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PCS Awards for 2003

By Robert Krull

On 23 September PCS will present its annual awards at IPCC 2003 in Orlando, Florida. The awards celebrate individuals for their contributions to technical communication and to the Professional Communication Society.

The recipients are **Daniel Jones**, the *Ronald S. Blicq Award* for distinguished contributions in technical communication education; **William Horton**, the *Alfred N. Goldsmith Award* for outstanding achievements in technical communication; **Luke Maki**, the *Emily K. Schlesinger Award* for outstanding service to the society; and **Antoon van Luxemburg, Jan Ulijn**, and **Nicole Amare**, the *Rudolph J. Joenk, Jr. Award* for best paper in the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* in 2002.

Blicq Award

Professor **Daniel Jones** has taught technical communication at the University of Central Florida for the past 20 years and he helped develop the department's programs in technical communication, as well as its new Ph.D. degree program in texts and technology.



Dan Jones

Professor Jones's research and teaching interests include technical writing style, technical editing, the relations of literature and science, and software documentation. He has published four books: *Defining Technical Communication* (Society for Technical Communication, 1996), *Technical Writing Style* (Allyn and Bacon, 1998), *The Technical Communicator's Handbook* (Allyn and Bacon, 2000), and, coauthored with Karen Lane, *Technical Communication: Strategies for College and the Workplace* (Longman, 2002).

In 1998 he received the Society for Technical Communication's Jay R. Gould Award for excellence in teaching technical communication and in 2000 was elected a fellow of that society. He also served as the executive secretary/treasurer of the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing for five years (1990-1995).

Goldsmith Award

William Horton is an internationally sought-after speaker and instructor. He recently delivered keynote addresses for the Distance Learning Conference in Madison, Wisconsin; the Human Resources Association National Congress in São Paulo, Brazil; the Information Technology Training Association conference in Barcelona, Spain; and the



William Horton

(continued on page 5)



Rudy Joenk

Instant Fame

It's not too late to reserve your portion of **INSTANT FAME** by writing just a paragraph or two about some of the presentations you attend at IPCC 2003. The idea is to capture a point of view, Q&A, discussion, etc. that isn't in the proceedings. Photographers, too, are eligible for this award; up-close shots are best. If all of you reporters and picture takers work fast right after the conference, we might even get the fruit of your labors into the November/December issue (normal deadline is 15 September, before the conference) rather than in the first 2004 issue.

I'm always interested in receiving proposals for single articles or columns. See the information for authors farther along in this column.

AdCom

The final meeting, including the AdCom's part of the annual election, will be 20-21 September in Lake Buena Vista (Orlando), Florida, just before IPCC 2003. (Online voting by members ended 31 August.) PCS members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

Potpourri

Apropos of "King of English" by Michael Brady in the July/August *Newsletter*, in a message to *PC World* (August 2003, p. 45) Ken Alford noted that ["God's secretaries"] introduced the first emoticons in Genesis: a winking smiley ;) after verse 14:8, and a happy face :) after verse 49:24. [Actually, both are artifacts of parenthetical expressions.]

On an insurance renewal form in the U.K. you are asked to enter "Your current date of birth." John Saffer in *World Wide Words*, 12 July 2003.

Simplifying the language: *e-mail* to *courrier électronique* to *courriel*. The latter is the French Culture Ministry's choice, following Québec's lead, to avoid an Anglo-Saxonism. *The New York Times*, 11 July 2003.

Via the Internet from France, Sheila Carrodus thinks that a likelier candidate for popular use is *mél*, an abbreviation for *messagerie électronique*, pronounced much like *mail*. From AWAD weekly message 96, 28 July 2003.

Weblish was added to the 6th edition of *Collins English Dictionary*; it is

defined as the new abbreviated Internet and text message language. *The Scotsman [newspaper]*, 26 June 2003.

Added to the new *Oxford English Dictionary* are *bling-bling*, an expression of appreciation; *blipverts*, very short subliminal TV advertisements; and *minging*, disgusting. *The Denver Post*, 8 June 2003.

"Make it possible for programmers to write programs in English and you will quickly discover that programmers do not know how to write in English." An old programming proverb found in the newsletter of the IEEE Nuclear & Plasma Sciences Society, June 2003.

Bar sign in a Michael Maslin cartoon: **LESSENERD ANXIETY HOUR**. *The New Yorker*, 24 March 2003.

"So many stories to write and only 600 000 words to write them with." "Thoughts Left Over" by Maynard Good Stoddard in *The Saturday Evening Post*, July/August 2003.

"Engineers must love irony. Why else would you have to click the Start button in Windows to see the turn-off-

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Elizabeth Weise Moeller

Paradigm Shift in the Writing Space

From the days of hieroglyphics and cuneiform to papyrus rolls, through the Middle Ages with the Gutenberg Bible, and on to today with massive computer-driven presses, the traditional writing space has always been the final output—that piece of paper or roll of papyrus. Each change in output has brought similar changes in writing style and process, effectively bringing about a new publishing paradigm.

“Publishing paradigm” seemed to be one of the key phrases at the June TAB meeting. As the IEEE moves away from printed publications and focuses its energy on the IEEE Electronic Library (IEL), we will begin to experience a publishing paradigm shift. Thomas Kuhn, in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 2nd ed., 1970), tells us that paradigm shifts tend to create more rigid definitions of the field. On the other hand, Jay David Bolter, in *Writing Space* (Lawrence Erlbaum Assoc., 1991), tells us that the electronic writing space could open up a world of opportunities. In reality, we will probably see a little of both as PCS works to define its role in the new paradigm.

Why this paradigm shift? Cost appears to be the driving factor. The cost of producing the number of journals that the IEEE produces on a yearly basis is extremely high. Many societies have been able to reduce their costs by unbundling their jour-

nals. They offer unlimited access to their members through IEL, but members pay extra to receive a print copy. The unit price of a journal is based on the number printed. Since there are standard setup fees, the unit cost of a journal issue goes down as the number of printed copies increases and the setup fees can be spread across many copies instead of just a few. Because our print run is so low, it would be cost-prohibitive to unbundle our *Transactions*. The setup cost would be borne by the relatively few copies printed. That is why PCS has chosen not to go the route many other societies have.

There are other concerns with a completely electronic journal. In many academic environments, articles in electronic journals do not carry the same weight during the tenure and promotion process as those in printed, archival journals. This is true even if the articles have gone through the same rigorous peer-review process. Another concern is that of simply holding the journal in your hand. Many people like to just sit down in a comfy chair, away from the computer, and read their journals.

There are benefits to an electronic journal as well. First and foremost, we could create a truly hypertext journal that allows users to venture off on tangents that interest them. The writing space is no longer limited to a piece of A4 or U.S. letter size paper. The graphics could be much more

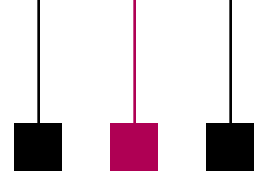
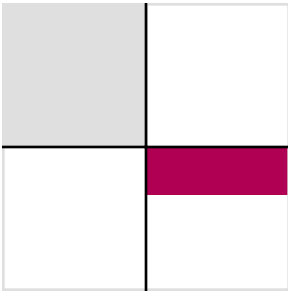
vibrant with color and we could even add animation when appropriate. Our *Transactions* could become a truly multimedia document.

Where does this leave PCS? As the Professional Communication Society, I would like to see us create a model that effectively combines the new all-electronic paradigm with the traditional print paradigm. We are communicators—many of us communicate in electronic environments on a day-to-day basis. We need to be leaders as the IEEE shifts to a mostly electronic environment.

One idea I have discussed with Kim Campbell (editor, *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*) and Roger Grice (chair, editorial advisory committee) is a combination of the two paradigms. Articles would go through the normal peer review and editing cycle but would be published in the IEL as soon as they are ready to go—no waiting until the next available slot in a scheduled journal. We would then publish a print version of the *Transactions* on an annual or semi-annual basis. This print version could be a compilation of all articles, or it could be a compilation of abstracts published online in the past year, and those authors who need their full article printed could pay a nominal publication fee for inclusion. Or it could be something else entirely.

Kim has presented this idea to authors from the past year. While not opposed to the idea, there are some valid concerns. Many feel that one

We need to be leaders as the IEEE shifts to a mostly electronic environment.



journal issue per year is not enough to keep PCS's name in the forefront in the field. There are also other logistical issues to be worked out.

However, this is why we are bringing the suggestion to the *Transactions* authors and to you for discussion *before* we make a decision.

As we begin to add virtual communities and online forums for our members, I hope you will join in the discussion of this topic on our Web site.

From the Editor

(continued from page 2)

computer command? In the same vein, you turn on the Samsung and Kyocera cell phones by holding down—that's right—the End key." David Pogue in *The New York Times*, 5 June 2003.

On a junk mail advertisement for a shoe sale: "At this price they won't last." Rod Blackburn in *World Wide Words*, 7 June 2003.

