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Muriel Zimmerman

PCS AWARDS FOR 1999

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

One of the important functions of the Professional Communication Society is to recognize outstanding achievements and contributions to our profession and to our society. PCS presents three awards each year: the **Alfred N. Goldsmith Award** for outstanding achievement in technical communication, the **Emily K. Schlesinger Award** for outstanding service to PCS, and the **Best Paper Award** for the outstanding paper published in the 1998 volume of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

This article highlights the 1999 award winners and invites award nominations for 2000.

Goldsmith Award 1999: Ulf-L Andersson

We are proud to recognize a distinguished international technical communicator



Ulf-L Andersson

with this year's Goldsmith Award. Ulf-L Andersson has contributed to our field through his publications, his vigorous involvement in professional societies, and his teaching.

Ulf-L Andersson has been a technical communicator for over 40 years. He has served as consultant to Swedish industries and research organizations, and he has taught technical communication for the Swedish Air Force. He is the author of two books and many articles on technical communication topics. His fine article on humanware

appeared in the *Newsletter* in this year's March/April issue. He is a vigorous advocate for user-centered hardware and software design and argues that technical writers can show technologists how to build products that do not require manuals.

Dr. Andersson was one of the founders of the Swedish Society of Technical Communications in 1964 and of INTECOM in 1969. It was he who had the vision that resulted in the Idea Market method of presentation at technical conferences, starting with Forum 75 in Sweden and continuing with each successive five-year Forum conference. He granted permission to PCS to use the Idea Market method at our 1998 conference in Québec City.

Ulf was unable to attend IPCC 99, to his regret and ours, so we made the award in absentia. Several PCS members will attend Forum 2000 in London next spring and they will arrange a special PCS ceremony and give him the award in person at that time.

Schlesinger Award 1999: Rudy Joenk

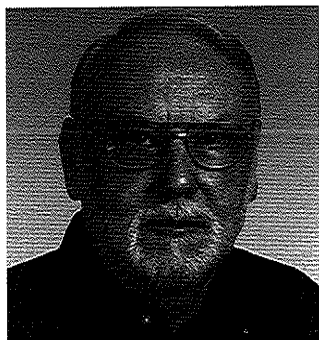
Dr. Rudy Joenk has served PCS long and faithfully, in a variety of important and visible positions. In 1977 he joined IEEE and PCS as a Senior Member to become editor of the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*. As editor for eight years he revived the publication, returning it from what was essentially a collection of reprints to an archival journal. In his last two years as editor (1983-84) Rudy also edited the *Newsletter*. He received the Goldsmith Award in 1980 for his work on the *Transactions*. He has been a member of the Administrative Committee (AdCom) since 1985.

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FROM THE EDITOR



RUDY JOENK

IPCC 99

This year we have extensive reporting and photography of IPCC 99 in New Orleans by George Hayhoe, Julia Land, Bernadette Longo, Luke Maki, Terrance Malkinson, Janet Rochester, and Tom van Loon; my thanks and an invitation to IPCC 2000 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, to them all. See the articles beginning with "Keynote Address" on page 20 and the collage of conference photos on pages 18 and 19.

Winners of the \$50 Amazon.com gift certificates for returning the conference evaluation form were Teresa Lau of Sun Microsystems (Palo Alto, California) and Susan Malmo of Meramec College (St. Louis, Missouri).

A few of those great conference T-shirts bearing the colorful jazz player logo are still available from Leann Kostek, l.kostek@ieee.org or 206 526-7040.

AdCom

See our secretary's report of the September 7 AdCom meeting on page 14. The next meeting is in Washington, DC, on January 21-22, 2000. Members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

The new AdCom members and their e-mail addresses will be listed in the January/February *Newsletter*.

E-mail Courtesy

I know this isn't my peeve only: Unnecessary information in forwarded e-mails, like previous e-mail addresses, Internet headers, the last message (often the one you sent), and previous messages. Only

occasionally is it important to maintain a string of messages. A few seconds with the *Delete* key will make easier reading for any recipient.

Potpourri

Did you notice the demise of two long-running summer programs for working technical communicators? The older program, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute's Technical Writers Institute, which was run by Jay Gould for more than 40 years until his death, was largely replaced by RPI's distance education program. Nearly as old, Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Communicating Technical Information, founded by Robert Rathbone and later run by James Paradis for a combined total of 30 years, succumbed to decreasing enrollment and rising costs.

A pair of sometimes misused words, similar but not usually interchangeable: *alternate*, *n.* someone who fills in or acts as a substitute, *adj.* serving as a backup, every other or the second of a series; and *alternative*, *n.* another possibility or a substitute for, *adj.* mutually exclusive uses or choices, nontraditional.

The opening sentence of a yet-to-come Great American Electronic Novel by John Boe: "Call Me E-mail."

Info for Authors

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

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple**; multiple fonts and sizes,

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IEEE PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION SOCIETY

OFFICERS

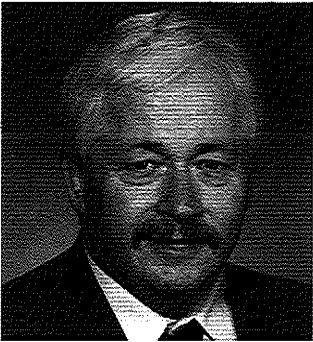
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PRESIDENT'S COLUMN



ROGER GRICE

SWAN SONG

I've recently returned from IPCC 99 in New Orleans. It was an excellent conference, filled with interesting presentations, lively discussions, and the sights, sounds, and tastes of New Orleans. Congratulations are due general chair Mike Goodman; his assistant Ralph Villecca; program co-chairs Bob Krull and Dave Hans; finance and registration chair Bill Kehoe; publications chair Terrance Malkinson; publicity chair Leann Kostek; Web site manager Dave Milley; exhibits chair David Beer; and all those who contributed to the success of the conference as presenters, facilitators, and attendees.

At the AdCom meeting preceding the conference, elections were held for society officers. The results are reported elsewhere in this *Newsletter* and, of special significance to me, George Hayhoe was elected as my successor as president of PCS. My term of office is over and I can duck out of the spotlight (and the crossfire) for a while. I have every confidence in George's ability and vision for the presidency and every confidence that he will lead the society into the next millennium with strength and insight.

As I step down I look back at some of the changes—and constancies—of the past two years with some feelings of happiness for the strides that the Professional Communication Society has made and some regrets for some of the strides that we did not make. But, in sum, we survive to continue the quest to foster better communication among engineering professionals and to move the frontiers of professional and technical communication forward.

When I was first elected to office, I stated that one of my main goals was to try to focus our activities more tightly than we had before, to focus on our strengths—those things that we did well, and to give less attention to some activities that took more of our strength and resources than they returned. Five areas of focus were conferences, publications, education, finances, and membership.

We have done well with our conferences. Our most recent conferences in Québec City and New Orleans were well attended and well received. Each had much to offer attendees and focused on important themes: a contemporary renaissance, and improvising the new international communication culture. Both did well financially and helped show the world what the Professional Communication Society is all about.

Our publications continue to be top rate. Our redesigned and revitalized *Transactions* stands out from the crowd and offers an array of important and useful archival articles. Our *Newsletter* is a wealth of information: news of PCS and practical advice for engineers and others who communicate technical information as part of their profession. Our Web site continues to attract attention and helps us communicate with members and with those interested in attending our conferences. It seems only natural that our society should have an outstanding Web site, but it is outstanding only because of the professionalism and hard work that go into it.

Our education products—seminars and workshops—continue to offer innovative, relevant information to engineers and communicators, showing what professional communication is all about.

Our finances remain a challenge, as they probably always will for a small society within the much larger framework of the IEEE. But we have managed to keep our budgets balanced and our cash flow positive, even if not always luxurious. We need to continue to monitor our spending and our sources of income, but we have managed to remain off the IEEE's watch list of societies with serious financial concerns.

Membership continues to plague us. Despite our efforts and innovations, it continues to fall. Perhaps our fortunes will turn. Certainly our attention will remain focused on membership.

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... to foster better
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and technical communication forward.

PCS AWARDS

(continued from page 1)

From 1988 through 1991 Rudy served PCS as vice president and president and developed PCS interactions with eastern Europe. Both the Russian Popov Society and the Russian Association of Information Workers made him an honorary member

in 1992. After his terms as president he returned to working with publications. He revived the Editorial Advisory Committee, managed the recruiting of three more editors for the *Transactions*, recruited three editors for the *Newsletter*, and oversaw its redesign.

Since 1998 he has again served as editor of our *Newsletter* and he is chair of the Editorial Advisory Committee. Through his outstanding writing and editorial work, he continues to enhance PCS's visibility and prestige. Our *Newsletter* is considered one of the finest in IEEE: useful, timely, and attractive.

Rudy retired from IBM in 1993, where he started as a research physicist and for ten years was editor and manager of the *IBM Journal of Research and Development*. He received a well-deserved standing ovation at the IPCC 99 awards luncheon.

Best Paper Award 1998: Susan M. Katz

The recipient of the 1998 Best Paper Award is Dr. Susan M. Katz for her

two-part article "Learning to Write in Organizations: What Newcomers Learn

about Writing on the Job" and "How Newcomers Learn to Write: Resources for Guiding Newcomers," *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 107-115, and no. 3, pp. 165-174.

Dr. Katz is an assistant professor in the department of English at North Carolina State University, where she teaches both graduate and undergraduate courses in technical and professional writing. She earned master of science and Ph.D. degrees in communication and rhetoric at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, and she received her B.A. degree in English from the State University of New York at Albany.

Dr. Katz has published a book called *The Dynamics of Writing Review: Opportunities for Growth and Change in the Workplace* (Ablex, 1998), many articles, and a wide range of conference presentations on issues in technical and professional communication. Her works-in-progress include a textbook with Lee Odell, due out in 2003, and chapters for books on research methods and university-industry relations.

