress Employment Session; Vice president Debby Kizer acted as facilitator for Sections Congress Newsletter workshop. **Center:** PCS Chapter coordinator Dave Kemp never missed a session—or a meal; **Bottom, left to right:** Sections Congress opening ceremonies featured local performers; PCS Chapter coordinator Dave Kemp and Philadelphia Chapter chairman Ed Podell partake of a final meal at Sections Congress picnic at Bicardi Brewery picnic grounds.



Officer Orientation Training, and FOG—Financial Officers Guide. Many were impressed to see progress in technology germane to our profession being used to increase our effectiveness.

Attendance from all over the world was outstanding: 212 Sections (73 percent) sent delegates. In total, 391 volunteers joined with 191 partners and 36 staff members to make this event both productive and rewarding.

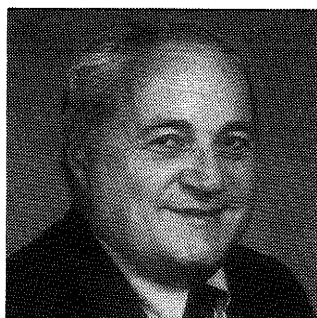
Sections Congress Chairman Luis Gandia, his committee, and the IEEE staff demonstrated superlative planning and attention to detail in ensuring that the event would be purposeful, enjoyable, and well organized. Local volunteers made certain the enchantment of the island pervaded all events.

*David Kemp is PCS Chapter coordinator; Manitoba Telephone System, P.O. Box 6666, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3C 3V6; (204) 941-5023; d.kemp@ieee.org.*

*It usually takes me more than three weeks to prepare a good impromptu speech.*

Mark Twain

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



*by Richard M. Robinson*

You probably can imagine the raised eyebrows I got when I informed my colleagues (at my paying job) that I would have to spend June 26 through July 4 at a luxury hotel in Puerto Rico attending the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB) meetings and Sections Congress. Even my wife looked askance, for although she occasionally accompanies me at IEEE activities, this time she had to stay home because of obligations at her paying job. Fortunately, when she picked me up at the airport on my return she was satisfied that my winter palor had not disappeared and that I looked even more fatigued than when I left.

Actually, the PCS contingent at these meetings did manage to get in a little fun. I sneaked off to the beach on two occasions for a couple of hours of sun—and the amenities at the hotel and, especially, the meals were excellent. By using their mass purchasing power and booking off season, IEEE is generally able to hold meetings at excellent venues at very competitive prices. The greatest expense at these meetings is usually the cost of transportation, but the transnational nature of the IEEE requires that meetings be held at varying sites throughout the world.

PCS vice president Debby Kizer and I attended both the TAB meetings and the Sections Congress. Membership Chairman Dave McKown's attendance at the Sections Congress was sponsored by PCS, and Chapter Coordinator Dave Kemp's expenses were split between PCS and TAB. PCS also picked up the registration fee for Philadelphia Chapter Chairman Ed Podell. Chicago Chapter Chairman Joe Feitler represented his Section at the Sections Congress, and I was happy to finally meet Brian Harrington, Chairman of the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland Chapter, who likewise was sponsored by his Section. We were all especially proud of the work of PCS member Cecilia "Goldie" Jankowski, who performed yeoman service on the Sections Congress organization committee and as chair of the Section Management/Activities program.

Debby Kizer and I purposely arrived a day early to sit in on a Sunday session of the Society Evaluation Committee. This committee reviews the operation of each TAB Society and Council on a five-year cycle and provides constructive criticism where needed. All facets of the operation of a Society are covered in these two-to-three-hour sessions. The Professional Communication Society is due to be reviewed this November, and we were invited to this meeting to see how they were conducted. (Debby and PCS treasurer Bill Kehoe will assist me in making the PCS presentation.) On Sunday afternoon, I spent my first session at the beach!

## This could be you!

A lucky IPCC 93 delegate will leave the October 6 awards banquet in Philadelphia bearing a gift voucher for two days' free accommodation at the Banff Park Lodge in Banff, Alberta, Canada. The two days can be either September 26 and 27, or October 1 and 2, immediately before or after IPCC 94.

The award has been graciously donated by the Banff Park Lodge—a prime hotel in a prime location in downtown Banff.

Look for IPCC 94 committee members at the Tuesday evening, October 5, reception in Philadelphia (they'll be wearing bright red T-shirts) and ask for your entry form. Fill in your name and deposit the form in the IPCC 94 ballot box. (On Wednesday, forms will be available at the conference registration desk.)

Then all you have to do is wait—with baited breath!—for your name to be called when we hold the drawing immediately following the banquet!



The first regular day of the TAB meeting series is generally occupied by committee meetings. On Monday, I sat in on the TAB Meetings (Conferences) Council meeting and Debby attended the Periodicals Council meeting. After lunch, I spent my second session at the beach; I didn't know it at the time, but it was to be my last session in the sun.

The TAB Caucus and Presidents Forum are always held the day before the formal TAB meeting. The purpose of the Caucus is to review items that are going to be voted on at the TAB meeting so that all the TAB members (Society/Council presidents and TAB directors) are knowledgeable enough to make good decisions without excessive additional discussion. The Presidents Forum, on the other hand, is used to discuss items of concern to Society/Council presidents, whether or not they are related to the TAB meeting agenda. Continental breakfast, lunch, and dinner are always served at these meetings; needless to say, there is little time for other activities.

The formal TAB meeting is held on the third day (although there are some subsequent directors and executive board meetings). Most participants have the common problem of scheduling their homeward flight because, though meetings are sometimes concluded before lunch on this final day, they occasionally drag on until evening. On this occasion, fortunately, most of us were staying for the Sections Congress and did not have the burden of that decision.