Embarrassing domain names: <http://www.classicalbums.co.uk> and <http://www.ringtoneshits.com> (for a company that creates cell-phone ring tones based on hit tunes). Douglas Yates in *World Wide Words*, 3 July 2003.

Jean-luc Doumont, about to board at an airport, heard the gate attendant announce that "The plane is in an overbooked situation." He doubts that a situation can be overbooked and wonders why the extra word was injected. Via the Internet from Belgium, 15 July 2003.

The European Commission has designated its currency to be the *euro* and the *cent*, no matter how many of them there are. However, a practical recommendation in its English Style

Guide, section 12.12, says, "Elsewhere, and especially in documents intended for the general public, use the natural plural with 's' for both terms." http://europa.eu.int/comm/economy_finance/euro/essentials/spelling_sign_informatics/00718_en.pdf. Thanks to Luke Maki for pointing this out.

Deadlines are the 15th of the odd-number months.

Information for Authors

One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome. Write about what you know, things that you're familiar with. If you live outside North America, consider writing about technical communication in your country. You needn't be a PCS member to contribute.

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple**; multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough formatting and highlighting (bold-face, 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.

The *Newsletter* issues on our Web site (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/newsletter.html>) can be used as examples. Issues are posted about one month after distribution of the print version and now have active e-mail, Web, and table-of-contents links.

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, RTF (rich text format), and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of p. 2 along with our copyright notice.

Deadlines

The 15th day of each odd-number month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-number month. For example, the deadline is 15 November for the January/February 2004 issue, 15 January for the March/April issue, etc. You won't be far off (and never late) if you observe the Ides of November, January, March, and so on.

PCS Awards for 2003

(continued from page 1)

Knowledge Management Seminarium in Stockholm, Sweden.

Horton is a registered professional engineer, an MIT graduate, and a fellow of the STC. He is a recipient of the Association for Computing Machinery's Rigo Award for contributions to software documentation and of the iF Award (Germany) for industrial design. His books include *Designing Web-Based Training*, *Designing and Writing Online Documentation*, and *Secrets of User-Seductive Documents*. He is coauthor of *E-learning Tools and Technologies* (with his wife Katherine), *Getting Started in Online Learning*, and *The Web Page Design Cookbook*. He is also the author of three books in the American Society for Training & Development's series on e-learning: *Leading E-learning*, *Evaluating E-learning*, and *Using E-learning*.

[Unfortunately, Mr. Horton is not able to attend the conference but he will be keynote speaker at IPCC 2004.]

Schlesinger Award

Luke R. Maki has been a member of the PCS AdCom since 1999, is the IPCC 2003 publications chair, and has represented the society on several IEEE-USA information technology committees. He helped provide both NetMeeting and telephone-conference-call connectivity for AdCom meetings, thereby reducing costs to the society and to AdCom members.



Luke Maki

Maki is a senior network designer at the Boeing Company and has been involved with Ethernet and data communications for over 20 years. While at Boeing and its affiliated companies he has developed communication systems to control automated circuit board assembly machinery; worked on development of standard data communication protocols; chaired an enterprise-wide technical group that reviews and approves agreements for network architecture, design, deployment, maintenance, and product selection; managed a test and development data network; been lead WAN design engineer for the Boeing Intranet, lead engineer and product manager for provision of Network Time Protocol on the Boeing network; and been central to the network organization's work to achieve ISO-9001 certification.

Prior to joining Boeing Mr. Maki was with GTE South and the Air Force Flight Dynamics Laboratory at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base in Dayton, Ohio. Mr. Maki is a registered professional engineer. He earned a bachelor of science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Akron in 1978 and a master of science degree in computer

systems from the Air Force Institute of Technology in 1984.

Joenk Award

The best paper in the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* in 2002 was judged to be "The Contribution of Electronic Communication Media to the Design Process: Communicative and Cultural Implications," vol. 45, no. 4, December 2002, pp. 250-263, by coauthors Van Luxemburg, Ulijn, and Amare.

Antoon van Luxemburg is employed as a consultant at M&I/Partners BV in Amersfoort, the Netherlands. He has a degree in electrical engineering from the Rijswijk Institute of Tech-



Antoon van Luxemburg

nology and a master's degree in technology and society from the Eindhoven University of Technology. In Eindhoven, Luxemburg

developed his interest in organizational and sociological implications of information and communication technology. That interest led to research in the role of different communication media in the interaction between a company and its customers during the design process.

Jan Ulijn holds the endowed Jean Monnet chair in Euromanagement at Eindhoven University of Technology

(the Netherlands) and a CLUSTER* chair at the Institut National Polytechnique de Grenoble (France). He also is a fellow of the Eindhoven Center of Innovation Studies. He regularly fulfills visiting professorships in other European countries such as Belgium (Ghent), Germany (Darmstadt), and Denmark (Aarhus).



Jan Ulijn

His professional experience includes the United States (Stanford University, California) and China (Jiao Tong University, Shanghai and Xi'an) in the areas of innovation management, psycholinguistics, and technical communication and culture. His current research interests include entrepreneurial and innovative culture as a mix of professional, corporate, and national subcultures. He is a fellow of the Society for Technical Communication and recipient of the 1998 Association for Business Communication's outstanding researcher award.

Nicole Amare received her Ph.D. degree from the University of Alabama where she taught and developed courses in management communication, English for engineers, and computer-assisted composition. As

an assistant professor of technical communication at the University of South Alabama, she currently teaches courses in technical writing, editing, and composition. She coauthored *Real Life University*, a college success guide, with Michael McMyne and recently edited *Beyond the Lemonade Stand*,



Nicole Amare

an anthology of acclaimed student entrepreneurs. From 1998 to 2000 she was an editorial assistant for the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.

How the Awardees Are Chosen

Nominations for the Blicq, Goldsmith, and Schlesinger awards may be submitted by the PCS membership. The final selection is made by the administrative committee (AdCom). The best paper award is determined by the editorial advisory committee.

Previous award winners from 1997 forward are identified in the July/August and September/October 2002 issues of this *Newsletter*. Pre-1997 awardees are listed in the May/June and July/August 1997 issues.

The author is awards chair for PCS and a member of the AdCom, and professor of communication at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York.

IPCC 2004 Set for Minneapolis

The 2004 PCS conference is scheduled for Wednesday, 29 September, through Saturday, 2 October, at the Radisson Hotel Metrodome in Minneapolis, Minnesota (near the University of Minnesota). The call for papers (see page 23) will also be available at IPCC 2003 in Orlando and on our Web site.

If you have questions about IPCC 2004 or would like to volunteer to help with it, please contact conference chair Bernadette Longo at blongo@umn.edu or program chair George Hayhoe at hayhoe_g@mercer.edu.

Haiku Error Messages—

First snow, then silence.
This thousand dollar screen dies
So beautifully.
The Tao that is seen
Is not the true Tao until
You bring fresh taoner.

If this copy of the *Newsletter* you're reading isn't yours, consider joining the Professional Communication Society as either a member of the IEEE and PCS or an affiliate of PCS. Visit our Web page (<http://www.ieeepcs.org/membership.htm>) for information; applications are online. On the other hand, if this copy is yours, please lend it to a friend.

* Consortium Linking Universities of Science and Technology for Education and Research [European]

New Words, Seven Drops at a Time

By Arthur Plotnik

“7 drops per qt water every time you water,” says the label on my Schultz Plant Food, a sea-blue slosh of nutrients in a bottle.

Years ago I tossed a grapefruit seed in a pot and the rest is four feet of limp-leaved history—except when I pump an eye-dropper-full of Schultz into the plant’s water. Overnight, foliage snaps to. Jessant shoots erupt like green starbursts.

This is not a product plug, but a Schultzy spin on infusing a writer’s vocabulary. Writing piece after piece exhausts the loam of expression. Sentences, descriptive passages, lines of poetry start to droop. The brain cries for invigoration, and the eye-dropper approach—seven new words or so weekly—may be just the ticket.

Who has not resolved to master a dictionary or jumbo vocabulary builder? Most such enterprises fizzle, which may not be a bad thing for readers. An overdose of new words can

create a garden of monstrous locutions. Drop-by-drop enrichment allows one to savor and test a word, integrate it into one’s style before sounding like Thomas Pynchon on Miracle-Gro.

Writers’ Words

The planet groans with word resources, many of them targeting language hobbyists or logophiles. Lexicographer Laurence Urdang has wisecracked (*The New York Times Dictionary of Misunderstood*,

Misused, and Mispronounced Words, 1985) that an “enchiridion of arcane and recondite sesquipedalian items will appeal to the oniomania of an eximious Gemeinschaft”—and who could disagree? Translation: Certain admirable types like to buy collections of big, unusual words.

Writers appreciate recondite items as much as the next word junkie, but they don’t want readers to gag on them. An asphyxiating vocabulary flirts with what Jonathan Franzen calls the “Status model” of authorship: the uncompromising *artiste* who disdains broad appeal and for whom “difficulty tends to signal excellence.” In the opposing “Contract model,” Franzen says, the author makes a deal with readers, a promise to connect with them for their efforts. When contract readers “crack a tooth on a hard word,” maybe they oughta sue.

