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PCS's Second-Issued IEEE Third Millennium Medal

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

The second of eleven IEEE Third Millennium Medals was presented to James M. Lufkin at an awards dinner in Minneapolis, Minnesota, on 5 May 2000. The event was scheduled with a meeting of the PCS AdCom—Jim's first in more than 20 years. The ceremony was attended by Jim's family and friends, as well as AdCom members. Jim has been retired for several years and lives in St. Paul.

PCS past president Jim Lufkin

First winner in 1975 of the PCS Alfred N. Goldsmith Award for outstanding achievement in engineering communication, Jim was president of PCS twice (in 1968 and 1975) and chair of three conferences on scientific journals (1973, 1975, 1977). The Millennium Medal was awarded in recognition of his contributions to the Professional Communication Society and as an indication of the important part he has played in our history.

One of Jim's distinctive contributions to our field was his authorship of numerous one-act plays dealing with problems of communicating in engineering (see November/December 1997 *Newsletter*). To celebrate his accomplishments, the awards dinner culminated in a presentation of one of those plays, *The Employment Interview.*

This play was first performed at the Society for Technical Communication national meeting in St. Louis in 1983 and it has had many performances since. Jim identifies the genre of *The Employment Interview* as "tutorial farce." In it, Adolph Glotz, the villain, (played by AdCom member Luke Maki) interviews physicist Dr. Betty Wright (played by AdCom member Muriel Zimmerman) for a job in the Non-Euclidean Space Institute. Glotz is a careless, insensitive, sexist boor who is never able to fathom that Dr. Wright is an exceptionally qualified candidate for a high-level job.

The lessons learned from this play are from bad examples—what interviewers should *not* do—and the dialogue is brisk and witty. Jim designed a set of overheads to serve as ironic backdrop to the events on stage. One overhead displays Dr. Wright's resume, indicating her Ph.D. degree in physics from the

Oscar nominees Luke Maki and Muriel Zimmerman

California Institute of Technology; another displays the job description for the position, providing the audience with solid proof that the self-absorbed Glotz has never bothered to think about what questions he should be asking.

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FROM THE EDITOR

RUDY JOENK

Letter to the Editor

Professor Grammar's column in the May/June *Newsletter* caused contemplation.

Slartibartfast, a character in *The Hitch-Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy* radio play, might easily understand "earthquake building code update coverage." He enters in "Fit the Third" (first broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 20 March 1978; in print on pp. 66-67 of the script book, ISBN 0-330-29288-9; on CD in the second of a set of five, BBC CD6001) and soon admits to being a skilled builder of planets.

Certainly, if he can build planets, he can build the earthquakes they sustain. In building an earthquake he might adhere to a code. Like most codes, it might be periodically updated (millennia in his world) to expand its coverage. So, in the design phase of an earthquake for a new planet, he would consult a document entitled "Earthquake building code update coverage."

Back here on the real Earth, excessive noun strings challenge comprehension, as you decry. But other Germanic languages suffer similar fates in compounding nouns, most famously German itself. Norwegian is as cumbersome as German in its compounding, or perhaps worse, as its rules on the matter are less rigid. Gerunds, declensional adjectives, and even prepositions join nouns in compounds. Moreover, new compounds appear almost daily, most frequently in political debate.

Compounds challenge translation, as invariably they are equivalent to excessive noun strings in English. A single excessive noun string annoys; repeating it may destroy communication altogether. So I cope by rewriting, typically by using more pronouns and reflexives than in the original text. After a few years of using this approach, I have compiled two averages that reflect your earlier call for deleting expletives (same *Newsletter*).

The word count of my English translation and rewrite almost always is the same or up to 1.5 percent more than that of the Norwegian original, principally because a Norwegian compound word usually translates to two or more words in English. However, the character count goes down by six to nine percent. I have yet to understand why that is so, but suspect that Claude Shannon's redundancy ratio of languages may be involved. English is efficient. Watchdogs such as you will keep it that way.

—Michael Brady
Asker, Norway

Postal Communication Reminder

R. L. Nailen has reminded us that not all members use e-mail, as might be inferred from our "Alias the AdCom" feature each January. And, in fact, I recently read a statistic claiming that 95 percent of the world population does *not* have access to the Internet. Postal addresses for AdCom members and chairs of principal committees are on covers 2, 3, and 4 of each issue of the *Transactions*. My postal address is in the boilerplate at the bottom of page 2 of each *Newsletter*.

On the Web

The January/February and March/April issues of this *Newsletter* are available on

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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

GEORGE HAYHOE

METHOD AND PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION

There are frequent discussions on the TECHWR-L e-mail discussion list for technical communicators (*http://www.raycomm.com/techwhirl*) about the need for consistent, repeatable processes for creating information products, whether manuals, online help systems, or multimedia presentations. Some list subscribers favor a methodical approach to creating technical documents of all kinds, but others are vehemently opposed to defining a documentation methodology.

The latter assert that time spent fretting over how to produce an information product is time not spent writing, editing, designing, illustrating, and performing the myriad other tasks that technical and professional communicators do. Rather than worry about elaborate methodologies, they say, we should apply the seats of our pants to our chairs and just *do* those tasks.

Is there time to do things over but not to do them right the first time?

What Is the Communication Process?

It seems to me that the problem with this objection is that all technical and professional communication—no matter what the medium, the length, or the elaborateness—benefits from the application of reproducible processes. These processes include understanding customer requirements, as well as user characteristics and needs. They include careful analysis of tasks that users must perform. They include determining how much information is needed and how that information can be most effectively delivered.

Reduced to its simplest form, the recommended method for technical and professional communication is:

1. Plan
2. Draft
3. Test
4. Revise

This approach is familiar to most IEEE members because it is essentially an engineering methodology applied to communication tasks.

For more than 10 years, a significant part of my job was helping the information technology department of a large company define its software development methodology. For more than 10 years before that, I taught technical, business, and expository writing at the university level. In those roles I found that many writing students and software developers were as allergic to a methodical approach to their tasks as some technical and professional communicators are to theirs.

We frequently hear complaints about bad software, poor writing skills, and technical documentation that no one reads. Is there a common causal thread here?

Why Do Some People Reject the Process Approach?

If the process approach to communication tasks is effective, why do so many people dismiss it? I think the answer is simple: Because, whether we admit it or not, many of us want to expend as little effort as possible in performing tasks we consider unpleasant.

Whether we admit it or not, many of us consider communication tasks to be the least desirable components of our jobs. Engineers are essentially problem-solvers by inclination and training, and few probably think of time spent on reports and technical presentations as productive.

Some professional communicators seem to think the same thing. They would rather debate the readability of serif versus sans serif typefaces or learn the latest software tool for producing online help than plan, design, produce, and refine information products.

The irony is that for engineers, communication is an essential but peripheral part of their work. For communicators, it *is* their work; it's the typefaces and tools that are peripheral.

"I just need to bang out this project wrap-up report to meet my manager's deadline,"

…the process approach to communication …works.

the engineer says. "I just need to get this user manual to the printer in time to ship with the product," the communicator says. Both say, "I don't have time to plan, test, or revise it."

It is axiomatic in too many businesses these days that there's always time to do things over but never time to do them right the first time.

How Can We Overcome Our Reluctance to Adopt the Process Approach?

When I taught writing, many of my students would listen dutifully to my advice about the communication process and then respond, "I spend all my time writing a draft. I don't have time to plan, test, and revise." They didn't see that they spent much of their time staring at a blank page or screen, time that would have been more productive had they embraced the process approach.