Susan has had a significant amount of nonacademic professional writing and editing experience, giving her a particularly helpful perspective on the problems that new employees have when they need to write on the job. Her award-winning articles provide a theoretically sophisticated understanding of the problems new writers face on the job and also a practical plan of action based on her keen understanding of the difficulties of both learning and teaching in organizations.

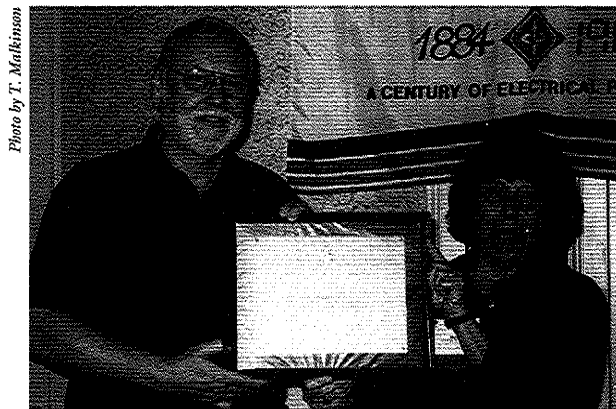
How Awards Are Chosen

The Best Paper Award is selected by the PCS Editorial Advisory Committee.

Nominations for the Goldsmith and Schlesinger Awards are submitted by PCS members. The final selection is made by a vote of the Administrative Committee (AdCom).

All members of PCS are encouraged to submit nominations for the Goldsmith

(continued on page 6)



Rudy Joenk receiving Schlesinger Award from Muriel Zimmerman



Susan Katz (center) receiving Best Paper Award from Muriel Zimmerman (left) and Kim Campbell (right)

TOOLS OF THE TRADE


PETER REIMOLD AND
CHERYL REIMOLD

TWO MASTER KEYS
TO RATIONAL BEHAVIOR

Cheryl's hitherto silent partner and coauthor breaks his cover. Ed.

At the end of a presentation someone asks you a question that suggests that this person slept through most of your talk. You know very well how to handle such occasions gracefully...yet you tell him just what you think, making an instant enemy.

You are trying to exchange a faulty product but the sales clerk cannot satisfy you because the product is out of stock and you don't have the original sales receipt for a simple refund. You know that problem solving is the way to go...but instead you yell around and leave with nothing.

This is one of the most frustrating things about improving your communication: Even when you know exactly what you should say, what comes out of your mouth in the heat of the moment is often the opposite. So, what's the good of all the theory if nobody knows how to *apply* it? Or are there some tools for stopping irrational behavior?

The simple answer is yes. There are certain *master keys* that unlock your dormant communication skills. Unfortunately, as you may have guessed, they are not quick fixes but hard-won attitude changes. (If it weren't so, gut-reaction control wouldn't be such a universal problem!) Two powerful master keys that are available to anyone who is willing are (1) slowing down and (2) appreciating people.

"You Need To Slow Down"

One day in North Carolina, one of us was driving a red imported sports sedan a bit over the speed limit. This prompted a state trooper to stop us and invite the speeder into his patrol car, where he pointed at the radar readout (73 mph in a 55 mph zone). What he said to the speeder was: "You need to S-L-O-W D-O-W-N!"

It impressed the speeder (in case you're still guessing: Peter) because it was true,

and not just for his driving. After that incident, Peter noticed that whenever he rushed things, he created chaos or discord. (Ironically, things also usually took *longer*: an extra two minutes to put on a Band-Aid, 10 minutes to listen to the trooper's lecture, 30 minutes to fix mistakes.)

What he learned from this was to do *everything* slowly and deliberately. Once he had internalized this principle, he was able to apply it to high-stress communication.

The point is, you're unlikely to remember to S-L-O-W D-O-W-N in a conflict situation unless you've made it a general principle to live by. Without this tool, success in stressful communication will forever elude you, because you'll act on your worst instincts.

People Do Matter

Let's revisit scenario 1: responding to a dumb question. Suppose the question was asked by the *president of your company*. Would you dress her down? Probably not!

Now what does that show? That our instincts are not all *that* blind! Under stress we may be prisoner to our fight-or-flight reflex, but there is a slot for judgment in that program: Is this opponent *SMALLER* or *BIGGER*? We shift into "fight" only with the small fry and run or make ourselves invisible with the big guys. In other words, when we're faced with an *important* person, temper control suddenly becomes the easiest thing in the world.

What we're suggesting is very simple: Learn to deal with *all* people as if they were important. Again, you won't remember that under pressure unless you build it into your daily life. And when you look at your overall values, "people matter" probably does fit near the top, doesn't it?

Putting the Master Keys to Work

The two principles go hand in hand. First, slow down so the "thinker" gets a chance to influence the "actor." And what should

*To stop destructive
gut responses, learn
to slow down and
appreciate people.*

the thinker think about? That people matter in the scheme of things. That nothing is ever gained by making unnecessary enemies or hurting people. That you didn't do so well in the past by ignoring these truths. That this would be a good time to do it differently.

In fact, right now—before you get a chance to forget—is a good time to start on that new philosophy. It will improve more than just your communication!

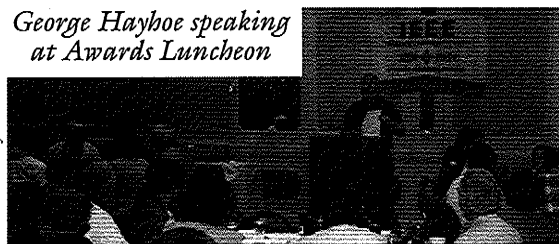
P.S.: Thanks to fear and professional pride, Peter did *not* get a speeding ticket; he talked his way out of it.

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have taught communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for 18 years. Their firm, PERC Communications (6A Dickel Road, Scarsdale, NY 10583, 914 725-1024, perc.com@aol.com), offers businesses customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills.

PCS AWARDS (continued from page 4)

George Hayhoe speaking
at Awards Luncheon

Photo by L. Maki



and Schlesinger awards. For more information about the awards and a list of past recipients, visit the PCS Web site at <http://www.ieeepcs.org/about.html>. If you would like to nominate

someone for an award, please send e-mail to m.zimmerman@ieee.org. Include the nominee's name, specify the award you think he or she should receive, and submit a 100-200 word explanation of why this person should receive the award. Nominations must be received by April 30, 2000.

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

(continued from page 3)

So, here I sit, writing my final president's column, content that I have shepherded PCS through two years of operation and very optimistic about PCS's future. I believe that great things lie ahead. And I think of our

ever-patient *Newsletter* editor exhilarating, "Finally! I don't have to worry about his missing deadlines again!"

I thank all of you for your support during my term as president.

PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER STUDENT WRITING CONTEST

Awards for the eighth annual undergraduate student writing contest were presented at the Philadelphia Section's Student Night Dinner, April 13. IEEE president-elect Bruce Eisenstein addressed the group. Ed Podell, founder and former chair of the PCS chapter, former AdCom member Janet Rochester, and John Schanley were among the judges.

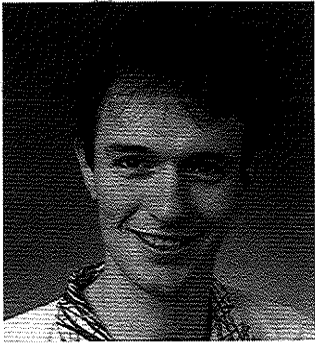
The winners were: Honorable Mention certificates to Michael Balog of Drexel University for "Self-Contained Computer-Controlled Helicopter" and to John Sausman of Rowan University for "Nuclear Power in Space"; Third Place (a certificate

and \$100) to Kenneth J. Heissler of Villanova University for "Harmonic Distortion in Microwave Semiconductor Switches"; Second Place (a certificate and \$150) to Amol Shah of Rowan University for "The Possible Carcinogenic Effects of Electromagnetic Radiation Emitted by Cellular Phones on the Brain"; and First Place (a certificate and \$200) to Portia Morse of Drexel University for "Who Wrote This Note?"

Portia Morse presented her research into automated handwriting recognition at the Region 2 Student Leadership Conference, where she won second place in both the written and oral contests.

BLACK TOOLS

COMMON NONSENSE



HANSPETER SCHMID

One of the most difficult things that experts have to do is discuss their field with other experts in front of laymen. The situation becomes worse when these laymen are the ones who have to approve an idea or make decisions based on the experts' knowledge.

In such a situation many of the discussion tricks I described in the previous four instalments of Black Tools can be applied, but there are three tricks that are excessively dangerous: Trick 28, "Convince the Jury"; Trick 31, "Declare Yourself Incompetent"; and Trick 30, "Authority and Common Sense."

What many experts forget is that the way they discuss things in their field is hardly ever suitable outside their field. The audience normally lacks the education necessary for a deep understanding of the field. What's worse, the experts' education makes their minds narrower: It is difficult for them to understand the views of non-experts, to think the way laymen think. Their education pushes many experts beyond social, cultural, and even natural reality, at least as long as they talk about their area of expertise.

If you are an expert who has to speak in front of laymen, you must be able to understand and speak their language as well as the language of your special field. If you can't do that, the audience will think you are out of touch with reality, and you make yourself a helpless target for Tricks 28 and 31!

A statement may be correct from the point of view of your special knowledge, but if you cannot state it in common terms, your opponent can easily make fun of your statement. He makes the audience laugh, and if you cannot counter his joke, the "jury" is convinced, you are discredited, and Trick 28 has succeeded.

For example, a speaker might state that laughing gas, which is emitted by many plants when they grow, contributes seriously to the greenhouse effect and should

be investigated properly. His opponent might then say, "And what would you like to do about it? Tell those plants to grow more slowly?"

There are only two ways out of this trap: Either you explain in a lucid manner how the emission of laughing gas can be controlled, or you counter the joke with a joke of your own, like "Oh yes, we think that farmers should start using Bonsai wheat as soon as possible. Well, joking aside, the investigations we propose"

A more straightforward trick is number 31, to "Declare Yourself Incompetent." If you know that the audience holds you in higher esteem than it does your opponent, you might counter a long explanation of his with "What you say may be right, but it is too complicated for me, I just don't understand it." The audience hears "You're talking nonsense" between the lines.