Those who want to connect, then, stock their journals with *writers’* words—not always the plainest or best known, but somehow rewarding to the reader. Franzen himself uses words such as *pemmican* and *solipsistic* in his article (“Mr. Difficult,” *The New Yorker*, 30 September 2002), but they turn out to be pretty good chaws in context.

For special purposes, a writer’s word can be anything from *firkin* to *flocinaucinihilipilification*. But to earn a place in one’s general writing vocabulary, the word should meet at least one of these criteria:

- Concise: *mulct* (defraud, as of money)
- Euphonious: *fanfaronade* (bluster)
- Evocative: *mojo* (charmed object)
- Forceful: *fulgent* (dazzlingly bright)
- Fresh alternative: *nimiety* (an abundance, instead of *plethora*)
- Fun: *cachinnate* (laugh immoderately)
- Onomatopoeic: *williwaw* (violent squall)
- Precise: *tor* (hilltop rock heap)

A word outside the reader’s active or half-known vocabulary should have some seductive aura, like majesty or mystery. Perhaps it reveals itself in context—“steam *purled* up from the pavement” (flowed in curls)—or begs to be looked up, like *scumble* (to soften brilliant color).

Where does one find writers’ words not yet trampled to death? Self-help compilations such as *Word Smart* (Princeton Review) or *1000 Most Important Words* (Ballantine) house a few, but big lists can be overwhelming. I favor collections with narrative to slow things down; e.g., *Word Watch* (Holt, 1995), Anne H. Soukhanov’s riffs on modern coinages such as *mamou* (something big and important).

Swarms of writers’ words appear in thesauruses and specialized glossaries, especially in the sciences (see Syntax in *The Writer*, October and

Vocabulary boosts can energize writing—or overload it.

December 2002); in obscure and antiquated works, including old slang dictionaries; and in such loopy Web sites as the Rap Dictionary, <http://www.rapdict.org>. Desk novel-ties like *The Mavens' Word of the Day Block Calendar* (Andrews McMeel)

deliver a few winners among their daily doses, but it's hard to pay atten-tion as days and desktops pile up.

Choice items are more likely to sur-face in the world's flow of expression —literary, journalistic, ethnic, and

subcultural. So what if Sunday pun-dits and other word mavens snap up the lunkers? Individual writers with keen eye and notebook will net their share. Anyone is free to snatch iso-lated words from what they read and hear. Outside of trademarked names,

Internet Word-a-Day Sources: A Selection

Vocabulary sort of spavined? Get some revitalizing words each day from sites like these personal favorites. Each offers e-mailed words by free subscription unless otherwise noted. Sample words (in italics) are only partly defined here.

<http://americanliterature.com> A Vocabulary Word of the Day, by Aaron Rene Ezis. Superior words and archive, but many ads and no auto-delivery. *Echt*, genuine.

<http://dictionary.reference.com/wordoftheday/> Word of the Day from Lexico Publishing. Well-organized; archives, quotes. *Wayworn*, travel weary.

<http://home.mn.rr.com/wwftd/> Worthless Word for the Day. Not so worthless. Its community exchanges of "obscure, abstruse, and/or recondite words" are often writers' words. Archive. *Muzzy*, muddled, confused.

<http://m-w.com/> Merriam-Webster's Word of the Day. Solid, informative. Etymology, usage examples. Archive. *Quidnunc*, a busybody.

<http://nationalreview.com/word/word.asp> Bill Buckley's Word of the Day. A quiz with three choices. No archive or subscription. *Indite*, to set down in writing.

<http://vocabula.com/> A Definition a Day, from The Vocabula Review. Selects words with "an aura of fun or majesty." Best/Worst archives. Subscription USD 5.95/year. *Weanling*, a newly weaned child or animal.

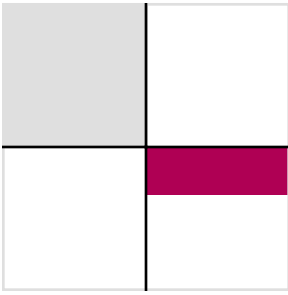
<http://oed.com/cgi/display/wotd> *Oxford English Dictionary* Word of the Day. Some words you may know, but the site includes fascinating histories and additional meanings you didn't. No archive or sub-scription. *Bower*, dwelling, abode, covered stall, inner apartment, etc.

<http://www.randomhouse.com/wotd/> The Mavens' Word of the Day. Only the archive remains on this defunct service, but it's a huge treasury six years in the making. Detailed, informed discussion with each entry. *Treacle*, unrestrained sentimentality.

<http://www.spizzquiz.net/index.html> Spizzerinctum: The Quiz of Breaking News and Obscure Words. Cool site that spots hot words in the media, lets you guess meanings from three choices, then links to source. Archive. *Creachy*, dilapidated, sickly.

<http://wordsmith.org/awad/index.html> A.Word.A.Day. *Hobbledehoy*, an awkward young fellow.

<http://wordspy.com/> The Word Spy. Paul McFedries's sharp-eyed collection of recent coinages; context, background, sightings, quotes. Indexed archives. *Invacuate*, to hold people in a building for safety.



no one owns a word, not even poets associated with, say, *darkling* or *diverged*.

My recent pickings include *flense* (to skin a whale or, figuratively, to flay) from Michael Chabon; *peridot* (green transparent gemstone) from Sandra McPherson; and *camorra* (secret society) from Anne Fadiman. I'll keep them handy for some inspired use.

Web of Words

These days the most overwhelming word source is the Internet, where some sites offer useful vocabulary in delayed-release doses, and others overwhelm the frontal lobes with Scrabble babble, blogger chat, and link madness.

Among daily infusions, the most renowned is A.Word.A.Day, <http://wordsmith.org>. Loaded with features and claiming some half-million devotees, it produced a best selling book from its word archives last fall (Anu Garg, *A Word A Day*, Wiley). Subscriptions are free for a selected word and commentary e-mailed each weekday.

In most word-a-day services, many selections will be technical, silly, arcane, or ordinary (though with interesting background). Only a few each month will be writers' words; but here's the point: You will see them, and see them at a reasonable pace for building your vocabulary. When eager for more, you can dive into the sites' archives of prior words and swim among the *momes* (boors) and *bonces* (heads).

The big-mamou question: Should you use a word you fear will stump your readers? Absolutely—if you adore it, believe it to be what Mark Twain would call the “intensely right word,” and haven't used too many puzzlers elsewhere. After all, what sweeter lagniappe for readers than a new word for their delectation?

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The author is a contributing editor to The Writer and a former publishing executive who has written six books, including The Elements of Authorship and two Book-of-the-Month-Club selections: The Elements of Editing and The Elements of Expression.

New PCS-sponsored Books

Writing and Speaking In the Technology Professions

A Practical Guide, 2nd ed.

By David F. Beer

The revised and expanded second edition of this popular book completely updates the original, providing authoritative guidance on communicating via modern technology in the contemporary work environment. Two new sections, on global communication and the Internet, address communicating effectively in the context of increased e-mail and Web usage. The new edition also includes updated articles on working with others to get results and on giving directions that work.

Wiley-IEEE Press, ISBN: 0-471-44473-1, 536 pp., USD 44.95, July 2003

The Short Road to Great Presentations

How to Reach Any Audience Through Focused Preparation, Inspired Delivery, and Smart Use of Technology

By Cheryl Reimold and Peter Reimold

The Reimolds—longtime *Newsletter* columnists—present an easy-to-follow program for crafting winning presentations focusing on two principles: (1) Find a message that is clearly meaningful and accessible to your audience, and (2) connect strongly with your audience throughout your presentation. In applying these principles to a series of step-by-step preparations and on-stage actions, the authors help speakers focus on their most vital content and strengthen their structure and delivery.

Wiley-IEEE Press, ISBN: 0-471-28136-0, 360 pp., USD 39.95, July 2003

IEEE members receive a 15 percent discount on Wiley-IEEE Press titles purchased at the <http://www.wiley.com> Web site.

Nearly Everything

By Michael Brady

Bill Bryson has done it again. This unfailingly amusing writer, widely known for his travel books as well as for his linguistic examinations of English (“Lingua Franca,” *Newsletter*, January/February 1998 issue, p. 7), has taken on science.

Why science? Mostly because in staring down at the vast expanse of the Pacific while flying over it a few years ago, he realized that “I didn’t know the first thing about the only planet I was ever going to live on.” The challenge was irresistible; he set out on a physical and intellectual journey to previously unvisited territory. Three years, countless interviews and library hours later, his sweeping overview of science, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*,* was published last spring in the U.S. and the U.K.

