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End of an Era

By Rudy Joenk

What defines the era is publication of a print *Newsletter* by the IEEE Professional Communication Society. The era began 20 August 1957 with volume one, number one, and editor John M. Kinn, Jr. (Recall that the group didn't even organize until late spring of 1957 so that was fast work.) The first issue was four pages and consisted of announcements, news, and a list of AdCom members. Through 1960 the 8½ in. × 11 in. *Newsletter* was printed on yellow stock; for 1961 and 1962 (only) the size was 5½ in. × 8½ in. Various editors evolved and modernized the format over the years but the first major change was the addition of color (green), along with a new design in mid 1995. That was repeated for 2002 and this time the color was and still is maroon.

The era ends with this issue: volume 48, number six, November/December 2004. The next issue will be an electronic one, on the Web, probably in mid January 2005, with our new editor. If you want to be notified when each edition of the electronic newsletter becomes available on the Web, go to <http://tinyurl.com/yqfsd> and include your e-mail address in your IEEE profile.

This transition is not one that makes me cheer, but perhaps the time is right for the society. We've had a Web page for almost a decade and have been communicating by e-mail much longer than that. Meanwhile, printing and paper costs and postage have been rising inexorably. (Would you like to bet, however, that the electronic newsletter will never be printed offline?)

(continued on page 4)

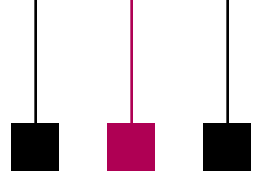
*An announcement of our new society in the
September 1957 Proceedings of the IRE. Courtesy of the IEEE History Center.*

TWO NEW PROFESSIONAL GROUPS FORMED

Professional Group on	Professional Group on
Education (PGE)	Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS)
Chairman: J. D. Ryder, Dean, Michigan State University.	Chairman: D. J. McNamara, Department of Publications, Sperry Gyroscope Co.
Assessment Fee: \$3.00.	Assessment Fee: \$2.00.

The PGEWS plans to hold a conference at the Sheraton-McAlpin Hotel, New York City, October 21-22, 1957.

How to join either Group: Send your assessment fee to the Technical Secretary, IRE Headquarters, 1 E. 79 St., New York 21, N. Y., and ask that your name be added to the membership list.



Rudy Joenk

This Issue

This is it, folks: the final print issue of the PCS Newsletter. Following the “regular” articles, the latter portion of this issue contains “auld lang syne” items, some contributed by readers and others culled from the files.

AdCom

The AdCom met for the last time this year after IPCC 2004 at the Radisson Hotel Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1-2 October. Reports of the conference and the meeting likely will be topics in the new electronic newsletter.

If you want to be notified when each edition of the electronic newsletter becomes available on the Web, go to <http://tinyurl.com/yqfsd> and include your e-mail address in your IEEE Web profile.

Potpourri

“Nutri-washing” appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* in mid September meaning public relations puffery by major food companies to offset

criticism about high salt, fat, and sugar levels in their products. *World Wide Words*, 25 September 2004.

While students were brainstorming a problem in a recent course, the tutor told them they “were no longer able to call it brainstorming. The approved term was ‘thought-shower.’” *World Wide Words*, 25 September 2004.

“Few knew what the word ‘font’ meant until the home computer revolution. A visit to <http://www.planet-typography.com> should put you in touch with your inner typographer.” *The New York Times*, 23 September 2004.

In the open-air main hall of the library on the campus of California State University, Sacramento, this sign is posted: ACESIBLE ACCESS. *World Wide Words*, 11 September 2004.

An article on dental advice recommended “frequent daily cleaning.”

The New York Times, 7 September 2004.

Bloggers who use digital camcorders to enhance their blogs with video are called “vloggers”; whether it’s pronounced “vee-loggers” is not yet known. *World Wide Words*, 28 August 2004.

Quickies: A real estate “lot with a probable ocean view”; “in Mauritania the locusts were disseminating

crops”; “bird flu is spreading faster than thought”; “money worries made easy”; “suggestive use of eye wear encouraged.” *World Wide Words*; 28, 21, and 14 August 2004.

“Linguistic foraging yields a hoard (horde?) of eggcorns” was a headline in the *Rocky Mountain News*, 21 August 2004. An *eggcorn* is the inadvertent substitution of one word for a similar one that makes a certain weird kind of sense, e.g., “binding (biding) my time.” Visit <http://itre.cis.upenn.edu/~myl/languageblog>.

Many thanks to our many contributors for support over these many years.

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• **PCS IEEE Professional Communication Society Newsletter** is published bimonthly by the Professional Communication Society of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, Inc., 3 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10016. One dollar per member per year is included in the society fee for each member of the Professional Communication Society. Printed in U.S.A. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices.

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Eduardo H. Clark

Web Era

This being the last printed issue of the *Newsletter*, I thank the editor, Rudy Joenk, the regular columnists, and the occasional contributors for their valuable contributions over the years. Rudy is stepping down as editor but we expect that most of those who contribute to the *Newsletter* will continue doing so in the online version. Some of the columnists, like the Reimolds, have been contributing for many years.

By the time you read this, the newsletter migration committee will have decided who the next editor will be from the pool of well-qualified candidates who were identified and contacted earlier this year. The new editor will be responsible for keeping all the good material that you have enjoyed over the years and to find new sources of society news and practitioner-oriented articles. An advantage of the online publication is that its inherent shorter development and delivery cycle will allow PCS to deliver society news on a more opportune basis. Evidently, the editor will have to identify ways to capture newsworthy events.

The frequency of the new publication has not been defined yet but I see two likely options: to continue on a bimonthly basis or switch to monthly. If the committee decides on a monthly basis, the regular columns might alternate months. The delivery of the electronic newsletter will probably be via an e-mail message with a summary of the feature articles with hyperlinks. The hyperlinks will con-

nect to the Web-based newsletter, or Webzine, which will have the full articles with pictures, graphics, and even links to related material elsewhere. Again, some of the details are still being considered at the time of this writing.

From my perspective as President's Column author, I see the transition in my favor. Don't get me wrong—for about 20 years I have been an avid reader and lately a contributor to the *Newsletter*. However, the online format will allow me a more casual and closer-to-real-time communication with my fellow members. I have found it difficult to write bimonthly columns with the quality of a state of the union address. I just cannot report membership growth, major initiative results, or inspirational visions every two months. Rudy has complained about my articles about *tamales* and, although I defend the use of analogies as a communication tool, I see his point.

Join the Web era.

TAB E-mail Threads

If we go for the monthly frequency, your president will be able to report IEEE developments that affect PCS as they evolve. As you may know, the society and council presidents and division directors constitute the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB). TAB is very influential within IEEE because the societies with their publications and conferences bring in about 90 percent of IEEE revenue. Many issues and initiatives have been discussed via e-mail since the last

TAB meeting in June: society mergers, governance reform, perceived unfair advantages of small societies, high infrastructure cost, etc.

I wish I had an easier venue to share these discussions with you. But for the record, although I didn't participate much in the first two discussions, I did feel compelled to speak out on the latter two. Some TAB members believe that the large societies are paying the bills while the smaller societies like ours get one vote like the larger societies but not a significant portion of the bill. I complained to TAB, reminding members that "we (the small societies) pay dearly for the right to vote." Another society president sided with me and yet another one from our division VI reminded the body that in the past only rich landowners could vote. In the modern democratic world, we all have one vote regardless of the taxes we pay.

Anyway, I won't get myself started with this issue, but I wish that I could have shared the issues with PCS members to inform them and better defend their interests.

E-mail Addresses

I look forward to receiving my first electronic issue of the electronic newsletter early next year and I hope that you do, too. When you renew your IEEE membership later this year, I am confident that you will continue with PCS and provide an e-mail address with your renewal information. Although more than 80 percent of PCS members have provided

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End of an Era

(continued from page 1)

Anyway, would that PCS had had a historian all those years. Lacking one, I reviewed most of the old *Newsletters* and all of the AdCom meeting minutes and some of the older *Transactions* and sought the help of the IEEE History Center and numerous senior citizens of PCS (among which I am one) to come up with the articles and photos in the latter part of this issue. Along with personal recollections they represent both the highlights and the ordinary doings of the society.

There are bits of history in both the photo captions and the author-identification paragraphs, too. Sometimes I use *PCS* in a less than literal sense in referring to a person or activity decades ago when *PGEWS* or *EWS* would be accurate. Some photos are less than gallery quality; that is because originals were not available and they had to be copied from long-ago publications.

All of the *Newsletter* editors through 1997 are listed in the September/October 1997 issue; there are 17 of them. That year was PCS's 40th anniversary, and items of administrative history along with personal recollections were published throughout the year in all issues. Similarly, in 2002, our 45th year, history items were published throughout the year.

My pet peeves in *Newsletter* contributions are excessive use of capitals, overuse of punctuation (especially the em dash), and superfluous or redun-

dant words and phrases. I think text is easier to read and more pleasing aesthetically when it's not full of capital letters. That condition is first cousin to screaming (using all caps) in e-mail messages, and senders of those usually get stomped on quickly. Punctuation can be used creatively for drama, emphasis, and of course clarity, but sometimes it's just not needed, so why clutter up the text with it? Often a colon or semicolon is a good substitute for a single em dash and parentheses for a pair of them; don't be afraid to use the em dash but give the alternatives a chance, too. Also, review, review, review.

In total I have edited the *Newsletter* for 10 years: 1983 and 1984, several issues in the '90s when we were seeking new editors, and 1998 through 2004. My advice to prospective authors has been to "write about what you know." (The *Newsletter* has never commissioned a freelancer to write about a specific topic.) In 1984, when I was relinquishing editorship of both the *Newsletter* and the *Transactions*, I wrote: "What the *Newsletter* still needs, however, is some regular contributors—some columnists to provide periodic reports, analyses, and updates on areas of PCS interest." Within a few years columnists Cheryl Reimold (1987) and Joan Nagle (1990) showed up and later the president and secretary began contributing and many new columnists came our way.

Perhaps the time is right for the society.

In addition to Cheryl and Joan, my deepest thanks go to Michael Brady, Jean-luc Doumont, Eliza Drewa, Michael Goodman, Professor Grammar, Vicki Hill, Julia Land, Beth Moeller, Ron Nelson, Jason Palmeri, Peter Reimold, Hanspeter Schmid, Kirk St. Amant, Paul Tuten, and the succession of PCS presidents for their long-term contributions and stabilizing influence as columnists. Without them we wouldn't have been able to provide a venue for a wonderful variety of single-contribution authors.

The editorial work hasn't all been a bed of roses, but there were more good times than bad, and I'm grateful that you have given me this opportunity. I have learned a lot about writing and communication and even about grammar and punctuation. I suspect that I won't miss the *Newsletter* initially, for a while, but sooner or later I'll feel a hole. What I've enjoyed most are the personal interactions and associations—they'll never be forgotten. *Auf Wiedersehen.*

Dr. Joenk (IEEE Member 1977, Senior Member 1977, Life Senior Member 2005) is past president of the society (1990–1991) and served on the AdCom from 1985 through 1999.

“Words, like eyeglasses, obscure everything they do not make clear.”

—Joseph Joubert



Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

How to Give Technical Presentations to Non-Technical Audiences

Part 5: A Fail-Safe Structure for Your Ideas

An effective structure is driven not by logic but by listener psychology, especially people's natural attention curve.

In the previous *Newsletter* (September/October 2004 issue), you saw how to develop strong, audience-focused material. Now you must mold your points into a well-structured talk. Fortunately, this is not something that demands a lot of complex decisions. That is because there is basically only one structure that works well:

1. A four-part introduction
2. A simple body containing only a few key points backed up in varied ways
3. A brief summary

In a technical presentation to technical peers, there might be some excuse for deviating from this structure, because everybody (you hope!) is in a working mood and will give your points full attention no matter how garbled your organization. But even there, the discussion will show much greater quality if you guide it with an effective structure.

Let's consider this structure in more detail, beginning with the introduction.

Creating Shared Commitment

We mentioned an important difference between presentations to technical peers and those to non-technical audiences: When you talk to peers, you can often count on an atmos-

phere of common challenge or shared commitment, even before you open your mouth. With non-technical audiences, you have to create this shared commitment. That is the job of your introduction.

A good introduction achieves this goal in four parts. Think of it as a commitment-creating RAMP leading up to your body:

R = Rapport Establish a friendly, positive, problem-solving connection with the audience through a brief greeting.

A = Attention Involve the audience in an attention-getter that spells out a problem, benefit, or challenge that matters to them. This attention-getter must relate directly to your main message. For instance, if you are proposing a piece of equipment, the attention-getter might be a severe problem that it would solve.

M = Message Preview your main message in the briefest possible form.

P = Plan Spell out the "contract" for your talk: the main sections of the presentation and the manner in which you propose to handle questions (throughout, intermittently, or at the end).

The whole introduction should take no more than two minutes; otherwise, the audience will begin to assume that you have moved into the body and that they have missed the transition.

Notice how much this optimal introduction differs from the typical lame preamble, such as the following:

This morning I'd like to update you on our quality improvement initiative. [What about it?] First, I'll review our objectives. Then, I'll discuss progress [What about it?] over the last six months.

This is basically just a plan, in no way designed to generate commitment. Perhaps even worse are long-winded introductions that ramble on pleasantly but without point, putting listeners to sleep before the speaker even gets to the body.

Answers to Common Questions

People often ask us questions about the kind of introduction we suggest.

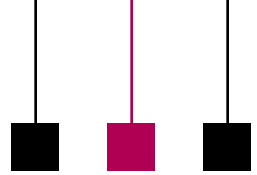
We'll address two of them here.

Question 1: "Why must the introduction contain a message preview rather than just an announcement of the topic? Don't I lose suspense

by giving away my conclusion at the beginning?"

Answer: The audience's natural attention is highest at the beginning of your talk. To make sure everybody hears your message clearly, you must take advantage of that. Also, stating your conclusion up front puts the audience in a position to evaluate your arguments as they come along. Otherwise, they'll have to guess all the time what you're driving at as you are building your "suspense story."

Sow persuasion rather than confusion.



Question 2: “Can’t I omit the attention getter? Doesn’t it smack too much of salesmanship for a technical presentation?”

Answer: There is nothing wrong with salesmanship, provided it is honest. The attention-getter is needed to spell out why your main message should matter to the audience. Just two or three sentences may be enough to focus the audience so they can receive your message and get ready to evaluate it.

Now let’s look more closely at the body and the summary.

A Body That Engages and Persuades

The bulk of your persuasive work is done in the body, where you present your evidence and arguments in detail. Unfortunately, the body is also where audiences commonly get confused, bored, and overwhelmed by numerical detail. To help you sow persuasion rather than confusion, remember three maxims:

1. **Less is better than more.** Limit your key points to three, or at most five. And instead of telling a lot of detail about each, start with a message summary—the most important thing the audience should know about that point. Then back up with only as much information as is needed to drive that message home in a persuasive way.
2. **Variety is better than monotony.** Don’t give your listeners a chance to nod off; keep them on edge with

change. Most presentations are unbearably monotonous; they consist of many general statements followed by equally general sub-points, all presented with the aid of endless bullet charts. Make your talk different: Switch between tell and show, general statement and specific example or anecdote, and lecture and interaction.