This trick can be countered by saying "It must be easy for a person having your intelligence and knowledge to understand my idea, I must have explained it badly," and then explaining it again in a way that makes the opponent understand, whether he wants to or not. Between the lines this says "You're right, you really just don't understand it."

With Trick 31, the opponent tries to assert his own authority. It is, however, much more common to cite other authorities whom the audience or the opponent esteems highly. I call this 30th trick "Authority and Common Sense," since the latter can always be used as an authority.

What common sense is depends strongly on the group of people to whom it is common. There is a common sense of Buddhists, Scots, engineers, even of customers of the Jolly Judge Lounge Bar in Edinburgh. On the one hand, we cannot live without common sense, because we would otherwise have to reinvent all sorts of wheels for any decision we have to make. It is also virtually impossible to talk

*As usual, not knowing
your audience can
be disastrous.*

to someone without heavily using common sense. Two Scottish engineers having a drink in the Jolly Judge can draw on much more common sense and talk much more easily with each other than can two people arbitrarily picked off Times Square in New York.

On the other hand, common sense is not very trustworthy because many of its elements arise in much the same way: Two or three people discuss something and have an idea. Several others trust them and believe that they thought about the idea enough and also tested it enough. This, of course, instills trust in even more people who then repeat the idea as a general truth without thinking much about it. From day to day the number of believers grows, until many of the others think, "Well, there must be some very good reasons for this idea, otherwise it wouldn't have so many supporters."

*Many politicians
use Trick 29
in every interview.*

The few people remaining who seriously thought about the idea but found it bad have to remain silent about it from then on, lest they be called rebels or smart asses. This also happens in science. For example, many historical "facts" that can be found in dozens of history books can be traced to one author who didn't even quote a reliable source.

The remaining two tricks are much simpler than the ones I just discussed.

Trick 29, "Diversion," is very common. If you realize that you are losing, start to talk about something different, which is, or is not, remotely related to the discussion topic. Many politicians use this trick in every interview. The only countermeasure is to ignore the diversion, but this is difficult to achieve without looking obnoxiously obstinate in the eyes of an audience.

Finally, Trick 32 is called "Pejorative Classification." "Oh, that's not new! It's Idealism, Marxism, Pantheism, Atheism, Mysticism, Spiritualism, Liberalism, Communism" Several decades ago many U.S. citizens had to pray for a good answer to this kind of classification. Alas, Trick 32 is almost impossible to avert if you get thrown into a class that the relevant people really hate.

You might now be prompted to say, "This is all very good in theory, but it is useless in practice." Say that. I will deal with this 33rd trick next time.

Hanspeter Schmid (h.p.schmid@ieec.org) is an analog-IC designer and Ph.D.-degree student at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (Zurich) who has an untamable interest in modern philosophy of science and society. He is an idealist, anarchist, pantheist, eclecticist, cynic, relativist, realist, communist, socialist, polarizing, liberal, conservative smart ass. Don't hesitate to add any classes of your choice to this list.

FROM THE EDITOR

(continued from page 2)

customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. all have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough specialized formatting and highlighting—boldface, italics, bullets—to show me your preferences.**

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

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

Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-numbered month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-numbered month. For example, the deadline is January 15 for the March/April issue, March 15 for the May/June issue, etc. You won't be far off—and never late—if you observe the Ides of January, March, May, etc.

MASTERS OF STYLE



RONALD J. NELSON

RULES OF CIVILITY IN AN AGE OF INCIVILITY

This column follows up on my previous two: "Of Horses and Professional Communicators" (this *Newsletter*, vol. 43, no. 4, July/August 1999) and "Richard Brookhiser's George Washington" (vol. 43, no. 5, September/October), both of which addressed the question posed by Joseph Conrad in *Lord Jim* (1900): "How to be?" How we write and how we behave reflect our personality, our character.

Each of us has our own way of speaking, of writing, of doing anything—in other words, each of us has a unique style. That style can be favorable or unfavorable. Perhaps more important, it can be changed—for most of us with less pain than that experienced by Cliff Clavin in the episode of *Cheers* in which he agrees to receive an electric shock from an attached device every time he behaves like, well, like Cliff Clavin.

The instrument of change that I suggest in this age of in-your-face incivility is one used by George Washington: *Rules of Civility*, originally published in 1595 by French Jesuits as *Bienveillance de la Conversation entre les Hommes* (Decency of Conversation Among Men). It went through 11 printings by 1672. Fortunately for the modern professional communicator, Richard Brookhiser has edited and provided commentary on the *Rules* in a delightful edition published by The Free Press (New York, 1997). From it we can take steps to improve ourselves. (Those not in need of improvement may skip the rest of this column.)

Brookhiser's introduction prepares the reader for the rules of civility that follow. The opening sentence—"How do you become a great man?"—poses a fascinating question. Washington's response to it was to copy down all 110 of the rules in a notebook and try to live by them. Early Americans "thought they knew something about virtue and liberty, and they believed

they could establish them in the world, if they made themselves fit for the task."

Although the idea of "greatness" seems somehow less important than it once was, even today people often seem intent on improving themselves, testified to by the myriad self-help, therapy, and workout books and tapes available. The *Rules* can be of considerable benefit as well by reminding us of a lost art.

The *Rules of Civility* can be grouped into seven categories: general and mixed precepts (rules 1-24), those governing conversation (25-36), the fashions of qualifying or titling of persons (37-50), clothes and arraying the body (51 and 52), walking alone or with company (53-57), discourse (58-89), table manners (90-107), and three from an appendix. The *Rules* deal more with etiquette than with moral issues, but they address the latter indirectly. They attempt "to form the inner man (or boy) by shaping the outer. They start with hats and posture and table manners, and work inward."

As Brookhiser concludes, they may help us "by putting us in a more ambitious frame of mind." Their very quaintness gives them a charming attraction, and, if we follow them, they may stimulate us to be a bit gentler in an often unkind world. Let's look at some of them:

1. "Every action done in company ought to be done with some sign of respect to those that are present." Brookhiser sees this first rule as key to all of them: We need to be mindful of others and their needs—not just to think of our own needs.
2. "When in company, put not your hands to any part of the body not usually discovered." Brookhiser notes that this is "a rule often flouted by rap singers, and pitchers." Professional communicators might also want to avoid this practice.

*The Rules of Civility
are a reminder
of a lost art.*

*"Think before you speak,
pronounce not imper-
fectly, nor bring out
your words too hastily,
but orderly, distinctly."*

12. "Shake not your head, feet, or legs, roll not the eyes, lift not one eyebrow higher than the other, wry not the mouth, and bedew no man's face with your spittle by approaching too near him when you speak."
13. "If you see any filth or thick spittle... upon the clothes of your companions put it off privately...." As Brookhiser notes, "In other words, don't make a fuss about helping someone. It only calls attention to his problem (and, incidentally, calls too much attention to your helpfulness)."
19. "Let your countenance be pleasant but in serious matters somewhat grave."
24. "Do not laugh too loud or too much at any public spectacle."
28. "If any one come to speak to you while you are sitting stand up...."
35. "Let your discourse with men of business be short and comprehensive."
36. "Artificers & persons of low degree ought not to use many ceremonies to lords or others of high degree, but respect and highly honor them, and those of high degree ought to treat them with affability and courtesy, without arrogancy."
40. "Strive not with your superiors in argument, but always submit your judgment to others with modesty." This rule is *not* saying, "Be submissive."
45. "Being to advise or reprehend any one, consider whether it ought to be done in publick or in private, presently, or at some other time, in what terms to do it; & in reproving shew no sign of choler, but do it with all sweetness and mildness."
49. "Use no reproachful language against any one, neither curse nor revile."
50. "Be not hasty to believe flying reports to the disparagement of any."
52. "In your apparel be modest and endeavor to accommodate nature, rather than to procure admiration."
54. "Play not the peacock, looking every where about you, to see if you be well deck't, if your shoes fit well, if your stockings sit neatly, and clothes handsomely."
67. "Detract not from others, neither be excessive in commanding."
72. "Speak not in an unknown tongue in company but in your own language and that as those of quality do and not as the vulgar. Sublime matters treat seriously."
73. "Think before you speak, pronounce not imperfectly, nor bring out your words too hastily, but orderly, distinctly."
82. "Undertake not what you cannot perform but be careful to keep your promise."
83. "When you deliver a matter do it without passion & with discretion, however mean the person you do it to." Brookhiser notes that "'Deliver a matter' means convey a message, give an order."
87. "Let your carriage be such as becomes a man grave, settled, and attentive to that which is spoken. Contradict not at every turn what others say."
89. "Speak not evil of the absent for it is unjust."
110. "Labour to keep alive in your breast that little spark of celestial fire called conscience."

Perhaps these rules will spark some subtle transformation of character in all of us.

Professor Nelson is a Fellow in the Institute of Technical and Scientific Communication, Department of English, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA 22807; (540) 568-3755, fax (540) 568-2983; nelsonrj@jmu.edu.

NAKED NO MORE

BY JOSEPH A. ROBINSON

Next time you coach a serious but nervous speaker with a serious topic make it win-win. The strategy is simple: Segue immediately from any talk of nervousness to the tough questions of who, why, and what. Once you have the speaker focused on *who* is the audience, *why* they should care about the topic, and *what* both can get out of the presentation, nervousness will start to fade.

A serious speaker will recognize right away whether it's worthwhile to invest the time, effort, and resources it takes to craft a suitable presentation on this topic for this audience. If it's not worthwhile, do what you can to help plan a graceful exit—an overlooked previous commitment, unexpected internal obligations, temporary lack of resources adequate for this important topic, etc. Your speaker has better things to do.