The bulk of the TAB meeting was devoted to typical administrative legislation: approval of new periodicals, appointment of committees and committee chairs, budgetary problems, etc. But buried among these items was one that can have a long-lasting effect on IEEE and on PCS.

As requested by the TAB Products Council, TAB approved a change in the name of the TAB CD-ROM Committee to the TAB Electronic Information Dissemination (EID)

Committee and approved the TAB Electronic Information Dissemination Committee Charter. The CD-ROM Committee had essentially completed its mission: to develop and demonstrate the feasibility of using CD-ROM technology as an IEEE publishing medium. (Conference records of a number of the larger conferences are currently made available on CD-ROM at the same price as the printed version.)

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*The PCS AdCom will stay informed of developments in this new area of electronic dissemination of technical information, and will advise the members of significant achievements.*

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The new EID Committee will be involved in a broad investigation into all forms of electronic media. One of the first results of the approval of this committee is an IEEE workshop on Electronic Dissemination of Engineering Information, scheduled for September 17-19. The following excerpt is taken from the announcement of this workshop:

The rapid developments in the technologies enabling electronic dissemination

of electronic property (publications) present significant challenges to traditional publishing enterprises. The IEEE, as the publisher of the majority of technical literature in our fields of interest, is a member of this group. Meeting these challenges will provide us with the opportunity to improve our services to members. There is not only the opportunity to deliver electronic versions of our present publications in a more timely manner, but also the opportunity to develop and deliver publications and other products specifically designed for the electronic dissemination media. At the same time, these challenges present significant risk. Over 50 percent of the total revenue stream of the Institute is generated by sales of our print publications. This income stream could be threatened by electronic forms of distribution; for example, on a relative scale, it is difficult to copy and distribute a print publication, whereas a few keystrokes are all that is required to copy electronically. Electronic dissemination will require completely new revenue/pricing models and possibly new rights and permissions models. The importance to the IEEE of successfully making the transition to electronic dissemination cannot be overstated.

The PCS AdCom will stay informed of developments in this new area of electronic dissemination of technical information, and will advise the members of significant achievements.

*Richard Robinson is president of PCS through 1993; Grumman Corp., MS C39-05, Bethpage, NY 11714; (516) 575-5472; r.robinson@ieee.org.* ◀

## Call for Papers

### Conference on Corporate Communication

The 7th Conference on Corporate Communication is scheduled for May 25 and 26, 1994, at Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey. With a theme of "Communication and Change," the conference will focus on responsibilities, roles, processes, and issues of concern to corporate communication professionals in planning for the rest of the decade and the century beyond.

Proposals are requested for:

- Original papers for the referred proceedings
- Complete sessions devoted to a single topic
- Panel discussions
- Workshops
- Demonstrations

Send a 300-500-word abstract by November 1 to:

Dr. Michael B. Goodman, Corporate and Organizational  
Communication Program, Fairleigh Dickinson University,  
285 Madison Avenue, Madison, NJ 07940

Dr. Goodman is also the source for conference information:

(201) 593-8709; fax (201) 593-8510.

# TOOLS OF THE TRADE



by Cheryl Reimold

## How to Write What People Like to Read

Take a look at these sentences:

1. *A thing of beauty is a joy forever.* (John Keats)
2. *We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars.* (Oscar Wilde)
3. *I never met a man I didn't like.* (Will Rogers)

They are some of the most famous words in English today. Once spoken, they reverberated throughout the English-speaking world, striking a chord in all their diverse listeners. We quote them so frequently that, by now, they have almost become clichés. I say "almost" because their power keeps them vibrating even after thousands and thousands of uses.

Why? Why do these sentences please us so well? Of course, the ideas they express form a large part of their attraction. To catch and keep readers, you must have something significant and interesting to say. But that is not all.

It is the *style* of these sentences—the choice and arrangement of the words themselves—that makes them memorable. To test this statement, let's look at the same ideas expressed in a different style:

1. *A thing of beauty is a joy forever. Objects of high aesthetic merit continue to give satisfaction for an interminable period.*

2. *We are all in the gutter, but some of us are looking at the stars. Some of us try to look on the bright side, even though things are tough all over.*
3. *I never met a man I didn't like. Speaking of people—and in my profession, I've met all sorts, I can tell you—of all the ones I've come across, I can honestly say that there wasn't one of them I wasn't partial to.*

As you can see, style determines readability. You can make your memos, letters, and reports a pleasure to read by following eight simple style rules.

### Rule 1: Make It Lean

If you look back at the original three sentences, you see that none has a word too many. Powerful, muscular writing comes from trimming away the "fat"—the unnecessary words and comments that weaken or obscure your message. Two ways to do this follow.

#### Remove redundancies and uninformative words

Redundancies are expressions that use more words than necessary to express an idea. Following is a sampling of common redundancies; the dispensable word is in *italics*.

<i>absolute</i> essentials	<i>make an effort</i> to try
adequate <i>enough</i>	<i>the most</i> unique
<i>advance</i> planning	never <i>at any time</i>
and so <i>as a result</i>	<i>new</i> recruits
but <i>nevertheless</i>	<i>opening</i> gambit
<i>complete</i> satisfaction	<i>passing</i> fad
consensus <i>of opinion</i>	<i>past</i> history
depreciate <i>in value</i>	<i>practical</i> experience
<i>factual</i> truth	<i>the questions</i> as to
few <i>in number</i>	<i>whether</i>
filled to <i>capacity</i>	<i>red in color</i>
follow <i>after</i>	refer <i>back to</i>
<i>grave</i> danger	<i>unimpeachable</i>
<i>in order to</i>	<i>integrity</i>
<i>joint</i> cooperation	<i>until such time as</i>
<i>major</i> breakthrough	<i>very</i> serious

This list may call to mind other redundancies that have crept into your speech and writing. If you notice familiar ones on the list, circle them and determine to keep

to the essentials when you're next tempted to overwrite.