3. **Strong examples are more persuasive and memorable than piles of numbers.** Take advantage of that. Have the numbers ready as backup for the question period but don’t make them the flesh of your talk! A clear, simple chart will show the trend of the data and give notice that your evidence is solid; then make the data come alive with an example that is meaningful to your non-technical audience.

Perhaps the hardest thing for technical presenters to learn is *intelligent simplification*. There is always the temptation to lift the audience up to your level of specialty knowledge. Resist that urge! Instead, internalize the magic words, “**To put it very simply....**” Once you say those words to yourself, you’ll be amazed how easy it is to reduce complex concepts to simple ones. Combine this with the idea of explaining things through examples rather than tedious details, and the audience will have an easy time following you.

For instance, instead of discussing hardware and software details of PC-based video conferencing, you might say:

Basically, the system consists of a digital camera, a special card you plug into a laptop computer, and software that works with the camera and the computer to capture images and sound for inexpensive videoconferencing over the Internet. If you and a person in Europe or Asia had this setup in your offices, you could hold a two-hour video conference for the cost of a local call. During that conference you could share documents, write comments to each other as well as talk, and transmit digital movies of procedures, production facilities, etc.

A Summary That Incites to Action

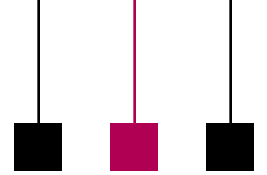
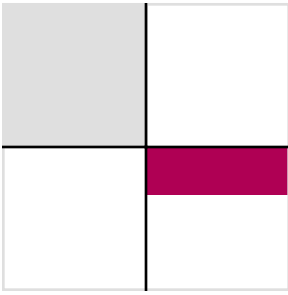
By the time you reach the end of the body, the audience may have lost the main message among all the detailed arguments. That is why you need a summary.

State your message as strongly as possible and add an upbeat invitation to action if it is at all appropriate.

It’s a grave mistake to skip the summary in favor of yet another detailed point in the body. Keep the body lean, varied, and focused on persuasive examples—and cut details in the body instead of skipping the summary.

On the other hand, don’t turn the summary into a five-minute lecture that has the audience squirming in their seats. When you say “In summary,” the clock is ticking for a *one-minute countdown!*

This is the last in our Tools of the Trade series. Good luck with your presentations. Do contact us at perccom@aol.com.



President's Column

(continued from page 3)

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for 20 years. Their latest book, *The Short Road to Great Presentations* (Wiley, 2003), is available in bookstores and from Amazon.com. Their consulting firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perccom@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their Web site at <http://www.allaboutcommunication.com>.

Issue?

Computerese has neologisms, like *byte*, and old words with new denotations, like *memory*. But its jargon also includes the euphemistic *Newspeak* of marketing. Consider the word *issue*.

The current CD *Oxford English Dictionary* entry on *issue* as a noun counts 6576 words, but none of its 16 definitions mention the usage in computerese as a synonym for *fault* or *error*. Two definitions suggest an etymology: In politics and law, *issue* means *point of contention*. That being the case, in computerese, is *issue* a legal term? Will we be told that the next blackout is due to a "power-grid issue"?

—Michael Brady
Asker, Norway

their e-mail addresses, we still must reach the rest of the membership with our electronic publication. We value your privacy and we comply with IEEE e-mail policies. We will use your e-mail address only to deliver the publication and notify you of important PCS events.

This year we received 64 electronic votes and one paper ballot during the AdCom election in August. That is by far the largest turnout in the three years that we have conducted electronic voting. It is still below the 12 percent of members that the IEEE considers normal turnout, but it is statistically significant.

The Web-based voting system (the e-mail is just a notification) uses a look-up table with the eligible voter names and membership numbers. It does not allow students to vote or multiple voting. It is a quite sophisticated system and we tested it before the election. IEEE itself is now having electronic elections and PCS was the pioneer that led the way.

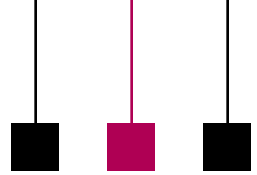
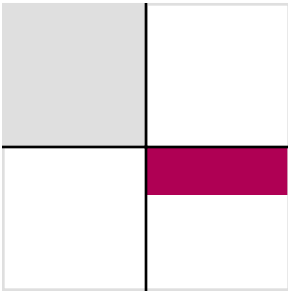
Technology Apprehensions and the Jet Era

We have had members and IEEE staff voice their reservations about electronic communication. I think that as communicators we are all aware of the limitations of Internet-based interaction and communication. Many people were apprehensive about switching to horseless-carriage commutes and telephone chats, and that

was all right and valid. However, with the exception of supersonic air travel, I have never seen any other state-of-the-art technology be preempted by the former technology. When the Concorde fleet was retired, mankind gave up on commercial supersonic travel for at least the few coming decades. That was an issue of economics more than technology, though.

Back in 1969, Houston, Texas, opened a new airport, pompously named Houston Intercontinental (IAH), now called George Bush (the first) International. In celebration of that new era, the boulevard connecting Highway 59 to the airport was to be named Jet Era Boulevard. However, the contractor who provided and installed the streets signs, probably oblivious to the significance of jet travel, posted signs naming it Jetero Boulevard and it stayed that way, perhaps because of time constraints for the inauguration or to prevent city officials from being embarrassed by admitting the mistake. Many decades later the west part of the boulevard, the one that actually takes you to the airport, was renamed Will Clayton Parkway and the story of the Jetero goof was published in the local newspaper.

Well, I guess my message for this column and my vision for PCS is this: Join the Web era (and I'm sorry for the unintended pun for those who speak Spanish).



Ethics, Technology, and the Technical Communicator

By Lori A. Marra

Sherron Watkins became famous for blowing the whistle on Enron’s suspicious accounting practices. Would you in your role as a technical communicator recognize an unethical practice in the technological world in which you work and, if so, would you take some action to right the wrong?

Steve Pauley and Daniel Riordan, in their book *Technical Report Writing Today* (2002), remind us that technical writers must take responsibility for their writing: “...readers count on you to be their guide, you must do what you can to fulfil their trust that you will tell them what—and all—they need to know.”

One specific moral role of a technical communicator is as a steward of information.

Stewards of Information

Data travels through and is stored on mechanical systems; however, through virtually all of the gathering, storage, manipulation, and retrieval, humans intervene. The people who intervene are stewards of that data. They oversee and manage that data and because of their intervention, those stewards have responsibility to ethically manage the information. Spinello, in his book *Case Studies in Information and Computer Ethics* (1997), refers to stewardship as “custodial responsibility.” He says,

The traditional concept of stewardship implies an obligation to look after property that belongs to another. ...It seems reasonable

to assert that one who has responsibility for maintaining a database of information assumes the obligation of stewardship.

Being a good steward of information means that the steward secures the information. That information may reveal vast financial fortunes. It may reveal a person’s health or social status. Information may hold immense personal power over others. Therefore, companies and organizations must be morally obligated to secure data to the best of their abilities. Technical communicators are stewards of information in their roles as users of information for research and validation and as developers of technical communication products.

Users of Information

As the technical communicator develops his products, he relies on vast amounts of data and information both to learn about and to use the technologies

about which he is developing materials. He is a steward of this data in the sense that he must take care of this electronic “property” with which he is entrusted. Technical communicators must understand the true nature of the information, software, and data with which they work. Is the data in the software real data? Are the software and associated programming highly confidential and therefore not to be copied onto other machines? Is the data being used to validate a set of procedures robust enough to ensure that the procedures are properly validated? If we make up infor-

mation to put into a software program or database, are we using spurious data or real data?

Information Developers

In addition to using data to develop materials, technical communicators produce a prolific amount of data in the form of educational deliverables. As both creator and overseer, the technical communicator is the steward of that data. Text, visuals, audio files, project management data, notes, review copies, outlines, and many other elements make up the information over which the technical communicator is steward. Part of being a good steward of information is ensuring that the information is secure.

Technical communicators must be able to discern what data they should secure, and then they must acquire the proper systems and develop detailed processes to ensure that the data remains secure. While it is obvious that some data must be secured, security breaches may not be so obvious. For example, let’s say Jane, a technical writer, decides to work on a manual at home. She copies several thousand records in a database and loads them on her machine at home so that she can run the software. If the information in those records is real and personal, that is a breach of data security.

A second element of stewardship is to ensure that the information is not misused. A technical communicator should know what information, software, hardware, or firmware he is

...ethical knowledge and a skill set on which to base our decisions.

allowed to share with others. He must understand the context in which technologies and information should be used, and he must think about how he presents information and technologies to his audience. Good stewardship means not only overseeing but improving the data. When we develop our communication deliverables, are we working to improve the deliverables?

Summary

Technical communicators can and should learn about ethics and how ethical teachings apply to the world of technical communication. We should see ourselves as stewards of information and within this role come to understand our responsibilities and learn more about technology and ethics. We must think about the ethical implications of technology and the ethical role we play within this world of technology. Finally, we must practice and sharpen our reasoning skills so that when we face an ethical dilemma in the technological world, we will have good ethical knowledge and a sound skill set on which to base our decisions.

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The author holds a B.S. degree in management science from Nazareth College, Rochester, New York, and an M.A. degree in philosophy from the University of Rochester. She manages a multimedia training design department for Kodak; teaches values and technology at Monroe Community College, Rochester; and is an adjunct faculty member at Nazareth College

where she teaches technical and professional writing and the senior seminar in technical communication project management. Lori consults with

*organizations on technical communication and ethics. She has recently published a book, *Preces pro Animalibus: Prayers for Animals*.*

From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

Nanofont is the really small print in a contract; *nanocorp* is a business with just a few employees. *Nano-* has replaced *micro-* which replaced *mini-* for describing something extremely small. Paul McFedries discusses the abundant use of technoprefixes in *IEEE Spectrum*, August 2004.

“Television is a communications medium. It’s called that because most of what you see on it is neither rare nor well done.” Thomas La Mance in *The Saturday Evening Post*, Sept./Oct. 2004.

A University of Wisconsin–White-water survey that ranks the reading culture and resources of America’s largest cities identifies Minneapolis, Seattle, and Pittsburgh as leaders in bookish behavior. Among the variables measured are education levels, library resources, and booksellers. *The Denver Post*, 3 August 2004.

Computer Haiku

You step in the stream,
But the water has moved on.
This page is not here.

Having been erased,
The document you’re seeking
Must now be retyped.

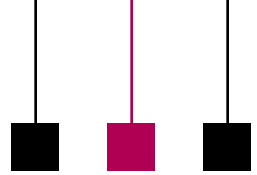
There’s more at <http://www.funny2.com/haiku.htm>; Sony has replaced some of the Microsoft error messages on its Vaio computers with Japanese haiku.

Thanks. This is my last opportunity to express public thanks to Michael Quinion, editor of *World Wide Words*, for all the amusement he’s provided me (and I hope you) during the last few years. Get a free e-mail subscription at <http://www.worldwidewords.org>.

Information for Authors

None...as yet. Writing for the Web may well have requirements that I haven’t considered. However, this one is media-independent: 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.

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Orwell Sequel

By Michael Brady

In 1946 George Orwell began his memorable essay *Politics and the English Language* by observing that “Most people who bother with the matter at all would admit that the English language is in a bad way....” He held that the decline of the language is a vicious circle in which foolish thought, principally in business and politics, triggers slovenly language, which in turn leads to foolish thought that can, in the worst case, erode democratic society.

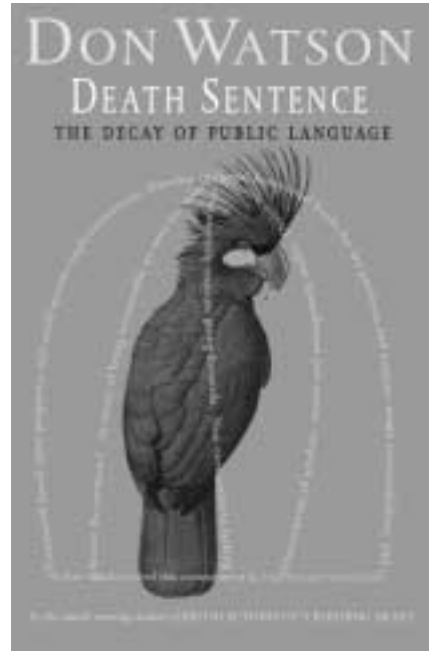
Now, nearly 60 years on, Orwell seems to have spoken from halcyon days of linguistic vigor and purity. Today, business, the media, government, and politicians speak to us in vapid, imprecise tongues that defy normal understanding. Not only is communication degraded, but, as Orwell feared, liberty may be at stake. So contends Don Watson in *Death Sentence, The Decay of Public Language*,* a convincing critique of the morass.

Watson faults no one human or process; accountability is not a solution—it is part of the problem. The root is in *Managerialism*, the Newspeak of our day. It infuses the language of all walks of life, from business and marketing, where it was hatched, to education and politics, where it doesn’t belong. Watson laments that it is endemic and “is writing of the kind George Orwell

said was tacked together like the sections of a pre-fabricated hen-house.”

The ultimate pre-fabs are mission statements so devoid of meaning that those of government agencies and those of fast-food chains often cannot be distinguished from each other. The elements are words that have lost their original meanings through disuse, such as *accountable, commitment, core, key, strategic*, and other contemporary buzzwords scrutinized in the glossary at the end of the book. Regrettably, the results are as pervasive as they are predictable. Regardless of calling, “you must be equal to the world’s best practice and responsive to customer needs, strategic (of course) and accountable and so on. So you must also be prolix and utterly predictable. You are trapped in the language like a parrot in a cage.”

Is there escape from the ever-expanding cage of decaying public language? Watson suggests that there is: “Everyone who writes can be a critic of writing.... All writers can improve, so the public language can improve.” It’s no easy way out: As Dr. Johnson observed, “What is written without



effort is in general read without pleasure.” But, as Watson points out in myriad examples, from the time of Pericles on it is effort that advances the language; like Czeslaw Milosz, we all can search for “our home in one sentence.”

Watson’s skills as a seer are both theoretical and practical. By academic training he is a historian, but in 1983, when he was in his early

30s, he changed careers and became a freelance writer of books, essays, and films as well as a lecturer on language. So *Death Sentence* is rigorous and well-referenced yet lucid and entertaining. The only drawback of the book is that readers unfamiliar with Watson’s native Australia may not fully appreciate the examples drawn from contemporary life there. But behind that drawback lies cogency. Australia, founded at about the same time as the United States of America, lacked gifted orators and writers such as Alexander Hamilton and George Washington. Hence, starting from a lower level of public rhetoric, Australia may have fallen farther. If so, *Death Sentence* comprises a caveat of what’s ahead and, as such, is a must for anyone concerned with the future of the language.

* *Death Sentence* by Don Watson, Sydney, Knopf, Random House Australia, 2003, ISBN 1-74051-206-5, AU 29.95. Also published as *Gobbledygook* by Atlantic Books in the U.K. and Canada, 2004, ISBN 1-843-54356-7, GBP 12.99.

Teaching Translation with Equations

By Kirk St.Amant

Translation generally involves transferring meaning from one language to another. Such transfers can be complicated because languages might have different conventions for conveying the same meaning. To facilitate the translation process, technical communicators are often encouraged to write in a certain way—one that restricts the meaning of terms and avoids culture-specific expressions (e.g., idioms). Those strategies, however, often exist as lists of do's and don't's that fail to explore nuances affecting translation.