In 30 chapters arranged in six parts plus an introduction, this book is as ambitious an overview of science as was ever attempted between two covers. That alone might recommend it; pick a page, any page, and you’ll find succinct essentials and trivia, entertainingly interwoven and paced like a good story. Even if you are conversant with a topic, you may learn a bit more about it and certainly will learn about the people who contributed to it, as Bryson highlights the scientists

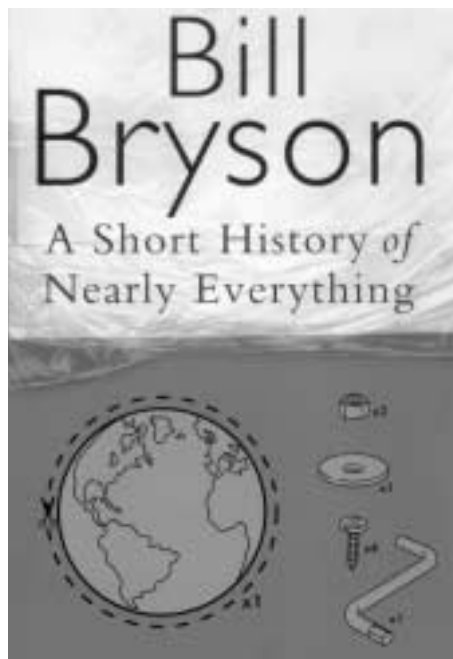
who made science happen. I, for one, learned much about the Michelson-Morley experimental determination of the speed of light, which I once probed as part of my dissertation research. I remember having marveled at the accuracy of the experiment in the framework of its time and recalled that for it Albert Michelson had become the first American to be awarded the Nobel Prize in physics in 1907. But I had no recollection whatsoever of Michelson’s having been a brilliant but poor lad who had learned physics at the U.S. Naval Academy, to which he had gained a free appointment by impressing President Ulysses S. Grant on daily walks.

And so it is, throughout the book; Bryson condenses but covers the whole, as if always paying tribute to Kipling’s *Six Honest Serving-men*, “What and Why and When, And How and Where and Who.” The trigger of that approach came early, when Bryson was in the last years of grade school. He had been captivated by a school text cutaway diagram of the Earth’s interior but disap-

pointed that the explanation of it provided no answers to questions that an inquisitive child might ask, such as to “How did we end up with a Sun in the middle of our planet and how do they know how hot it is?” Moreover, how did scientists figure it out? Later he was to suspect that there must be a “universal conspiracy among textbook authors to make certain the material they dealt with never strayed too near the realm of the mildly interesting....”

In writing *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, he proved that suspicion wrong. There is no conspiracy of dullness. Instead, among scientists, there is a common failing to communicate the amazing and exciting

aspects of their interesting pursuits. Bryson has done much to counterbalance that failing. Not only is the book a compact overview of science without the boring parts, it’s a lucid example of scientific writing as it should be, a page-turner worthy of emulation by all who write on science and technology.



* Bill Bryson, *A Short History of Nearly Everything*, New York, Broadway Books (Random House), May 2003, 560 pages, hardcover, 0-7679-0817-1, USD 27.50; and London, Doubleday, June 2003, 515 pages, hardcover, 0-385-40818-8, GBP 20.00.



Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

Tips for Making Writing Easier

Part 4: Break Out of the Endless Editing Cycle

For many business writers, editing becomes the most time-consuming task in the writing process. There are three main reasons for this: (1) an unsystematic approach to editing that leads to procrastination and wasted steps; (2) a feeling of incompetence or insecurity, leading writers to keep revising until they find something that seems safe; and (3) a lack of priorities—in particular, a failure to see when timeliness becomes more important than turning out a perfect piece.

As we show you in this column, you can speed up editing by following a systematic approach based on two simple principles:

1. Work from the large picture to the small detail, rather than randomly or from small to large.
2. Stop when you reach the last step.

A Common Problem: The Endless Editing Cycle

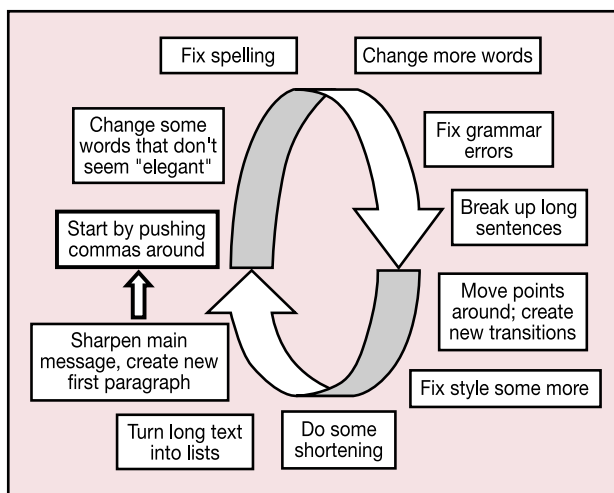
Many writers follow a haphazard editing cycle that looks something like the figure. There are several problems with such an unsystematic approach:

- Each step involves a decision on what to do next. This takes time and energy.

- It is hard to find a stopping point because some late-cycle editing may require further editing for grammar and spelling. For example, the belated decision to move points around and create new transitions may call for fixing grammar, punctuation, and spelling errors in the new transitions.
- A lot of editing is wasted. For example, you may fix many grammar errors in sentences that you later decide to delete because they hold no interest for the readers.

Editing in a Systematic One-Pass Sequence

Instead of editing haphazardly in a never-ending cycle, follow a single rational sequence that moves from the large picture to the fine detail. Here is the general outline of this process:



The endless editing cycle is a black hole for writing time.

Avoid the endless cycle of editing by following a systematic top-down approach.

1. Check the general impression. Will this get the desired result?
2. Sharpen the message.
3. Fix the organization:
 - Put the main message first.
 - Order points according to the reader's needs.
 - Use headings and lists for easy reading.
 - Cut out annoying repetition.
4. Edit for style and tone.
5. Fix grammar errors.
6. Correct punctuation and spelling; proofread.

Notice how this avoids the problems inherent in the cyclical approach:

- There are no ad hoc decisions to be made about the next editing step—the sequence is purely routine. You can concentrate all your effort on editing, rather than on thinking about editing.
- It's clear when to stop editing: when you've completed the last, most detailed step. For instance, transitions created by reorganizing will be fixed for style and then for grammar and spelling when you get to that phase. Similarly, any style changes you make will be put through grammar and spelling checks at the end. Ordinarily, there should be no need to go through any second or third round of editing.
- None of your editing is wasted. For example, any grammar changes will

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Ronald J. Nelson

David Brinkley's Ludic Legacy

We lost a great television news reporter and commentator, a master of style, on 11 June 2003: David Brinkley. He was educated at the University of North Carolina and Vanderbilt University, served in the Army in World War II, and worked for United Press. At NBC he and Chet Huntley did *The Huntley-Brinkley Report*, starting in 1956; later he co-anchored the *NBC Nightly News* with John Chancellor and Frank McGee. At ABC he had his own program of news commentary and interviews on Sunday mornings, starting in 1981: *This Week with David Brinkley*.

His books include *Washington Goes to War* (1988); *David Brinkley: 11 Presidents, 4 Wars, 22 Political Conventions, 1 Moon Landing, 3 Assassinations, 2,000 Weeks of News and Other Stuff on Television and 18 Years of Growing Up in North Carolina* (1995); and *Everyone Is Entitled To My Opinion* (1996).

Brinkley's use of the word *stuff* in the title of that second book suggests his take on the events of the world, which—no matter how serious or important—he apparently felt the need to put into perspective. One of his techniques for doing so was to undercut the utterly imposing nature of some events by surprising the listener or reader with unexpectedly wry wording. He thereby not only got and held the audience's attention, but also provided a fresh reminder of the human condition. By underplaying events (rather than hyping them) and giving them a new slant, he achieved

a potency that made subject matter memorable. He was perhaps aware of Robert Frost's useful dictum from the poem "Mowing": "Anything more than the truth would have seemed too weak." In any case, he played his searchlight on the foibles of human nature, brilliantly illuminating them for his audience.

Here is Brinkley in action, from *Everyone Is Entitled To My Opinion*, a collection of "the odd, amusing and unusual" in his closing remarks on the ABC program over a 15-year period. They were delivered "in the hope of leaving our television audiences in a slightly better frame of mind than if we had left them with depressing thoughts of war, murder and drugs" (p. vii). While the wholesale use of his techniques would be inappropriate for professional communicators, his ludic touches, his deliberate sentence fragments, and his penchant for searching out the incongruous can on occasion be employed to advantage. The impact of such strategies is to punctuate information about people and events as if by an invisible (implied) exclamation point, urging the age-old adage, "Ecce homo" (Behold the man). How to deal with or resolve the sometimes bizarre facts of life may be problematic, but the beginning point for any solution to a problem is awareness of the problem or situation. In that sense, Brinkley's legacy is unfailingly positive.