Once over the *worthwhile* hurdle, audience analysis is the key. Insist on the usual research. What brings this audience together on this occasion? Information about range of backgrounds, education, experience? Previous speakers on similar topics, other speakers on this occasion? Sensitivity to particular topics, language, examples?

More important, what potential benefit might audience members realize from the topic: Why should they care, what's in it for them? Entertainment, change of pace are possible benefits if the presentation is scheduled for a break in a technical program. More likely some combination of education, update, prediction, new developments, tools, techniques.

Solid answers to an individual member's *What's in it for me?* lead to the logical

follow-up question: What do *I need to know* to realize those benefits? Right there your speaker has the key to content. What are the three or four—half a dozen at the most—key ideas to highlight the promised benefits and how to realize them? In each case supported perhaps by a brief case history, something gathered in the field, results of an experiment, a testimonial.

Here is where your speaker has the opportunity to weave in references to the audience and occasion, personal anecdotal material, something in the news—all furthering his or her own objective.

As your speaker fleshes out the key ideas and tests their benefit for the audience they begin to take on a life of their own. Once you craft them into a succinct summary for the conclusion, your speaker will be sold on them as a valuable package the audience can take away and begin to use to their—and his or her—mutual benefit.

Finally, by the time you build a suitable introduction previewing the listener benefits to come, your speaker will be so eager to get out there and get started that nervousness will be pushed aside. Knowing that he or she has something to share that the audience will understand and value builds a kind of self-confidence quite different from visualizing them naked, as some have suggested.

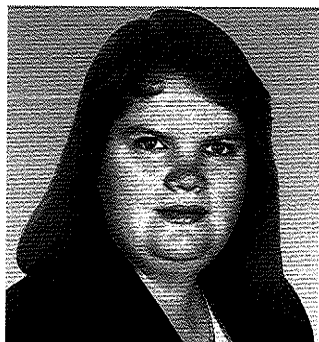
Dr. Robinson is a Life Member of the IEEE, having started with 1941 student memberships in the predecessor AIEE and IRE. As a consultant to professional management since 1963, he serves corporate clients, law and accounting firms, banks, and professional organizations. He is a frequent presenter at IPCCs. E-mail: sanfranjar@aol.com.

*Gain composure
through analyzing your
audience rather than
picturing them naked.*

The Lord's Prayer is 66 words, the Gettysburg Address is 286 words, and there are 1,322 words in the Declaration of Independence. Yet, government regulations on the sale of cabbage total 26,911 words."

—David McIntosh

NET NOTES



ELIZABETH MOELLER

BUT I FOUND IT ON THE NET...

We've all gotten these e-mail messages: Don't open anything with "Good Times" in the subject line; Win a trip to Disney World if you help with a Microsoft e-mail tracking program; and the \$250 recipe for Nieman Marcus chocolate chip cookies. What's common about all these stories? They are all hoaxes. In fact, the Nieman Marcus hoax is so widespread that Nieman Marcus has added chocolate chip cookies to its offerings in honor of the hoax. Unfortunately, intermingled with these hoaxes are serious virus warnings and other real stories. How do you tell the difference?

Virus Alerts

Potential viruses are the most dangerous to ignore. Fortunately, there are a number of legitimate resources available to help, as well as some signs to look for in the message. The CERT® Coordination Center (<http://www.cert.org>) maintains a list of real threats to computer users around the world. It also offers an electronic newsletter to keep subscribers abreast of updates and alerts. A number of other sites keep an updated list of virus hoaxes; good resources include About.com (<http://urbanlegends.miningco.com>) and DataFellows (<http://www.datafellows.com/virus-info/hoax/>).

Stiller Research (<http://www.stiller.com/myths.htm>) and Barn Owl Software (<http://kuumite.com/myths>) both provide a comprehensive listing of virus myths. These organizations explain how viruses work and what can and cannot hurt your computer. The first and most important thing to remember is that you *cannot* get a virus simply by reading an e-mail message or viewing a picture on the Web.

For a virus to infect your computer, you must execute an already infected program or boot from an infected disk. Therefore, to get a virus sent to you via e-mail, you need to actually run a program attached to the e-mail message. Common sense tells you not to run any program sent to you unless you know its origin and the person sending it to you.

Macro viruses are another story. A macro virus can hide in Microsoft Word and Excel documents. When these documents are opened in your version of Word or Excel, the virus is executed. Sometimes its effect is as simple as corrupting your version of Word and you need to reinstall the program. Other times, the consequences are more dangerous.

The best protection is to make sure that your e-mail program does not automatically launch Word if it sees a Word attachment. If you must view the document and are still unsure of its source, use the Word or Excel viewer available from Microsoft (<http://www.microsoft.com>).

Stiller Research provides other guidelines for gauging the truth of a virus warning:

1. Viruses do not come from simply being connected to an online system (e.g., AOL, CompuServe, the Internet).
2. Viruses do not come from simple data files (but watch Excel and Word files for macro viruses).
3. Viruses do not come in Web cookies.
4. Viruses do not come in JPG or GIF images.

The best protection against viruses is to keep antivirus software current and running at all times. Software that runs in the background automatically scans disks and downloads and other files as they are used. It is important to update your antivirus software at the manufacturer's recommended intervals; many provide free updates periodically. New viruses are created every day and the only way to protect yourself is to have the latest information.

Finally, keep backups! Back up your system regularly. Since you have original disks and CD-ROMs from software applications, they can be reinstalled and do not need backing up. However, it is important to back up system files (Windows registry, autoexec.bat, and config.sys, among others), initialization files (*.ini), and data files.

*Don't believe
everything you read,
especially on the Net.*

Urban Legends

Urban Legends are a lot more fun than virus warnings. They rarely cause problems with your computer, but they generate an awful lot of e-mail from well meaning friends and family. The Disney e-mail message says that the first 1000 people to help with Bill Gates' experimental e-mail tracking program will receive \$5,000 or an all-expense-paid trip to Disney World. Think about it: Do you really think you're one of the first 1000 people to see that message?

The Nieman Marcus cookie story tells the tale of a shopper who ate chocolate chip cookies at Nieman Marcus and wanted the recipe. When told the recipe cost "two fifty," the shopper thought it was \$2.50. When the credit card bill arrived it said \$250. Outraged, the shopper vowed to tell everyone about this ripoff—and give everyone the cookie recipe as well. These stories are just a sampling of the urban legends on the Internet. Many people believe what they read; therefore, if they find it on the Net, it must be true. That is not always the case.

It has gotten to the point where even television media are reporting some of these urban legends. This summer a story was going around about how a child had gone blind after getting waterproof sunscreen in his eyes. The story created quite a dilemma for parents across the country. They wanted their children to wear sunscreen but

they did not want to risk blindness. Date-line NBC reported that no children have gone blind by getting sunscreen in their eyes. Their experts also explained why it was not likely to occur.

To determine whether a story is true, one of the first places to visit is Urban Legends (<http://www.urbanlegends.com>). They have all the urban legends broken down by category. CNET is also a good source for information (<http://www.cnet.com/Content/Features/Dlife/Truth/>). Their listings include Net hoaxes, virus warnings, and an Internet Lie Detector Test, which lets you test your Urban Legend IQ. There isn't anything you can do to prevent urban legends except to stop forwarding them.

The important thing to remember is that just because you find it on the Net does not mean it is true. There are a lot of people out there propagating messages and stories that simply are not true. But pay attention to virus warnings and check them out.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller is a PCS AdCom member and chair of the Publicity & Marketing Committee. She owns Interactive Media Consulting (518 366-8765, 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.

Keep your antivirus software up to date.

REJECTION REJECTED

Three times twenty years of rhymes,
And still an aging ego bleeds
For all the hundred dozen times
Of reading "Does not meet our needs."
Yet never would that ego mock
Or yield to pride's impulse to whine,
"The stuff you print is urban schlock,
And far inferior to mine!"

Rejection's pains are really mildish
Compared to those of being childish.

—Wen Smith, Dana Point, California;
reprinted with permission from Sapphire
Sunday (an online magazine), 20 June
1999.

"When you take stuff from one writer it's plagiarism; but when you take it from many writers, it's research."

—Wilson Mizner

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE SEPTEMBER AdCOM MEETING

BY MURIEL ZIMMERMAN

The Professional Communication Society's Administrative Committee (AdCom) held a one-day meeting in New Orleans on September 7, preceding IPCC 99. Major discussion issues were conferences, publications, and publicity. We held elections for AdCom vacancies as well as for president and vice-president.



George Hayhoe, new PCS president, with Beth Moeller, new PCS vice president

The next AdCom meeting will be in Washington, DC, January 21-22, 2000. All PCS members are welcome to attend AdCom meetings.

Conferences

IPCC 2000 chair Beth Moeller reported that Nicholas Negroponte, director of the MIT Media Lab, has

agreed to be keynote speaker for IPCC/SIGDOC 2000. The call for papers for IPCC 2000 is now available at www.ieeeeps.org. Joe Chew will be chair of IPCC 2001,

located in Santa Fe, New Mexico, also in conjunction with SIGDOC; Roger Grice will be program chair. For IPCC 2002, Laurel Grove and Paul Seesing will host a conference in Oregon.

AdCom member Ron Blicq begins his second year as president of INTECOM,

and he chairs the conference operations for Forum 2000, which now has more than 100 presenters. Several PCS AdCom members will attend Forum 2000 in London, and a special awards ceremony will be

arranged for Ulf-L Andersson, winner of the 1999 Goldsmith Award.

Publications

Transactions editor Kim Campbell reported that future issues of the journal will focus on a variety of important topics: Communication in Virtual Organizations, Communication in Cross-Functional Teams, Document Evaluation Methods, Communication as a Social Construct within an Information Society, and Technical Innovations and Global Business Communication. Gene Hoffnagle has been appointed PCS liaison to the IEEE Press.