Uninformative words are those that you can remove without changing or impairing the message. These may be whole phrases, such as the one thrown into the rewrite of Will Rogers' statement above, or filler words that add nothing to your writing. Here are some common filler words:

<i>angle</i>	<i>function</i>
<i>area</i>	<i>nature</i>
<i>aspect</i>	<i>phrase</i>
<i>case</i>	<i>point</i>
<i>character</i>	<i>process</i>
<i>circumstance</i>	<i>type</i>
<i>factor</i>	<i>variety</i>
<i>field</i>	

#### Omit irrelevant detail and unnecessary repetition

The second way to make your sentences lean is to stick to the point. How much do you have to say to get that message across? Say *only* that much. What does your reader already know? Don't tell him again.

Now, try removing some unnecessary words. See if you can make the following sentences lean.

1. *Meaningful goals are a crucial component of a measurement system which enables managing for efficiency improvement.*
2. *With this in mind, the accounting department set out to develop a cost-effectiveness measurement system that would be a tool plant management could use to guide decision-making and to direct action toward successful cost-effectiveness improvement.*

Keep it lean, and your readers will get the point quickly, clearly, and with pleasure.

Possible rewrites:

1. *Meaningful goals are crucial if the measurement system is to help improve efficiency.*
2. *The accounting department set out to develop a system that plant management could use to*

*measure and improve cost-effectiveness.*

## Rule 2: Write Exactly What You Mean

Suppose you produce a monstrosity such as this one:

*After due consideration of the matter and further deliberation, it was concluded that the project exerted no immediate exigency for the assumption of an additional operative.*

How do you deal with this? The answer is simple. Don't try to fix it!

Instead, put it aside and ask yourself, "What did I mean here? How would I say it?" Speak your response—and then replace the original sentence with the words you just said. Here, your answer might be something like this:

*The committee decided that we didn't need to hire anyone else for the project.*

Fine. That's a perfectly acceptable rewrite.

To follow Rule 2, begin by speaking your sentences. If they don't lend themselves to smooth speech, ask yourself what you meant and how you could say it differently. Write your answer.

Additionally, you can write what you mean by avoiding four types of words that muddy your written expression.

### Avoid unclear technical or business jargon

Notice the word "unclear." If you are writing a technical memo or report to someone in your specialty, you will, of course, use the technical language familiar to both of you. But, be careful! If the distribution list includes non-technical people, you must use words that they too will understand.

### Avoid "phony fancies"

"Phony fancies" are those words chosen to make the writer sound

professional, impressive, managerial, well educated, in the know, or important. Don't ever write to "sound like" this or that. Write only to express your ideas clearly, simply, and persuasively.

Here's a short list of phony fancies to avoid and suitable replacements:

Phony fancy	Good replacement
<i>enclosed herewith</i>	<i>here is</i>
<i>please find</i>	
<i>for the purpose of</i>	<i>to</i>
<i>has the ability</i>	<i>can</i>
<i>in the event that</i>	<i>if</i>
<i>provide a means</i>	<i>enable</i>
<i>whereby</i>	
<i>take corrective action</i>	<i>correct</i>
<i>utilize, utilization</i>	<i>use</i>
<i>with the result that</i>	<i>so</i>

But perhaps you're saying to yourself, "That's all very well, but I've got to show that I fit in here. I've got to use the words that sound . . . well, fancy!" Stop for minute. Reflect on *your* reaction to puffy, polysyllabic pomposities. Do you think of the writer as important, impressive, professional?

Or do you think of that writer as being too afraid to be himself and say what he has to say? That's how most people react to the old-fashioned businessese. They see the writer as one who lacks confidence in himself and his message, and so hides behind that flimsy barrier of overinflated words.

### Avoid cliches

Once they were powerful, colorful pictures. Now, through overuse, cliches have become expressions that cover so much they tell very little.

*It is the considered opinion of the committee that there is more to the absenteeism problem than meets the eye and that we should leave no stone unturned, since this is a matter of life and death for the company.*

How do you like that sentence? Don't you wish the writer had cut through those tired old cliches and said simply that the company needs to study absenteeism more closely?

Cliches are not interesting or picturesque, because they have been used so often. Furthermore, the images they suggest, such as "leaving no stone unturned," have very little resonance in the world of today's urban business people. It's wonderful to use imagery in writing *if* you create new images yourself. Just don't pull out those old, faded pictures.

### Avoid problem words

Problem words are those that you or your reader may misuse or confuse. They often overlap with

---

## The eight style rules of effective business and technical writing:

Rule 1: *Make it lean.*

Rule 2: *Write exactly what you mean.*

Rule 3: *Write one thought to a sentence.*

Rule 4: *Make your writing personal.*

Rule 5: *Use the active voice whenever possible.*

Rule 6: *Reach for verbs, not nouns.*

Rule 7: *Be positive when possible.*

Rule 8: *Put related concepts together.*

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phony fancies, since they are rarely words we would choose to express our ideas clearly and simply. Here's an example:

*To mitigate these incipient problems, it would be spurious to engage in precipitate "remedial" action.*

The writer meant, "Rash responses will not solve these problems."

Here are some common problem words with clear replacements.



Problem word	Clear replacement
biannual	twice a year
biennial	every other year
fulsome	excessive, offensive
gratuitous	unwarranted, unearned
militate (against)	work against
mitigate	moderate, alleviate
precipitate	abrupt
precipitous	steep
spurious	false, forged

Just say what you mean, clearly and simply. That's all!