So how can we overcome our reluctance to take an engineering approach to writing and other communication tasks?

For some, it's as simple as working for the right company or the right manager. They don't give us a choice; if we want to work for them, we approach communication methodically.

For others, it's a journey of discovery. After a time of wandering aimlessly whenever tasked with a report, presentation, manual, or online help system, we stumble upon the process approach to communication and discover that it works.

Some, however, will never see the wisdom of adopting a communication methodology. The loss is theirs—and their audience's.

For more information about the engineering approach to communication tasks, I recommend books by two winners of the Professional Communication Society's Alfred N. Goldsmith Award for outstanding achievement in engineering communication:

- Joan G. Nagle's *Handbook for Preparing Engineering Documents: From Concept to Completion* (New York: IEEE Press, 1996) is an excellent introduction to the writing process for engineers. Joan, the Goldsmith Award winner for 1989, presents this information as "a handbook, conceived and arranged as an analog to other handbooks that engineers use regularly in their work" (p. xv).
- JoAnn T. Hackos's *Managing Your Documentation Projects* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1994) does a superb job of presenting a publications methodology for communication professionals. The winner of this year's Goldsmith Award, JoAnn details "a way to produce high-quality documents consistently" (p. xiii).

So yes, just **do** it—but do it **right!**

IEEE Third Millennium Medal

(continued from page 1)

The IEEE Third Millennium Medals honor 3000 members who have made outstanding contributions to the Institute. The number of awards allotted to societies and sections is based on size, allowing each entity to receive a proportionate number—11 to PCS.

A presentation to Dr. Emily Schlesinger at her home in January (see March/April 2000 *Newsletter*) was the first of our award celebrations, and the presentation to James Lufkin was the second.

The year of the Millennium Medals will culminate in a special event at IPCC/SIGDOC 2000, at the Boston Museum of Science on 25 September 2000. Nine additional Millennium Medals will be awarded to the following PCS members who will be acknowledged for the significant contributions they have made to the Institute and to the Society: Ron Blicq, Roger Grice, Rudy Joenk, Bill Kehoe, Herb Michaelson, Joan Nagle, Richie Robinson, Stephanie Rosenbaum, and Scott Sanders.

FROM THE EDITOR

(continued from page 2)

our Web site in PDF file format at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/* and, about the time you read this, the May/June issue will be there, too. The Web postings are scheduled to occur about the time the succeeding print issue is distributed.

Luke Maki

Let this be you at our Cambridge conference.

Instant Fame

If you're going to attend IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, 25-27 September, I'd like to offer you temporary appointment as a reporter (or photographer) for the *Newsletter*. A paragraph or two about each presentation in a session—what was said, not what's in the proceedings—should be enough unless you're really "hooked" by something. E-mail me at *r.joenk@ieee.org*.

AdCom

The final meeting of the year, which is the annual election meeting, is 24 September, 2 p.m. to 7 p.m., preceding IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 at the Marriott Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

Potpourri

Crossed signals: College professors demand correct grammar from incoming students whereas high school teachers rank that skill last; they care how students organize their writing. From a survey by ACT Inc. as reported in *U.S. News & World Report*.

Said to be Ernest Hemingway's favorite sentence when he worked at the *Kansas City Star:* "He was punched in the nose by the girl he was engaged to's brother."

AmericanGreetings.com says that 60 percent of adult Internet users prefer reading their e-mail to reading snail mail.

Denver International Airport (DIA) recently installed "a new way-finding system" featuring colorful signs with western themes. The east-side garage signs are blue with images of animals (bear, rabbit, trout, etc.) and the west-side signs are red with images of a horseshoe, a wagon wheel, a campfire, etc.

Medical Misdirectory: *artery,* the study of paintings; *dilate,* live long; *nitrates,* cheaper than day rates; *post operative,* a letter carrier. From *The Saturday Evening Post.*

Info for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome.

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple;** multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough specialized formatting and highlighting—boldface, italics, bullets—to show me your preferences.**

If you borrow text—more than a fair-use sentence or two—from previously published material, you are responsible for obtaining written permission for its use. Ditto for graphics. Always give credit to the author or artist.

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of page 2.

Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-numbered month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-numbered month. For example, the deadline is 15 September for the November/December issue, 15 November for the January/February 2001 issue, etc. You won't be far off—and never late—if you observe the Ides of September, November, January, and so on.

MASTERS OF STYLE

RONALD J. NELSON

ALEXANDER THEROUX ON COLORS, TAKEN INDIVIDUALLY

As I was walking on campus the other day, I noticed some striking, deep blue flowers. What made me stop to drink in their beauty, I suspect, had something to do with their intense brightness, their saturation, contrasted with the drab surroundings. I later checked my copy of Roy Hay and Patrick Synge's *The Color Dictionary of Flowers and Plants for Home and Garden;* they were *Gentiana verna.*

The experience caused me to reflect on the importance of color to daily life in general and to documents of various kinds in particular. We most often see colors in combinations, rather than individually. These combinations can indeed be impressive, as in the movie *What Dreams May Come* and in many of the documents we regularly encounter in hard copy or online. But in the blurring rush of things, we need occasionally to slam on the brakes and see colors one at a time. It is a matter of improving our power of concentration, of focus, of appreciation.

It is not just what *you say that matters, but* how *you say it.*

Advertisers, of course, are picking up on this idea in a clever way—the current (22 May 2000) issue of *Time: The Weekly Newsmagazine* being a case in point. It contains no fewer than five ads entirely in achromatic colors (black, white, gray) except for one usually small part done in green or red or blue (see pp. 2-3, 27, 39, 45, and 159), thereby calling attention to the minimized color and, once noticed, making it memorable. Another four or five ads in this issue are wholly in achromatic colors but with two minimized color areas.

To assist in heightening awareness of color and exposing the professional communicator to a writer whose colorful style meets the sole criterion for this column (that it have a rich blend of form and content, i.e., genuine substance), I recommend Alexander Theroux's *The Primary Colors: Three Essays* (New York: Henry Holt, 1994) and *The Secondary Colors: Three Essays* (same publisher, 1996). Both books consist of lengthy essays on color so that one enters the world of each individual color and inhabits it for an extended time.

The first book delves into the intricacies of blue (pp. 1-67), yellow (pp. 69-158), and red (pp. 159-268); the second into orange (pp. 1-108), purple (pp. 109-208), and green (pp. 209-312). The reader emerges from each essay with the feeling of having assimilated the fullness of the color in all its manifestations. Those who design documents can gain immeasurably by perusing these books, as can those who read the documents. To do so would be a valuable tool for audience analysis.

Each essay is written brilliantly, employing a multiplicity of writing techniques from which we may profit: varying sentence structures, sprinkling occasionally difficult words into the prose and thereby providing a means of expanding our vocabularies, choosing dynamic words that almost leap from the page, differentiating the various nuances of each color, narrating the history of the color in its variations, probing the etymology of the color, explaining the process of how the color is made, elucidating the uses of the color, and selecting engaging anecdotes and allusions that embellish the essay—making each reading of an individual color a thorough, lively learning experience.