From a teaching perspective, technical communication students need to appreciate the importance of translation as part of business practices essential to gaining international market share. Such an appreciation must go beyond do's-and-taboos approaches if communicators are to draft documents that can be translated quickly and effectively. By improving student understanding of the translation process, instructors impart the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workplace.

To understand translation, students should practice moving ideas from one representational system (i.e., language) to another. Teaching the subtleties of transferring meaning across languages can be complicated, especially when students have limited fluency in a second language. There is, however, one system of representation with which all students are familiar—mathematics—and even students with little aptitude in math can recognize ideas represented by

basic equations such as $1 + 1 = 2$. Instructors can thus use math to devise exercises that examine the intricacies of translation. Such exercises would require students to translate ideas represented by mathematical relationships into text-based structures (i.e., sentences or paragraphs) that convey the same meaning.

Whenever I present this idea to students, they usually respond with sly smiles and sarcastic chuckles. I then give them their first equation, $1 + 1 = 2$, and ask if anyone does not understand what this equation means. Next I ask the students to transfer the meaning represented by this example into written format, and pencils and pens quickly scratch out a phrase. At this point I ask for a volunteer to read his or her translation to the class. The sample sentence I get is almost always “One plus one equals two.”

“One what?” is my usual response. Looks of confusion ensue. “Well, if I have one apple and *plus* it with one banana, what exactly do I have two of? Oh, and what kind of verb is *plus*? How do I *plus* something?” Students generally appear perplexed by these questions. They know the meaning of the calculation so well that many have forgotten the complexity of the ideas it conveys. Realization begins to creep over many of the faces and there is usually the follow-up response of “One item when combined with one of the same kind of item gives you two of those items.”

From this point, the class discusses how assumptions played a role in determining and conveying meaning; that is, what did the students assume the equation meant when they said “One plus one equals two,” and what background did they assume I had in order to understand that translation? Next the class examines word choice and how selecting the correct verb or verb phrase (e.g., *plus* vs. *combined with*) affects the meaning related to an expression. Finally, the class explores how the exercise parallels translation processes involving language and what factors one should address and consider as limiting the meaning translators associate with a particular expression. At this point I generally provide students with a series of everyday English sentences and ask them to revise those sentences to make their meanings clearer.

To help students appreciate the complexities related to translations, I often have them translate a series of increasingly complex mathematical representations as a homework assignment. Such equations include subtraction ($3 - 1 = 2$), multiplication ($2 \times 3 = 6$), and division ($6 \div 3 = 2$). Whereas a single example of basic addition ($1 + 1 = 2$) provides an overview of the complexities related to transferring meaning, a series of different operations helps students realize how intricate this process can be when it involves different concepts. Students present their translations of these ideas in class and then discuss how

...recognize the inherent complexity of the idea to be conveyed...



the examples parallel aspects of communication such as passive voice, compound complex sentences, and paragraph structure.

This use of mathematics also allows students to appreciate an additional translation aspect: querying subject matter experts. When translators encounter a passage containing unfamiliar ideas they often must contact the original author or technician who provided those ideas and ask for clarification. That author or technician needs to appreciate the translator's situation if he or she is to provide a response that can be used vs. a quick reply designed to "get that person to leave me alone." To help students appreciate such situations, I place them in the position of translator and give them a relatively complex formula or equation to translate into text (e.g., $E = mc^2$). I also provide them with the name of a technical expert (a colleague in Texas Tech's college of science) to contact for help with this assignment.

After students turn in their final translations, I ask them to share their frustrations and experiences with the rest of the class. Many students note how difficult it can be to ask the right kind of question, especially when one knows little about the related item. Students also tend to mention how they thought they understood a response, went off to do their work, realized they did not fully grasp a concept, and had to go back to ask additional questions. When asked what factors were essential to success with this assignment, students over-

whelmingly respond "patience." The class then discusses how their assignment paralleled the translation process and what it taught them about how to behave when working with translators.

Technical communication students can expect to work as a translator during their careers. By using mathe-

matics, instructors can place students in the role of the translator and can help them develop the understanding needed to work effectively with those individuals.

Kirk St. Amant teaches for the department of English at Texas Tech University. He can be contacted at kirk.st-amant@ttu.edu.

Trends Toward the Teutonic

For a long time we in technical writing have been sliding toward German, not just by smashing our words together but in many other conventions.

Take capitalization. We invariably pretend to prefer a "down" style, because it is more "professional." But then, fearing that lower case is disrespectful, we ultimately capitalize every noun in sight, including committees, departments, and titles, as in "Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Adjunct Professors."

We frequently abandon the English subject-verb-object word order and tack the verb on at the end. "We increased the strength" becomes "Strength has been increased."

We also follow the German tolerance of what Henrietta J. Tichy (*Effective Writing*, Wiley, 1966) calls "mountains of modifiers," as in "specific diesel fuel system design variations." "This is common and idiomatic in

German," says Ms. Tichy, but in English is "lumpy, bumpy reading."

Our blitzkrieg inclination to smash words together is demonstrated in nouns like *database* and *spreadsheet* and adjectives like *nonmilitary* and *freshwater*. I once even saw *explosiveproof*, presumably a desperate attempt to be consistent with *fireproof*. Engineering authors dislike hyphens, so some day (or someday) we may see *windtunnel* tests and *drycell* batteries. Unfortunately, this Teutonic English, while saving tiny increments of space, immensely degrades readability, especially in coinages like *nonelite* or *antimen*.

Postulate this scenario. On a flash gun, a strobe is used to time the flash. That strobe has a pulse, and the pulse has a certain width, which is represented by a symbol. That's the *flashgunstrobepulsewidth* symbol.

—Don Bush
San Diego, California



Elizabeth Weise Moeller

Internet Applications: The Importance of Data and Workflow

In the September/October *Newsletter* issue I covered Internet applications and how they can help a business Web site by providing interactive, real-time features for customers. The article stated that there are four main elements needed to create Internet applications:

- Database connectivity
- Secure Web server
- Web site
- Well-defined workflow process

Web site and secure Web server are elements that are defined very well in other places. In this issue I cover the importance of data integrity and a clear workflow process.

Data Integrity

The ability to connect a database to a Web site has greatly improved the customization abilities and customer-focused tools on Web sites. Unfortunately, connecting the database is not as simple as it might sound. The two primary obstacles are the actual connectivity and the integrity of the data.

Connectivity is how your company's database interfaces with your company's Web site. Previously I used the example of the Country Gardens who provided a searchable database of plants for a perennial garden for their Web visitors. That search would also tell visitors if the plants found during the search were in stock. To do this, the company periodically uploads the spreadsheet they use to store their data. During

the upload process, it is read into a data table stored on the server.

To go one step further, other clients have set up timed jobs on their computers to automatically send a file to the Web server via FTP at specific times. In turn, we have set up timed jobs on our Web server to read in that file after it is received. In this case, data is transferred on a regular basis without any human intervention.

To go another step further, one client allows the Web site to access the in-house database to obtain real-time data. Security is clamped down very tightly on this server to prevent anyone else from gaining access. Web users are also very limited in what data they can access and which tables they can write to.

Many companies that host their own Web sites internally set up a mirror of their database. The mirror, which is often housed outside the company's primary firewall, is refreshed on a regular basis throughout the day to reflect changes. A company the size and scope of Amazon.com stores their databases on their Web server as they are integral parts of the Web site. However, there are redundant backups in place to prevent any problems.

While the connectivity issues are relatively easy to work out with the information technology staff, the data integrity issues are much greater. As a consultant who works with small and large companies, I know that this is one of the biggest issues clients face

as they migrate their information to the Web site. They all recognize the impact of giving customers the ability to retrieve information on a moment's notice. However, many of them have internal data issues that are difficult to resolve before moving the data online. This is especially true in companies that have used antiquated systems or have given up and started to store everything in a spreadsheet. Problems to watch for include:

- **Inconsistent data entry** For example, someone might enter a state name using its two-letter code (e.g., NY) while another person might enter the entire state name (*New York*).
- **Incompatible data types** For example, someone might enter a number in a text field or try to enter text in a field meant for numbers.
- **Translation errors** For example, software such as Excel will "helpfully" convert 20% to .20 when exported to a different file format, even when not asked to do so.

Inconsistent data entry is, by far, the largest problem. When Web sites are programmed to retrieve data from data tables, they are looking for specific instances. For example, searching for all outlets in a specific state will yield incomplete results when the script searches for *NY* but someone has entered *New York* in a data field.

Data integrity issues often appear only when scripts are written to try to retrieve data based on a certain set of

(continued on page 15)

Having a process makes all the difference.



Jean-luc Doumont

The Patent-Pending, Deadwood-Pruning, Chocolate-Tasting M&M's® Method

Conciseness: one of the fundamental qualities of effective communication. A quality not so easily defined, really. For a text, it is related to length, as expressed for example by number of words, but in a relative rather than an absolute fashion: A 50-word abstract may well lack conciseness, whereas a 50-page report might be deemed concise, depending on what the audience gets out of reading the document.

I expect lean documents and fat participants.

For engineering audiences, I usually define conciseness as $(C \times A)/N_w$, with C the text's clarity, A its accuracy, and N_w its length in number of words. Of course, training participants know I do not mean it literally (the wise guys ask in what units clarity and accuracy are expressed), but they get the point: A text that is clearer or more accurate with the same number of words (or equally clear and accurate in fewer words) is more concise—something of a cost/benefit analysis from a reader's point of view.

Conciseness, alas, is seldom learned in school. Students typically write papers to demonstrate their mastery of a body of knowledge, with a view to being graded—why would they want to limit themselves? Why would they risk leaving out something that the professor might deem important? At first glance, at least, does it not look like they know more if they use more words to state and develop what they know? Academic purposes and

audiences too often lead students to developing inappropriate communication skills for the real world.

Interestingly, conciseness need not be limited to text. Nonverbal communication, being largely non-sequential, may not have a measurable length, but it nonetheless can be seen as consisting of a number of "signs": gestures or facial expressions in an oral presentation; lines, shapes, and

colors (or perhaps just ink dots) in a graphical display; etc. Nonverbal conciseness is perhaps even rarer than the verbal one. Even those of us who strive for concise texts (and perhaps cross out unnecessary words in the writing of others) may well fail to apply the same principles in our page layouts, illustrations, or visual aids. Too often, we wonder what we might add to a drawing, not what we might suppress.

Conciseness is mostly a second-draft optimization. Conveying messages clearly and accurately is usually enough of a challenge for a first draft. Looking for opportunities to express those messages in fewer words or with less ink is the next step.

To those who need encouragement with slashing through their creations, I recommend my patent-pending, deadwood-pruning, chocolate-tasting M&M's® method. Once you are ready to work on conciseness, place a bowl of M&M's candies (or peanuts or gummy bears or...) on your desk and

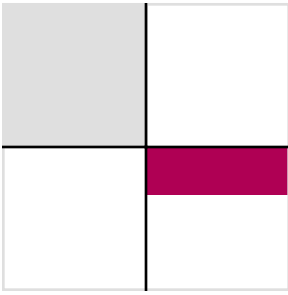
As an example of visual conciseness, tables can usually be typeset without rules. Appropriate spacing ensures readability.

Year	Conference location
1996	Saratoga Springs, NY
1997	Snowbird, UT
1998	Québec City, Canada
1999	New Orleans, LA
2000	Cambridge, MA
2001	Santa Fe, NM
2002	Portland, OR
2003	Orlando, FL
2004	Minneapolis, MN
2005	Limerick, Ireland
2006	Saratoga Springs, NY
2007	Seattle, WA



Year	Conference location
1996	Saratoga Springs, NY
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2000	Cambridge, MA
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2002	Portland, OR
2003	Orlando, FL
2004	Minneapolis, MN
2005	Limerick, Ireland
2006	Saratoga Springs, NY
2007	Seattle, WA

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Net Notes

(continued from page 13)

criteria. It is at this point that the inconsistencies become apparent. The solution is a clear workflow process that defines the database and data entry rules.

Workflow Process

The data has to come from somewhere. Sometimes the source is a customer service agent adding information to a client's record. Sometimes it is a data entry clerk adding new data to a data table. Sometimes it is a Web user requesting information. In all cases a clear process needs to be identified and used, whether implicitly or explicitly.

When a customer service agent or data entry clerk is entering data, he or she should have a previously prepared set of coding conventions. These might include how to enter state names, what format to use for phone numbers [e.g., (555)555-1212 or 555.555.1212, etc.], and any other special type of data required. In addition there should be some information on how to handle exceptions. There will always be data that does not conform to the specification. The usability of that data depends on how it is handled.

The next important element is ownership. Who "owns" the database? This person would be responsible for the integrity of the data and should check it periodically.

The final important element is the process itself. A well-defined process

answers the following questions:

- What happens to the data when it arrives?
- Who enters the data and is this person trained?
- How often is data uploaded to the Web site server? Is this a manual or an automatic process?
- What happens after the data has been entered?

A well-defined process may resemble the following:

1. Inquiry arrives by e-mail to customer service agent.
2. Agent, who has been trained and supplied with all documentation, enters data into the inquiry table. This particular inquiry table is uploaded to the Web server nightly, so nothing needs to be done here.
3. A message is sent to the sales representative assigned to this inquiry.
4. The agent files the electronic request in the designated location.

The process is simple but it is defined and the agent knows how to handle all the special cases. Having a process makes all the difference.

The size of a company does not seem to matter in cases of data integrity and workflow. Small companies can do things well whereas larger companies can have breakdowns. The important piece, though, is that the integrity of the data is maintained and

the workflow is defined. If the data is maintained consistently, it is much easier to transfer the data for use on your Web site.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller was president of PCS 2002-2003. She owns Interactive Media Consulting, LLC (+1 518 587 5107, 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.

Good Intent, Poor Outcome

(continued from page 14)

reward yourself with one every time you take out a word or erase a little ink without hurting the clarity or accuracy of the document. By the end of any training program I run, I thus expect lean documents... and fat participants.

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

That's not writing, that's typing."
—Truman Capote
(about Jack Kerouac)



Ronald J. Nelson

Getting Poised: Ted Williams and the Science of Hitting

This column is my last. One of my reasons for throwing in the towel is that I prefer having the hard copy in my hands, as Ted Williams did his bat. Call me old-fashioned, but I don't want no virtual bat.

I do want to thank Rudy Joenk for letting me come to the plate 41 times and write pretty much what I wanted in order to introduce professional communicators to writers they might not have known, but who nevertheless have merit and are worth studying. I am reminded of my original criterion for the column, as I articulated it in the one on Scott Russell Sanders (*Newsletter* January/February 1997): "The sole consideration for inclusion in this column is that the writer's work must contain a rich blend of form and content, i.e., it must have genuine substance." As I also said there, "We can learn much from the writing strategies and stylistic subtleties of the masters, and, in the spirit of generosity fostered by Benjamin Franklin, we can share those perspectives with our colleagues in industry and academe."