### Rule 3: Write One Thought to a Sentence

Take a moment to think of yourself as a reader, not a writer. You read *sequentially*, taking in one idea after another as your gaze moves from left to right and then down the page.

What separates these ideas for you? Punctuation marks. They separate the text into digestible chunks. The most powerful of these is the period, the mark for the end of a sentence. It tells you, the reader, that the writer has completed a thought. So, as a reader, you go from one thought to the next. And you process each sentence as a single complete thought.

The conclusion for the effective writer is clear. Write only one thought to a sentence. That's what the reader wants and expects. It is also all he can comfortably digest. That makes sense, doesn't it? The trouble is that it is so hard to do because the pull to write long or involved sentences is often irresistible.

### Break up multi-thought sentences

Obviously, you do not want to produce a staccato series of small, simple sentences. That would lead to a monotonous, childlike style. English allows you to vary your style and delineate your thoughts by expanding your sentences with phrases and clauses. The trick is to limit these to a manageable amount for the reader.

To see what I mean by this, look at the previous paragraph. That paragraph consists of four sentences. However, I could have forced all four into one:

*Since you do not want to produce a staccato series of small, simple sentences that would lead to a monotonous, childlike style, English allows you to vary your style and delineate your thoughts by expanding your sentences with phrases and clauses, which must, however, be limited to a manageable amount for the reader.*

That is a single sentence composed of four thoughts. I think it's pretty indigestible. Hurl two or three of those monsters into a paragraph, and the only readers you'll retain are the people who report to you, and your mother.

Let's look at another one:

*We recommend and agree with the manufacturer that with another set of isolation valves located at the Top Circulation (TC) pump section and the High Pressure Feeder discharge, along with the existing valves at the inlet and outlet of the digester, we could ensure that during repairs to the feed system, there would be no possible way, if the valves are properly sealed, for any liquor trapped in the Top Circulation line even after venting to drain into the work area, thus causing injury.*

The first step in breaking up masses like this is to find the separate thoughts. Here, there are three:

1. We should install another set of valves.
2. During repairs, trapped liquor can cause injury.
3. The extra valves will allow this liquor to drain safely away.

Now the rewrite is easy:

*We agree with the manufacturer that another set of isolation valves should be installed at the Top Circulation pump suction and the High Pressure Feeder discharge. The reason for this*

*installation is that some liquor can remain trapped in the Top Circulation line, even after venting, during repairs to the feed system. The additional valves would ensure that such liquor could not drain into the work area and cause injury.*

### Check words that can let new thoughts into a sentence

The following connective words invite new thoughts to creep into a sentence. When going over your draft, stop at these words to see if they lead to a refinement of a single thought or to a new thought entirely. Be particularly rigorous with long sentences containing several of these words.

although	including
and	notwithstanding
as	or
because	since
but	that
despite	whether
even though	which
if	who
in reference to	with

Read your sentences carefully. When you come across intervening phrases or connecting words, examine the information that follows. Does it constitute a new thought? If so, make it a new sentence.

Remember, you are writing *to be read*. That is your first goal. And people don't like having to re-read a sentence to get the message. If they don't get it on first reading—they generally stop reading. Write only one thought to a sentence. You'll keep your readers.

*To be continued in the next issue.*

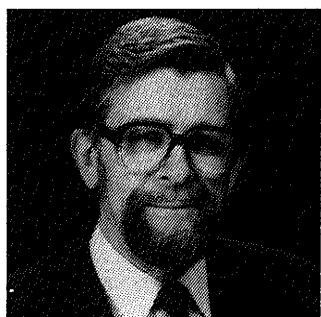
*Cheryl Reimold is a member of the PCS Administrative Committee and the author of more than 200 articles and several books, including How to Write a Million-Dollar Memo, Being a Boss, and The Language of Business. She is president of PERC Communications—6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583, (914) 725-1024—which offers businesses in-house workshops and courses in writing, presentations, and on-the-job communication skills.* ◀

# Profile of a Distinguished Professional Communicator

by Ron Blicq

*This is the first of a series of articles profiling professional communicators who have distinguished themselves in their fields, but who are not necessarily well known by PCS members. If you know of someone we should profile in a future issue, please tell me and describe why he or she is a distinguished communicator. Or, better still, write an article yourself about that person.*

—THE EDITOR.



**Ustus Agur,  
Executive Director,  
Eesti Informaatikafond,  
Tallinn, Estonia**

When I first met Ustus Agur—it was September 1990—I was impressed by the relaxed, smooth way he chaired a trilingual conference attended by delegates speaking five different languages! (The conference focused on the effects of new information technology on technical libraries in what was then the USSR. It was held in Kabli, Estonia, and four PCS Ad-Com members were invited to present papers on the American experience and, particularly, the role of PCS within the IEEE. Other papers were presented by representatives from Estonia, Russia, Germany, and Poland. See *PCS Newsletter*, volume 33, number 3, September 1991.)

What I did not realize then was that our charming host was a gifted lecturer, a prolific writer, and a multilingual translator. Ustus Agur has been a PCS member for the past two years, and it's appropriate that we know more about our enigmatic representative in Estonia.

Currently he is Executive Director of the Estonian Informatics Fund, an organization whose main responsibility is to provide funding for research and development in information systems, organize computer exhibitions, participate in standardization work, and publish books and a journal on computer technology.

Ustus studied electrical engineering at Tallinn Technical University and obtained his Candidate of Sciences degree from Leningrad Electrotechnical Institute in 1962 (his thesis concerned modeling of electronic drives—hence his subsequent interest in computers). He stayed as a teacher at the Tallin Technical University and in 1966 was appointed to the newly established Chair of Information Technology, which later was renamed the Department of Electronic Computers. From then until 1978 he taught subjects such as information theory, information retrieval systems, data transmission and networks, and computer hardware.