What Theroux conveys in "Blue," for example, makes a person realize how little he or she knows about that color. Reading along, one becomes informed by accretion. Did you know that deep blue beards were common on Greek and Roman statues? That in Greece marble was frequently painted with blue festoons? That blue threads appeared in the ancient linen garments found in the caves of the Dead Sea Scrolls? That in Jerusalem a blue hand painted on a door gives protection? That a blue spot placed behind a groom's ear in Morocco drives off evil? That chows have

How much thought have you ever given to blue and orange?

blue tongues? And do you remember that the dominant color in Munchkin Country in L. Frank Baum's world of Oz was blue and that the "solid endearing color" of Watty Piper's *Little Engine That Could* was blue?

The hues and variations of blue are myriad. Reflect momentarily, won't you, over the subtle differences between Dutch Boy azure, Pacific Pool Supplies blue, lapis lazuli, Eskimo Pie blue, cue-tip chalk, the Sears color Alice Blue Gown blue, "true as Coventry blue," Tiffany blue, Windex blue, Gauloise *bleu*, the blue dye on the bristles of some toothbrushes, glacier-ice blue, turnsole (used by monks for wonderful pen flourishes around letters), and indigo blue, to name a few?

Blue was the color of the temperance movement. It is the airy color of the sky. It was the color for Walter Winchell, who almost always wore a blue suit, a blue shirt, and a blue tie along with his gray felt hat. "Blues" was Confederate money, to contrast it with the Northern "greenbacks." The Aztec word *Xiuhtecuhli* ("the prince of the turquoise") denoted the name of the solar (male) color and of the jade shirt worn by the goddess of eternal renewal. Goethe, in his *Theory of Colors* (1810), regarded blue as producing "anxious, tender, and yearning responses."

Blue is the color for the discouraged—got the blues. (W. C. Handy's "blue note" was a minor third, like G to B♭.) In jazz, Blue Note recordings are synonymous with excellence.

And then there is the song, "Blue Moon," and Miles Davis' great album, *Kind of Blue*. Appropriately, I must ask the question, as Theroux does, "What did the cow do when he ate blue grass? Mood indigo."

Here is how Theroux's essay "Orange" begins:

> Orange is a bold, forritsome [according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, "forward, 'pushing'"] color. It sells, it smiles, it sings, it simpers, combining the aura of Hollywood musicals, the leisure of sunshiny Florida—*Moon Over Miami* in Technicolor—and South American festivals. Orange is "hot," gives back light, and sits at the center of one's *ch'i* (cosmic or vital energy). It is an active, warm, advancing earthy color, indicative of and supposedly preferred by social types with an agreeable, good-natured, and gregarious personality, glad-handing and salesman-hearty, yammering and bumptious and irrepressible, although it carries the added connotations, predominantly in its mode of near-phosphorescence, of fickleness, vacillation, lack of steadiness, and, many even insist, a lack of warmth. But, surely, it is nothing if not unshy and bottomlessly flippant and even pagan, a color that takes place, in the parlance of twenties journalism, in full view of the spectators.

As Theroux also says, it is a color that "rides over opposition through its sheer pluck and inventive ability and radiates with plenitude and exhilarating expenditure a brash and noncollaborating dynamic, a shouting hue that, dominating, exuberant, everywhere superabundant, speaks out all at once." It is "flame, fire, foolishness, and fun, the color of poodles, samba-maniacs, and people with zipperoo." Orange is "sharper than shy and flashier than frail, with nothing of diffidence or doubt in what is announced of its high saturation, and somehow always reminds me of what Ty Cobb once said of the game of baseball: 'It's no pink tea, and molly-coddles had better stay out.'"

As a bit of an interactive exercise, what words in the above passage make it come alive? What words do you regard as sophisticated? Does the alliteration work? Why or why not? Do the allusions to a movie and to a baseball player make the passages more effective? Can you *see* the essence of the color through concrete, dynamic imagery rather than abstractions? Can you sense how the mind is stretched by the interweaving of techniques? Can you get a feel for the important principle that it is not just *what* you say that matters, but *how* you say it? You can put your readers to sleep with your writing, or you can virtually coerce them to sit up and pay attention.

Orange you glad you read this column?

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NET NOTES

ELIZABETH MOELLER

WHAT EXACTLY IS A PORTAL?

It's a hot topic on the stock market—portal Web sites (many of those "dot com" companies) have made many people wealthy. It has almost become a game. Netscape and Microsoft have set up portal pages in the hope that people will not figure out how to reset their browser (i.e., Netscape Navigator, Microsoft Internet Explorer) home page. Computer manufacturers such as Dell and Compaq have set their preinstalled browsers so that their company portal appears as the default home page. It's a good bet that just about everyone has seen those sites. So what exactly is a portal and why do you need one?

What Is a Portal?

"Portal" is defined by *The American Heritage Dictionary* as "An entrance or means of entrance: *a portal of knowledge*." That is exactly what a Web portal is—an entrance to the Web. The difference, however, is that portal sites vary depending on your needs. The goal of a portal site is to become your entrance to the World Wide Web. As with many things, there are advantages and disadvantages to portal sites.

A portal can present all the information you want in the order you want it.

The advantages are many; these sites allow you to customize the information presented to you so that it meets your needs. For example, CNN (*http://www.cnn.com*), Excite (*http://www.excite.com*), and Yahoo (*http://www.yahoo.com*) allow users to customize the first page they see. This means that you dictate the order and presentation of information instead of letting the Web site do it.

Many users customize one of these sites and make it their default home page, so that every time they open their Web browser they see the page they customized with the information they want. These sites often offer "search the Web" areas so that you can use their affiliated search engine to find information you want instead of going somewhere else like AltaVista (*http://www.altavista.com*) or Google (*http://www.google.com*).

The main drawback, and argument against customizing an existing site, is that these sites are still able to dictate content. Users are simply reordering the information so that it is presented as they want to view it. John Dvorak argued in his October 1998 column in *PC Magazine* (reprinted on the Web at *http://www.zdnet.com/pcmag/insites/dvorak_print/jd980922.htm*) that portal sites are truly advertiser-driven and only lead you to information from one of their partners—never one of their competitors.

A secondary drawback is often the narrow scope of a portal. Users of the Garden.com portal (*http://www.garden.com*) receive a wealth of information on gardening—but on little else. Those who use the Motley Fool portal (*http://www.fool.com*) receive a wealth of information on investing—but on little else.

Dvorak argues that users should simply create their own portal site—one that presents all the information they want in the order they want it. Before creating a site, however, it is good to take a look at other portals to get a feel for what they do.

Where Do I Find Portals?

Many people are surprised to learn that sites they visit every day are actually portals—which is the point. Sites like Excite want you to customize them so that you come back every day. Because most of these larger sites are advertiser-supported, they count on users to come back regularly. A large number of regular visitors translates into more advertising revenue for them.

Other portal sites are created by companies to keep you coming back to their products and those of their strategic partners. Netscape (*http://www.netscape.com*) is a good example of this. The default home page for Navigator users is the Netscape home page. This is a site that users can customize to their own needs. Netscape has created strategic partnerships with organizations such as CNN to provide general news, The Weather Channel for

weather information, CNET for technical news, and so forth.

Some portals are purely topical. A new venture, Nothing But Networks (*http://www.nothingbutnetworks.com*), has created a family of portals on a range of topics. These are still primarily advertiser-supported but they have a definite topical focus. Their family includes sites on pets, music, toys, computers, and other areas—all billed as the "most popular topics on the Internet."

A personal portal is a fast-loading list of links.