I have tried to keep those ideas in mind. When I have forgotten, Rudy has reminded me. Like the best teachers I have had over the years, Rudy has let me get away with nothing. His keen eyes, as reliable as those once in the head of the now sadly headless frozen body of "The Splendid Splinter," as well as his meticulous intellect are traits that I shall miss. So thanks, Rudy. [*My pleasure. Ed.*]

My hero, like so many other Bostonians, was Ted Williams. As boys we went to Fenway Park primarily to see him dig into the batter's box, swish the bat, and produce results. In a short piece, entitled "Ted Williams, as of 1986," John Updike reminds us that "We loved him because he generated excitement: He lifted us out of our own lives and showed us, in the way he stood up at the plate, what the game was all about" (*Odd Jobs*, p. 98).

Williams has produced (with John Underwood) marvelous results in *The Science of Hitting* (New York: Simon & Schuster, rev. ed. 1986—a USD 12.00 Fireside paperback). Between its covers lies sound advice for hitting a baseball, but that advice is phrased in such a way as to constitute a philosophy of approaching virtually (what a flexible word that is!) any situation, professional or otherwise. Its writing style, in short, is admirable and its logic flawless.

Williams opens the book by noting the extraordinary skill needed to hit a baseball: It is "the single most difficult thing to do in sport" (p. 7). Similarly, the professional communicator must develop reliable, effective skills to size up any task at hand. Even the best hitters succeed only about three of 10 times at bat (.300+), so it is essential to understand the pitcher-to-batter relationship (the assigner of the document or reader to

writer), as well as many other factors that influence a game. It is a no-nonsense situation that the batter (writer) wants to win.

To make his point, Williams uses the example of Frank Howard, a power hitter who in Williams's opinion did not know the strike zone—the place where hitting the ball (writing the document) takes place. Williams resolved to mention to Howard, if he ever got the chance, "the value of knowing the strike zone. The value of proper thinking at the plate. The importance of getting a good ball to hit. Of knowing when not to be too big with his swing" (p. 26). Effective writing also involves knowing the limits and strictures of the document, thinking through and addressing the subject matter appropriately, being discriminating about word choice, and avoiding exaggeration, which is likely to miss its target of making solid contact with the reader.

...thinking through and addressing the subject matter appropriately...

Proper thinking also involves such common-sense matters as knowing one's weaknesses (in Williams's case, after hurting his elbow in the 1950 All-Star game, low outside pitches). For writers that weakness might be, for example, comma splices, a problem that can be solved only by recognizing it and working to correct it.

Moreover, proper thinking employs anticipating or guessing, based on the batter's knowledge of the pitcher and the situation in a game: "If a pitcher

is throwing fast balls and curves and only the fast balls are in the strike zone, you would be silly to look for a curve, wouldn't you?" (p. 29). Realizing that a pitcher has good days and bad, the batter does well to watch him warm up and try to gauge his effectiveness on that day. Reviewing how the pitcher got the batter out the last time and being determined not to let it happen again is a smart idea—a matter of being observant and of having a proactive attitude. In other words, "You work from a frame of reference, you learn what you might expect in certain instances, and you guess from there" (p. 30). That is sage advice in the workplace as well.

In terms of professional communication, Williams's words about not arguing with umpires makes sense. He says (using chiasmus), "There is no question that some strikes are called balls, and some balls are called strikes, but you're far better off forgetting the calls that hurt you and concentrating on that next pitch, or that next turn at bat" (p. 27).

Seemingly minor points can make a significant difference to the prudent hitter. For example, the standard batter's box is

4' x 6', and they all look pretty much alike. But the batter's box in Boston was, according to Williams, "a fraction higher in the back than in the front. I always felt I had a better hold with my back foot when I swung there" (p. 36). Ah, the subtleties of the game! Analysis and close observation can make a significant difference in the world of baseball and in the world of work.

Williams believed a slight up-stroke was better than a level swing because there was a larger impact zone when

the pitch came in (raised pitcher's mound and the pitcher is usually throwing overhand or three-quarter arm, yielding a slight downward slope to the ball as it heads toward the plate). If possible, a subtle upward slant to messages is probably a worthwhile idea to keep in mind because it is more likely to exert a favorable impact on the reader. At the same time, of course, it is important to be on the level with one's reader.

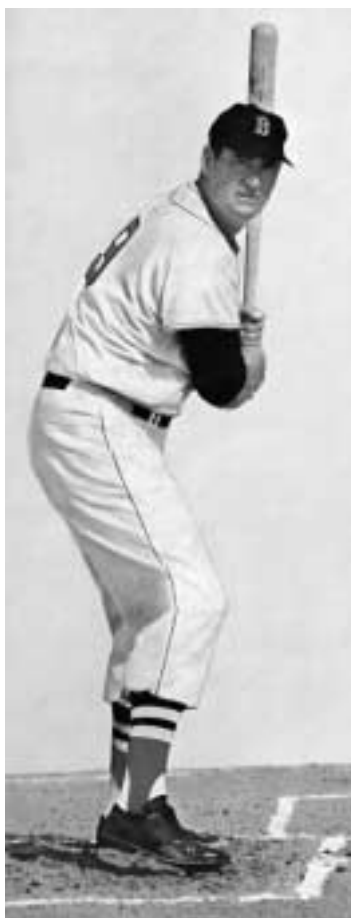
Just before a record of his career stats, his *Gallery of Great Hitters* (pp. 84-96), and a handsome picture of him (p. 97), Williams speaks of the importance of goals:

I think that every player should have goals, goals to keep his interest up over the long haul, goals that are realistic and that reflect improvement.... Goals keep you on your toes, make you bear down, give you objectives at those times when you might otherwise be inclined to just go through the motions. You certainly cannot go through the motions and be a great hitter. Not even a good hitter. It's the most difficult thing to do in sport (p. 82).

The same is true of effective professional communicators.

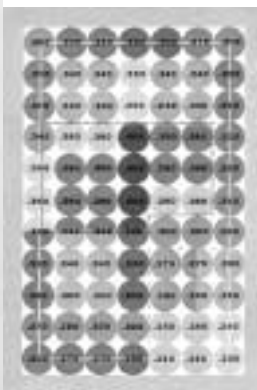
In conclusion, I am getting poised to hit my next writing project out of sight, over the newly added seats atop the 37'-high Green Monster onto Lansdowne Street, perhaps beyond. I hope the reader, too, is poised to attack the next document (pitch) with Williams's splendid eyes that (it is said) could watch the spin on the ball as it came in and perhaps even see the point of contact of bat and ball, and then have the pleasure of watch-

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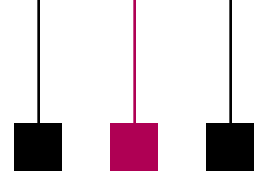
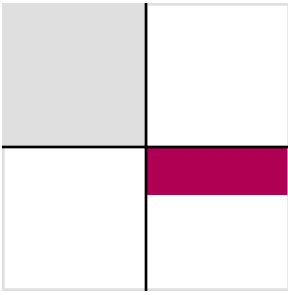


Left: *Ted Williams at bat.*

Below: *Ted Williams's batting zones within the strike zone (seven balls wide and 11 balls high).*



Reprinted by permission of JCA Literary Agency from The Science of Hitting by Ted Williams and John Underwood, Simon & Schuster, 1986.



Professionals

By Michael Har-Even

Though I enjoy my membership in the IEEE Professional Communication Society, and have benefitted from the information shared by authors in the *PCS Newsletter*, something has nagged at me with each issue, and only lately have I succeeded in piecing together what it is.

The name PCS indicates, I believe, an imbalanced philosophy. George Bush, Tony Blair, Arthur Miller, Maya Angelou, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Judith Jamison, Steven Spielberg, and Bob Woodward are all professional communicators. Ronald Reagan was the Great Communicator. While most of us would be flattered to be thus associated with some or all of the above, our society deals (or should) with something very different. We are not just communicators but, rather, as the logo subheading under PCS proclaims less boldly, communicators of *Technical & Business Information*.

Before you roll your eyes (or am I too late?) let me stress that this is not semantics. I propose that the blurring of lines in the way we have chosen to identify ourselves reflects an unfortunate approach to our profession. Assuming we are not all frustrated authors, artists, and orators but writers keenly interested in technology, let us raise the technological banner as high as that of communication. It has become, after all, and remains for the time being, a somewhat sexy banner.

Why should our educational interests and our attempts at self-improvement focus solely on writing skills? The *Newsletters* abound with helpful material about being better communicators. But aside from the requisite administrivia and an occasional review of a technical book, that's pretty much all there is. It is nigh impossible to find anything helping, or even exhorting, us to improve our *technical* competence. Yet the boundaries of technology are advancing so much faster and farther than the boundaries of writing. The PCS Forum (<https://www.ieeecommunities.org/ieee.pcs>) has postings for courses teaching communication skills to engineers. It would indeed make our work easier if engineers improved their grasp of our world. Would it not make their work easier if we improved our grasp of theirs? Where are all the courses, workshops, and articles teaching technology to communicators? It may well be that there are no teachers stepping forward or, judging by the name of the organization, it may just be seen as out of scope.

What has happened to the *technical* in technical communicator? Woe upon us, members of the IEEE, if it has been relegated to a mere reference to the tools we use. Although high-tech tools enhance our work, a technical communicator should be able to peck out relevant, quality work on an old Smith Corona. And

while *technical* may refer to the environment in which we each work, that's almost there but is not quite enough. *Technical* is a mind set.

When we sit with technical professionals, we are expected to bring certain things to the table—besides a pen or a laptop. At least, that is, if we want to be partners in the process. To wit:

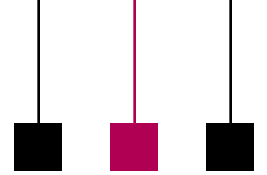
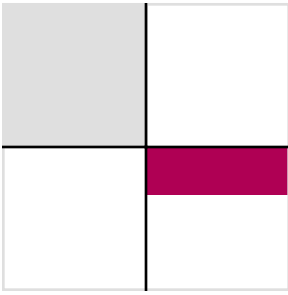
Writing skills All those satisfied working as editors cleaning up after engineers who took courses on communication skills need go no further. Though that task, performed conscientiously, is as noble as any other in this world, I for one would not care to see it become the job description of a technical communicator. Our writing skills should, indeed, be part of our personal professional package, but they should be

that part which forms the basis, that part which is taken for granted. Yes, we should strive to improve those skills, but these guys invite us to the table because they assume we can write. There must be more.

Technical intelligence Over and above that, we must be technical. We must be comfortable with the nerds and they with us. We must live and breathe high-tech and low-tech, business and science. We must be at least as intrigued by copies of *Business Week*, *PC Magazine*, and *Scientific American* as we are with a manual of

Technical communication requires a balance between its two terms.

(continued on page 23)



“A Web Site Before Its Time” Navigating Cyberspace, Then and Now

By Jamie Hutchinson

As the PCS *Newsletter* makes its final transition to a place we call “cyberspace,” what better time to take a long view of that much used, little understood word and its implications for communicators?

According to *The New Oxford American Dictionary*, *cyberspace* originated in the 1980s (probably with William Gibson’s novel *Neuromancer*, though *NOAD* doesn’t say so), and is “the notional environment in which communication over computer networks occurs.” The term derives from *cybernetics*, a 1940s coinage by the mathematician Norbert Wiener, who wished to name the emerging, interdisciplinary science of control and communication in animals and machines, which he helped found. Wiener reached back for the Greek root of the Latin-derived *governor*, in the technical sense used in automatic control theory, and found *kybernan* (to steer) and its noun form *kybernetes* (steersman). For Wiener, the new science was symbolized in the image of a steersman guiding a ship: alternately reading his environment while adjusting speed and direction in a holistic, self-organizing, goal-oriented process. And that is how the ancient Greeks gave us the prefix we now use to denote just about anything high-tech.

So much for etymology. What about the actual place, *cyberspace*? Is it as imaginary as Gibson’s story? Is it

merely “notional,” as the dictionary tells us? And if there’s more to it, then what does that mean for communicators? For guidance, we turn to a group of university students who 31 years ago took an intensive seminar in cybernetics and made a book about it—what they called a “cybernetic book.”

Austrian-born physicist Heinz von Foerster was a junior participant in the meetings at which Wiener and other cybernetics pioneers outlined the new field. Von Foerster would go on to establish, in 1958, what became the de facto headquarters for cybernetics research in the United States: the Biological Computer Laboratory at the University of Illinois, which thrived into the mid 1970s on Pentagon grants. There von Foerster gathered students of all persuasions together with cybernetics luminaries from around the world in an educational environment that was itself a grand experiment in cybernetics. Whereas Wiener’s “first order” cybernetics bracketed the observer of a system, von Foerster’s “second order” cybernetics embraced the question of the observer, opening cybernetics to the input of social scientists, humanists, and artists, and vice versa.

The culmination of von Foerster’s teaching career was a two-semester

seminar during 1973–1974 in which the students produced a book, *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*, that attempted to introduce readers not only to the major ideas of cybernetics but also to a cybernetic process—in fact, the very process by which the book itself had been produced. Needless to say, such an approach to the production of a book led students to the outer limits of what could be achieved with the medium of paper.

Cybernetics of Cybernetics democratized the editorial function, though not quite in the individualized sense of many Web sites today, where anyone can publish anything without regard for the input of others. Editorial work was carried out by

a committee of volunteers who solicited and selected submissions for printing based on free and open discussion. The result is a collection of works by leading cyberneticists immersed in dialog with prose, poetry, photography, and illustration by students from a wide variety of majors. As with

a good Web site, the intelligent use of graphics makes the book a feast for the browsing as well as the reading eye.

Web sites are well equipped to reveal the processes of their own production by archiving old versions and incorporating interactivity for participants and readers. *Cybernetics of Cyber-*

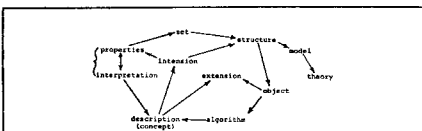
The tools of communication may come and go, but the job at hand remains the same.

MODEL

MODEL OF A THEORY IS A STATISTICAL MODEL THAT EVERY MEMBER OF THE THEORY BELIEVES IN AS THE STRUCTURE. (L.L.)



L.L. [Lars Löfgren]



104, 173, 332, 424, 426
properties, set.

Figure 1. Top: Page 333 of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*. Cybernetician Lars Löfgren's definition of the concept "Model" appears at top, next to a thumbnail of his conceptual entailment structure. Below that is an illustration by student Rodney Clough; used with permission. Punch dots appear along the right margin.

Below: Löfgren's entailment structure as it appears in the *Metabook*. The words below the entailment structure are concepts unique to Löfgren's entries in *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*. The numbers tell on what pages Löfgren's entries can be found.

netics does the same within the strictures of traditional printing. Many materials are reprinted from a periodical, *The Cybernetician*, produced by the students about once a month during the school year. The periodical, as well as the final book, contains proposals from the students about what form the final product should take. A "Parabook" in the middle of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*, set off from the rest by its heavier paper stock, contains much material about the book's form, content, and context, including a summary of seminar discussions throughout the year. Material that would normally go in the front or back matter of a book—list of contents, acknowledgments, author index, etc.—appears in the Parabook.