In 1978 he left the Technical University to become deputy director of the Estonian Information Institute, and from 1980 to 1990 served as its director. When the Informatics Fund was established in 1990, he became its executive director.

During his career Ustus Agur has authored 10 books and more than 300 technical papers and journal articles. His books range from the purely technical, on topics such as electrical drives, computer hardware, and design of logic circuits, to technical dictionaries, including the *Information Science and Processing Vocabulary: Estonian-German-Russian*, published in 1977, and the *Dictionary of Computers: English-Russian-Estonian*, published in 1991. The dictionaries evolved from his continuing active work on the development of Estonian technical language terminology, first in electrical engineering and later in computers and informatics.

He has been scientific editor of over a dozen books on electrical and computer technology, information processing, and linguistics. He also has translated six books on computers, robotics, and the history of technology, and has written more than 100 articles for the Estonian Encyclopedia.

When one meets this unassuming, relaxed man, he gives no indication of his busy schedule or his wide publishing experience. When Nancy Corbin and I returned to Tallinn in May 1992 (to teach PCS's course on written and oral communication, which in Tallinn was organized by Ustus) we were met by

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*When one meets this  
unassuming, relaxed  
man, he gives no  
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his daughter Tiina, who apologized for her father's absence—he was attending meetings in Stockholm—but was on his way back and would join us imminently.

As soon as Ustus arrived in Tallinn, he and Tiina took us on a walking tour of the lovely, old, walled Town of Tallin, built on a hill above the new town, and then hosted us for dinner in a quiet restaurant with excellent meals, tucked away on a side street of the old town. He never mentioned that he had just stepped off the ferry from Stockholm, or that he had attended a gruelling series of meetings the previous three days. Similarly, throughout the two-day course he was present the whole time, quietly looking after both our and the participants' needs.

Ustus also finds time to organize computer exhibitions, coordinate conferences on new information

technology, and participate in standardization work (most recently, the first Estonian standard on character sets, code tables, and keyboard arrangement). He is editor-in-chief of the first Estonian-language computer magazine *ARVUTIMAAI* and, in its June 1993 edition, wrote two of the dozen or so primary articles. Currently, he is writing a book on open systems architecture.

As a result of the course we presented last year, Ustus organized the publication of a book titled *KÄSIRAAMAT—Ettekande, Aruande, Ärikirja Kirjutamiseks*, which is an Estonian translation by his daughter Tiina of the English-language textbook, *A Report Writer's Handbook*, we used for the PCS course.

Ustus Agur is indeed a distinguished communicator! He can be contacted by mail at Eesti Informaatikafond, Tõnismägi 8, Tallinn EE0001, Estonia, or by fax at 011 3722 61 10 12, or by e-mail on Internet: [ustus@eif.ee](mailto:ustus@eif.ee). ◀

## IPCC 93: Invited Speakers

The International Professional Communication Conference this year, IPCC 93, is being held in Philadelphia at the Hotel Atop the Bellvue. You can still register using the coupon in the May/June *Newsletter* or by phoning Bill Kehoe at (301) 953-5000, x7944. Registration also will be accepted at the conference. The fee is \$280 for IEEE members and \$350 for non-members (the \$70 difference can be applied to 1994 IEEE membership).

### Conference Speakers

At the awards banquet on Wednesday, October 6, Dr. Patricia Peacock will talk about making the transition from engineering employee to entrepreneur. She is director of the regional Small Business Development Center at Rutgers University in New Jersey. The

Center, funded by the Small Business Administration, provides assistance to entrepreneurs as they plan and carry out their business plans.

At lunch on Thursday, October 7, Bruce Nutting will describe successes and failures along the path to quality, and the lessons that can be learned from them. He is director of Quality Process Development at Unisys Corporation, where more than 70 percent of the company's 54,000 employees have been introduced to the program, which is being expanded to include Unisys's customers.

At the annual "Last Lecture" at noon on Friday, October 8, Dr. Eleanor Baum will explore some of the directions in which engineering education must move to meet national and societal needs of the next century. She is Dean of Engineering at Cooper Union, New York, and is a Fellow of the IEEE and of the Society of Women Engineers.

### Recreation

The Hotel Atop the Bellvue is within walking distance of the United States' most historic district, including such sites as Independence Hall and the Liberty Bell, Franklin Court, Betsy Ross House, Elfreth's Alley, and Head House Square.

Museums abound throughout the city, from the Port of History Museum on the Delaware River to the Philadelphia Art Museum by the waterworks on the Schuylkill River, with the Franklin Science Museum, the Rodin Museum, and others in between.

Conference participants staying at the Hotel Atop the Bellvue will have temporary full memberships at the Sporting Club at the Bellvue, a 93,000-square-foot facility connected to the hotel by an enclosed skywalk.

See the previous issue of the *Newsletter* for other information about the conference and about the hotel, or phone the general chairman, Michael Goodman, at (201) 593-8709. ◀

## CHAPTER NEWS

Recent monthly meetings of the Los Angeles Joint (EMS, ES, and PCS) Chapter have focused on helping members cope better in the changing job environment.

In May, Dr. Fred Sawyer spoke on "The most neglected communication skill of all: Listening." He stressed that "We all know the importance of clear writing and effective lectern manners but generally know very little about improving listening." During the Q&A period afterward, the focus changed. Questions then centered on the engineer as (poor) communicator in today's society. One promising tool for improvement was identified as membership in the IEEE Professional Communication Society.

The June meeting provided a special discussion about the unique entrepreneurial spirit that has helped build the modern world with all of its wonders and fresh challenges. Dr. Bill Drobish provided an overview of some key steps necessary to win in the competitive high technology marketplace. Topics included the requirements for a successful business, people and skills required, steps in creating a business, best sources of information on high-technology entrepreneurship, and local organizations that support new company development. (The Los Angeles Chapter and PACE have helped establish a local entrepreneurial network.)