Publicity

PCS will have a booth at the STC conference in Orlando, May 21-24, 2000. We need volunteers to staff that booth during exhibit hours. The PCS Web site, designed and maintained by Beth Moeller, is attracting a large number of visitors. Most popular pages visited are (in order) Home Page, Publications, Membership Information, About PCS, AdCom Information, General Conference Information, and Tools of the Trade Index.

Elections

The AdCom elected six members to three-year terms, and three others were appointed to fill unexpired one-year terms. Five of the six elected to the AdCom are committee veterans (George Hayhoe, Gene Hoffnagle, Bill Kehoe, Beth Moeller, and Cheryl Reimold) and one is new (Bernadette Longo).

Of returning AdCom members, George Hayhoe has served as vice president; Gene Hoffnagle has served on the IEEE Press Advisory Board as a representative of the Computer Society; Bill Kehoe has served as treasurer; Beth Moeller is publicity chair, Webmaster, and chair of IPCC 2000; and Cheryl Reimold has served on the Education Committee and is a regular contributor to the *Newsletter*. New AdCom



Conference Chairs: Mike Goodman IPCC99, Joe Chew IPCC2001, and Beth Moeller IPCC2000

*The next AdCom
meeting is in
Washington, DC,
January 21-22, 2000.*

member Bernadette Longo teaches at Clemson University and is the PCS program chair for IPCC/SIGDOC 2000.

Nancy Walters Coppola, Marjorie Davis, and Paul Dombrowski were appointed to one-year terms. Nancy Coppola directs the M.S. program in professional and technical communication at New Jersey Institute of Technology; Marj Davis is founding chair and professor of technical communication at Mercer University School of Engineering, and Paul

Dombrowski is associate professor at the University of Central Florida. These new AdCom members have a remarkable record of publication and professional activities in the field of technical and professional writing.

George Hayhoe was elected president and Beth Moeller was elected vice president. Departing AdCom members Mark Haselkorn, Rudy Joenk, Leann Kostek, and Stephanie Rosenbaum have our warm appreciation for their service.

NANCY C. CORBIN

Nancy Corbin of Nokesville, Virginia, died August 8, 1999, at Prince William Hospital in Manassas.

Nancy joined the IEEE in 1989 and became a Senior Member in 1991. She served as secretary of the Professional Communication Society from 1988 through 1990, a time when I was also a PCS officer and we both worked for IBM. Many times the wires between our locations were hot as we compared notes on the minutes she was preparing. Nancy was a charter member of our delegation to eastern Europe, where she returned several times to teach, and she was chair of our Washington, DC-Northern Virginia Chapter in 1996.

Nancy began her career with IBM Federal Systems in Manassas, Virginia, in 1969. In the mid-'70s and early '80s, she was involved in technical manual and logistics activities supporting a sonar program in the engineering laboratory.

After earning a bachelor's degree in business management in 1993,



and a master's degree in science for management and business in 1994, both from National-Louis University, Nancy moved into proposal development, with responsibility for activities and scheduling for multi-hundred-million-dollar proposals. Later she worked on developing new business opportunities in Norway, Turkey, and Switzerland, and on continued support activities with NATO, Germany, and the United Kingdom.

Continuing her education, Nancy was awarded a master's certificate in international business from George Washington University in May 1999. At the time of her death

she was working on a doctorate and was an advisory program manager in (what is now) Lockheed Martin Space Electronics & Communications.

Memories of Nancy that characterize her well are still fresh among us because she died so young:

"Nancy Corbin was a great communicator. I remember her always smiling when she talked to me, as if our conversation were sheer pleasure. She would look closely at me as she gave her full attention to whatever I was saying. She encouraged me to get involved with the Education Committee of PCS and, herself, gave many a bright and inspiring workshop on presentation skills.

"We had many a good chat, Nancy and I. Often we discussed communication issues, but the one I remember best concerned her outrage at being chased by an elk at the PCS conference in Banff! She had approached it in a friendly way, but the elk clearly needed a course in manners. We sat on a

bench at the Banff Conference Center and laughed and laughed.

"I enjoyed every minute I was lucky enough to spend with Nancy. With her ready smile and interest, she lit up your day. What better gift could any human being give another?" — *Cheryl Reimold, Scarsdale, New York*

"I remember Nancy quite clearly from this one afternoon that we spent together in Tallinn with her, Ron [Blicq], and my father. She left an impression of a lady of kindness and warmth. Curiously enough, I remember telling her some things about my situation in life at that time and getting some extremely sensible advice. This was the way I remember her, as a person whom you just instinctively trusted. She must have been a wonderful mother. I will cherish this memory." — *Tiina Agur, Tallinn, Estonia*

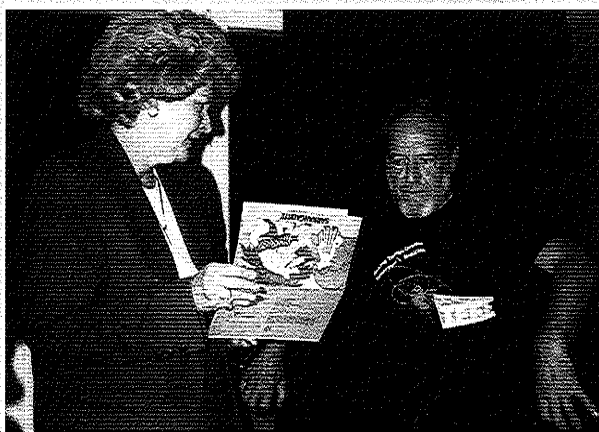
"With great pleasure I recall all our meetings in Tallinn, September 1990; in Moscow, October 1991 and May 1992; and in Orlando, October 1991.

She was among the members of the first PCS delegation to Russia (Ron Blicq, Rudy Joenk, Debbie Kizer; 1990).

"She presented her interesting paper in Kabli, Estonia, with her usual charm and skill. She enjoyed this visit very much. We laughed and sang songs and she played the piano.

"For the workshop held in May 1992 in Moscow she especially prepared a book, *Technically Speaking to the International Audience*. The book was translated into Russian and published. She devoted this book to her Russian friends and wrote in it, 'With fond recollections to my friends and colleagues in Russia.' Her smile, kindness, unique sincerity, art, skill, and ability to establish personal contacts had great success in Russia and she had here a lot of admirers.

"Once she visited my home in Moscow. Since then my wife and daughter loved her very much. She will be forever in our hearts and



thoughts. We'll always cherish her charming image." — *Henrich Lantsberg, Moscow, Russia*

"It was 1990 and we were in Kabli, Estonia, taking part in a conference. On the last night our Russian friends set up a party and we had beer and vodka and ate wiener-like sausages and enormous field mushrooms cooked over an open

fire. Then they asked each group to entertain. Nancy looked at me and pulled out a child's picture book, *Little Red Riding Hood*, all in Russian, which she had bought at a local shop.

"'Now, my friends,' Nancy announced, 'my associate Ron and I will demonstrate to you that we have learned some of the Russian language while we have been with you. We will translate the story in this Russian book!' She held it up for all to see, tied a napkin over her head, picked up one of the mushroom baskets, and announced: 'I am Miss Riding Hood. This,' she said, pointing to me, 'is the big bad wolf.'

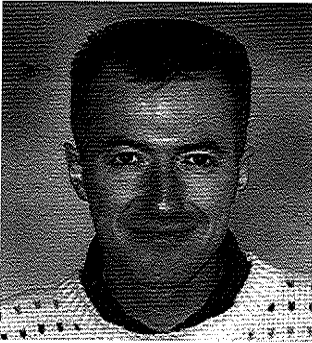
"We held the book up and not only started 'reading' the story but also acted out the parts. After no more than three lines, the laughter was so great that no one could hear our words. We made our names as 'translators' that night.

"Thank you, Nancy, for enriching my life with quite a few adventures!" — *Ron Blicq, Winnipeg, Canada*

Nancy Werngren was born December 15, 1945, in Washington, DC. She grew up in Culpeper, Virginia, and in 1964 married John E. Corbin, who died in 1989. She is survived by daughters Theresa Woodyard and Michalle Kuntz, two sisters, and four grandchildren.

Prepared by Rudy Joenk

GOOD INTENT, POOR OUTCOME



JEAN-LUC DOUMONT

WHERE'S THE BEEF?

You sell the sizzle, not the steak," a manager at a giant clothing company once lectured me, obviously little excited by the page layout of the self-help guide I had developed for their personnel. "Make the layout interesting," she went on, "a child who cannot read should feel like picking up the document and turning the pages."

Make it interesting! Make it memorable! Here are tunes I have heard many times. "You have to put pictures on this Web page," another client told me; "if there are no pictures, people don't even look at it!" He has a point.

Yet my own experience suggests a corollary: If there are pictures, people look... at the pictures. I have seen many a reader (if they still deserve this name) pick up a corporate annual report and turn the pages, looking at each of them, then put the document down and exclaim, "nice report!" They had not read a single word—not even picture captions!

Getting the audience's attention certainly is a worthwhile intent. The Fundamentals chapter of my training programs establishes it as a required first step. Yet when we focus more on the sizzle than on the steak, this first step often becomes the last one. What was supposed to be an attention getter turns into an attention keeper: Because of it, the audience pays no attention to the messages—they never get "the beef."

In his well known book *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information*, Edward Tufte makes the point decisively: How interesting a graph can be is intrinsically limited by how interesting the data and related story are. By "decorating" the graph, we can make it more eye-catching, but certainly not more interesting.

What is worse, by decorating a graph we can distract the audience from the message. In a sense, we do create interest, but for the wrong topic: The audience probably wonders more how the graph was produced than how the data were obtained or what the data mean.

The effectiveness of professional communication must of course be evaluated with respect to its objectives. If the corporate report is meant solely to improve the corporate image by getting across a feeling of aesthetics and luxury, there is nothing wrong with "readers" not reading it. In such a case the gloss is no mere decoration: The medium is the message. By contrast, if the report is also meant to communicate the year's results, the gloss may distract more than it helps.