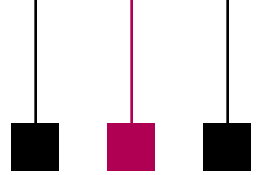
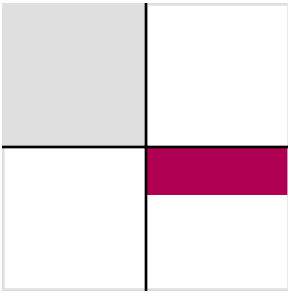
In addition to the Parabook, *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* comes with a "Metabook" whose purpose is "to help the reader discover and invent connections between the concepts, and the authors, of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*." A small chapbook attached with Velcro to the inside back cover of the main

book, the *Metabook* comprises dozens of "entailment structures"—graphical representations of how cybernetic concepts are related in the thinking of various contributors to the book. Many of the interior pages of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* are adorned with thumbnail versions of those entailment structures (see Figure 1).

Perhaps the oddest navigation tool in *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* is a row of dots—some solid, some open—printed along the margin of right-hand pages. Readers are advised to punch holes in the open dots (but not



Figure 2. Combining the geeky with the artsy, p. 194 (broadside orientation) of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* introduces a table of entropies in a section about information theory. Students used props, such as bags over their heads, and varying poses to illustrate lengthy, dull lists of logarithms used in calculating uncertainty. Photography by Glenn Kowack; used with permission.



in the filled ones), which designate target pages. Then, by inserting a stylus in any open dot, the reader can go directly to the next target page related to the concept being addressed.

The student proposals and discussion about the layout and organization of *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* reveal a very forward-thinking group of communicators. One student submitted an elaborate proposal based on the idea of self-contained “bits” and “packets” of information, such as definitions or illustrations, interspersed with and providing connections between longer articles. Another student carried this idea forward in a diagram that supplemented the bits and packets with the entailment structures. Other published discussion expresses the students’ intent to make an “interactive” book, a “functional” book, a “network” book. Indeed, one seminar alumnus aptly remembers *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* as “a Web site before its time.”

By any truly cybernetic understanding of the term, von Foerster’s students were navigating *cyberspace* and knew it only too well. Whatever readership *Cybernetics of Cybernetics* may enjoy today must surely be struck by the same realization. (A thousand copies were reprinted in 1995 by Future Systems Publishers, so you never know where one might turn up.) *Cybernetics of Cybernetics*

reminds us that while the tools of communication may come and go, the job at hand remains the same.

Jamie Hutchinson (jhutchin@uiuc.edu) manages the publications office in the Department of Electrical and Computer Engineering, University

of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He is at work on a lengthy study of Cybernetics of Cybernetics scheduled to appear in winter 2006 in Technical Communication Quarterly, a special issue dedicated to cultural studies approaches to technical communication.

Masters of Style

(continued from page 17)

ing the ball (document) take flight and add to the score (the number of successful documents).

On his last trip to the plate, against Jack Fisher of the Baltimore Orioles, Williams sent the third pitch into the right-field bullpen. John Updike describes that dramatic event in his extraordinary, must-read essay, “Hub Fans Bid Kid Adieu” (*Assorted Prose*, 1965): “[Williams] ran as he always ran out home runs—hurriedly, unsmiling, head down, as if our praise were a storm of rain to get out of. He didn’t tip his cap.” He just went into the dugout, refusing to

acknowledge the crowd’s wild cheering, its “cry to be saved.” As Updike puts it, “...immortality is nontransferable.... Gods do not answer letters” (p. 146). For Updike, “Williams’s last word [silence] had been...exquisitely chosen, ...a perfect fusion of expectation, intention, and execution...” (p. 147). Since I run no risk of being mistaken for a deity, I tip my Red Sox cap to the reader.

Ron Nelson is a professor of English at James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia 22807; +1 540 568 3755, fax +1 540 568 2983; nelsonrj@jmu.edu.

I never associated today’s word [*calefacient*] with *nonchalant*, but I once had a clue. In the dark ages I worked as a typesetter for a printing company. One hot morning an apprentice sauntered in as teenagers do. I asked him why he seemed so nonchalant. His reply: “Too hot to act chalang.”

Art Darwinu in AWADmail Issue 139, 10 October 2004



Recommendation: Read This

A new year is almost upon us and the Professor wants to take this opportunity to reiterate a message that she has communicated in several past lessons. She is packaging it in a new way, however, in hopes that her students will receive it like a welcome gift in the mail and begin following the advice right away.

The message is this: *Use the most effective form of recommendations for users.*

First, the Professor would like to share with her students some ineffective forms of recommendations and demonstrate just why they are ineffective.

Ineffective form 1:

Ambiguous, empty pronoun form

The Professor never enjoys ambiguous pronouns. The pronoun *it*, for example, is often used in ambiguous contexts. Sometimes this word is even used in its expletive form, which is totally meaningless. Examples:

It is best to use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to navigate through the information.

It is recommended that you use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to navigate through the information.

To the Professor, that type of recommendation is like scraping fingernails on a chalkboard. To what does the ambiguous pronoun *it* refer? Shouldn't the subject of any sentence

be a clear, understandable noun? How might a translator or reader for whom English is a second language parse this sentence? (The Professor loves to remind her students that ESL readers frequently translate English into their primary languages one word at a time. Therefore pronouns that are ambiguous and empty cause particular problems for those users.)

Ineffective form 2: First-person form

Although the Professor is the first to enjoy novels, personal letters, and e-mail notes that are written in first-person form, she is not one to advocate use of first person in technical writing. And in IBM information, using first person can sometimes create legal difficulties. In the information that she edits the Professor finds too many first-person recommendations. Examples:

Our recommendation is to set the value of MAXVAL to 10.

We recommend a MAXVAL value of 10.

The Professor's problem with this form of recommendation is that users are bound to wonder whom *our* and *we* represent. Do these first-person pronouns represent the writer of the information and his or her family? The writer and writing colleagues? The complete set of people who work on the product to which the recommendation relates? The company that produces the product? The industry? Everyone else in the world but the

reader? The Professor stands firm in altogether avoiding use of first person in any technical information, including recommendations.

Effective Forms of Recommendations

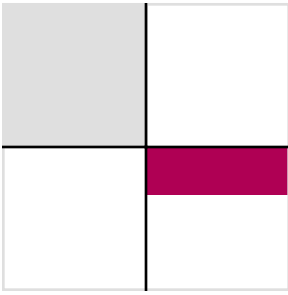
To choose the best form of a recommendation, the professor's students need to consider the context. Most of the situations in the preceding examples would be more effective if they included a label and an imperative verb. Examples:

Recommendation: Use the mouse, rather than the keyboard, to efficiently navigate through the information center.

Recommendation: Set the value of MAXVAL to 10 unless you are using LIMIT=5.

Generally, this label-imperative form of recommendation works well. However, the Professor acknowledges that using labels and direct imperatives isn't always possible. Perhaps the recommendation is included in information that has many other types of needed labels and using another label would dilute the clarity and visual effectiveness of the information. Or perhaps the writer knows that the recommendation isn't a strong one and that it applies to only a small subset of users in rare situations. Using a label in this case might exaggerate the importance of the recommendation. In such cases the Professor accepts recommendations that do not have labels. Examples:

Provide context
or rationale
with a
recommendation.



On a window that has seven other labels of five types (Example, Syntax, Prerequisites, Authorization, and Procedure), the writer can write the recommendation in an imperative sentence like this:

For better performance, run the xyz.exe file from the drop-down list rather than from the command line.

For a recommendation that applies to only a subset of users, the writer can clearly state the context (conditions or circumstances) for the recommendation. The writer can then follow the context information with an imperative recommendation like this:

If the three other approaches do not fix the problem, run the program from the command line until you apply the fix to this problem.

The Professor is certain that her students, armed with this lesson about recommendations, will never write an ineffective recommendation again. When, however, her students work on information that someone else originally wrote, they might need to determine the best way to turn an ineffective recommendation into an effective one. For these writers, the Professor offers some sage advice:

Recommendation: When transforming an ineffective recommendation into an effective one, try to include either context or rationale for the recommendation. State the recommendation using an imperative verb.

All the examples of effective recommendations in this lesson do just that.

Providing context or rationale with a recommendation helps users decide whether to follow the recommendation.

The Professor hopes that her students start the coming year with a commitment to use effective recommendations in their technical information.

Copyright 2003 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. Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book **Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors**, recently authored by the Council.*

Professionals

(continued from page 18)

style. We must be as techno-savvy from the gut as the other professionals we sit with. That's not to say we have to understand the details as well as they do; that is, after all, why they were hired. Personally, I have found engineers happier to be questioned about the logic of their design than about the logic of their paragraphs. One thing is certain: We can't discuss their world, let alone turn around and explain it, if we can't even master the basics.

Clear thinking What the first two items have in common. We all know, from training and experience, that good writing must clarify, and it can do so only if we have correctly analyzed and clearly understood the subject beforehand. When brought to that table, this highly valuable ability adds something critical at an early stage. The resulting documentation will be of higher quality, both because the product itself may be improved and because the communicator's

understanding of it will be that much deeper.

I propose that these are the things that allow us to fully contribute to the processes in which we participate. Technical communication requires a balance between its two terms. Some may consider this an aggressive definition of our role. I think that if we affirm this definition, to ourselves and to our colleagues, and use our resources to cultivate it, we and the companies we work for can only gain.

The author traded his career in computer programming/systems analysis for one in technical communication, working for NDS Technologies Israel Ltd. (mhareven@ndsrael.com). He is also a published novelist.

“Truly I am discovering that all I learn by writing badly is how to write badly.”

—Philip Sidney

PCS Over the Years

Just a few of the people and events of influence over the years—tens of thousands of hours of volunteer effort.



Left to right: Charles Meyer, David Dobson, Eleanor McElwee, Charles DeVore, Alan Lytel. Circa 1964; occasion unknown.



Standing, left to right: Laurence G. Cumming,* unknown in white robe, Donald G. Fink, George Bailey; seated, left to right: Walter R. G. Baker,* John D. Ryder, Alfred N. Goldsmith,* Ronald McFarlane. IRE executive committee meeting in June 1958 at Dr. Baker's home in Syracuse, New York. Asterisks indicate PCS founders. Courtesy of the IEEE History Center.



Walter R. G. Baker, a PCS founder; date unknown. Dr. Baker was president of the IRE in 1947 and received its Medal of Honor in 1952 and its Founders Award in 1958. Courtesy of the IEEE History Center.

Clockwise from left: George Martin, Deborah Kizer, Linda Kosmin Langford (hidden), George Hayhoe, unk, Stephanie Rosenbaum, Rudy Joenk, unk, Richie Robinson, Steve Robinson, Joan Nagle, Marlene Kehoe, Bill Kehoe, Nancy Corbin, Dave Kemp, Cheryl Reimold, Gavin Reimold, Peter Reimold, Betty Martin. AdCom dinner at Anthony's Fish Grotto, San Diego, California, 2 June 1995.



Early meeting of the founders and supporters of IRE PGEWS (which ultimately became IEEE PCS), probably at their First National Symposium, New York, New York, 21–22 October 1957. Seated, left to right: Harold Lisk, Ronald Murray, Patrick Leahy, Daniel McNamara,* Herbert Michaelson, Thomas Farrell, Jr.; standing: Gerry Curtis, Edward Grazda,* Roger Stern,* Tom Patterson,* Chet Sall,* Joe Chapline,* Eleanor McElwee,* Charles Meyer,* Jack Kinn,* Jerry Rosen. Asterisks indicate PCS founders. Reprinted from the *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech*, vol. EWS-1, no. 1, March 1958, p. 1.



Left to right: Harold Lisk, treasurer; Dick Johnson; Eleanor McElwee; Jim Lufkin, vice chairman; Jack Donal, secretary; Wes Fields, *Newsletter* editor; Charles Meyer; Herb Michaelson; Bill Ternent; Ed Grazda, chairman. EWS AdCom workshop at Motel on the Mountain, Suffern, New York, 22 September 1967; *Newsletter*, December 1967.



Alfred N. Goldsmith, a PCS founder and long-time advisor; probably 1928. Dr. Goldsmith was president of the IRE in 1928 and received its Medal of Honor in 1941 and its Founders Award in 1954. He founded the *Proceedings of the IRE* in 1912 and was its editor for 41 years. He also received the first IEEE Haraden Pratt Award in 1972. In 1975 PCS created its Goldsmith award in his honor. Courtesy of the IEEE History Center.



IRE certificate of appreciation for Alfred N. Goldsmith's service as editor of the *Proceedings of the IRE*, and as president, secretary, and director of the IRE. On the society's 50th anniversary, 28 March 1962. Courtesy of the IEEE History Center



Herbert B. Michaelson in 1958. Herb was the first PCS treasurer (1957–1960); second *Transactions* editor (1960–1962); and a member of the AdCom 1958–1967, 1969–1971, and 1988–1989.



Rudy Joenk relaxing on the overnight train from Moscow to St. Petersburg, October 1991. Compartment mate Ron Blicq was the photographer.

Though authorized in 1975, the first Best *Transactions* Paper Award was given for a paper published in 1981. At the award presentation, left to right: Lois Thuss (PCS president 1986–1987), Janan Al-Awar (author), Alphonse Chapanis (author), and Daniel Rosich (PCS president 1982–1985). *Newsletter*, January 1983.



Sumerian tablet (ca 1700 B.C.) from Nippur, excavated in 1950. This tablet was called the "world's first technical report." It comprised 35 lines and was one of nine (total 109 lines) containing a farmer's instructions to his son about agriculture. It was used by editor Herb Michaelson on the cover of our *IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech* in April 1960. This current photograph was obtained through the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philadelphia, and is used with permission.



Left to right: Bert Pearlman; Jack Friedman, secretary; Tom Patterson, vice chairman; Rudy Joenk, *Transactions* editor; John Phillips (treasurer). PCS AdCom meeting at IEEE New York City headquarters; 11 November 1977. Jim Lufkin took the photo. *Newsletter*, January 1978.



Rogues' Gallery (two decades of *Newsletter* editors): Emily Schlesinger, 1976–1982; David McKown, 1982; Rudy Joenk, 1983–1984; Deborah Kizer, 1985–1991; Bruce Brocka, 1991–1993; David Nadziejka, 1993–1995. Photos are contemporaneous with editorship.



Left to right: John Phillips, Della Whitaker, Ron Blicq, and Carol Adams at our Practicum in Communication, Richmond, Virginia, 16–18 March 1978.



Professor Jay Gould of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and Dr. Eugene Garfield of the Institute for Scientific Information at our Psychology of Communication conference in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 14–15 February 1972. *Transactions* editor Irv Seideman took the photos. *Newsletter*, April 1972.



Emily Schlesinger and John Phillips, probably at our first (New York, New York, May 1973) or second (Cherry Hill, New Jersey, April 1975) conference on scientific journals.



Participants in PCC82 in Wakefield, Massachusetts: left to right: John Moffett, Lois Thuss, Bill Kehoe, and Sam DeAmicis. From *APL News*, November 1982.



This colorful little jazz man was the logo of IPCC 99 in where else? New Orleans, Louisiana. The next year the International Technical Art Competition of the Society for Technical Communication gave its Distinguished Technical Communication [first place] Award to our IPCC 99 promotional materials.

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This ad and two others provided by membership chair Richie Robinson made their appearance in 1980.

PCS member S. S. Narayanan receiving a Super Recruiter award for his efforts in India and the surrounding region from Wallace Read, IEEE president, early 1996.



IPCC 93 at Hotel Atop the Bellevue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in September. Left to right: Rudy Joenk, Emily Schlesinger, Andrew Malcolm, Richie Robinson, Ron Blicq.