In July, an IRS representative answered key questions on independent contractor status, forming a small business, and being self-employed.

The Chapter executive committee invites all members to participate in Chapter activities or just to join us for the social aspects of the monthly meetings. Most meetings are centrally located in Anaheim, making an easy commute for members in the greater Los Angeles area.

*Terry Lutwen is publicity chair of the Los Angeles Chapter; Lutwen Management Services, 22675 Gray Fox Drive, Canyon Lake, CA 92587; (909) 244-2573.* ◀

# PROTOTYPE

by Tim Whalen

## Signal Magazine

When historiographers of 20th century mass communication come across *Signal* magazine in their sorting and cataloging process, someone will give a sigh and say, "What an attractive example of technical communication." A more practical eye will distinguish the truth, however, because *Signal* was (and is) a prime model for pseudo-communication of a technical sort.

*Signal* magazine was the brain-child of Dr. Paul Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister for Propaganda and Popular Culture. Goebbels himself held a Ph.D. degree in romantic literature, philology, and history, and was a failed novelist and journalist when *Signal* crossed his mind as part of what we have come to know in the late 20th century as "The Big Lie." Briefly, The Big Lie simplifies language to slogans and symbols, glossing over any fact that is inimical or contrary to party policy. *Signal*'s role was mass communication—to reach and persuade readers internationally that the party line was true and beneficial.

Great resources were poured into *Signal* to make it credible and authentic in appearance. The chief editor was Giselher Wirsing; production was the responsibility of Franz Mosslang. (Both men went on to prestigious careers after the war—at *Paris-Match*, *Quick*, and other quality European magazines, and so did their staff members—some 15 editors, 120 translators, and more than 100 combat photographers.

From the magazine's onset in 1940 until its last issues in 1945, the annual budget for salaries alone was \$2.5 million, with about \$400,000 per issue dedicated to production costs like four-color reproduction. Albert Speer guaranteed *Signal* large quantities of the highest quality paper, and plenty of silver for photo development. The best Agfa-Gevaert cameras were pro-

vided to *Signal*'s cameramen. Fine office space and living quarters were provided *Signal*'s staff in its Paris location where the English and French versions were written.

In appearance, *Signal* resembles 1960s oversized magazines like *Look* and *Life* in their heydays of multiple full-color pages and full-color covers. *Signal* measured 9" x 12" and was usually 48 pages in length. Typically, six issues per year appeared. Versions were published in 20 languages, including English, French, Russian, Greek, Arabic, and Turkish. In 1943, at *Signal*'s high distribution point,

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*Even after 50 years, Signal is still quite an achievement in persuasive communication, a hallmark of how technology and writing can be slanted to appear as informative technical data . . .*

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three million copies were in circulation for each issue. In 1943-44 in France, *Signal* sold over 800,000 copies per issue. Until 1941, *Signal* could be bought at U.S. newsstands for 10¢. The English language version was regularly sent to the U.S., Ireland, India, the Middle East, Australia, Canada, and to Britain herself—as well as to the German-occupied islands in the English Channel—Jersey, Guernsey, Alderney, and Sark. As late as the summer of 1944, miniature copies of *Signal* were rocketed into England in V-1s without warheads.

The illustrations are still stunning, and have been called the finest collection of photos from the war. Action shots and shots from aircraft are breathtaking and capture the excitement of the moment—when cameramen rode and flew along for the invasions of Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Greece, and Russia.

In content, *Signal* focused on the success of Wehrmacht forces and on the supposed decay of its enemies, with plenty of battlefield stories to back up its contentions. Massive infusions of quasi-technical information propped up these assertions—views of designers proving out new engines and weapons crowd the pages; factory technicians explain the workings of some new Henschel aircraft; brilliant orange, yellow, and sky-blue photos of the North African desert illuminate accounts of how the war progressed there.

Some of the articles cannot be found elsewhere. Franco's Blue Legion of Spaniards fighting alongside the Germans inside Russia is a prime example; another is Britain's attack on the French fleet in the port of Oran; yet another is the Arab Legion filled with volunteers from Iraq, Turkey, and Persia fighting for Germany in Egypt and Yugoslavia.

Even after 50 years, *Signal* is still quite an achievement in persuasive communication, a hallmark of how technology and writing can be slanted to appear as informative technical data while at the same time it was never more than a part of The Big Lie. Today's readers can recognize *Signal*'s progeny at the newsstands in slick, attractive, four-color, oversized magazines that seem to be asking for someone to open them and read—magazines like *Soviet Life* (1929-1992) and others. Even the advertisements look harmless, as with those of *Signal*.

*Signal* continues to be a subject of interest to military historians, bibliographers, scholars of European publishing, and propaganda students. In the general writing and editing community, *Signal* should be remembered as a political house organ that achieved some pretty persuasive stuff—the sort of stuff of which modern pseudocommunication is made.

*Tim Whalen is a business development manager for Frank E. Basil, Inc., 1510 H St. NW, Washington, DC 20005; (202) 835-1265.* ◀

## CURMUDGEON'S CORNER



by Joan G. Nagle

### Carpal Tunnel Syndrome and Other Occupational Hazards

Do you wake up in the middle of the night with a tingling arm, hand, fingers? Do your wrists and hands ache after a long day at the keyboard? If so, you may be falling victim to the latest designer disease, carpal tunnel syndrome. The carpal tunnel is not a cut through the mountains somewhere in eastern Europe, but a passageway in the wrist which becomes swollen, or clogged, or something (Ask your doctor! I can't tell you everything) when stressed by the repetitive motions of computer keyboarding.