Interesting messages often need no attention-getting artifacts. (They need proper context and motivation, of course, but these I do not consider artifacts.) If the circumstances nevertheless call for an attention getter, we can minimize the chance of its monopolizing the available audience attention by:

- *Making it relevant* to the topic: Whatever does not help get the message across is bound to distract from it—a simple question of signal-to-noise ratio.
- *Keeping it short*, that is, removing it from the audience's scope of attention as soon as it reaches its objective. Obviously, this is achieved more easily in an oral presentation than in a written document, and more easily with words than with visual elements.

During a recent trip to Argentina, I was taken to a restaurant by my hosts. Ignoring how tired and hungry I was (it was close to midnight), they recommended a dish that took half an hour to cook. When it finally came, it was just a pound of meat on a plain white plate; no fries, no vegetables, no sauce nothing.

This steak did not sizzle. Yet it was the best beef I ever ate!

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

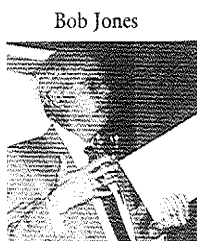
*When we focus more
on the sizzle than on
the steak, the audience
never gets the beef.*

IPCC 99

IPCC 99 ♦ NEW ORLEANS

The location of New Orleans for IPCC 99 combined contemporary communication with a festive, musical flavor in this historic area.

Special thanks to Luke Maki, Janet Rochester, and Terrance Malkinson for their photographic contributions on these pages.



Bob Jones



James Watt



Sean Campbell



Mississippi Steamer Natchez



George Hayhoe



Patricia Cooley



Roger Grice



Michael Lynch



Valerie Lecompte



Teresa Lau



Charles Campbell



Bernadette Longo



Anne Lemieux, Eva Knoll, Candace Soderston



Leann Kostek



Maria Kreppel, Thomas Case, Muthar Al-Ubaidi

Angela Jones
Susan Malmo
Mary Jo ReiffDaniela Schlaud,
Susanne Janssen

Margaret Hamilton

Roger Grice, Tony Temple, Mike Goodman



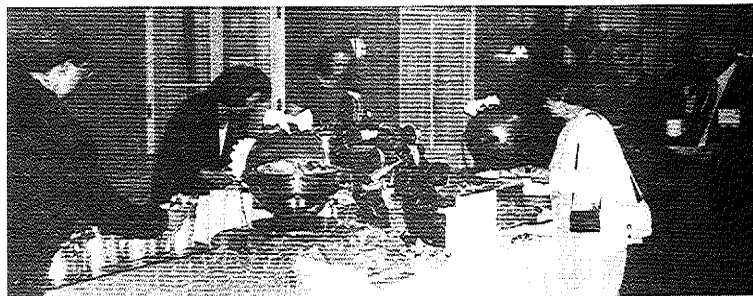
Marj Davis, Susan Feinberg, Linda Driskill

David Beer at IEEE Press display



Ed Clark

Breakfast served in style



Break time on the patio

IPCC 99



Chairman Mike Goodman and Marie Madden



Marj Davis



Virginie Ahrens



Kim Campbell, Susan Katz



Reception conversation



Ken Mitchell

Charlotte Brammer



George Rimalowcr

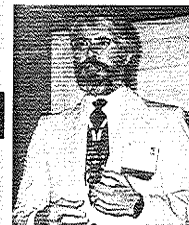


Judith Strother, Brenda Rubens, David Ma

Beth Moeller



Roger Munger



Philip Rubens, Sherry Southard



Terrance Malkinson



Nicole Ervin



Christy Lankenau



Marie Madden



Judy Ramey, Susan Feinberg



Kenneth Keiser



Richard Spencer



Jim Ramsay

Susan Kleimann



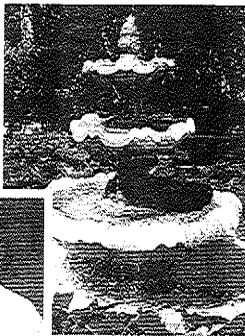
Andrew Malcolm and Susan Alexander

There is always activity on Bourbon Street

The Registration Desk:
Christy Lankenau
Marie Madden
Jennifer Lambert



Hotel patio fountain



Jay Friedman



Bob Krull



Paul Sawyer, Jane Gibson, Charles Blackwell

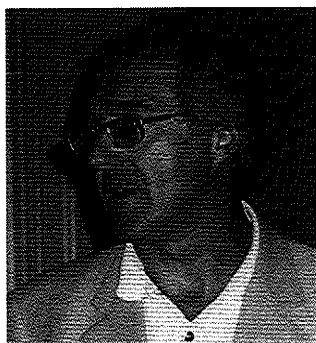


Stephanic Rosenbaum, Judith Strother, Janet Rochester



Rob Neutelings, Andrew Malcolm,
Carolyn Boiarsky, Nicole Ummelen



*Tony Temple*

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY BERNADETTE LONGO

IBM Fellow **Tony Temple** emphasized that the focus of his thinking is how to “get technology out of users’ faces.” Believing that people want to use technology without necessarily understanding its complexity, Mr. Temple discussed roles that technology plays in our culture and how those roles impact users’ expectations of computers.

Noting that virtually every computer on the planet is at least capable of being connected through the Internet, Mr. Temple said that this current state of computer technology presents vast and untapped opportunities for developers. Pointing to the range of current communication devices, he argued that users should be able to do the same tasks on different devices in a seamless manner. For example, people should be able to use their television monitors to purchase airline tickets online while they watch their favorite programs. Likewise, people should be able to use their cellular telephones to receive e-mail. Mr. Temple sees these potentials being realized in the near future.

Looking to new technologies, Mr. Temple asked why current embedded computer devices could not be modified to connect to Internet information networks. In this scenario, computer chips in automobile engines could not only diagnose malfunctions, but also transmit that information to service centers and even emergency responders. Mr. Temple predicted that new technologies will change our interactions with computers as input methods such as voice recognition, eye tracking, gesture recognition, and even wearable input and monitoring devices become more sophisticated. In this future of expanded and customized computer interaction, people will enjoy an ease of using computers that we can only imagine today.

Although human-computer interaction continues to suffer from ease-of-use limitations, people increasingly expect to use computers and other technological devices within ten minutes of opening the box. This heightened expectation for ease of use implies that manuals, traditional documentation, and technical support mechanisms are perceived as user problems rather than help. Ideally, technology should be “self-describing” for its users. Mr. Temple argued that “every call to a 1-800 support number is negative for both the user and the supplier.”

Finding that users have different expectations about their relation to technological devices, Mr. Temple described three types of users: technophobes, who simply want to use the technology without understanding it; technophiles, who want to know everything about how the technology works; and technofollowers, who only want to know enough about the technology to maintain it in good working order. Each of these groups will have different experiences with the same device. It is a designer’s task to craft the technology and its interface to allow all of these groups to use the technology in the way they desire. For example, the same Web site can present different views to people who have different needs to know and different expectations from the technology.

Through IBM’s Ease of Use initiative, the design goal is to make a “one stop shop for the total user experience.” In other words, the same Web site—for example, www.ibm.com/Easy—should accommodate an integrated approach to all users’ needs. People within IBM have access to a large portion of the site because they have a need to know internal as well as external information. External audiences access the same site but have a more limited view of its pages. Overall, the site provides access and information on all aspects of the IBM-user transaction, from preliminary information to fulfillment updates.

Mr. Temple emphasized that content for the IBM site is developed separately from the design, allowing many people within IBM to contribute information on their specialized areas of activity. The information thus contributed resides in a database that can be used for many purposes, one of which is conversion into Web pages. Specialized staff design and implement the standardized Web design for the database information, freeing information providers from that task. This separation of content from Web development is an important change in information design that Mr. Temple argued is crucial to effective integration of computer interface, customer needs and expectations, and the entire transaction cycle.

In conclusion, Mr. Temple emphasized that rapid changes in our workplaces present great opportunities for professional communicators because we have opportunities to shape the future. “Have some fun with it.”

It is a designer’s task to craft the technology and its interface to allow all to use the technology in the way they desire.

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EDUCATION: INDUSTRY NEEDS, ACADEMIC RESOURCES

BY GEORGE HAYHOE

As you might expect at a conference held in New Orleans' Vieux Carré, the IPCC 99 program blended topics as complementary yet excitingly different as the textures and tastes of a Creole gumbo. And attendees at the sessions I selected seemed to savor the presentations as much as they enjoyed the cuisine at the many fine restaurants throughout the Quarter.

The first session I attended featured presentations by professors in two academic programs in technical communication and by a professional communicator in industry.

In "Computing Across the Curriculum," **Judy Ramey**, chair of the technical communication department in the University of Washington's College of Engineering, described a program her department is about to implement. Using the "writing across the curriculum" model that has been widely used to improve student writing skills by incorporating writing instruction in every course they take, the University of Washington's program focuses on helping students understand the role of software in our profession rather than on the software products themselves.

A three-level approach emphasizes content rather than tools. An initial required course called Computers in Technical Communication helps students

understand the role of computers in our field, the main types of applications, techniques for designing a "whole tools solution" to communication problems, and ways to learn new technologies. All subsequent courses require students to learn and use specific tool features relevant to course content.

For example, a course on substantive editing might consider how using a word processor's outline view can assist in focusing on a document's structure. Finally, lab peer tutors in each course serve as resources to other students by providing small-group and one-on-one assistance, as well as helping students find

and utilize other resources for learning specific products and the features emphasized in various courses.

Muriel Zimmerman, in "Shared Responsibility for Computing Instruction in a Technical Communication Program: Industry, University, and Community Collaboration," discussed how the University of California—Santa Barbara is addressing the many changes in technical communication instruction during the past two decades. She focused especially on the many new roles for faculty, students, interns, mentors, software trainers, alumni, and community volunteers.

For example, in many cases, faculty have become fundraisers to allow the department to acquire the hardware and software it needs despite budgetary restrictions. Thus, money to enable the department to establish a documentation lab was raised as a result of donations solicited from companies, program alumni, and the local Society for Technical Communication chapter.