Topical sites are not always advertiser-supported. LinuxLinks (*http://www.linuxlinks.com*) and LinuxWaves (*http://www.linuxwaves.com*) are excellent examples of topical portals. They provide links to Linux information with no advertising. Other topical sites include Doct.org (*http://www.doct.org*) for medical information, CNET (*http://www.cnet.com*) for technical information, and Internet.com (*http://www.Internet.com*) for Internet industry information.

The question is whether any of these portals work for you. If they don't, you may want to create your own.

How Do I Create My Own Portal?

There are two ways to create a portal for your needs. The first, and easiest if you do not know HTML, is to use one of the existing portal sites and customize it for your needs. The more general ones, such as Netscape, Excite, and Yahoo, are great for people who want a quick look at the headlines, weather, and sports and a place to enter search terms.

For people who want more detail, a topical portal may be the answer. However, those may not meet all users' needs since they stay on a focus and do not offer the range of topics a more general site does. As John Dvorak suggests, many people are turning to creating their own personal portals. Dvorak's personal portal can be found at *http://www.dvorak.org/home.htm*.

A personal portal is essentially a fast-loading list of links. It can even reside on a user's hard drive for faster access. The difficulty here is that to create one of these, users must know HTML or have access to a visual HTML editor such as Microsoft FrontPage or Macromedia Dreamweaver.

Portals bear watching this year. As more and more people use the Web, the driving force is content. Users are tired of the eye-candy and flashy sites—they want information. Creating a portal is one way to bring users to your site and provide much needed information for a targeted audience. The downside for those creating them is that they are time-consuming to maintain and must be maintained 24 hours a day, seven days a week to be current and keep users coming back.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller is vice president of PCS and chair of the Meetings Committee. She owns Interactive Media Consulting (+1 518 366 8765, http://beth@imediaconsult.com*), a World Wide Web and Internet training firm in Saratoga Springs, New York, which provides Web site design and Internet training for businesses in the northeast.*

Why English presents problems in learning:

- I did not object to the object.
- The insurance for the invalid was invalid.
- The bandage was wound around the wound.
- There was a row among the oarsmen about how to row.
- They were too close to the door to close it.
- The buck does funny things when the does are present.
- The cat with nine lives lives next door.

PROFESSOR GRAMMAR

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LABELING NOTEWORTHY INFORMATION

In these lazy days of summer, the Professor has been cheerfully writing thank-you notes to all those wonderful friends with whom she visited recently.

Speaking of notes, the Professor was surprised when she realized that she's never written a lesson on one of her pet peeves: general notes. (She's not particularly bothered by notes to figures or examples because those notes are really like footnotes to those helpful devices.)

Labeling information meaningfully helps your users.

What Is a General Note?

By *general notes* the Professor means those little facts that are preceded by a boldface **Note** label. In much of the information the Professor edits, those notes are as numerous and annoying as the weeds amidst the columbines and lavender in the Professor's garden. The problem is not so much with what comes after the pesky **Note** labels as with the excessive and inconsistent use of the **Note** label actually muddying the information rather than clarifying it.

Consider the following note:

- **Note:** You cannot delete product-generated objects, but you can delete objects that you created.

This fact seems important, but how does the **Note** label help the user? This information is really a restriction, so the user would be helped more if the label were **Restriction**.

Notes That Could Use Other Labels

Here are some other notes that would be better with different labels:

- **Note:** You can encrypt users' passwords by using the ENCRYPT command.

Although the Professor can't be sure without seeing the context for that note, she doubts this information needs to stand out from the information surrounding it. Putting a **Note** label on sentences like this one subtly tells users that information without a **Note** label is less important. In cases like this, the Professor recommends that you use no label.

- **Note:** It is recommended that you back up your system before you migrate to a new release.

For important information like this, the Professor finds a **Recommendation** label far more appealing than a **Note** label. She wagers that users will agree, especially if you follow the **Recommendation** label with an imperative verb that tells users what you recommend they do. For example:

- **Recommendation:** Back up your system before you migrate to a new release.

If you recognized something else the Professor doesn't like about the "It is recommended" note, congratulations! You have a discerning eye. The first word of the note, *It,* is what the Professor sometimes calls an expletive. The *it* in that sentence is a meaningless word that takes the position of the subject. Revising the sentence in imperative mood makes the sentence much more clear. To read more about expletives in our language, see the May/June 2000 issue of this *Newsletter*, page 19.

- **Note:** To use the EXTEND command, you must have version 3 of the Database/Extend product installed on your system.

Again, the Professor finds this information important, but she would rather see a **Requirement** or **Prerequisite** label.

- **Note:** To organize your Web bookmarks, use the Netscape *Insert Folder* function.

For time-saving ideas like this, the Professor likes a **Tip** label.

When writing cross-references, some writers like to use labels like these:

- **Related reading**
- **Related topics**
- **See also**

These labels can make information easier to find, especially in a large library, but the Professor would not be happy to see too

CHAPTER NEWS

PHILADELPHIA WRITING CONTEST

The winners in this year's student writing contest are:

First Prize: David Tack of Drexel University for his paper "Design of New Instrumentation to Detect and Diagnose Spine Pathology"

Second Prize: James DeFuria and Amol Shah of Rowan University for "The Guardian ANJEL—Automated New Jersey Emergency Locator"

Third Prize: A tie between Suor Kim of Swarthmore College for "The Mechanism for Improved Ultrasound Contrast with Intermittent Imaging" and Brandon L. Rutter, also of Swarthmore College, for "Biologically Inspired Approaches to Real-World Interaction of Autonomous Agents."

The prizes are $200, $150, and $100, respectively, and an engraved trophy that moves each year to the first-place winner's IEEE student branch.

David Tack, James DeFuria, and Suor Kim also participated in the IEEE Region 2 contest at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, where each made an oral presentation of his paper. David Tack and James DeFuria won first and second prize, respectively.

PCS congratulates the students on their excellent performance and the high standards achieved by all the entries and thanks the contest judges: Glenn Pritchard and Barney Adler of PECO Energy Distribution Co., Katherine Adams of Roy Weston, Inc., Roger Boyell and John Schanely of Lockheed Martin Corp., and Ed Podell, chapter founder and former chair, who coordinated the judging.

PROFESSOR GRAMMAR

(continued from page 10)

Use an imperative verb with important recommendations.

many of these labels on a single window or page. If you want to use these cross-referencing labels, the Professor recommends that you and your colleagues agree on what type of cross-references you will label, such as information on a separate Web site or in a different printed book. And if you are writing for the Web or an online system, use a link to take the user directly to the referenced information.

In Summary

Labeling information more meaningfully helps your users and makes information easier to find. So make the Professor, your editor, and your users happy by limiting your use of general notes and using more meaningful labels when appropriate.

The Professor hopes your summer is as pleasant as hers and that your notes reflect your true intent.

Copyright 1998 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. *Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Santa Teresa Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. The Council recently authored the Prentice-Hall book* Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors. *Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in this* Handbook.

"Leaders who win the respect of others are the ones who deliver more than they promise, not the ones who promise more than they can deliver."

— Mark A. Clement

Highlights of the May AdCom Meeting

By Ed Clark

The Professional Communication Society Administrative Committee (AdCom) held its summer meeting on 5 and 6 May 2000 at the Holiday Inn (Metrodome) in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Awards

Long-time PCS member Jim Lufkin was a guest in attendance at the meeting and at the AdCom dinner, where close family members accompanied him. After dinner, Jim received from president George Hayhoe the IEEE Third Millennium medal that he was awarded by PCS in recognition for a lifetime of contributions to professional communication (see page 1, this *Newsletter*).