Take, for example, his recommendation about receiving disruptive or

unwanted phone calls. He notes how one insurance company handled the problem of employees' spending excessive time on the phone answering questions on the day when the bulk of the mail typically came in: A recorded message informed such callers to call back the next day. And at home, Brinkley suggests, "if you're busy, let it ring" (12 December 1981).

...disturbing revelations of how people act.

On his 3 June 1984 program, Brinkley closed with some words about an acquired immunity syndrome perhaps unknown to the medical profession: "...an immunity to all reason and common sense acquired by those in government spending money that is not theirs. The prime symptom is an utter indifference to what anything costs, because as they see it, it's really nobody's money." Thus the Navy bought a socket wrench worth USD 1.49 for USD 466; the Pentagon bought an Allen wrench worth USD 0.45 for USD 9000; and the Pentagon bought little plastic feet that stick on the bottom of the legs of metal chairs worth USD 0.17 for USD 1118. Brinkley asks, "Has anyone ever been prosecuted for cheating the government this way? No. Is it surprising that more and more taxpayers are reluctant to finance this kind of insanity? No."

Of the Washington Press Club's Salute to Congress (a black-tie affair) Brinkley called attention to the reaction of John Riggins, then football star of the Washington Redskins, to the scintillating goings-on. Riggins

“got up from the table, lay down on the carpet and fell asleep. The waiters serving the tables just stepped over him, nobody said anything—after all, what was there to say?” He had gotten through a Washington function the way many would like to—“by falling asleep and waking up when it’s over” (3 February 1985).

For his 2 August 1987 show he disclosed the “brisk and officious notice” he received from the District of Columbia tax collector claiming Brinkley owed back taxes from 1985 (which he did not) in the amount of USD 0.10. As Brinkley explained, “It cost them 22 cents to send me the notice... The notice said that unless the 10 cents was paid immediately by certified check, the fines and penalties would be USD 2137.32.” He paid it with a certified check that cost USD 2.50 (plus postage, return receipt, etc.), totaling about USD 4.00 to pay the taxes he did not owe. Brinkley ends this anecdote with “A USD 2000 fine for claimed back taxes of 10 cents? That’s the law, they said. That concludes today’s lesson in democracy in action.”

In short, Brinkley’s observations make for hilarious reading; for example, his suggestion—after Utah Senator Jake Garn’s flying around the earth as a passenger on the space shuttle Discovery and saying he’d rather be an astronaut than a senator—that perhaps we should put the whole Congress, all 535 of them, “in orbit for a while.” As he says, “...it is

engaging to imagine all of them drifting up to the ceiling at zero gravity, floating loosely in the air, making speeches about a new tax bill while upside down” (21 April 1985).

At other times his observations make for sad reading, like the one in which he contradicts Dante’s prediction that the world would end in fire and ice. Citing a prestigious medical journal’s report on health costs having risen to USD 666 billion a year, Brinkley discloses that one-fourth of that amount goes to paperwork, not to doctors, nurses, etc. If half that money were used to buy health insurance for all 35 million uninsured Americans, everyone would be covered. Brinkley

concludes that “Dante was wrong. The world will not end in fire and ice. It will drown in paper” (12 May 1991).

At still other times, his observations leave one speechless. The final homily (as these one-to-two-minute segments were called “for no very good reason”) reports that an Oklahoma death-row inmate who was about to be executed wished to take a nap before his execution—bizarre in itself to want to sleep during his final hours of life. When the guards came to get him, he was “unconscious because of an overdose of something, apparently in a suicide attempt. They rushed him to a hospital, had him revived, then brought him back to the prison, where they executed him.” As Brinkley notes, “This is not nineteenth-century Italian opera. It is twentieth-century truth” (13 August 1995).

...unexpectedly wry wording.

These and other incisive observations resulting from his searching the news for items that normally do not make the headlines *do* make for disturbing revelations of how people act. Whether the audience is the general public or the professional communicator, we can all exercise a bit more common sense in our dealings with others as a result of Brinkley’s contributions to the way we see things.

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Tools of the Trade

(continued from page 11)

be applied only to passages you have fixed for content, organization, and style.

Next time you are tempted to rush into wild editing, stop for a moment and remember the one-pass approach. It may cut your editing time in half.

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for more than 20 years. Their firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perccom@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services, as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their Web site at <http://www.allaboutcommunication.com>.



Jean-luc Doumont

This Is Definitely Not My Room

“This is your room,” says Charlie (Tom Cruise) to his autistic brother Raymond (Dustin Hoffman) as the two settle for a hotel night—Raymond’s first—in the acclaimed 1988 movie *Rain Man*.

Many of us remember Raymond’s unexpected reaction: “This is definitely not my room.” Why not? For a variety of reasons, but chiefly because “the bed is in the wrong place.”

This and other famous scenes from *Rain Man* may have amused or moved us as they revealed a different, somewhat surreal logic. Yet I can often identify with Raymond whenever I am shown the room where I am about to deliver a presentation or run a workshop. “This is definitely not my room,” I feel like saying, “Everything is in the wrong place.”

Many of us know the impact that a room can have on the effectiveness of a presentation or workshop. We can experience this impact both as a speaker and as an audience member: When the room is inappropriate, communication always suffers. Still, when I attend a conference, I am amazed at how few speakers take any step toward selecting the right room or just rearranging a suboptimal one.

Providing an appropriate room can of course be seen as the responsibility of the host, not of the speaker. Yet the speaker knows best how the room should be set up for the type of session he or she has in mind. Moreover, if the atmosphere exuded by the room feels wrong, the speaker is the one who will suffer most from it.

Rooms set up for a panel of speakers exemplify the mismatch between what is provided and what is needed, as another case of a good intent resulting in a poor outcome. Panel speakers are almost always invited to sit side by side at a long table, facing the audience, for the duration of the session, and to speak in turn from the table or from a lectern. When not speaking, they are thus in a most uncom-

fortable position, as they silently confront the audience. Where, for example, should they look? They have no reason to make eye contact with the audience at this point, and often they cannot look at the speaker or at the screen without risking a stiff neck.

Rooms are often needlessly cluttered. Paradoxically, they try to show and hide the speaker at the same time. For example, they place him or her in a prominent position, such as on a platform or in a spotlight, but hidden behind a lectern or table, so he or she is reduced to a talking head. Whatever part of the speaker is visible may be further obstructed by a glass of water that speakers typically do not touch until after the presentation.

In room settings, as in any aspect of communication, strive for conciseness: Remove from the audience’s view whatever is not the speaker or the visual support. Remove tables and lecterns and unused equipment. Have panel members sit in the first row—facing the screen, not the audience—until it is their turn to speak. When speaking, remove any conspicuous item, such as a name tag.

In room settings as in any aspect of communication, strive for conciseness.

Selecting a room of the appropriate size always reflects positively on the atmosphere of the session, too. An audience scattered in an overly large room makes the session feel cold, impersonal, and unsuccessful, no matter how good the speaker is. If anything, I prefer too small a room; a little overcrowding helps build group spirit, as long as the session is not too long. Humor works better on crowded audiences than on scattered ones, too. If you do have to speak in too large a room, encourage the audience to sit in the first rows. (People already seated hate to move, so you may have to insist a little.)

Insisting on getting the room right does not mean being inflexible. It means recognizing what cannot be changed, then optimizing what can. Clearly, it is a demanding attitude: It requires that we express our wishes ahead of time, that we check the room early enough to have time to fix problems, possibly that we roll up our sleeves and move the furniture ourselves. All in all, though, it is time well invested, as speaking in the right room does make a difference. Moreover, adapting the room to the speaker (instead of vice versa) reduces the speaker’s stress. He or she can now start confidently, thinking “this is definitely my room.”

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

Stop Typing...This Is Dumb...Maybe...

By Elizabeth Weise Moeller

My husband ended an instant messaging session with me the other night by saying, "Stop typing...this is dumb." It wasn't the conversation that was dumb, it was the fact that we were using an instant messaging program when he was just two rooms away from me in the same house. But the use of instant messaging may not be so dumb after all. Its popularity is booming, it brings convenience to its users, and it is free for most people. There are some security drawbacks, but those are being addressed in new releases of both the individual and the enterprise editions of the software.

Instant Messaging Defined

Instant messaging (IM) is a communication method that allows people to communicate one-on-one via computer, PDA, cell phone, or any combination of these. The software basically allows users to create a private chat room. There are a variety of instant messaging services: ICQ (<http://www.icq.com>), now owned by AOL; AOL Instant Messenger (AIM) (<http://www.aim.com>); Yahoo Messenger (<http://messenger.yahoo.com>); and MSN Messenger (<http://www.msnmessenger.com>). All these are free services for individual use.

Each messaging service operates on its own network. To communicate with your friends and colleagues, they must be on the same network you are. Some software, such as Trillian from Cerulean Studios (<http://www.ceruleanstudios.com>),

attempts to bridge the networks. Users of Trillian can communicate with friends and colleagues on the four major services, provided they have accounts with those services.