Despite the significant role that computing now plays in our technical communication curricula, however, she pointed to a 1981 article by Patricia Wright that identified the basic skills of our field (task analysis, use of language and language alternatives, document design and graphics, the relation of behavioral research to instructional design, and management of the document production process), emphasizing that those skills are still central but that hardware and software can contribute to our performance levels in those areas.

Bob Krull of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, standing in for **David Hans** of IBM, examined "The New Breed of Technical Communicators: Leaders in the Software and Information Design Profession." The roles and responsibilities of many technical communicators in industry have changed, and many professionals in our field now play a key role in the software development process.

For example, there is a new emphasis on "wizards" and other user assistance that is part of the user interface design and less emphasis on online help and hard copy. Although traditional skills are still important, other knowledge—such as expertise in instructional design techniques—has become an



Judy Ramey, Bob Krull, and Muriel Zimmerman

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increasingly important part of the technical communicator's job.

The challenge for educators is to discover the skills that students need to incorporate itera-

tive, user-centered design principles on the job, and then include the right combination of corresponding concepts, techniques, and practice in their courses.

COMMUNICATOR SKILLS IN A CHANGING WORLD

BY TOM VAN LOON

The Wednesday post-coffee-break session lacked one of the three listed presenters. Nevertheless, the session was attended in such large number that several people had to sit on the floor or stand all the time. And so they did, because the two presentations were quite interesting.

Carolyn Boiarsky (Purdue University-Calumet) emphasized that the education of technical communicators can no longer follow tradition. The world is changing rapidly and communication should meet new requirements. Much more than before, it is realized that interaction with the consumer is a necessity. Carolyn showed by the example of kitchen design how disastrous a lack of consumer-designer interaction can be. Only by feedback procedures can texts be made truly effective. Aspects to be considered in this context by the communicator are:

1. How does a reader read technical text?
2. What schemes should be followed?
3. How are comparable reports structured?

Many Web pages show how little attention designers pay to these considerations; much research on the design of Web pages is

required. Students should learn more about it and, particularly, the function of color.

Susan Alexander (Bangalore, India), analyzed the present-day business climate in which communicators face new challenges. The three most important characteristics that differ from previous times are that:

1. Competition is tougher than ever.
2. The Web significantly affects business operations.
3. Business is globalized.

Consequences are that technical communicators get an ever widening scope of work, and that business decisions increasingly affect the communicator's working conditions.

Communicators should have (at least) eight vital competencies, one of which is rarely recognized: In most companies, technical communicators are presumed to be walking dictionaries, if not encyclopedias, that can deliver input to other employees' tasks even though their workload is still increasing and resulting in high stress levels (the manager often requires virtually impossible deadlines). Advice: Try to realize workable conditions by looking for solutions that benefit all concerned.

CREATIVE APPROACHES TO ORGANIZING INFORMATION

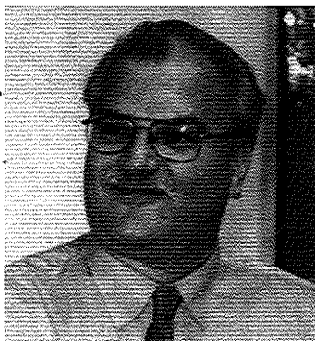
BY JULIA LAND

Michael Doyle of PUBSNET presented a very organized workshop that closely followed his paper in the proceedings. He led us in activities illustrating three techniques for generating lists of information to be included in a document and for organizing that information.

The three techniques were mind mapping, brainstorming, and affinity diagramming.

Using a car owner's manual as the desired product, we first developed a list of topics by mind mapping. This is a technique that combines sketches and text to generate and record ideas and relationships. It is a solitary activity

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Michael Doyle

that works best in five-to-seven-minute bursts. We started by sketching the central topic, in this case a car and driver, and continued by writing topic keywords around the sketch and connecting the keywords to the sketch with radiating lines. If we thought of a keyword related to a word already listed, we connected the new word to the existing word rather than to the sketch.

For the second exercise, we used brainstorming to develop the list of topics. This is a group activity where individuals call out ideas, which are then recorded on individual Post-it™ notes. A key similarity between mind mapping and brainstorming is that the ideas are not edited during the creative process.

The brainstorming session generated more ideas than the individual mind mappings did, perhaps because more people were contributing to the idea flow. Another significant difference is that the mind mapping process generated both ideas and rudimentary organization of the ideas. There was no order at

all to the brainstorming ideas and a third technique, affinity diagraming, was used to organize them.

In affinity diagraming, the Post-it notes with the topic ideas are stuck on the wall and arranged in groups of seven or fewer related ideas. Each group is given a label identifying the relationship among the members of the group. The labels are then arranged in groups of seven or fewer related concepts, and the new groups are labeled with the concept that relates the entries. The higher-level labels are arranged in groups of seven or fewer and so on. This process was to continue until we had built an outline from the bottom up.

The exercise in affinity diagraming was less successful than the other two exercises. There were so many of us and so many Post-its with ideas, and so little time. This in itself was instructive, illustrating that organizing information can take more time and more careful thought than the original generation of ideas.

ETHICS IN ACTION: A NO-TALK WORKSHOP

BY JANET ROCHESTER

One of the most interesting and valuable sessions I attended was this workshop presented by **Lori Allen** (Metropolitan State College—Denver) and **Dan Voss** (Lockheed Martin Electronic & Missiles). They had the participants read definitions of ten values in technical communication, then a set of realistic scenarios representing those values. Each scenario gave a situation and a challenge to a technical communication team.

Each participant selected one scenario; then we formed a group with others who had selected the same scenario. My group chose Social Responsibility. Our challenge was to

develop a damage control communication plan for a chemical company responsible for a large chemical spill in the Mississippi delta. We focused on honest admission of the problem, how we would solve it, and how we would monitor the situation and prevent future occurrences.

The three other groups in the workshop chose Privacy, Quality, and Avoiding Conflict of

Interest. Each group summarized its plan to the group as a whole. The workshop was well organized and structured; it involved all the participants and stimulated interaction with both the other members of the small groups and the larger group in the summary phase.

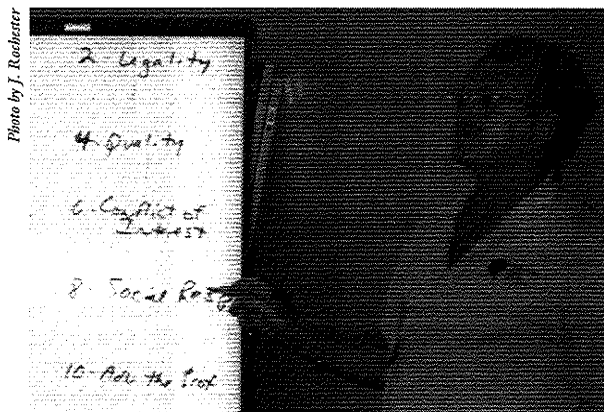


Photo by J. Rochester

Dan Voss

A CONFUSED MIND SAYS "NO": TURNING DATA INTO USEFUL INFORMATION

BY JULIA LAND

In this workshop Jan D'Arcy (Jan D'Arcy and Associates) focused on effective ways to present information. The paper in the proceedings gives only a general idea of the content of the workshop; the colorful handouts were much more informative.

The guiding theme for the workshop was pirates. Ms. D'Arcy used Jean Lafitte's exploits as a pirate and as an aide-de-camp to Andrew Jackson during

the Battle of New Orleans as examples of successful communication and alliance building.

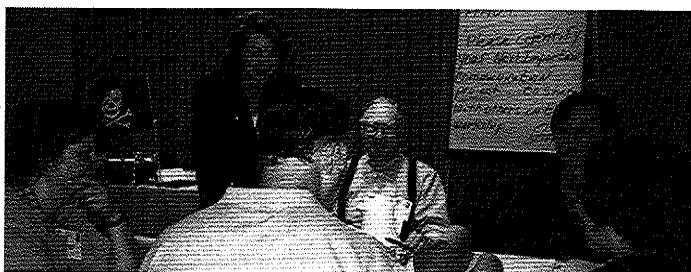
In developing presentations of complex information, Ms. D'Arcy suggested:

- *Write the finish first.* This helps keep everything else you write relevant to the end you desire. The ending should restate the message and reinforce the value of the information.

- *Write the start next.* As part of the beginning of the presentation, you should find some common ground with the audience and establish your credibility.
- During the body of the presentation *limit the amount of detail.* Provide only the data the audience needs to do the job or make the decision. She compared the effectiveness of a bugle call during battle for communicating important instructions to a symphony whose message would be lost in battle conditions.

Ms. D'Arcy used an exercise in tying a knot to illustrate the effectiveness of different teaching mechanisms. We were working in small groups and each group was given a rope and written instructions for tying a specific type of knot. When we couldn't follow the written instructions, we then were allowed to look at a diagram of the knot. This was still too much for most of us, so Ms. D'Arcy demonstrated how to tie the knot, using a metaphor of a rabbit to describe the twists and turns of the rope. "The rabbit goes around the tree and down the hole...." I confess that even so, I didn't get it, although others in my group did.

Photo by T. Makinson



Jan D'Arcy and her workshop

INTRODUCTION TO USABILITY TESTING

BY JULIA LAND

In this workshop Karl-Erik Bystrom (Comforce Technical Services) provided a broad overview of usability testing. He started by placing usability testing within the scheme of usability engineering methods. In addition to testing, there are contextual methods, inspection methods, and a broad category he called other methods.

Usability testing means testing products and product designs with users using real-life tasks and real products or prototypes of products. It can occur at any stage of the product life cycle. Early-phase testing is used to gather information about user needs and existing products. Middle-phase testing is to test and refine product designs. Late-phase testing is to verify the design, benchmark the current product, and plan for the next release.

Testing can be expensive in both time and money, so while it would be nice to test every aspect of a product, that is not always possible. You should test any aspect that is vital to the product. You should also test when you are having difficulty making a design decision. You may not need to test easy or standard design decisions or minor product parts.