You can get elegant dark blue velvet wrist supports to prevent this, or wrist splints to alleviate it, or surgery to cure it. What you probably can't do, if you're a professional communicator, is stop working at the computer. By the way, when was the last time you heard anyone complain of writer's cramp? There's an occupational hazard that may have gone the way of smallpox.

But there are others . . .

- The tight shoulder muscles and stiff neck you get from extreme concentration at the tube, especially when it's a WYSIWYG monitor and you're designing a document in 9-pt. type. And especially if you wear bifocals.
- The glassy-eyed stare that comes not so much from eyestrain as from brainstrain, from trying to

think up a way to clarify a concept that you don't understand and you're not sure its author did either.

- The liver damage from prolonged inhalation of spray adhesive.
- The paper cuts and staple punctures and binder pinches.

There's another occupational hazard, more insidious than these, and probably more injurious to lifestyle. Since it has not yet been reported in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, I have assumed the privilege of naming it: Nitpicker's Eyeball. Symptoms including the following:

- You can't relax with the newspaper in the evening, because of its horrific mistakes. (You can't really call it a typo when it's a substitution of *travel* for *travail*, for instance.)

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*By the way, when was the last time you heard anyone complain of writer's cramp? There's a occupational hazard that may have gone the way of smallpox.*

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- You can't enjoy a meal in a restaurant, because the menu lists such ridiculously styled offerings as *roast beef with au jus*, *green beans almondine*, and, for dessert, *iced mellon*. (The last is prevalent in Pittsburgh, also among bankers. Figure it out.)
- You can't even get into the right spirit at church, because you have a compulsion to design a more attractive and user-friendly bulletin.

As you can see from my knowledge of the symptomology, I have a bad case of this. It's driving me crazy, doctor. On my last birthday, I received a book that I'd asked for, a pricey volume from an eminently respectable house. Settled down to read it forthwith, and found a typo in the Foreword, for goodness

sake! (At least it wasn't labeled *Forward*, and don't ask me how many times I've seen that.) The book went downhill from there . . . not its contents, which were learned and interesting . . . for \$40 you'd think they'd at least have run a spell-check on the thing.

I wish I knew the extent to which noneditors and nonwriters notice these things. Does a normal person get bent out of shape by formatting inconsistencies, excessive punctuation and capitalization, non-parallelism? I suspect not, which is why normal people think what we (communication types) do is so nearly worthless. But I suspect there is an effect, nonetheless. The effect is that a manual that is poorly designed just doesn't get used (or the tool that it came with purchased ever again). That a magazine or newspaper with bad writing/editing just gives people a case of the subliminal heaves . . . they don't know *why* they quit reading the thing, but they just couldn't stomach any more. That a menu is fractured Franglais just diminishes the customer's impression of the restaurant as a fine eating establishment.

This is why what we do is not, in fact, worthless. A well written, well edited, well designed document gives the reader/user a feeling (however fleeting) that all's right with the world. Whether they recognize it or not, somebody out there cares. Somebody cares that they can use, understand, get a lift out of.

For true curmudgeons, the feeling that they've performed a service to humanity is truly fleeting. Enjoy it while it lasts.

Joan Nagle is a member of the PCS Administrative Committee and a former editor of the Transactions; Westinghouse Savannah River Co., 1991 S. Centennial Ave., Aiken, SC 29803; (803) 644-5674. ◀

*This is the sort of English up with which I will not put.*

Winston Churchill

## Academic Program Reviews: Keeping Technical Communication Programs Strong

by Mark Haselkorn

As economic resources become harder to come by, assessment becomes more significant. There is no accreditation body for academic programs in technical communication, and debate over the need for one has gone on for more than a decade.

Nevertheless, another review mechanism has been quietly implemented during this time: program reviews instigated and run by the universities and colleges themselves. These periodic reviews are multidisciplinary and generally have a national component. Because there is no educational standards body in the field of technical communication, these program reviews are crucial in assessing and enhancing the strength of technical communication programs.

In June 1993, the University of Washington's Dept. of Technical Communication underwent its five-year program review. The review committee consisted of Dr. Roger Grice, formerly of IBM and RPI; Prof. David Kaufer, Director of Technical and Professional Writing, Carnegie Mellon Univ.; and three UW reviewers from the Depts. of Aeronautics and Astronautics, Chemical Engineering, and English.

The report of the committee identified considerable strength in the UW program and recommended continuing status (that is, 10 years until the next review). It also, however, recommended numerous improvements and called for a better articulated departmental vision.

Equally as important as the review itself is the preparation and self-

analysis that the department had to undergo to prepare for the review. A set of standardized materials was prepared for the committee that describes in great detail every aspect of departmental operations through December 1992. These materials were reviewed not only by the committee but also by the university administration.

The UW Dept. of Technical Communication is willing to share these materials with other academic programs to help in their assessment process.

*Prof. Haselkorn is director of the Dept. of Technical Communication, College of Engineering, University of Washington, Seattle, WA 98195; (206) 543-2577; mark@uwtc.washington.edu.* ◀

## PCS Presents Course for Mayo Clinic Graduate School

by Ron Blicq

### Writing Scientific Papers for Publication

PCS's Education Committee has developed a new course designed to help researchers—particularly graduate students—write papers for publication in scientific journals. The course was developed at the request of Dr. Richard A Robb, Graduate Education Coordinator for the Physiology and Biophysics Department of the Mayo Graduate School in Rochester, Minnesota, and Kerrie Holton, President of the Mayo EMBS (IEEE Engineering in Medicine and Biology Society) Student Club. I presented it to 20 graduate students in February 1993.

The course comprises four three-hour sessions spread over five days, with the middle day being reserved for students to work on their papers. Each session is interactive

and includes a mix of instruction and personal interviews between the participants and PCS's course leaders.