IM services work by having users create buddy lists or lists of contacts. The listed people are friends and colleagues with whom you want to communicate who also have accounts on the particular service. My IM software is set so that I must authorize users who want to contact me over the service. When your software is running, your friends and colleagues can see that you are online and available for chat.

There are ways to set yourself *Away* so that people know you are away from your computer or not available to receive messages, or you could simply shut down the IM software.

Instant Messaging Uses

Instant messaging uses are countless. The biggest fear among managers is that IM will become the virtual office water cooler. While it is true that people will use IM to discuss non-company business, the value of knowing a colleague is available to answer a quick question often outweighs the chatty drawback.

Until about a year ago, my employees worked from their homes. We used IM to keep in touch throughout the day. We could ask each other questions without having to pick up the phone, which was especially

convenient with an out-of-state employee. E-mail could have served the same purpose, but if I weren't checking e-mail frequently, my employees would have to wait for an answer to their questions. With IM they could just send me a quick note and we could move forward with the projects much faster. Even though we're in an office now, with one person telecommuting part-time, we still use IM to keep in touch throughout the day. It's an easy way to bounce a Web address or quick note to someone.

There are also chatty reasons to use IM software.

I use it during the week to keep in touch with one of my brothers. He keeps me up to date on the latest college hockey happenings and I ask him to *ping* or *traceroute* something for me from outside our network. Also, if someone is on IM, I can send a quick message asking if she or he has time for an in-depth conversation by phone. IM definitely has reduced the amount of time I spend playing voice-mail tag.

Instant Messaging Security

Within many organizations, individual work groups have downloaded the free software to communicate among themselves. There are security concerns, however. Since most IM software uses a public network to send and receive messages, there are significant concerns for people within organizations who use IM to discuss

Simpler and quicker than e-mail or phone for exchanging small amounts of information.

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Perfect Your Portfolio

By Ann Hernandez

If you are a recent college graduate and hope to land a great job as a technical writer, you probably think you have nothing in common with experienced technical communicators who are looking for jobs. Your resume, for example, probably consists mainly of educational accomplishments, part-time jobs, and possibly internships that gave you experience in the field.

And if you are an experienced technical communicator, you probably think that you have nothing in common with candidates for entry-level positions. Although your resume probably includes educational accomplishments, the meat of your resume likely focuses on your major responsibilities and accomplishments in the field of technical communication. Perhaps you have developed new information that is available for millions of your current employer's customers on the Web. Perhaps you have led other technical communicators in developing award-winning information about new technologies.

Regardless of your experience level, if you are looking for a job as a technical communicator, you need to have a strong portfolio of writing samples to show prospective employers.

So what does it take to make a winning portfolio? This article focuses primarily on the actual writing and content of your samples, not on what tools and techniques you might use to make your samples attractive. Here are some tips from IBM technical

communicators who have years of experience evaluating writing samples of prospective technical communication candidates.

Content: Provide the right samples for the job you are seeking.

- Provide at least one procedural writing sample that demonstrates that you can write task-oriented information.
- Provide at least one sample that shows that you can deal with technical information. (Samples that demonstrate that you can analyze a film or piece of literature aren't as helpful.) If you are looking for a job in the software industry, try to supply a sample of software information that you wrote. If you are applying for jobs in different fields, supply a variety of types (such as software information and assembly instructions for a hardware product).

Use consistent formatting and highlighting.

- If you can supply multiple samples, which is a good idea, include different types of information to show that you can deal with several types of technical material. For example, don't provide just the links to Web sites or copies of newsletters that you edited. If you edited newsletters, wrote content for Web sites, and wrote in-house procedures, include examples of each.
- If you don't have a lot of experience in the field, look for opportunities to develop different types of infor-

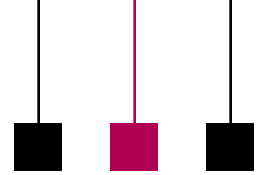
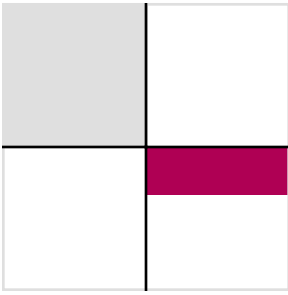
mation. Maybe you can perfect an assignment from a technical writing class and revise it so that it looks more professional. Consider volunteering for an organization that will let you write a brochure with task-oriented instructions or develop a Web page. You don't need to receive money for the samples that you develop; just make sure they appear as professional as possible.

Quality: Make each sample as good as it can be.

- Prospective employers draw conclusions about your ability to write in a technical environment by evaluating the samples that you supply, so include only your best.
- Quality matters more than quantity. If you send a very long sample, employers will probably skim it at a high level and carefully read only a few excerpts.
- Employers often look at visual design and style elements as well as your writing ability: Use consistent formatting and highlighting. Failure to be consistent says something about your attention to detail.

Background: Be honest about your samples.

- If you wrote only a portion of a sample that you supply, clearly identify what portion you wrote and what portions were written by others.
- If the sample that you supply is part of a larger document, indicate the context and perhaps the circum-



stances for which the document was written. If applicable, provide a brief description of the assignment (if the sample was written for a class, for example), problems and challenges you encountered, and how you resolved those issues.

- Indicate whether you worked with an editor on any of your samples and, if so, the extent of the editorial assistance (copy edit, help with organizing the information, and so on).

Access: Make sure that employers can see the samples.

- Make sure that you supply your electronic samples in an industry-

standard format that uses standard fonts. If employers can't open the samples, they can't evaluate them.

- If you publish your samples on a Web site and supply the Web address of the site to prospective employers, make sure that the Web site is on a reliable server that is available most of the time. Prospective employers aren't likely to try a Web link more than once, regardless of how great a candidate's resume seems.

Generally you can supply the same samples to all prospective employers, so any work that you do to build and perfect your portfolio is time (and sometimes money) well spent. Take

the time to develop a great portfolio and you're much more likely to land the perfect job.

The author has worked at IBM for over 20 years, primarily in the technical communication field, and is currently a technical editor at the Silicon Valley laboratory in San Jose, California; akhernan@us.ibm.com.

Engineer's Terminology

- Close project coordination: We know whom to blame.
- Low maintenance: Impossible to fix if broken.
- Years of development: One finally worked.

Net Notes

(continued from page 15)

proprietary or confidential information. To address this issue, the major IM services are beginning to introduce enterprise editions or to enhance the security of existing software.

Enterprise editions of the software offer more control for system administrators in terms of logging and auditing corporate communications. Some enterprise editions provide for a private domain structure, allowing the organization to use the same naming conventions as used for their e-mail (e.g., *bob@company.com*), even if *bob* is a username already reserved within the IM public network. System administrators can also grant permission at the user, group, or organization level for various types of access.

In an effort to attract more business customers, AOL recently announced a new release of the public version of AIM that supports encryption. They have partnered with Verisign, who provides a significant number of Web site security certificates. Instant Messaging Planet (<http://www.instantmessagingplanet.com>) is reporting that encryption will cost about USD 10 per user. They also have upgraded their enterprise version to provide encryption.

Back to my original question: Is instant messaging dumb? With millions of users signed on to the major services, I believe instant messaging is here to stay. The development of corporate enterprise editions suggests

that it will be used more frequently inside organizations. So, is it dumb to type a message to someone in the same building? If you are three floors away and need a quick answer, definitely not. If you are sending a message to someone two rooms away, maybe you should just get up and walk over.

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Spare Us the Clip Art and Other Musings

By Jason Palmeri and Paul Tuten

In past columns we've discussed the use and importance of visual aids in persuasive technical presentations. Like effective presentation delivery, the creation of effective visuals represents a significant challenge to most speakers. With this premise in mind we thought it was time to dedicate a column to the topic. Recognizing that many textbooks address the basics of visual design, we decided to comment on the day-to-day experiences we've frequently had with presentation visuals. Thus, much of this article suggests "what not to do" when designing visual aids.

Ideally, visual aids supplement the information an audience hears with information an audience can see.

A well-constructed visual should enhance the presenter's overall message. All too often, however, we see visuals that do little to further a speaker's persuasive appeal; indeed, poor visuals seem to pop up more frequently than spam e-mails.

Visuals may take a variety of forms: transparencies, slides, flip charts, posters, handouts, models, miscellaneous objects (think: "show and tell"), movies, handwritten messages on whiteboards/chalkboards, and computer-generated graphics. Of these, computer-generated visuals—primarily PowerPoint presentations—are the most commonly (mis)used. Having looked at thousands of visuals while sitting through hundreds

of presentations, we offer some musings based on our experience.

1. The Presentation Equals More Than the Sum of the Visuals

Inexperienced and poor presenters frequently use their visual aids as public, multimedia, note cards. What one says in an effective presentation—or at least one that maintains the audience's attention—should extend beyond the content of the slides. We suggest augmenting the slide content with examples, anecdotes, narratives, and asides. Similarly, the words spoken should differ to some degree from the words on the slides; the all-too-often act of reading a presentation is unacceptable.