President George Hayhoe leading strategic plan discussion

The AdCom voted Henrich Lantsberg winner of the Schlesinger award and JoAnn Hackos winner of the Goldsmith award. These awards will be presented at IPCC/SIGDOC 2000.

The PCS Web site *http://www.ieeepcs.org* has been updated to include the 1999 award winners as well as a new section listing winners of best *Transactions* paper awards.

President's Report

An IEEE review of PCS is planned before the next TAB meeting in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, on 22 June. The IEEE conducts these reviews approximately every five years to ensure that societies are healthy and follow good practices in conferences and publications. Bill Kehoe, Kim Campbell, and George Hayhoe will attend the review.

Membership, finances, publications, and future plans are usually discussed at these reviews and the outcome is a series of recommendations. The publications review includes mailing on time, meeting page count, rigor of peer review, and acceptance rate for papers submitted. PCS is in good position for the review. We expect favorable comments about the joint issue of the *Transactions on Professional Communication* with the STC *Technical Communication*. The recommendations from the review will be blended with the strategic plan of PCS.

Treasurer's Report

The budget for fiscal year 2000 is based on a membership of 1801, which is the actual number as of the end of March. PCS could end up with a $22k surplus based on this budget.

The proposed new financial model for IEEE has not been approved by TAB. This model seeks equitable distribution of the cost of running IEEE. Currently, IEEE does not have enough money for infrastructure, membership, corporate activities, business administration, and human resources. Because society surpluses technically belong to IEEE, if a new model is not approved at the TAB meeting in June, the society surpluses could end up being transferred to IEEE. It is not clear how the new model would affect PCS.

Conferences

Activities for IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 are on schedule and corporate sponsors have committed $9000 for sponsorships including the bags, the banquet, and coffee breaks. The *Transactions* may sponsor another event. The program committee received 110 proposals for papers and panels, of which 62 were accepted. A full slate of tutorials is scheduled for Sunday, 24 September, the first day of the conference. Conference information is available online at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/2000/*.

Activities for IPCC 2001 are also on schedule. This is the last year planned for

collaboration with SIGDOC and only one joint speaker, Moira Gunn, is scheduled. The treasurer sent a budget to Joe Chew based on registration of 130, of which 30 would be from SIGDOC. IPCC 2001 will be held 24-26 October 2001 in Santa Fe, New Mexico, at the La Fonda Hotel on the Plaza; a contract with the La Fonda (site of IPCC 92) has been signed.

Other conferences are in the early planning stages. The chair for IPCC 2002, Laurel Grove, has been exploring venue options in the Portland, Oregon, area. Bernadette Longo has agreed to be program chair of IPCC 2004.

Above:
PCS secretary Ed Clark hard at work

Publications

PCS is negotiating with the IEEE Press to sponsor publication for the U.S. market of the third edition of *Writing Reports to Get Results* by Ron Blicq and Lisa Moretto. Other PCS-related books are in process. One of those, the recently published *Essence of Technical Communication for Engineers* by Herbert Hirsch, is being promoted at the IEEE online store at *http://www.shop.ieee.org/store*.

A heuristic evaluation by three independent experts was conducted on the new design of the *Transactions*. The evaluators considered the new design far superior to the old but still needing improvement.

Publicity and Marketing

The Publicity and Marketing Committee continued working toward increasing PCS visibility and name recognition. To that end, P&MC sponsored the TECHWR-L list, placed an ad in the Society for Technical Communication annual meeting program, arranged booth coverage and supporting materials for that and another technical communication conference, and updated the PCS Web site. Visits to the site continue to increase, especially during PCS sponsorship of the TECHWR-L list.

Publicity and Marketing's immediate goal is to create an identifiable brand for PCS. An online membership application is being developed and the committee is soliciting bids for the design of a PCS logo.

The second day of the meeting was devoted to the strategic plan, and work will continue between meetings, with conclusions disseminated as soon as possible.

Below: *Paying attention: Tom van Loon, Ron Blicq, Bill Kehoe*

Luke Maki

Below: *Frederick R. Weisman Art Museum at the Univ. of Minnesota. Property of the Univ. of Minnesota; ©1993.*

AUDIENCE QUEST

VICKI HILL

GIFTS FOR THE AUDIENCE

This column is the third to offer a tale describing real audience engagements. I decided on the use of tales because I wanted to find new and effective ways to reach audiences. A lot of generic guidance on reaching audiences is available, but almost no specifics. In the first tale I was the writer and I described a successful audience engagement. For the second tale I compared published audience analyses for *Brill's Content* and *The Blair Witch Project*.

Working through those two tales has given me a much clearer vision of which audiences I want to reach and which techniques can work for me. At this point in my writing life I am most interested in more creative works—those that, in Peter Elbow's model (*Writing With Power*, 1981), require initial distance from the audience to allow innovation and creativity. And I am fascinated with adapting the techniques of the Web and film. For this third tale my reaction to a British film led me to ponder whether others had the same reaction to it, and how I could adapt some of its techniques.

Films and the Web are filled with images and metaphors that are well crafted to communicate directly and with a sense of drama.

Illustrative Tale 3

Last Christmas, a particular scene drew me almost hypnotically to the film *Peter's Friends*. Why, I wondered, was the scene so entrancing to me? I certainly hadn't analyzed it at the time—just enjoyed it.

During a holiday gathering at his castle, Peter's friends sing "The Way You Look Tonight." The formerly tight-knit group hasn't been together in a long time, and as normally happens in such reunion movies, conflicts and misunderstandings have threatened to pull them apart. At first, there are only two singers (who happen to play singer/songwriters in the movie) around the piano. Gradually, the other friends join in. At the end of the song, Peter makes a gesture of tying a bow. The song is over, the friends have bonded again, and everyone has received a Christmas gift, including the audience.

The package metaphor communicated more deeply and effectively to me than any words proclaiming love and friendship could have. I wondered whether the film had the same impact on other people, or if perhaps I was a sentimental fool. Below I've listed some of the audience comments I found.

From a film review Web site, *http://us.imdb.com/boards/wwwthreads.pl?action=list&Board=b0105130*:

"It makes me laugh. It makes me embarrassed. It evokes so many feelings that are pivotal for the human spirit, so many things that are universal. If you have friends, or if you've lost them, or if you've met any people at all in your life, you will be able to relate to the six friends in *Peter's Friends*. What the heck, you only have to be human to relate to it."

From amazon.com, *http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ts/video-customer-reviews/6302767741/Internetmoviedat/103-1682287-0823032:*

"A great movie to watch when you're feeling cynical about friendships. Funny and touching, this movie will lift you up while dealing with serious issues."

"In my opinion, if you watch this film, you can become a bit of a better person. I, certainly, re-thought some of my relationships after watching it."

"You could go to any stately home in Britain today and find an identical assortment of friends behaving in exactly the same way. As we are fond of saying in England, it was 'spot on'—wonderfully funny, poignant, yet excruciatingly sad at the end."

Yes, there were some negative comments: sentimental, familiar plot, and so on. But I focus on those people who had reactions similar to mine. The film did manage to strike a deep chord—to be true to life, and stir the audience to action—a call to think about our own friendships, "to become a better person." Pretty good measures of successful audience outreach.