The primary steps for designing and running a usability test are:

1. *Analyze the product and develop the test goals.* The test goals should be based on feature and usability requirements; they will be used to determine the tasks, participants, and measures.
2. *Select the tasks and measures.* The tasks to be tested should be the com-



Karl-Erik Bystrom

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mon tasks and the important tasks for the product. You can plan on using skills gained in one task for the next task. The script for the test should start and end with easy tasks, and there should be an easy task in the middle.

Typical objective measures include performance rates (Can they do the task?), performance times (How fast can they do it?), the number and types of errors, user interface efficiency and navigation paths, and the use of documentation and help. Typical subjective measures include ease of use and perceived usefulness.

3. *Develop the participant profile and recruit the participants.*

The criteria for selecting the participants depend on the goals of the test, but there should be a range of skill levels. There are usually about five or six participants, but you should recruit about eight in case some do not show up.

4. *Prepare the usability lab.*

The lab can be anything from a full-blown lab with one-way mirrors and lots of equipment to an office or a conference room. Video cameras are very helpful, as is software to use in logging.

5. *Prepare for and run the test.*

To prepare, develop the test and set up the lab. Run a pilot test and revise the test if needed. Running the test includes meeting the participant, giving a verbal introduction to the test, preparing any needed paperwork such as consent forms and non-disclosure agreements, doing pretest

questionnaires, running the tasks, doing post-test questionnaires, and debriefing the participant.

6. *Record and analyze the data.*

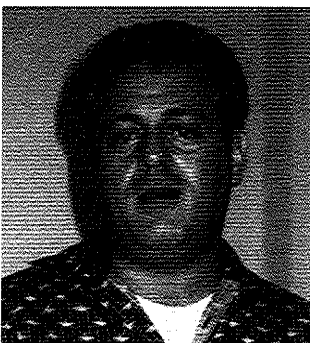
The goal is to track what the participant says and does. You should record the participant number, the task, the time, actions, the interface used, and any comments. Correlate the performance with the participant profile and determine average difficulty ratings. Prepare affinity diagrams of the problems.

7. *Communicate the results.*

Prepare a usability report. Designers want to know what was tested and with whom, the nature or type of the problems, the severity and scope of the problems, and the general categories of the problems (from the affinity diagrams) within and across the tests.

Mr. Bystrom also discussed testing documentation. Documentation can be tested by itself or be integrated into product testing. The benefit of standalone testing is that the participants have to focus on the documents because the product isn't there. However, the absence of the product can raise questions about the validity of the test.

Integrating the document testing into the product testing shows how the users use the product and the documentation together, but the participants may not use the documents much so there may not be much data. You can prompt the participants to use the documents, but you cannot force them to do so.



Saul Carliner

INDUSTRY MEETS ACADEMIA

BY JULIA LAND

"Reflections of a Practicing Professional Turned Professor." That was the name of the presentation, but if you want to know about Saul Carliner's reflections, you need to read the proceedings. As it happened, during this session one of the other presenters went well over the allotted time. This may or may not have been the reason Mr. Carliner abandoned his prepared remarks, but whatever the reason, the result was a fascinating discussion

of his opinions about our profession and suggestions for profitable areas of research.

Some of the research areas he proposed are:

- Principles of document design.
- Scope of the industry. How much money is spent annually on technical communication?
- Practicing professionals. Who are we? How many of us are there? What are our salaries? What core job skills are required?

- Techniques to demonstrate the value and effectiveness of technical communication.

He was concerned that many of the researchers in technical communication are trained in literary research. A more scientific approach, with considerations for such things as sample size, would yield important differences in research design.

Some of the other suggestions he made are:

- Closer ties between academia and industry with the professors taking consulting positions in industry.
- Addition of an associate degree in technical communication.
- A role for technical communication in risk management. The value of a document may well come from the lawsuit that is avoided because of the document.

HUMAN BODIES AND TECHNOLOGY

BY GEORGE HAYHOE

One of the last sessions I attended dealt with the relationship among science, explanation, and instruction in the physics of skiing in the first presentation, and the advantages of preserving data for reuse as a way of making future biological research more productive and less costly in the second.

In his paper "Science, Explanation, Instruction," **Bob Krull** of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute explored how moving from scientific discovery to human performance requires two steps: from science to explanation, and from explanation to instruction. Using David Lind and Scott Sanders's book *The Physics of Skiing* as an example, he explained that the use of abstract concepts and technical terms, general principles separated from concrete instances, complex relationships often expressed mathematically, and the reductive analysis of relationship pairs often makes scientific information very difficult for most of the population to grasp. In explaining this information, we tend to emphasize words over graphics and equations, use language that is closer to lay terminology, and chunk complex relationships into phases.

But to instruct, we must move from motivating (by encouraging readers to try instruc-

tions), to imaging and naming (by providing mostly procedural information and relatively little declarative information), to doing (by providing practice modules), to evaluating (by helping users sense when they have performed correctly), and to integrating skills through successive trials.

In "A Database-driven Interactive Learning System for the Quantification of Body Temperature During Exercise," **Terrance Malkinson** of the Southern Alberta Institute of Technology explained that in the past, the data collected from most research have eventually been lost; only the conclusions drawn from the data remain. The data have been destroyed because they could not be economically stored or easily shared with other researchers. This practice has required duplication of effort, which not only makes other research less productive but also more expensive.

As a result of his research in applying information technology to the work of biomedical scientists and engineers, Malkinson has been developing an integrated database that will preserve data, which could prove helpful in the future by allowing researchers to easily compare current and archival data related to the same phenomena.

"A common mistake that people make when trying to design something completely foolproof is to underestimate the ingenuity of complete fools."

—Douglas Adams

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STORYTELLING AND TECHNOLOGY

BY TOM VAN LOON

This Friday morning session might well have been scheduled earlier in the program: The topic is of fundamental importance for technical writers and consequently should have been considered during each of the meeting's presentations.

What was it about? It was about the presentation of technical data to various audiences. The fairly remarkable conclusion of the session

was that all presenters agreed about the most effective way of communicating technical data even though they started their considerations from different points of view.

Alan Manning (Brigham Young University) emphasized that the technical "truth" (in the

form of schemes etc.) differs fundamentally from the "truth" (practical use) of users of appliances. It therefore makes no sense to disturb the lay user with a wealth of schemes and technical data. It is better to present the information that is essential for use in a narrative form. The reader of this information might—but only in addition!—be interested in the technical aspects through a particularization strategy.

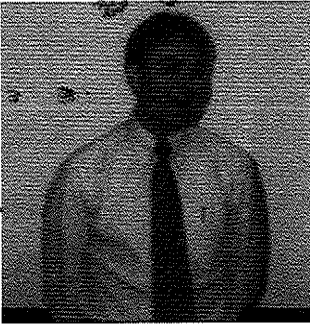
Patrick Dean and Pete Kloppenburg (Certicom), who started their story with a bit

of well chosen humor, emphasized that the narrative is a fundamental mode of human understanding. This should be reflected in the form of a manual: The manual should construct a hypothetical user with whom the reader can identify. A good manual should take the form of an heroic narrative that describes the successful use of the product. Because most manuals treat complex technical equipment, the narrative might contain sub-narratives to deal with second-order potential problems for the user.

Patricia Search (Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute), who was originally to present her contribution during another session, was the last speaker. Her talk about "Ancient Voices and Cyberspace" was based on the use of symbols by primitive cultures worldwide. There appear to be similar symbols (circles, chevrons, etc.) for essentially identical meanings, which reflects Howard Gardner's idea that "the basis of human thought is in the symbol." This observation might be used to make electronic communication more effective by adopting more fundamental symbols, which might replace the numerous computer interfaces that change continually.

Technical writing, according to the discussion following the presentations, should indeed be more than the presentation of technically correct data in an order that is logical from—mainly—a technical point of view. Prehistoric man developed an astonishingly coherent view of the world, originally only on the basis of communication through symbols. Let modern man take advantage of the old wisdom.

Photo by J. Rochester



Alan Manning

Photo by J. Rochester



L. Patrick Dean and R. Pete Kloppenburg

Photo by J. Rochester



Patricia Search

SPELLING: A PECULIARLY CANADIAN DILEMMA

How do you spell *centre* and *labour*? Or *center* and *labor*? In Canada there are no clear guidelines. Even Canadian dictionaries don't agree: Funk & Wagnall's *Canadian College Dictionary* promotes U.S. spellings, the new *Canadian Oxford Dictionary* promotes British.

Yet there are some words where Canadians have decided for themselves: *recognize* and *tire* are typical examples (*recognise* and *tyre* in Britain). However, Canadians seem to be ambivalent about *pajama/pyjama*, *maneuver/manoeuvre*, and *program(me)*. You can view such spelling inconsistencies as an interesting quirk or as total frustration. It depends on where you sit!

—RGI News, No. 4, Winter 1998

KEYNOTE SPEAKER FOR IPCC/SIGDOC 2000

Based on the success of both back-to-back and overlapping conferences, PCS and ACM SIGDOC have scheduled a joint conference in 2000. Join us for IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 September 24-27 at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Cambridge Marriott Hotel. For this truly joint conference you will find only one call for papers, one registration fee, one proceedings, and one spectacular keynote speaker.



Technology & Teamwork

We are pleased to announce Nicholas Negroponte, cofounder of the MIT Media Lab, as our keynote speaker. Professor Negroponte, author of the best-seller *Being Digital* and numerous other publications, has been a member of the MIT faculty since 1966 and is the Jerome B. Wiesner Professor of Media Technology. Current work in the Media Lab focuses on the overlap of electronic information and the everyday physical world.

For more information on IPCC/SIGDOC 2000 visit <http://www.ieeeecs.org> or <http://www.acm.org/sigdoc>. For more information on Professor Negroponte or the MIT Media Lab, visit <http://www.media.mit.edu>.



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