Newcomer mistake: overuse of graphics and multimedia effects

2. Generally, Follow Standard Design Advice

Most introductory business, professional, and technical communication texts offer similar design guidelines for constructing visual aids. Standard advice includes limiting the amount of text, using phrases instead of sentences, selecting a simple typeface, increasing readability by utilizing larger and bolder fonts, limiting the amount of data provided, making the data simple to grasp conceptually, and so on. By providing a solid foundation, such guidelines enhance audience understanding. Therefore, we suggest picking up your favorite textbook and following its guidance in most cases.

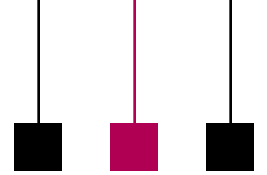
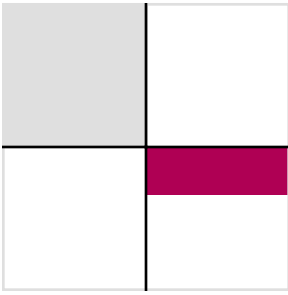
3. Sometimes, Break the Rules Intentionally

Occasionally, though, it's fun and even desirable to break with the standard advice. For example, we've watched seasoned presenters include a complex slide or two that is virtually incomprehensible. Such a slide is anathema to traditional advice about visuals; however, if the intended message is "our company makes something this complex easy for you," the jumbled slide may actually underscore the point—if the presenter can deliver it convincingly. This fact, however, is not a license to engage in visual anarchy. Rather, if you are going to break the rules, you should do so consciously and with a clear rhetorical intent in mind.

4. Visuals Should Be Visually Appealing

Admittedly, this point should be obvious. Unfortunately, many presenters (especially those who have just learned a few PowerPoint tricks) create hideously ugly slides that detract from their persuasive appeal. We suggest using an attractive (and relatively simple) background or template; you should avoid using garish and wildly contrasting colors. Additionally, text and graphics should be located with purpose, keeping in mind issues of size, space, balance, etc. If you lack formal training or design sensibilities, you should either aim for simplicity or consult a graphics professional.

(continued on page 22)



Writing an Effective Glossary

By Charles Cowan

Glossaries are an invaluable source of information for users of products or technologies. They are helpful to new users who need to come to grips with new terminology as well as to those who need a quick reminder about the meaning of a term. A glossary is also essential in ensuring that terminology is used correctly and consistently. But how often have you found that a glossary does not contain the terms you are looking for, or does not adequately define terms or show how they are related? Apart from that, the writing and presentation style of glossaries is often inconsistent. This article can help you avoid those problems and prepare effective and stylish glossaries.

Deciding Which Terms to Include

According to *Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, a *glossary* is “a collection of textual glosses or of specialized terms with their meanings.” (A *gloss* is defined as an unusual word requiring explanation.) It follows that you should include all terms that are unfamiliar to your readership. You therefore need to understand your readership—there is no point in including terms with which all of your readership are familiar. Remember, though, that the terminology used by the developers of a technology is not necessarily the same as that used by the readers of published documentation.

Many of the terms relevant to your readership may be terms that are already defined elsewhere. You can

include such terms as long as they are unfamiliar to your readership, but check whether you need permission to do so. If you do include existing definitions, edit them to your style conventions but do not change their meaning. Also, be careful that the imported term does not introduce further terms that need explanation. You could simply refer to relevant glossaries from your glossary, but that would force readers to look in an external source.

When including new terms in your glossary be sure that you do not introduce synonyms for terms that already exist. Equally, be sure that you introduce only one new term for each new concept. Discuss the meaning of the new term with all interested parties, and try to introduce terms from which one can infer the meaning.

Other terms in your glossary may be familiar terms that have a specific meaning within the context of your product or terminology. But try to avoid these, as adding nuances to well-understood terms only creates confusion. Also, avoid introducing new abbreviations, especially if they correspond to familiar abbreviations like TCP and URL.

In choosing candidates for your glossary, bear in mind that a definition describes a concept, so you should not include command names, program names, file names, product names, and so on in the glossary.

Finally, make sure that all terms in your glossary are actually used in the associated documentation, and make sure that all unfamiliar terms in your glossary are defined in your glossary or elsewhere.

Writing Glossary Entries

Apart from the term itself, glossary entries consist of:

- The definition—a sentence that describes the concept and distinguishes it from other concepts. The definition can contain an optional qualifying label, used when a term has a specialized meaning within a particular context.
- Optional sentences that further clarify the concept, particularly for inexperienced users of the technology.
- Optional cross references to other terms in the glossary that are related to, or need to be compared with, the defined term.

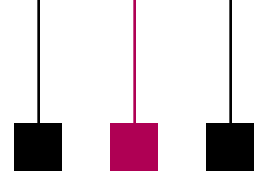
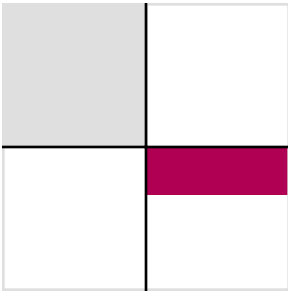
For example:

cookie In Internet technology, information that a Web server stores on a client machine and accesses during subsequent sessions. Cookies allow Web servers to remember specific information about clients. See also *Web server*.

Presenting the Term

Do not begin terms with a capital letter, and do not use capitals in terms unless they contain proper names or the capitalization of the term is well established. Use the singular form

Use a consistent style.



of a term unless the plural form is more familiar.

Writing the Definition

In technical glossaries the great majority of terms are nouns that describe the essential and delimiting characteristics of a concept. To write such a definition you need to determine the category to which the term belongs and the differentiating characteristics of the term. For example:

World Wide Web Consortium An international body that governs Internet standards.

In this example, the category is “international body” and the differentiating information is “that governs Internet standards.” When writing the definition, make sure that you really have differentiated the term; it is a common mistake to write definitions that are equally applicable to other definitions. For example:

Wireless Markup Language A markup language based on XML.

In this extreme example, the definition would apply to a number of other markup languages.

Another common mistake is to omit the category, as in the following example:

globalization Addresses the business issues associated with taking a product to the global market. Globalization usually involves internationalization and localization.

You could rewrite this definition to include the category (*process*) and

to clean up the cross references as follows:

globalization The process of addressing the business issues associated with taking a product to the global market. See also *internationalization* and *localization*.

The following is another example that does not contain a category:

scalable vector graphics Used to code vector-based images and text.

This could be rewritten as:

scalable vector graphics
An XML-based markup language for coding vector-based images and text.

In another, less common, type of definition the set of objects that the concept covers is enumerated. For example:

comparison operator The operator $\neg <$ (not less than), $< =$ (less than or equal to), $\neg =$ (not equal to), $=$ (equal to), $> =$ (greater than or equal to), $>$ (greater than), $<$ (less than), and $\neg >$ (not greater than).

You will commonly find glossary definitions that use lead-in words such as *refers to*, *this is*, or worse still, ones that repeat the term in the first sentence. For a consistent style, match your definitions to the part of speech of the term itself. That is, define a noun with a noun, a verb with a verb, and so on. For nouns, begin with an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) followed by another noun that is the category. For example:

endpoint A network node containing a Web service.

For verbs, begin with the word *to*. For example:

discover To find a description in a service registry and invoke the associated Web service.

For adverbs and adjectives, use *pertaining to*. For example:

state-of-the-art Pertaining to technological sophistication, the highest level of achievement.

Avoid definitions that add nothing to what can be inferred from the term itself. For example:

keystore A repository of keys.

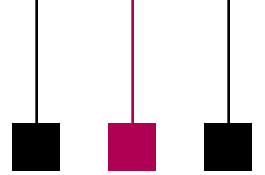
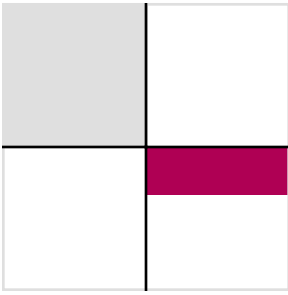
In definitions you should include a qualifying label only when it is necessary to distinguish the definition from other definitions of the term in other contexts. For example, there is no need to include the label *In Java* in a glossary of Java-related terms.

Adding Explanatory Information

Provide information to further clarify your definitions and to relate them to concepts that are familiar to your readers; include examples of how the concept is used or applied. For example:

JavaServer pages (JSP) An extensible Web technology that uses template data, custom elements, scripting languages, and server-side Java objects to return dynamic content to a client. The template data are typi-

Include only terms that your audience needs.



cally HTML or XML elements, and the client is often a Web browser.

Adding Cross References

Cross references to other terms are important in showing how terms are related, either by being similar terms or synonymous terms.

References to synonyms usually take the form “See *term*” or “Synonym for *term*.” Define only the preferred term and just provide a cross reference from synonymous terms.

References to related terms usually take the form “See also *term*” if they are similar in meaning or “Compare with *term*” if they are antonyms.