Jim Lufkin receiving his IEEE Third Millennium Medal from PCS president George Hayhoe at the AdCom meeting 5 May 2000 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Jim was president in 1968 and 1975 and received the society's Goldsmith Award in 1975. He chaired three conferences on scientific journals in 1973, 1975, and 1977. A distinctive contribution to our field was Jim's authorship of several one-act plays dealing with problems of communicating in engineering. See "The Plays of Jim Lufkin" in the November/December 1997 *Newsletter*.



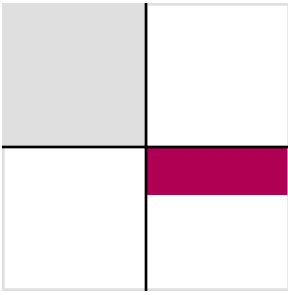
AdCom meeting at Washington, D.C., IEEE office, 20 January 1995; seated from left: Michael Goodman, David Kemp, Nancy Corbin, Mark Haselkorn, Roger Grice, Deborah Kizer, Janet Rochester, Cheryl Reimold, Laurel Grove, George Hayhoe, Joan Nagle; standing: Richie Robinson, David Dobson, Rudy Joenk, Herb Michaelson. Bill Kehoe also attended and likely was the photographer.



AdCom meeting at Hotel Atop the Bellevue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1 May 1992 (site of IPCC 93). Banner was prepared for a meeting in Moscow later in May. Left to right: Janet Rochester, Dan Plung, Barbara Strack, Richie Robinson, Herb Michaelson, Joan Nagle, Debby Kizer, Bill Kehoe, Michelle Corbin, Ron Blicq, George Martin, Dave McKown, Joe Chew, Nancy Corbin, Mark Haselkorn, Michael Goodman, Ed Podell. Rudy Joenk was the photographer.



Ken Rainey won free registration for IPCC 2005 in a drawing during IPCC 2004. Marj Davis, chair of the Limerick, Ireland, conference made the presentation.



Good Writing and Speech—Their Importance to the Engineer

By Alfred N. Goldsmith

The task of the engineer is multiple in nature. He must be a capable scientist. He must have a sense of practical values. He must recognize and apply effective technical methods. He must have a vast store of genuine and detailed information dealing with his specialized field of engineering. He must be a competent, thoughtful, and speedy worker. He must recognize good ideas when he encounters them. And he must apply them in open-minded fashion. He must have a reasonable amount of managerial skill. And it is desirable that his personality traits shall be attractive.

After considering this formidable catalog of engineering virtues, the engineering candidate might well be dismayed. To add to his possible distress, it may also be emphasized that even if he has all of the preceding characteristics, he may fail dismally through lack of an additional pair of qualifications less frequently considered. He must be articulate. And he must be literate.

Clarity of Expression

Even a highly qualified engineer in the general professional sense labors under a terrific handicap if he cannot express his thoughts clearly in words, either through speech or in writing. These are prime and necessary characteristics of the successful engineer.

And this is where the IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech steps into the picture. Its function is to explore the modes of

communication, verbal and textual, between an engineer and his associates, an engineer and his fellow members of engineering societies; between the engineer and his industrial supervisors, managers, and company executives; between the consulting engineer and the representatives of his clients; and between the engineer himself and society broadly.

The first year's experience of the IRE PGEWS has been enlightening and encouraging. It has won respect from the membership of the Institute and has secured its membership in many instances from those who are already members of other specialized technical professional groups. Its growth has been healthy and better than average. Its *Transactions* has been instructive and stimulating. But its work has so far only scratched the surface of its major tasks and oppor-

tunities which lie ahead. As the engineer increasingly recognizes the importance to him of skill in utilizing the spoken or written word, the IRE PGEWS will correspondingly grow, expand its activities into many new and as yet unexplored fields, and be accorded universally the acclaim to which it will then be entitled. No more worthy task could be selected for any professional group. And the Institute may confidently expect this Group to fulfill its manifest and necessary destiny.

Dr. Goldsmith was the founder of PCS for whom our primary award was created and named in 1975, the year after his death. [See "History of the PCS Goldsmith Award" by Joan Nagle, Newsletter, May/June 1997.] Reprinted from the IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech, vol. EWS-1, no. 2, August 1958, p. 9.

Thoughts of Guildford

As chairman of the 1990 PCS conference in Guildford (near London), I was pleased to preside over this first opportunity for PCS members on one side of the Atlantic to interact with PCS members on the other side, primarily those in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland section of the IEEE. The end of the conference brought to both sides a greater understanding of each other's procedures, problems, solutions, and roles in the communication process.

On a light note, in the months leading up to the conference I would often get phone calls from stateside PCS members asking, "What's the weather going to be?" Invariably I would reply, "England is the land of the Macintosh and the broly, so be prepared for rain." As it turned out, however, that was the driest season in living memory, not a drop of rain fell during the conference, and I subsequently retired permanently from being an amateur weather forecaster.

—John B. Moffett, Potomac, Maryland, 15 July 2004

The Challenging Field of Engineering Writing and Speech

By John R. Pierce

I was pleased and honored to be asked to deliver a keynote address at the first meeting of the IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech, and only business of the most urgent kind could have called me away. I have, however, tried to put what I wanted to say in black and white, and I hope that the spirit of my remarks will reach you even if my voice is missing.

I think that few things are more important to the engineer than the ability to write and speak clearly. It is largely through what a man says or through what he puts down on paper that we can judge his thoughts and his contributions. Sometimes things which are really good and important can be obscured through being badly expressed. It is very hard to tell sloppy thinking from sloppy writing, and at times the two may be almost the same thing. Writing or speaking clearly is not a matter of decorating one's ideas with nonessential frills.

Yet, however important effective writing and speaking may be, they are certainly neglected in the usual college training. I have met many people who seem almost unable to give an account of the important things that they have done. Sometimes, when they are able to describe their work in words after some fashion or other, they can do so only through an inordinate expenditure of time and labor. This makes them unwilling to write or to speak. If

their work is outstanding enough or if their bosses are understanding enough, this may not hurt them, but there is always the possibility that their contribution may be unrecognized because no one will take the trouble to find out what they have accomplished.

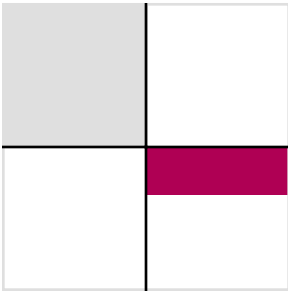
Experience shows then that many people cannot put their ideas into intelligible words or that the effort of doing so is so great that they simply don't. Yet writing and speaking can go a great deal beyond mere intelligibility. There is a vast difference between things that one can read and things that can be read painlessly, or even with pleasure. In this connection we are apt to believe that a great deal of the difficult and unattractive traits of the engineering papers and presentations come about through bad standards set by technical journals and meetings. I remember Simon Ramo's telling the story of his unsuccessful efforts to get a joke into *Fields and Waves in Modern Radio*. The censorious supervisors of the great corporation for which he at that time worked at first insisted on taking out the joke entirely but, after due protest, they left half of it in. Whether this had any point or not I do not know, but sometimes I feel that I would like to see even half a joke in the *Proceedings of the IRE*.

Undoubtedly, dull, stuffy, and yawn-producing writing is the rule in technical literature, but I think that this is so largely because those who write

for technical journals have nothing better to offer and no legitimate grounds for protest. If engineers are repelled or bored by what they find it necessary to read, they have only themselves to blame. They should do something about it.

Some engineers and scientists do. I admire the fluency with which Dr. Isaac Asimov of Boston University expresses his ideas. Besides books on biochemistry, he has written more science fiction novels and short stories than most full-time writers. Certainly this has enabled him to write with an ease that few today who have anything to say attain. Such easy writing need not be empty, and it is so ordinarily only because the people who indulge in it have no technical training.

I myself find that I have acquired something of a reputation as a science fiction writer, largely among those who know nothing about science fiction. Actually, I have had published only seven stories and perhaps a couple of dozen popular articles in one place or another. This output represents an interest in writing which I once felt to be somewhat frustrated. In the last few years I have awakened to the fact that it is only through writing that one learns to write, and my practice has given me a certain facility with words which I have been able to put to good use in writing and speaking about professional matters.



It has come to seem to me that being able to write is just like being able to walk or to swim or to ride a bicycle. Walking is a problem to a baby and learning to swim or to ride a bicycle can be tasks involving alarm and confusion even for an adult. Granted practice and skill, however, these accomplishments become automatic, so that we can think and admire the view as we are traveling along. It is, I think, the same way with writing. With enough practice we can learn to concentrate on what we want to say, and the words will take care of themselves. Without this practice we may lose sight of what we wish to express in trying to get the words down on paper.

I don't want to give the impression that I am the only person who has recognized the importance of good technical writing. In recent years a lot of attention has been given to writing and speech. I am sure that the various universities and colleges are fully conscious of this need. Some of them have courses in technical writing, and most of them have a program in the humanities which involves a certain amount of writing. I merely question, from my observation of professional men, the effectiveness that such programs have had in the past. Perhaps this all goes back to a lack of effective teaching in grammar schools and high schools, but this is a confused problem about which I could offer little that is constructive.

The need for good writing has been brought home to people in connection

with the preparation of both popular accounts of engineering and scientific advances and of the clear and readable technical manuals that are required in increasing numbers, especially concerning military equipment. There is a considerable group of professional writers in each of these fields, made up of men who must know a good deal about writing and quite a lot about engineering and science. They have their own societies through which they exchange views and endeavor to advance their arts. Some members of the IRE belong to one or the other of these societies.

Up to the present, however, the IRE as such has not shown an organized and effective interest in the problems of writing and speech. Now, a number of members have chosen to found the Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech, and I am trying to find appropriate words to express my thoughts concerning this new development in a field which, as you can see, I have always regarded as highly important.

Certainly, the Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech is representative of as important a field as there is in modern engineering and, indeed, in modern life. It is a field that is important not only in radio engineering but in all science and technology and, indeed, the need for clear writing and clear speaking transcends the bounds of technology and is an obligation upon all of those who have something to say. This wide importance in scope should be

a challenge to the Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech, but it is one that should not be taken lightly. The problems of this new group will not be as simple as those of a group concerned with a clearly limited technical field which extends beyond the range of radio engineering only in that all interested in the field of the group must belong to it. I am sure that this Professional Group will exert every effort to meet this challenging and difficult situation, and I look forward with the utmost interest for time to reveal the nature of its progress and contributions.

J. R. Pierce was a long-time engineer at both Bell Laboratories and the California Institute of Technology and is widely regarded as the inventor of the communications satellite. He was made an IRE Fellow in 1948 and was editor of the Proceedings of the IRE, 1954–1955. This paper was presented in absentia at the First National Symposium of the IRE PGEWS, New York, New York, 21-22 October 1957. Excerpted from the IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech, vol. EWS-1, no. 1, March 1958, pp. 12-13. Text was prepared for the original publication by Andrew Malcolm.

I have always wished that my computer would be as easy to use as my telephone. My wish has come true. I no longer know how to use my telephone.”

—Bjarne Stroustrup

A Review of the IRE PGEWS

By T. T. Patterson

I have been asked many times, “What is PGEWS?” Now that we are well into our third year, it is time to review our original charter and our aims. Our membership has grown to over 1300. This figure is not startling, but it does indicate that there is considerable interest in writing and speaking. We have held four symposia, with widely varying comments.

The purpose of PGEWS is clear: To increase the effectiveness of technical writing and speaking by engineers in the electronics industry. No one disputes this, but some disagree with our methods of implementation. I feel there are two ways in which we can help the electronics engineer. First, we can help the engineering writers who in turn work with the design engineers; second, we can help the design engineers directly.

More than half the members of PGEWS are engineers, yet less than half of those attending our symposia are engineers. Therefore I submit that the way to reach the design engineers directly is through our *Transactions*. On the other hand, through our symposia we can reach the publications engineers who in turn can help the engineers at the local level.

I have received several suggestions that PGEWS should feature the theory of communication. This, of course, is a noble ideal and perhaps should be investigated. The theory of communication is under intensive

study by members of other professional groups of the IRE and involves kinds of language and media of transmission. The transplanting of ideas from one mind to another is under investigation in the field of psychology. PGEWS is primarily concerned with communicating technical information in the English language for decision-making. We have found that the English language is poorly taught and poorly used. We are trying to correct this in an interim manner by placing before our membership examples of good and bad writing and by pointing out self-taught rules for recognizing the difference. Ultimately, this should be a function of the Professional Group on Education. It amazes me that business and engineering are carried on as successfully as they are, based on written and oral English-language presentations that are full of ambiguities and misleading statements.

For our purposes in PGEWS, let us assume that those who are writing have a working knowledge of the English language. Then we can help the author in setting his ideas down on paper in a logical manner to achieve his intended purpose. His purpose may be for recognition in the field, for additional funds to carry on the work, or for the production department to make his plan into hardware. Whatever the author’s purpose, his meaning should be clear.

For verbal presentations, again let us assume that the person has sufficient

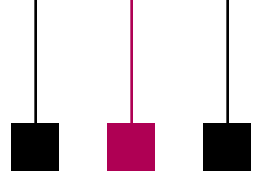
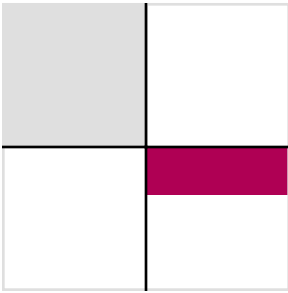
knowledge of spoken English. He may then be helped in the use of visual aids and in platform techniques so that his presentation will achieve its intended purpose effectively.

In conclusion, I suggest that this *Transactions* become the primary medium for helping our engineering members directly in improving the accurate transmission of their ideas. The symposia, on the other hand, should be aimed at exchanging ideas with others in the engineering publications field. We should encourage local meetings at the section level. We should further establish liaison with the Professional Group on Education and with the Professional Group on Engineering Management to study our common problems.

Tom Patterson [Theodore T. Patterson, Jr.] was a founder of PCS and president in 1959 and 1978. Reprinted from the IRE Transactions on Engineering Writing and Speech, vol. EWS-2, December 1959.

Dash Dash Dash

Contrary to my view that the em dash is overused, at least in *Newsletter* submittals, Bryan A. Garner, in his *A Dictionary of Modern American Usage* (Oxford, 1998), thinks “[t]he em dash is perhaps the most under-used punctuation mark in American writing” (p. 539).



International Cooperation

By Henrich S. Lantsberg

One of the main purposes of the Professional Communication Section of the All-Union (now Russian) A. S. Popov Scientific-Technical Society for Radioengineering, Electronics, and Communications founded in 1967—the first section on professional communication within the scientific-technical societies of the country—was the establishment and development of cooperation with scientists, engineers, and institutions of foreign countries in the field of informatics, computers, and professional communication.

The first efforts to establish cooperation with the IEEE go far back to 1956 when for the first time I met an IEEE delegation in Moscow during the Popov Society annual meeting. The impetus for establishing direct contact with PCS came in New York in April 1990 during my visit to the United States for participation in the IEEE SuperCom conference in Atlanta, Georgia. The meeting with then PCS president Dr. Rudy Joenk and his colleagues Richard Robinson, Herb Michaelson, and Michael Goodman took place and the idea for cooperation between the IEEE PCS and the Popov Society PCS was generated. I consider this event as a milestone in our further relations and their successful development up to the present time.