Films and the Web are filled with images and metaphors that are well crafted to communicate directly and with a sense of drama. Too often I find that my first drafts are based on abstract ideas and use a small group of boring phrases over and over, words and phrases that I always use with the same audiences. Communicating by

(continued on page 18)

WORKING FREELANCE

JULIA LAND

CORPORATE STEPS

Last time, after we talked about the cat who walked by himself, we talked about freelancers working as individuals, either as temporary employees or as sole proprietors. One problem that individuals may face is the reluctance of some corporations to contract with them for services. These corporations feel safer in relationships with other corporations.

Since corporations usually make up the largest part of a freelance technical writer's clientele, some freelancers have formed corporations of their own to address those concerns.

There are other reasons that a freelancer might form a corporation: A corporation can offer tax advantages and can protect personal assets from business liabilities such as law suits and bankruptcies. Having a corporate name can lend additional credibility to the freelancer when negotiating with clients or seeking financing.

Whatever the type of corporation, there will be more paperwork.

Jean-luc Doumont says, "Owning a company offers few financial advantages (tax or otherwise) compared to working under my own name [...], but it increases credibility, provides an official business name (JL Consulting), and facilitates growth (through hiring or selling shares to a new partner)."

And, of course, there can be disadvantages to forming a corporation. Instead of tax savings, a corporation may result in increased tax expenses. There are costs associated with forming a corporation and the corporation has increased record-keeping requirements, also with associated costs.

In the United States, a freelancer's corporation is likely to take one of three structures, each with its own set of advantages and disadvantages. The corporate types are standard, subchapter S, and limited liability. Each type is a legal entity separate from the freelancer. Each offers protection to personal assets from business debts. Each must pay unemployment tax and Social Security tax on behalf of its employees. Depending on the location, there may be a franchise tax as well. A corporation must file quarterly reports and an annual federal income tax return, hold annual meetings of the directors, and keep certain corporate records. The main differences among the types of corporation are related to how they are taxed.

A **standard corporation** is a separate entity for tax purposes. The freelancer is an employee of the corporation and must pay income and Social Security taxes on his or her salary. The corporation also pays Social Security and other taxes on the salary. The corporation then pays tax on remaining profits using the corporate rate, which is frequently lower than the freelancer's individual rate.

A standard corporation can distribute profits to the shareholders (the freelancer and any others who have invested in the corporation) as dividends. The shareholders must then pay income tax on the dividends, so this money is taxed twice—once as corporate profit, once as individual income. Alternatively, a corporation can accumulate its earnings for reasonable needs of the business. In this case, the money is taxed only once, but it belongs to the corporation and is not available to the freelancer for personal use.

Further, the IRS limits how much a corporation can accumulate and requires that amounts in excess of the reasonable needs be distributed to the shareholders as dividends. A rule of thumb for maximum retained earnings for corporations that provide consulting services is $150 000. If the corporation accumulates more than an appropriate amount, the IRS can levy a penalty of up to 39.6 percent.

All income tax liabilities on profits from a **subchapter S** corporation are passed through to the shareholders. The corporation itself pays no income tax, so there is no possibility of double taxation. Again, the freelancer is an employee and must pay Social Security tax on the salary earned from the corporation. Other income from the corporation is subject to income tax but not Social Security tax.

The IRS is sensitive to reasonable salaries, though, and can assess penalties if the freelancer's salary is unreasonably low to avoid paying Social Security tax. There are regulations limiting the number of shareholders (currently 75) and limiting certain types of passive income. All income tax liabilities must be distributed based on ownership percentages, independent of whether the income is distributed that way.

A **limited liability corporation** (LLC) can be treated either as a corporation or as a partnership for tax purposes. If the LLC is treated as a partnership, the LLC itself pays no income tax and the partners pay income taxes based on their individual tax rates. Profits and losses can be allocated among the partners differently than their actual ownership percentages. Using an LLC avoids the limitations on the number of partners and types of income that apply to subchapter S corporations.

Tax agencies may decide whether a freelancer is really independent or should be considered an employee of the client.

Whatever the type of corporation, however, there will be more paperwork. Kevin Porter reports, "After I set up my S-Corp I was really surprised by the extra paperwork and forms required. I had to formalize a lot of things I hadn't been paying much attention to and paid many penalties before I finally got it figured out. I now sit down with my accountant every month to make sure every form gets filled out properly and nothing is forgotten."

Since corporations are legal entities separate from the freelancers who own them, there can be opportunities to pass non-salary income from the corporation to the freelancer. For example, one freelancer receives rent from her corporation for the office located in her house. She must pay income tax on this rental income, of course, but not Social Security tax.

Freelancers in other countries face similar choices regarding incorporation. In **Norway**, for example, there are two types of businesses: the personal proprietorship and the stock company. The personal proprietorship is similar to the U.S. sole proprietorship. The freelancer is personally responsible for the business, including business debts, and the profits from the business are considered the freelancer's personal income.

The stock company is similar to the U.S. standard corporation. The company is a separate entity and the freelancer is not personally responsible for the business debts. Important differences are that there is a minimum value on the shares for the company (currently NOK 100 000, about U.S. $12 500) and the freelancer and his or her spouse can own no more than two-thirds of the shares.

In **Belgium,** a standard incorporated company requires at least two owners, but one of the two may have only a symbolic percentage.

As mentioned in my previous column, changes to how the **Canada** Customs and Revenue Agency handles taxes and benefits of freelancers working through agencies, coupled with increasing client reluctance to contract directly with sole proprietors, are causing increasing numbers of sole proprietors to consider incorporation. A similar pattern occurred in the **United Kingdom** some time ago and now most freelancers are incorporated. However, on 6 April, a new law went into effect limiting the business deductions that many incorporated freelancers can take to five percent of their gross income.

The U.K. Inland Revenue (the equivalent of the U.S. IRS) determines whether the freelancer is *employed* or *self-employed*. Self-employed freelancers can continue to deduct their business expenses. Employed freelancers can deduct a maximum of five percent of their gross income as business expenses. The factors that the Inland Revenue uses to make this determination are very similar to the factors the IRS uses to decide whether a freelancer is really independent or should be considered an employee of the client. Both agencies consider whether the freelancer has multiple clients, how much day-to-day control the client has over the freelancer, and how much financial risk the freelancer is taking.

A decision to incorporate can have many ramifications. Anyone who is considering forming a corporation should consult carefully with tax and legal experts.

(continued on page 18)

TOOLS OF THE TRADE

PETER REIMOLD AND
CHERYL REIMOLD

COMMUNICATION IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM

Part 3: The Art of Tolerance

One of the greatest challenges ahead will be to turn the tide of intolerance that is sweeping the globe. Unless we succeed in doing this, all the bright promises of technology and worldwide communication will come to nothing.

The Flip Side of Self-determination

Globalization has become an unstoppable force with many great benefits. Commerce is creating interdependencies that encourage peace. Communication is becoming ever easier, faster, and cheaper. And international support for democratization and self-determination has made it more difficult for repressive regimes to survive.

Isn't tolerance an inevitable consequence of this trend toward one free world? Apparently not. Instead, "self-determination" often seems to mean "the right not to have to put up with any differences"—even if that means attacking or killing those who differ.

The problem is most visible on the national level, where civil wars and the emergence of miniature nations claim our attention. But in large and small groups all around us, we can see the same phenomenon: pro-life extremists having no difficulty taking the life of abortion-clinic doctors; racist groups committing hate crimes; and environmentalists burning down a Vail ski lodge to fight developers. In all such cases, groups, or extreme members of groups, assume the absolute right to impose their will, even if they are a minority.