For both synonyms and related terms use a consistent form and explain your conventions at the beginning of the glossary.

Applying a Consistent Style

If you have corporate guidelines that dictate the style of your glossary, be grateful, because most style manuals have little or nothing to say about the style of glossaries; one exception, however, is *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

Consider the following attributes:

Headings Do you need a heading for each letter of the alphabet? These are probably only effective in larger glossaries but they certainly can be useful for quick retrieval in online glossaries when the letters are arranged in a row at the top of the

glossary and are selectable. You should also consider whether to include letters that do not have any term entries.

Terms Should you use bold or some other kind of emphasis for the terms? Should they be followed by a period, colon, or dash, and should the definition follow on a separate line?

Imported terms Should you identify the source of the imported term? If so, what form should the citation take?

Parts of speech Usually terms are nouns but it can be useful to identify terms that are adjectives or verbs. If you identify the part of speech, should you indicate it by *n*, *v*, *adj*, and so on, or spell out *noun*, *verb*, *adjective*?

Qualifying labels Which style should you use for labels, and which contexts do you need to cover?

Abbreviations You can include these as a separate entry in the glossary with a cross reference to the full term. Decide whether the term should be followed by the abbreviation in parentheses or vice versa. Sometimes it may make more sense to include the abbreviation as the main entry if the abbreviation is likely to be more familiar to users. Should you use the abbreviation or the full term in the body of other definitions? Do you need a separate list of abbreviations?

Terms with multiple definitions

Should you present the definitions as separate paragraphs or in an ordered list (numerals or letters), or should there be separate glossary entries for the different definitions?

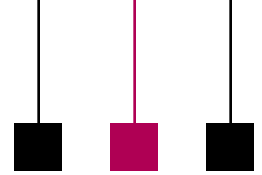
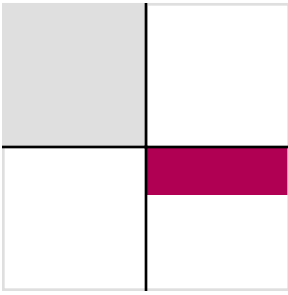
Sorting Glossaries are sorted in alphabetical order, but you can choose letter-by-letter or word-by-word sorting.

Cross references What form should you use for cross references to synonymous or related terms, and what emphasis should you use for the referenced term?

Hyperlinking In online glossaries should you include hyperlinks to cross-referenced terms? Should you also include hyperlinks to terms within definitions? Should you include hyperlinks to external Web sites? When cross-referencing a term with multiple definitions, you may need to indicate which definition is being linked. Also, should you hyperlink to your glossary from elsewhere in the documentation?

And finally, you may need to decide where to place your glossary within your documentation. Go on, make sure it gets pride of place!

The author is an information developer in the user technologies department at IBM United Kingdom, Hursley Park, England. He is a fellow of the Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators. Contact him at c8cowan@uk.ibm.com.



End Computer Rage with a Manual That Makes Sense

By Emma Young

This article could not be posted because of copyright restrictions.
See New Scientist, vol. 177, issue 2383, 22 February 2003, page 19.

Persuasive Presentations

(continued from page 18)

5. Avoid Gratuitous Graphics and Multimedia

Another mistake frequently made by newcomers is the overuse of graphics and multimedia effects. We call this disease “gratuimediaitis” and have identified numerous symptoms: complex (and slow) transitions between slides, either with or without sound effects (e.g., slide projector advances, race car noises, etc.); musical interludes that interrupt the flow of the presentation; video clips that are seemingly unrelated or poorly related to the topic; and images from the stock clip art library. Unfortunately, this disease is responsible for numer-

ous presentation fatalities. The good news is that prevention is possible. Avoid “cute” graphics and only use multimedia when it directly enhances your broader persuasive message.

Paul, an AT&T employee and information systems doctoral student, is a subject matter expert and frequent presenter on networking technologies, specifically virtual private networks. Jason is an experienced professional writer/trainer and a graduate student in rhetoric and professional communication at Ohio State University. Paul can be reached at tuten@nova.edu; Jason is available at palmeri.2@osu.edu.

IPCC 2004 • Communication Frontiers • Call for Papers

29 September - 2 October 2004 • Minneapolis, Minnesota

Professional communicators are adept at negotiating frontiers of all kinds.

- ...We communicate across international borders, addressing audiences whose languages, cultures, and expectations of communication products may be quite different from our own.
- ...We enjoy expanding our comfort zone by dealing professionally with subject matter experts whose work pushes the boundaries of science, engineering, medicine, and other fields.
- ...We explore undeveloped areas within our own discipline that are fruitful for research and exploration.

Possible Topics

Because of its broad and expansive nature, many topics fit the theme of Communication Frontiers. Here are some samples.

- Planning and implementing content management: Roads traveled and lessons learned
- Adapting rhetorical strategies and document design for international audiences
- Aligning document-development strategies to new product-development techniques
- Communicating effectively with managers and with subject matter experts
- Adding visual interest to technical documents without sacrificing accuracy
- Testing the usability of leading edge products: What new challenges do they pose?
- Expanding the use of media in engineering, scientific, and medical documents
- Writing effective English for nonnative speakers: Syntax and vocabulary
- Learning to love structured writing: Professional communicators and content management
- Preparing engineers, scientists, and professional communicators to cross new frontiers

Session Type

- Paper (one of two or three presentations offered in a 90-minute session; two or three proposals may be submitted together as a proposed session, or the program committee will combine papers on related topics)
- Panel discussion (one to four speakers make brief presentations and lead discussion with audience in a 90-minute session)
- Conference workshop (90 minutes)
- Postconference workshop (half-day or full-day workshop offered on 2 October only)

Program Calendar

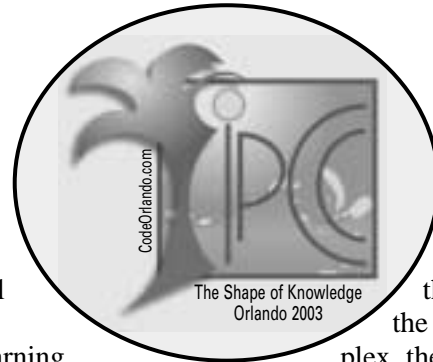
- Proposals due 15 January 2004
- Acceptance notifications sent 15 February 2004
- Drafts of proceedings papers due 15 April 2004
- Comments returned to authors 15 May 2004
- Final drafts of proceedings papers due 15 June 2004

Proposals

Your proposal should consist of the following items:

- A description of your topic (250 words)
- A brief description of your intended audience
- A brief (100-word) biosketch of each author, including contact information (e-mail address and telephone number)
- The suggested session type
- Statement of agreement to present: "If this proposal is accepted, I agree to register for IPCC 2004 and make the presentation described in this proposal." (In the case of proposals with multiple authors, only one is required to attend the conference.)

Send your proposal to George Hayhoe, program chair, at hayhoe_g@mercer.edu no later than 15 January 2004. Electronic submissions are preferred. If you need to send your proposal by paper mail, contact the program chair at +1 478 301 2299.



Last Call!

By Paul Dombrowski

Interested in digital media and visual research? We are pleased to have Dr. **J. Michael Moshell** as our guest speaker on Wednesday, 24 September, from 10:30 to noon. Mike Moshell is a renowned researcher in the interface between technology and knowledge at the University of Central Florida. He is a cofounder of CREAT (Consortium for Research and Education in the Arts and Technology), director of the new digital media program, and a professor in the computer science department, all at U.C.F. He is also closely involved in the technical writing M.A. degree and texts and technology Ph.D. degree programs in the English department through his interest in technical writing, script writing, and writing for media. At the Institute for Simulation and Training at the U.C.F. Research Park, he is chief scientist in the Visual Systems Laboratory.

Dr. Moshell's research interests include digital media, virtual environments for work and learning, computer graphics, and real-time physical simulations, all exploring the visual dimensions of communication, knowledge, and experience. One current project uses wearable computers and global positioning to present place-oriented oral histories. Another involves remotely accessible databases, geographic information systems, and shareable virtual worlds to present the results of an archeological site study. He will discuss his current research, industry trends, and the new U.C.F. school of film and digital media.

The Wednesday afternoon excursion to Kennedy Space Center, just an hour from Orlando, will cost about USD 50. Air-conditioned tour buses

will carry us across the site, including the Apollo launch complex, the vehicle assembly building, and the Saturn V center. The Space Center itself is navigated by walking from building to building. Its outdoor rocket garden has all the familiar missiles of the space race poised for launching. The immense size of a shuttle fuel tank and its two solid rocket boosters together with a shuttle test vehicle leave one feeling awed and inspired to honor our space heroes. Contact Sherry Steward (ssteward@ieee.org) or Paul Dombrowski (pdombrow@ucf.edu).

Unfortunately, Bill Horton (recipient of the Goldsmith Award) will not be a speaker at this conference due to scheduling difficulties, but he will be the keynote speaker at IPCC 2004 in Minneapolis, Minnesota..