Great efforts for our mutual and beneficial cooperation were further developed during the visit of IEEE PCS AdCom members to Moscow and Tallinn in September 1990 after attending the conference, Information

Centers and Technical Libraries (in Estonia), as well as during the international colloquium, New Information Technology (October 1991, Moscow), with a delegation of 10 PCS members from Canada, England, and the United States participating. This event was organized by the Russian Popov Society PCS and the International Center for Scientific and Technical Information (ICSTI) and co-convened by the IEEE PCS.

The colloquium took place notwithstanding both the war in the Persian Gulf and the August 1991 coup in Moscow, thus showing a significant example of the willingness and readiness of foreign and Russian professional communicators to get together and share and discuss information on actual problems in technical communication, hypertext technologies,



Dr. Henrich Lantsberg signing an extension of the IEEE PCS–Popov Society PCS agreement in August 2001 in Suzdal, Russia. Newsletter, November/December 2001; photo by Karen Baranich.



PCS delegation to the Moscow New Information Technology colloquium in October 1991: Back, left to right: George Martin, Patricia Carlson, Paul Trummel, Rudy Joenk, Nancy Corbin, Alexander “Sasha” Khatkin (interpreter); front: Janet Rochester, Lisa Moretto, Kimberly Manthy, Ron Blicq. Newsletter, January 1992; photo by Haydon Rochester.

information systems, databases, and information processing. In fact, the colloquium had shown that cooperation is a very good instrument for bridging the world.

In October 1991 the delegation of the Popov Society PCS (Dr. Yuri Gornostaev of ICSTI and I) participated in IPCC 91 in Orlando, Florida, where I presented a keynote paper and both of us spoke at some of the sessions and workshops. During our journey to the U.S. we visited a number of places of high professional interest, such as AT&T, Bellcore, Brookhaven National Laboratory, IBM, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and the IEEE Service Center in Piscataway and IEEE Hq in New York City.

During 1990-1992 there were held in Moscow and Tallinn, Estonia, joint

workshops on technical writing and speech led by Nancy Corbin and Ron Blicq. Those workshops were well attended. The books *Technically Speaking* by Corbin and *A Report Writer's Handbook* by Blicq were translated from English and published in Russian especially for the workshops.

In May 1992 an IEEE PCS delegation with its past-president Dr. Rudy Joenk attended the Russian Popov Society annual meeting. Dr. Joenk presented a paper on PCS organization and activities as well as on IBM information resources and multimedia technologies.

The Russian Popov Society Board elected Dr. Joenk an Honorary Member of the Society in recognition of his distinguished contribution to establishing and furthering interna-

tional cooperation between the IEEE PCS and the Popov Society PCS. The diploma was presented to him at the annual meeting. Dr. Joenk was also awarded the diploma of Honorary Member of the Association of Information Workers of Russia. It should be noted that Dr. Joenk was the first person from the West to be elected to this high grade of membership of both organizations.

In June 1992 Prof. Michael Goodman (Fairleigh Dickinson University) attended the second Russian forum, Electronic Communication Technologies of the '90s: The Future of Electronic Communication, where he presented a paper.

An official agreement of cooperation between the PCS of the Popov Society and the PCS of the IEEE was worked out and signed in English and Russian versions in December 1993 in New York by then president Richard M. Robinson for IEEE PCS and in February 1994 in Moscow by myself for the Popov Society PCS.

The author is chair of the Popov Society professional communication section, vice chair of the IEEE Russia Section, chair of the PCS Russia chapter, IEEE Popov Society coordinator, and a Senior Member of the IEEE. Since 1955 he has been head of the science information department of the Institute of Radioengineering and Electronics of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Excerpted from Dr. Lantsberg's introduction to a group of Russian-authored papers in the Transactions, vol. 37, no. 2, June 1994.

Centennial Retrospective

There was a meeting of the IRE Executive Committee in 1957 or 1958 at IRE Headquarters, 1 East Seventy-ninth Street, New York City, at which a professional group on engineering writing and speech was proposed. Questions were raised as to the propriety of such a group without hardware interests in an organization of engineers. But W. R. G. Baker, czar of the IRE group system of that day, was always willing to allow experiment—he would give those who proposed new groups a license to fail. But the Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech, which was founded as group number 26, did not fail. Later the name was changed to the current name, the IEEE Professional Communication Society. Board members hoped that an organization devoted to communicating engineering information would, among other accomplishments, improve the writing and presenting of technical papers at conferences.

Excerpt from John D. Ryder's keynote address at PCC84, Atlantic City, New Jersey; IEEE Trans. PC, vol. 8, no. 2, June 1985. Dr. Ryder was president of the IRE in 1955 and an IRE and IEEE Fellow.

As We Were 2

By Emily Schlesinger

At my early AdCom meetings nobody wanted to be secretary, but as all were writers, nobody had a good excuse to decline. You could see this thought process going through people's minds time after time when the officer line-up changed. After my early stint as secretary I could be amused by this each year.

When I first became president, PCS was at a low point. Men had family-supporting jobs and little time for the IEEE; my job was not demanding, I had an understanding boss... I was a fool rushing in. I kept nagging the *Newsletter* editor for more articles, more interesting and varied, etc. So he promptly resigned: "Get someone else to carry out your policy." I didn't even know I had a policy; I just wanted a *Newsletter* that members might enjoy reading.

So I wrote it myself—what cheek! I didn't know how to go from type-writer to print... a mystery. But all that was done in New York City at IEEE headquarters. It was fun (and confusion) to learn amid many mistakes made in NYC, though I met some great people there. After a few years, the Society for Technical Communication, a several-times-larger group, asked for 20 copies to show their newsletter editors what could be done. As a member also of STC I saw several of those newsletters and felt they improved by becoming less stodgy and serious.

I was the first lady president of an IEEE society. PCS was just a year

ahead of the next group to follow suit (Society of Writing Professors or some such title). While I was still active we had another lady president: Lois Moore (1986–1987). [*Later, Deborah Kizer (1994–1995) and Beth Weise Moeller (2002–2003) were president. Ed.]*

Jim Lufkin (president 1968 and 1975) was probably our greatest energizer, though Tom Patterson [*Theodore T. Patterson, Jr., president 1959 and 1978; Ed.]* held us together in a strong, quiet way, and big Bert Pearlman [*president 1979–1981; Ed.]* had enthusiasm and resources. (In Los Angeles he rented a big limo and transported 10–12 of us to dinner "uptown" in high style.)

The greatest accomplishment in my mind was Jim Lufkin's idea of having PCS sponsor, with several other publishing groups, the Association for Scientific Journals, with conferences in 1973, 1975, and 1977, the best attended of all our conferences. Each

was well reported in succeeding issues of our *Transactions*. Ultimately the group's interest diverged from those of PCS and in 1978 a spin-off society, the Society for Scholarly Publishing, was created. [*See "PCS and Scholarly Publishing" by E. K. Gannett in the May/June 1997 News-letter. Ed.]* Jim was my first mentor in tech writing and gave me a big push.

Written 21 May 2004. As We Were 1 is in the July/August 1997 issue of the Newsletter. Emily joined the IRE in 1958 and PCS in 1964. She was secretary of PCS 1970–1972, president 1976–1977, Newsletter editor 1976–1982, and a member of the AdCom 1970–1986; she recruited me to edit the Transactions in late 1976. Emily received the Alfred N. Goldsmith Award in 1978. In 1995, in her honor, the society created the Emily K. Schlesinger Award for outstanding service to the society. See the July/August 1997 issue for "History of the PCS Schlesinger Award" by Joan Nagle.

Thinking Positive

One explanation for why we're adept at creating reasons for non-action is that we practice so much. (We *do* get better with practice!) But what if we practiced how we *might* be able to do something? If we think more about answering that question, we'll have taken the first important step

toward getting that something done. Indeed, if we're destined to live the self-fulfilling prophecy, doesn't it make sense to prophesy something positive?

—Jeff Brand
Newsletter associate editor
January 1983

Recollection 2

By David B. Dobson

Auld Lang Syne (in the May/June *Newsletter*) jarred my EWS/PCS memory button; up flashed memories of the Where Is Technology Leading Communication? conference, recorded in *IEEE Trans. EWS* 12, 2, August 1969. Next, the Conference on the Future of Scientific and Technical Journals, *IEEE Trans. PC* 16, 3, September 1973, held at the New York City Hotel Commodore (for newbies, now the Grand Hyatt of Donald Trump fame). This conference pulled together a varied lot of individuals who were not members of PCS and had never heard of it until that meeting. Credit goes to Jim Lufkin for the idea.

Especially memorable were the luncheon addresses. One was by George Scherr, the creator and publisher (until the title was sold to Blackwell) of the *Journal of Irreproducible Results*. For those readers to whom this title is unfamiliar, this journal was exactly what the name implied: a grand spoof of scientific writing of all types. Try looking up some of the old issues—in a library with paper copies!—and enjoy. Scherr was followed by Philip Ableson, editor of *Science*, one of the grand old editors in place for seemingly centuries, who entertained us with some of the lusus he had had to “massage” into publishable form.

The most memorable (because of its being controversial) presentation was by Robert W. Bemer; he tried to stun attendees with his method of setting

mathematics at some ridiculously low cost and time. (Remember: This was at the beginning of computer usage for setting mathematics.) The questioning and discussions that ensued were worth the price of admission several times over.

At the 1975 IEEE Conference on Scientific Journals (*IEEE Trans. PC* 18, 3, September 1975), Jim Lufkin announced the formation of the Association for Scientific Journals, with no membership requirements and a constitution that forbade officers. Following the third in this series, the 1977 IEEE Conference on Scientific Journals (*IEEE Trans. PC* 20, 2, September 1977), since PCS had more-or-less decided that this area was “Not our thing,” the attendees formed the Society for Scholarly Publishing. [See “PCS and Scholarly Publishing” by E. K. Gannett, *Newsletter*, July/August 1997. Ed.] With the benefit of time it appears that this decision was an almost fatal mistake on the part of the PCS AdCom. SSP’s first meeting, Boston in 1977, featured Jim Lufkin speaking on “Observations of a Godfather,” based on the creation of the conference series by PCS.

Another memory button push: There were attempts by many to record Jim Lufkin’s numerous playlets and operettas for posterity; all failed for lack of follow-through. [However, see the list and descriptions of most in the *Newsletter*, November/December 1997. Ed.] Jim’s first playlet

crammed a ballroom at the New York Hilton to the walls with standees (1968). The subject? “How to Present a Technical Paper” [*also known as “The Slide Talk” Ed.*]. And this was at a major IEEE meeting—not a meeting of EWS/PCS.

Yet another push: Years back someone was collecting a lot of old EWS and early PCS material to form an archive. Does anyone know what happened to this? I donated most of my collection at that time. Knowing how the Piscataway library was decimated by “tossing all the old material out—no one needs it,” even though there was no other repository. Did ours recycle into the pulper at that time? [No. A PCS archive was established in 1989 at the library of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Madison, New Jersey, sponsored by Michael Goodman. It is still there though it’s short a few conference proceedings. Ed.]

Enough. I am very sorry to see the demise of our published-on-paper *Newsletter* for whatever reason. Historians will not find the electronic records usable, as formats and storage mediums continue to evolve and become obsolete. No one is planning an archive. For all you doubters: Next time you are in Washington, D.C., arrange to visit the National Archives annex and tour their basketball-court-size room crammed with one each of various electronic recording devices, some over 60 years old. They are essential as historians must read the records in their original form (storage

(continued on page 38)

Archive and More

By Ron Blicq

When Rudy Joenk asked, “Can you cast your mind back and describe some of the enigmatic events and people you met as a member of the Professional Communication Society,” he was throwing a curved projectile at me.

Until about 15 years ago I had all the *Newsletters*, *Transactions*, and conference proceedings dating back to my first involvement with what was then the IRE Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS). In 1989, working with Michael Goodman (we both were members of the PCS AdCom), we set up a PCS archive at the Fairleigh Dickinson University library in Madison, New Jersey (and it still exists), and all my publications, from 1958 onward, were lodged there. As I no longer have instant access to names and events, what follows are some random memories mostly about PCS conferences I attended.

- Attending my first, in Chicago in 1960, which was, I believe, the society’s fourth conference. I would like to think the program committee selected my proposal because they particularly liked my paper, but I heard later that when they discovered I was from Canada and would be the only person attending the conference from outside the U.S., they quickly inserted “International” into the conference title!
- Presenting a two-day technical writing course for engineers for PCS and IEEE Educational Activities in six U.S. cities on six consecutive weekends at six Sheraton hotels,

where the IEEE had arranged for exactly the same meals at every sitting at each hotel (1974).

- Tramping the famous red-carpeted staircase at the hotel in Richmond, Virginia, where Emily Schlesinger had organized a two-day symposium. This was the staircase up which Rhett Butler had carried Scarlett O’Hara in a critical moment in the 1939 film *Gone With the Wind* (1978).
- Eight of us sitting packed like sardines in a rental car in Los Angeles, singing lustily and giggling like a bunch of teenagers while Bert Pearlman, the PCS president, tried to find a restaurant he knew about (1979).
- Tramping the boardwalk at Atlantic City with Emily Schlesinger, trying to round up conference delegates (including the PCS president and vice president!) from the gambling halls so the afternoon speakers would have an audience (1984).
- Representing PCS in Russia and Estonia on four occasions over a 12-year span, three times with Rudy Joenk and Nancy Corbin, and seeing how Russia had evolved over a very difficult period (1990–2001).
- Swimming laps with Stephanie Rosenbaum in the heated outdoor pool at Banff, Alberta, Canada, with snow falling onto our heads and shoulders (1994). We both wondered why we felt so puffed and out of condition, not realizing that Banff is nearly a mile above sea level and the air is much rarer.

- Being PCS’s delegate to INTECOM, which gave me an opportunity to meet with technical communicators from around the world, learn about and experience the differences in culture, and recognize that there is some great work being done by technical communicators in other countries. *[Ron was president of INTECOM 1999–2004. Ed.]*
- Acting in Jim Lufkin’s humorous plays at various conferences over a 30-year period, and recognizing what a creative PCS-er he is.
- Recognizing over a 44-year span that PCS conferences, as well as being technically sound, also were great social events where once a year I reestablished friendships with a grand group of people.
- Receiving a letter from the IEEE in 1990 informing me that as a Senior Member with over 40 continuous years of membership I was entitled to free membership for the rest of my life. Retirement is great!

Written 20 June 2004. Ron Blicq joined the IRE and PGEWS in 1958, was a member of the PCS AdCom 1975–2001, chaired the education committee for several years, and was chair of IPCC 98 in Québec City, Canada. He received our Goldsmith Award in 1986 and our Schlesinger Award in 1997. In 2001, in his honor, the society created the Ronald S. Blicq Award for distinction in technical communication education. See the September/October 2001 issue for “Award for Technical Communication Education Created” by Muriel Zimmerman.

Gone Are the Days

By Jack Friedman

I still remember the names of people who once worked with me or for me in a fine central communication organization consisting of engineering writers (degreed engineers and B.S.- or M.S.-degree people) and technical writers. A few years after I retired in 1998 the company dissolved that group of about 20 people. The roots of the group went back to the 1950s, serving as a central unit in the company. I believe strongly that it was a quality asset as a standalone group with a manager and unit managers as originally established.