Instruction includes modules on writing the parts of a research paper (abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, and conclusions), plus additional topics such as how to:

- Identify a suitable journal and its audience.
- Differentiate between writing for scientifically knowledgeable people and lay readers.
- Organize information into topic groups.
- Develop an outline.
- Adopt a suitable tone and style.
- Determine the extent a writer can be subjective.

- Avoid jargon and wordy expressions.
- Use abbreviations and metric symbols correctly.
- Create effective visuals.
- Prepare a bibliography and a list of references.

The course participants wrote exercises and submitted samples of their writing for evaluation, and completed the course with a short test (the Mayo Graduate School assigned the course a 1-hour credit).

This is the third in a continuing series of specialty courses the Education Committee is developing. For more information, call, write or fax Education Chair Ron Blicq at RGI International, 569 Oxford St., Winnipeg, MB, Canada, R3M 3J2, (204) 488-7060, fax (204) 488-7294, e-mail: r.blicq@compmail.com. ◀



# Lives in Transition

by Roger Grice

A number of organizational newsletters and magazines have a column called "Life in Transition," or something similar. Sadly, the transition they focus on most often is the one from this life to the next.

Many of us have grown up (or are growing up) in a time when careers were marked by few major transitions. Many—but certainly not all—of us started our careers in a company or other organization where we planned to spend most, if not all, of our working lives. Yes, there were promotions, moves, and changes in direction—some major, many relatively minor. In today's world of "down-sizing," "right-sizing," "out-sourcing," and rapid change, such security and steadiness are becoming increasingly rare. More than a few of us find ourselves striking out on our own much sooner than we had planned.

For some, the transition is exciting and rewarding; for others, traumatic and sad. In the next several issues of this *Newsletter* we will hear how some of our members have weathered—and are weathering—the storm. If you have a story you'd like to share, please send it in. You might want to offer encouragement and support, or you might want to caution others about pitfalls to avoid.

Having set the stage for this series, I suppose I should start it off.

My one and only full-time job after college was as a technical communicator for IBM Corporation. It was a rewarding and fulfilling job, one that I truly enjoyed. When early retirement incentives started to be offered, I really didn't pay much attention; I was very happy doing what I was doing. As the incentives became more attractive, I had to start giving them some serious thought. I had to reflect seriously

on the direction my life was taking and the directions it could take. (This can be a painful and wrenching experience, I must tell you.)

I'll spare you the soul-searching and jump to the bottom line. There I was in my forties (OK, my late forties—OK, two weeks before my fiftieth birthday), signing up for a retirement package.

Traumatic! Leaving the only job you've had, one that you've enjoyed for 28 years is not easy. It's not just leaving a job; it was, for me, leaving the concept "job," the whole idea of working. My wife calculated that if I planned to sit home in a rocking chair, I might survive for a month—maximum! (In fact, my "retirement" lasted for three days, and that was about half a day longer than I could handle.)

During my time at IBM, I had become involved in teaching technical communication courses at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and the State University of New York College at New Paltz. I was fortunate enough to be able to turn these avocations into part of my post-retirement career.

I had to learn about doing business. I learned that (in New York State at least) you can establish yourself as an entity doing business by filling out a few simple forms and paying a small fee. It was much easier than I had expected. I formed my own consultancy and have been keeping busy there, too.

My transition was from one full-time job that I enjoyed to a number of part-time jobs that I enjoy. Maybe one of these days I will settle into one of those jobs as a full-time activity. Then again, maybe I won't. It might be too much like "growing up," and that's one transition that can wait a while.

My advice to those of you who may be considering a transition (and to those of you who may have no choice in the matter) is to take stock of what you're doing, what you'd

really like to do if you had the choice, and then see what's out there. Going out into the world can be pretty scary, but it's a nice place out there. There are options and opportunities that you may never have dreamed of. The move can be rough at times, but the rewards—and the enjoyment—can make it all worthwhile.

*Dr. Grice is a member of the PCS Administrative Committee; Roger Grice Associates, 52 Woris Lane, Lake Katrine, NY 12449; (914) 382-2015; roger\_grice@mts.rpi.edu.* ◀

## Newsletter Schedule

The *Newsletter* deadline and issue schedule is as follows:

Issue	Deadline
Nov./Dec.	October 8, 1993
Jan./Feb.	December 3, 1993
March/April	February 4, 1994
May/June	April 8, 1994
July/August	June 3, 1994
Sept./Oct.	August 5, 1994

Articles, letters, and reviews from readers are welcome. E-mail and ASCII diskettes are preferred. Please send your contributions to:

R. J. Joenk  
3035 O'Neal Pkwy #S39  
Boulder, CO 80301  
(303) 541-0060  
Internet: r.joenk@ieee.org ◀

*The two words 'information' and 'communication' are often used interchangeably, but they signify quite different things. Information is giving out; communication is getting through.*  
Sydney J. Harris

## IPCC 94

### Conference Announcement Call For Papers

PCS will hold IPCC 94 (the 1994 International Professional Communication Conference) in the Canadian Rockies. The theme will be **Scaling New Heights in Technical Communication**; the site will be the prestigious and spectacular Banff Centre for Conferences, 65 miles west of Calgary, Alberta; and the dates will be Wednesday to Friday, September 28 to 30, 1994.

IPCC 94 will bring together practitioners, specialists, and teachers of technical communication to hear about and discuss current trends in four main topic areas:

- Teamwork in Technical Communication
- Information Design
- Electronic Information and Emerging Technologies
- Education and Training/Preparing for the Future

The deadline of the call for papers is January 31, 1994. Send a 300-500 word abstract to:

David K. Farkas, Program Committee, Department of Technical Communication,  
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