Groups are the source of intolerance—but you and I can reverse it.

Where Does It Start?

The scourge of intolerance has its roots in *groups,* which often define themselves in opposition to other groups. Two things usually happen: One, there is no dialogue with any opposing group, but only *public* communication directed *against* the other groups; two, other groups are vilified to the point that they lose essential human traits. For instance, animal rights activists are not likely to talk to hunting groups, and because of their abhorrence of hunting, they will tend to see hunters as deficient in the gentler human emotions.

And How Can We Stop It?

Since groups are the intrinsic source of the problem, one might think they are also the solution. But that doesn't seem so. Rather, groups have to be influenced internally—by ***individuals***—to develop tolerance. In other words, each of us holds the key and is responsible. Specifically, here are some things we can do to stop the cycle of intolerance:

1. **Be aware of your true level of tolerance.** Just think about your strongest convictions and their source. Are you a Democrat (or Republican) *just like your parents?* How much of your own thinking went into that conviction? And do you honestly see the other side as fully human?

2. **Listen without fear.** As the psychologist Carl Rogers recognized, we often do not listen because we are afraid, deep down, that we might change our essential beliefs if we do. This is especially true when the convictions at stake are not thought through but just inherited from a group, family, or other authority. Try to set aside that fear and just listen, without response. You don't *have* to give up your beliefs, even if the other side sounds as if it has a point. But you will begin to see "opponents" as full-fledged humans, which is the seed of tolerance.

3. **When a common higher principle is involved, leap over group obstacles without hesitation.** For example, when Turkey recently suffered from catastrophic earthquakes, Greece sent helpers. The sight of Greek and Turkish rescue workers fighting side by side to save Turkish lives did more than any

diplomacy over decades to dismantle the hatred between the two nations. It's the same with any other group: Seeing them in an act of caring reveals them in their true light, as *people* rather than members of a despised group.

4. **Influence your groups to make tolerance an official principle.** Let your colleagues and group leaders know that you think it important to respect opponent groups and have a true dialogue with them. Just consider the opposition genetically altered foods are facing in Europe. If U.S. groups interested in genetic-engineering research had followed a policy of respect and listened carefully to opponents, might they not at least have chosen a path of lesser resistance—say, one starting with medical and other accepted applications?

As that example suggests, you can't always "win" by practicing tolerance. But you can avoid a lot of trouble by acting realistically—and you'll be a member of a very exclusive group of enlightened world citizens!

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and businesspeople for 18 years. Their firm, PERC Communications (telephone +1 914 725 1024, e-mail perccom@aol.com), *offers businesses customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their new educational web site at* http://www.allaboutcomunication.com.

AUDIENCE QUEST

(continued from page 14)

images and metaphors takes more time and thought, and especially takes that distance that Elbow talks about. Some courses in creative writing may be helpful. The payoff is that the likelihood of influencing your audience, and stirring them to action, is greatly increased.

Vicki Hill (vghl@erols.com) *is a consultant in the areas of business process improvement, software life-cycle processes, and telecommunications applications. Special interests include the presentation of complex technical information, the magazine scene, biographies, films, and Web surfing.*

WORKING FREELANCE

(continued from page 16)

Me? I'm quite happy as a sole proprietor.

As before, several other freelancers have helped by telling how they deal with the issues in their city or country. Many thanks to Jane Aronovitch, Ian Blythe, Michael Brady, Jean-luc Doumont, Carrie Estill, Nigel Greenwood, Mick Harney, Kathy King, Ruben Oren, Kevin Porter, Hilary Powers, Kim Shaw, and Tom Van Loon. Among us we have lived and worked in Austria, Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, Israel, Malaysia, the Netherlands, Norway, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

The author has been a freelance technical writer for seven years and a member of PCS for five. She lives and works in Houston, Texas. She would especially like to hear from freelancers working in Asia or along the Pacific Rim. E-mail: julia_land@ieee.org.

"Infinite patience brings immediate results."

— *Wayne Dyer*

GOOD INTENT, POOR OUTCOME

JEAN-LUC DOUMONT

SIMPLIFY, SIMPLIFY?

"Our life is frittered away by detail," Thoreau said, "Simplify, simplify." Those wise words apply beautifully to professional communication, yet may often be misunderstood in this context. What, specifically, should we simplify and why, after all, should we simplify it?

The scientists and engineers I talk to often object to simplifying their documents. "My subject is complex," they argue; "if I make it simple, I don't do it justice." Clearly, they believe that the only way to simplify a document is by truncating contents or erasing nuances. Yet a complicated expression can often be replaced by a simpler one without loss of information, the same way the heavy fraction 679/194 can be replaced by the lighter 7/2 without loss. Excellence in communication may well be expressing complex ideas in simple ways.

Simplicity should refer to how easily the audience can access the information, understand the messages, or perform the actions.

Simplicity, however, may be but a facade. Almost 15 years ago, I bought my first answering machine, boasting a simplified "one-touch operation." And indeed, there was only one large black button to be seen on the machine: how simple! Of course, the "one touch" on this button would always produce the same "one action": Rewind the tape and play the messages. To obtain any other action, such as fast-forwarding or saving messages, one had to press and hold the button in complex, unintuitive sequences. This "simplification" makes as much sense as replacing a computer keyboard by a single Morse key.

As far as communication goes, simplicity should refer to how easily the audience can access the information, understand the message, or perform the desired action. In other words, it has little to do with appearance and certainly nothing to do with carelessness or shortcuts on the part of the writer, speaker, or graphic designer. On the contrary, it often requires additional care, including attention to the details—a most unrewarding effort, for the details are precisely designed not to call attention to themselves.

Punctuation is a typical example of detail meant to simplify the reader's task, but often given little attention by writers who prefer to simplify their own task, for example by not bothering about some punctuation signs. Commas may come to mind, but missing hyphens are another frequent source of misreadings in English.

Last year in Victoria, British Columbia, my attention was caught by a sign that said "Free Spirit Soap." I was about to request my own bar of free soap, when I realized that the adjective free qualified spirit and not soap. The sign really advertised free-spirit soap…for sale!

Hyphens used to clarify premodifiers are admittedly a complex issue, for at least three reasons. First, they are a matter of syntax and not of spelling, so dictionaries do not help. Second, they can in some instances be long debated. In the expression "nuclear(-)fuel rod," for example, does nuclear qualify fuel only or fuel rod as a whole? Third, they pose the problem of recursion. Anyone who ever programmed math on a computer somehow feels that a guide for students of high-energy physics ought to be written as "a ((high-energy)-physics)-student guide."

The actual need for or usefulness of hyphens is, of course, largely a matter of familiarity with the phrase. Authors therefore may not see how their phrase could be misunderstood, yet readers may get misled, even if temporarily. I remember a research report that occasioned much hilarity by referring, without the proper hyphenation, to "blown film producers." Even chemical engineers familiar with the production of blown film couldn't help but think of people from the cinematographic industry.

Dr. Jean-luc Doumont teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. Over the last 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication (http://www.JLConsulting.be).