I joined the group as a unit manager in 1975. We supported company proposals, notably huge contracts for Navy cruisers and destroyers still in effect after 20 years. We edited, wrote, and guided publication of conference papers, especially for foreign-born authors, test and software documentation, internal management guidelines and presentations, and we ghost-wrote executive and military-officer columns and speeches. We were involved in any documents needed in business development (marketing), human resources (personnel), and manufacturing. We also supported large efforts in other divisions of the company.

In other words, the group was a flexible company asset that lost its collective voice after the final professional-communication-type manager retired. The responsible department sent a non-communicator-type manager to run the group and he soon dissolved it into individual engineers working in various technical depart-

ments. I bemoan the loss of such an organization and still would champion the idea of such an entity in a large enough company division involved in marketing, engineering, and manufacturing.

Central groups like that are probably mostly extinct these days with the advent of auto-edit and software writ-

ing aids. I saw ours as an efficient and effective way to get the best communication help to the most people in a diverse and dynamic environment. But that was then and this is now.

Written 30 July 2004. Jack Friedman was secretary of PCS in 1977 and a member of the AdCom 1974–1979.

Flocci...’s End

By Michael Brady

This *Newsletter* is not destined to be a permanent record for the centuries to come, so arguably few will lament abandoning paper in its publication. With mixed feelings I’ve been a regular contributor since Donna Wicks recruited me in 1996 I admit to being among those few.

I’m an aficionado of online for looking up information. Yet I feel that print cannot be beat for browsing or for bringing news in its true sense. I see a newsletter as something to read without an advance need to know its content. Just as the first newsletters read in the coffee houses of 17th and 18th century London brought unexpected news, I enjoy finding without seeking—as opposed to finding upon seeking.

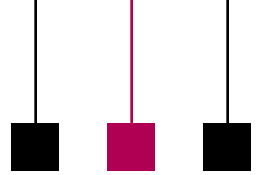


Michael Brady is author of the long-running column Floccinaucinihilipilification. This is his first (and last) picture in the Newsletter. We both wonder how many readers learned the meaning of flocci....

That penchant might come from having much in common with outgoing editor Rudy Joenk, from graduate degrees in hard science to avocational pursuits. Though we’ve never met face-to-face, we’ve enjoyed an excellent working relationship that I doubt would have evolved had the *Newsletter* been online only. So, with this swan song, I’ll bow out with Rudy.

The shift to an online-only newsletter may be successful and thereby

prove me to be outdated. In taking that risk, I note that in 1929, Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte (1898–1967) painted *The Treason of Images*, an oil-on-canvas picture of a pipe above a text line reading *Ceci n’est pas une pipe (This is not a pipe)*. Of course, it’s not a pipe; it’s a painting of a pipe...



The CommuGuide Story

By Rudy Joenk

This story is documented largely in the administrative committee (AdCom) meeting minutes. CommuGuides were an excellent PCS-product idea that petered out because of marketing woes, PCS's perennial problem. Here's what we said about them in our brochure:

...a series of practical, "how to" booklets for engineers, scientists, and technical communicators. Each CommuGuide addresses a single topic in the field of technical communication and provides short, focused guidelines for dealing with it effectively. ...Anyone who wants to communicate technical information effec-

tively can benefit from this extension of PCS's continuing communication assistance program.

AdCom meeting minutes 16 August 1985: "Lois Moore and Dan Plung proposed a series of 'How To...' pamphlets. These pamphlets would be approximately 30 pages each and

Abstracts of the CommuGuides

1. *How to Publish an Anthology*

D. L. Plung and L. K. Moore
1986, 20 pages

This first booklet in the CommuGuide series provides a pragmatic overview of the steps in preparing an anthology. It guides you to ask the questions that are important to the project. It contains suggestions for communicating with publishers in such areas as the initial proposal and the anthologist-publisher agreement. Progressing from development of the initial scope and proposal, through compiling source materials, to copyright information and publicizing the finished work, the authors summarize their successful experience in authoring anthologies for the IEEE Press. Their 14-step process is applicable to a variety of publication projects in addition to anthologies.



2. *How to Write an Invention Disclosure*

R. J. Joenk
1987, 44 pages

CommuGuide 2 describes how to document the information needed both to evaluate an invention and to develop a patent application. It guides you through the steps necessary for applying for a patent, including details on how to keep a technical notebook, how to describe an invention, and how to write a clear and concise invention disclosure. The booklet outlines what is and is not patentable, and describes copyrights, trademarks, and trade secret status as alternatives to patenting. Differences among utility, design, and plant patents are discussed. Pertinent sections of Title 35, U.S. Code—Patents, are reprinted, and a glossary explains words and concepts every inventor should be familiar with.



3. *How to Effectively Deliver or Moderate a Technical Presentation*

D. F. Kizer, L. K. Mays, D. L. Plung
1989, 28 pages

CommuGuide 3 details how you can make a presentation more effective through sound planning and the use of visual aids. The process starts with identifying your key message and understanding your audience and purpose. Sample forms are provided to help you analyze your audience, your message, and your presentation style. There are suggestions for selecting visual aids, establishing credibility with an audience, maintaining a consistent, logical flow to your presentation, and handling question-and-answer sessions. The second part of the booklet explores what is expected of a moderator before, during, and after a technical presentation. The moderator's responsibilities are discussed in detail, and sample lists of actions and their timing are included.

retail for \$3.00. It was moved and duly seconded that L. Moore and D. Plung establish a task force and propose specific publications/topics for AdCom discussion at the 12/06/85 meeting.” [No action at that meeting.] Moore and Plung were appointed editors of the series.

20 June 1986: “[Deborah] Flaherty indicated that she and Christopher Parker had reviewed booklet 1 of the CommuGuide Series.” “Two book-

lets, ‘How to Publish an Anthology’ and ‘How to Write an Invention Disclosure’ are in process.”

5 December 1986: CGs would be available at the Winnipeg (1987) conference and CG 1 would be given to all conference registrants (27 February 1987).

19 June 1987: An IEEE proposal for CommuGuide marketing was approved: USD 5200 over two years.

[A lot of money 17 years ago!]

10 February 1989: CommuGuide 3 on oral presentations by Deborah [Flaherty] Kizer was underway as was CG 4 on proposal planning by Dan Safford.

14 July 1989: CommuGuides 3 and 4 were being typeset and would be distributed by the IEEE.

20 October 1989: The AdCom decided that the Editorial Advisory

Abstracts of the CommuGuides (continued)

4. How to Write a Proposal

Dan Safford
1989, 30 pages

CommuGuide 4 discusses approaches to writing both solicited and unsolicited proposals and shows you how to analyze the needs of your customers. It explores how to write program objectives and procedures, how to identify resources needed, and how to organize the writing project. It shows how aids such as Gantt and PERT charts can help identify the strengths and weaknesses of your proposals. You can highlight the proposal strengths using the methods outlined in this booklet, and you can follow its procedures for offsetting weaknesses. Sample outlines and checklists are included along with tips for completing your project in limited time. This is a useful tool for writing grant proposals as well.

5. How to Produce a Technical Video Program

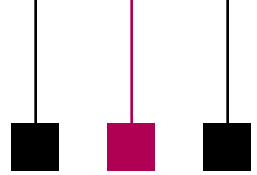
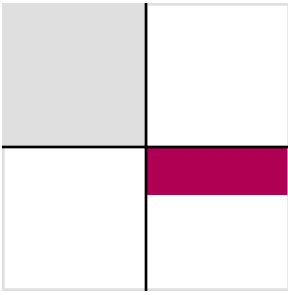
J. A. Longo
1992, 40 pages

CommuGuide 5 describes the skills needed to produce a successful video program. It helps you determine whether video is the appropriate medium for your message; it emphasizes and details the steps for writing the script, including both narration and visual effects; and it shows how different visual approaches affect the cost. The booklet describes video production—formats, camera sessions, and working with camera crews, and it covers the steps after you have your video footage, from selecting scenes to adding sound effects, describing what must be done to complete the video.

6. How to Prepare Contract Performance Documents

D. E. Milley
July 1993, 50 pages

CommuGuide 6 discusses contractually required reports used to describe performance on engineering efforts to a customer. It explains differences in intent, format, content, and limitations among the common report types: activity, status, and progress. Strategies for publishing successful reports are provided, and pitfalls to be avoided are spelled out. Award-fee progress reports receive special emphasis because of their direct link to profit. Editorial concerns specific to this high-visibility report are examined in detail.



Committee would henceforth (a) approve CommuGuide topics/content and (b) “perform a final review before they are published. (This review does not take the place of technical refereeing; it is to confirm, for the AdCom, the overall quality of the PCS product.)”

9 February 1990: The proposed topic of CG 5 (conference management) was rejected as being duplicative of extant literature. Lack of IEEE marketing activity and high charges are noted in a financial report.

11 May 1990: Janet Rochester was appointed CommuGuide editor because Lois Moore resigned from the AdCom and Dan Plung would be taking over IPCC 91.

12 October 1990: The American Association of Engineering Societies (AAES) expressed interest in co-marketing the CommuGuides. The author and editor honoraria schedule was revised. Three new topics were proposed: contract performance documents, producing technical videos, and contract delivery procedures; only the first two topics were approved (there was already adequate literature on the third).

18 May 1991: IPCC 91 plans to give CG 3 to registrants.

1 November 1991: CG 4 was ready for reviewing. PCS received USD 150 from AAES but there really is no marketing activity, and the early CGs are aging.

6 December 1991: CGs 5 and 6 are likely to be published in March 1992. The AAES wants a larger commission for selling them. CG 2 (the best seller) will be reprinted when 5 and 6 are printed.

28 February 1992: The CGs were not selling well, so we’ll try to develop our own marketing plan and advertise in the *Newsletter*; initially \$5 each and four for \$15. We will reassess the situation in December before proceeding with CGs 7 and 8. [*For simplicity I did not replace all the dollar signs in this article with USD.*]

1 May 1992: The cost of the first four CGs has averaged USD 2600 each. We agreed to print CGs 5 and 6.

1 October 1992: We will try distributing the CGs ourselves. New prices: \$7.50 each singly; \$6.50 for four or more; \$5.50 for 10 or more; \$5 for 25 or more. All prices include postage.

11 December 1992: CGs will be sold at conferences rather than given to registrants. CG 5 is finished.

2 April 1993: Michael Goodman (Fairleigh Dickinson University) will be the distributor for CG sales. Dave McKown will print a sales brochure. Work continues on CG 6.

8 October 1993: President Richie Robinson reported a feeler from the IEEE Education Board about becoming involved with the CommuGuides. Sales are better since we are controlling publicity—about USD 500 since the CGs were moved to FDU in May. CG 6 is still being worked on.

3 December 1993: Approximately half of CG sales are outside North America. A *Newsletter* ad always brings a spurt of orders from overseas.

4 March 1994: A desire to publish two CGs per year was recorded.

20 January 1995: No recent or current activity; count stands at six CGs completed.

2 June 1995: A slow but steady trickle of orders is being filled. There are no viable prospects for CGs 7, 8, etc.; the project is probably nearing an end.

30 September 1995: Consensus that CommuGuides be dropped and other educational publication avenues be investigated.

Recollection 2

(continued from page 33)

of originals has always been mandated by law). The sight of all that gear is very humbling; it reminds me of the very first telegraph message: “What hath God wrought?”

Written 10 June 2004. Recollection 1 is in the September/October 1997 issue. In addition to being a long-time member of and adviser to PCS, Dave was a member of the AdCom 1973–1988 and has just completed 40 years as administrative editor of the Aerospace and Electronic Systems Society publications.

Other Events of 1957

Organizational meetings of the Institute of Radio Engineers (IRE) Professional Group on Engineering Writing and Speech (PGEWS), which was the forerunner of the IEEE

Professional Communication Society, were held in the spring of 1957. Here are some other events that occurred that year.

- 2000-transistor computer was released by IBM, saying goodbye to vacuum tubes
- *Bridge on the River Kwai* was chosen best picture of the year
- *Cat in the Hat* was written by Theodore Geisel (Dr. Seuss)
- Digital Equipment Corporation was founded
- Fairchild Semiconductor Corporation was founded
- “In God We Trust” first appeared on U.S. paper money
- Nobel Prize for Literature was awarded to Albert Camus for *The Fall*
- Theory of superconductivity was proposed by John Bardeen, Leon Cooper, and J. Robert Schrieffer
- *The Wapshot Chronicle* was written by John Cheever
- World Series Baseball: Milwaukee Braves 4, New York Yankees 3



1957 Ford Thunderbird convertible

- 14 January: Actor Humphrey Bogart died; his last words are reputed to be “I should never have switched from Scotch to martinis”
- 16 January: Conductor Arturo Toscanini died
- 17 January: Cuban Revolution began
- 8 February: Mathematician John von Neuman died
- 12 March: Polar explorer Richard E. Byrd died
- 22 March: San Francisco area hit by largest earthquake since 1906
- 25 March: Six European countries signed the Treaty of Rome establishing the European Economic Community
- 23 August: Rudy Joenk received an M.S. degree from the University of Washington
- 4 October: Russia launched Sputnik, first earth-orbiting satellite
- 3 November: Russia launched Sputnik 2 with dog Laika
- 24 November: Artist Diego Rivera died
- 9 December: The U.S. Department of Justice created a Civil Rights Division
- 18 December: Shippingport, Pennsylvania, Atomic Power Station went on line (first in U.S.)
- 25 December: Queen Elizabeth’s Christmas message was televised for the first time

“Shakespeare’s” Last Sonnet

Oh, tell me not that your computers think,
And then to weighty questions answers find,
For if they then their thoughts to actions link,
Dead matter will usurp the place of mind,
And man’s dominion over all the Earth,
Which he has strived for ever since the Flood,
As was by God ordained in Adam’s birth,
Will soon sink back into the primal mud,
And mortal wisdom’s guiding light will fall,
As driverless machines in chaos rage,
And wild, untrammelled chance will rule all,
A wretched end to this our Golden Age.
Dear friends, whatever these machines demand,
Pray God that you, not they, do keep command.

From Shakespeare Gets a Computer by James M. Lufkin, 1990. See “The Plays of Jim Lufkin” in the November/December 1997 Newsletter, where this sonnet is also to be found.

Knitpicking Vulture

By Jim Boren

Behavior Pattern Communicative scavengers that feed on the work of more productive birds, the Knitpicking Vultures pick over proposals, reports, policy statements, and other wordalities for the purpose of preserving the status quo. They rarely flutter and tend to roost with glowering joy as they take a bare bones approach to retrogressive communication. Knitpicking Vultures replace clarity with their own flotational bloatum.

Habitat Government agencies, corporate headquarters, banks, universities, and research centers. Aging members of the species still use the blue pencil, but up-to-date and swinging members of the species use word processors and computerized absquat-

ualities. Habitat includes cluttered desk areas and computer centers.

Profile and Plumage Haunchy stance for searching, hovering, and roosting over paper; plumage: pin feathers.

Song Boren Dirge of Creativity: You won't get lost if you stay in a rut (usually warbled with a gruntistic uuuulp and ohmmmm).

Dr. James H. Boren, originator of mumblepeg (The Voice of the Bureaucrat) and president of the International Association of Professional Bureaucrats, created this Boren Bird especially for the October 1984 issue of the Newsletter. Several other Boren Birds were reprinted in earlier issues that year.