C-A-T-T-T-T-T-T-T-T

By Steve Mirsky

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Registration Form

24-27 September 2000 • Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA

Easy, secured, online registration is available on our website at http://www.ieeepcs.org/2000

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY

Name: _____

Preferred name on badge: _____

Affiliation: _____

Street Address: _____

City/State/Zip/Country: _____

Telephone: _____

E-mail: _____

ACM SIGDOC Member #: _____

IEEE PCS Member #: _____

PLEASE CIRCLE APPROPRIATE REGISTRATION FEE(S):

	Prior to 6 August 2000				After 6 August 2000			
	Member	Non-Member	Student/Retiree	TOTAL	Member	Non-Member	Student/Retiree	TOTAL
Full Conference	$400	$475	$150	$_____	$475	$550	$425	$_____
Single Day*	$175	$225	$ 50	$_____	$200	$250	$ 50	$_____
Tutorial Half Day**	$150	$200	$150	$_____	$175	$225	$175	$_____
Tutorial Full Day**	$225	$300	$225	$_____	$275	$325	$275	$_____

*__Single Day Registrants__ – indicate which day you will attend:

___ 25 September ___ 26 September ___ 27 September

**__Tutorial Attendees__ – indicate which tutorial you will attend:

___ Plain Language and the Document Revolution (full day)
___ Introduction to XML, DTD Design, and XSL (full day)
___ How Virtual Objects Facilitate Team Work Across the Disciplines (full day)
___ What You Need to Know About Law in Cyberspace (full day)
___ Conducting Mail, Telephone, and WWW Surveys (half day)
___ Building Information Models for Single Sourcing (half day)
___ Designing Web-based Training: Combining Usability Issues and Learning Theory (half day)
___ Mining for Information: Tactics for Interviewing (half day)
___ Teamwork and Technology: Designing, Developing, and Delivering Effective Distance-education Classes (half day)

Full conference registration includes access to all sessions and one copy of the proceedings. Also includes a $25 credit towards IEEE PCS membership or full ACM SIGDOC membership. Membership forms available at registration desk during the conference.

Registration Form

ADDITIONS:

	Price	Number	TOTAL
Awards celebration at the Museum of Science 25 September – Guests and families welcome	$60	_____	$_____
Awards Celebration – children 12 and under	$25	_____	$_____
Extra proceedings	$40 Member	_____	$_____
	$50 Nonmember	_____	$_____

Total Remittance (must be in U.S. dollars) $_____

SPECIAL INFORMATION:

___ I am a full time student (include copy of valid student I.D.)
___ I am willing to be a session moderator
___ Do not include me in the conference attendee listing
___ I have special needs or meal requirements as follows:

METHOD OF PAYMENT:

Charge my: ___ Visa ___ Mastercard ___ Diners Club ___ American Express

Name on card: _____

Expiration date: _____

Card number: _____

Signature: _____

___ Check enclosed (payable to IPCC/SIGDOC 2000)
___ Wire transfer (contact registrar below for more information)

CANCELLATION POLICY: No refunds will be made after 15 September 2000. All requests for refunds must be in writing. Refunds will be processed after the conference. There will be a $50 service charge on all refunds.

MAIL COMPLETED REGISTRATION FORM AND FEES TO:

IPCC/SIGDOC 2000
c/o Beth Payer, Registrar
15 Jumel Place
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866 USA

Or fax to: +1 518 580 1352

___ I can not attend IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 but would like to order the proceedings.
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A Hint of the Program at IPCC/SIGDOC 2000

Luke Maki

Conference co-chair Elizabeth Weise Moeller

The program for IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 is shaping up and you can view each day's tutorial and panel topics on the conference site at *http://www.ieeepcs.org/2000/*. Plan now to attend the sessions that will give you the up-to-date information you need on your job. And be sure to leave some time for fun and exploration at the awards celebration at the Boston Museum of Science on Monday evening, 25 September.

This conference includes five full-day and four half-day tutorials on Sunday, 24 September, covering a wide range of topics from XML to distance education to law in cyberspace. The program includes 30 panels on teamwork and technical, educational, and related topics. These panels begin on Monday, 25 September, and conclude by early afternoon the following Wednesday.

As much as possible, the program committee scheduled panel sessions to include a range of topic categories. This will enable participants who are interested in technical topics, for example, to attend discussions in this category in each of the nine panel sessions.

SIGDOC Rigo Award winner Barbara Mirel, senior manager at Lucent Technologies, and Edward Barrett, representing Diana Award winner MIT Press, will speak at plenary sessions in the morning and afternoon of the first day of the conference. The Rigo Award celebrates an individual's lifetime contribution to the field of information design, technical communication, and online information design. The Diana Award celebrates the contribution of an organization, institution, or business to the field of information design, technical communication, and online information design. You can find more information about these plenary sessions on the conference Web site.

ipcc sigdoc 2000
Technology & Teamwork

On Tuesday, keynote speaker Nicholas Negroponte will be featured at a late-morning session. Professor Negroponte is the director and co-founder of the MIT Media Lab and author of the 1995 best seller *Being Digital*. The focus of the Media Lab is "how bits meet atoms: how electronic information overlaps with the everyday physical world." You can find more information on Professor Negroponte at *http://www.media.mit.edu/~nicholas/*.

After you have filled your head with tutorial information, insights from the plenary speakers, and some current thinking of panelists, prepare yourself for fun at the awards celebration Monday evening. This event at the Boston Museum of Science will recognize this year's award recipients, offer a sumptuous buffet dinner, and engage everyone in hands-on opportunities to learn about science through playful exhibits in the Blue Wing of the museum.

There you can create your own virtual fish in a 1700-square-foot electronic undersea environment and interact with the other 3D fish. (Watch out for those hungry big ones!) You can find out about physics by playing in the Science in the Park exhibit or see the world's largest air-insulated Van de Graaff generator in the Theater of Electricity. For dinosaur aficionados, A *T. rex* named Sue will be in residence at the museum during our visit (see *http://www.fmnh.org/sue/default.htm*). For more information on the Museum of Science, see *http://www.mos.org*.

With all those fun and educational attractions, you might want to bring the family to this IPCC/SIGDOC conference. Children will be welcome at the awards celebration and there will be plenty for them to do in the museum while we recognize this year's award recipients.

THE GOLDEN RING OF RUSSIA

Like a necklace lying northeast of Moscow, the Golden Ring comprises nine (sometimes said to be 11) ancient Russian towns with 12th-to-17th century architecture; one of these is Suzdal, about 200 km from Moscow. Art and architecture from the early years survive. Set a Web search engine to work on "Suzdal" and you'll find a wealth of fascinating material.

Suzdal is to be the site of our technical communication colloquium with the Professional Communication Section of the Russian A. S. Popov Society. The program dates are 6-7 June 2001, with local travel before and after. This meeting will mark the 10th anniversary of our first such collaboration. Topics will include (but are not limited to) problems, services, and technology of professional communication; Internet services and technologies; and inter-society cooperation.

Suzdal monasteries

(Courtesy Funet Russian Archive)

Deadlines and requirements for abstracts, papers, reservations, and registration will be forthcoming, probably in the September/October *Newsletter* and on our Web site, *http://www.ieeepcs.org/Suzdal/*. The *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* is likely to publish the proceedings.

In addition to its ancient history, Suzdal has modern conference and tourist facilities. The daily rate for us at Suzdal will be about U.S. $30, with private bath. Moscow hotels before and after the colloquium will cost about U.S. $100 per day.

If you are interested—that is, if there's at least a 50-50 chance you'll go; no commitment yet—send an e-mail message to *r.joenk@ieee.org* and we'll include you on a distribution list for further information as it develops. An early indication of interest will help drive the planning forward.

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