

blue pencil



Notes of the Employment Roundtable, October 8

Our October chapter meeting consisted of roundtable discussions on becoming employed. The meeting, held at Duranti's restaurant, was preceded by dinner. Eight STC and outside experts then stationed themselves at separate tables, and attendees moved among the tables. There was enough time for each person to hear five discussions. Each talk is summarized in a separate article in this newsletter.

Interviewing – John Clark

By Jim McCarty

John Clark led an exciting and lively discussion on polishing interviewing techniques ... complete with role playing!

Why should we be concerned with interviewing? John suggests that jobs go to the people who do the best job of selling themselves, not necessarily those who are most qualified. Success comes from being well prepared, anticipating questions, and preparing solid answers to those questions.

Do you know the first question asked by most interviewers? It is usually some version of "Tell me about yourself". Knowing this, you should have a strong "commercial" about yourself already prepared. Be prepared to cover your background, accomplishments, and ambitions, including where you are and what you are looking for. Keep it brief; your opening statement, just like all of your answers, should be between 20 and 90 seconds.

During the interview, phrase your answers in a way that will elicit a positive response

from the interviewer. Creating a positive image with the interviewer is the first step towards getting a job offer. Give answers that show how you can contribute, using examples from your experience. Do your homework. Tailor your answers to the needs and desires of the employer.

When discussing your accomplishments, structure your answers following the "S-A-R" format. Describe the Situation you faced, the Action you took to solve the problem, and the Result of that action.

What type of questions should you anticipate? John believes that of all the questions that you could face, most interviews center around five basic questions:

1. Why you?
2. Why this company?
3. What can you do for us?
4. How do you fit in with us?
5. How can we afford you?

Don't talk about money until you're sure that there's a good fit. The more they like you the stronger your negotiating power.

Do you need time to collect your thoughts when asked a tough question? Repeat the question (while thinking about it) with a preface like "Let me make sure I understand your question," then paraphrase the question. But don't be afraid to pause and think. It's OK not to appear too polished. Remember that the interviewer is probably just as nervous as you are.

The key to preparing for an interview is role playing. Develop a list of potential

questions, then prepare and rehearse your answers to those questions. Role play with someone asking you the questions randomly. Give your best direct, succinct, positive answer. Then ask them to critique your response. You will most likely learn more from this exercise than from any other preparation you could do.

Would you like more help? John has prepared a list of frequently asked, hard-hitting questions that you should have ready answers for, as well as a resource list on interviewing that can help you prepare. Contact John at clarkenter@attbi.com and he will email you his notes along with an interviewing resource list.

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Blue Pencil

Blue Pencil is the official newsletter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), Pittsburgh chapter. It is published monthly from September through June by the Pittsburgh chapter to inform and promote communication within the chapter and the Society. Material contained in this publication may be reprinted by other STC chapters, provided credit is given. Please send a copy of the reprint to the editor. Readers are invited to submit ads, short articles, news, reviews, and other material of interest to technical communicators by the 10th of the month prior to publication to:

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President's Column

The calendar year may be winding down, but activity in the STC is showing no signs of slowing.

First of all, it is time to renew your membership for the 2003 calendar year. Each member whose email address is on file with the national STC office should have received an invitation to renew online. Please renew early and online if at all possible. The Society will save the cost of mailing physical renewal notices to those who renew online by mid-November.

Don't forget the Region 4 Conference, coming up November 8 and 9. (Official registration deadline is October 31.) Conference information is available at <http://www.centralohiostc.org/region4conf/>. We are proud to have five members of the WorkQuest group attend the conference to present about the group.

WorkQuest(TM) is continuing to meet the needs of technical communicators who are seeking employment. For information about WorkQuest, contact Janis Ramey at ramey@technical-writing.net or 412-833-5548.

In other news, we are expanding the scope of our Consulting and Independent Contracting SIG. Because of the diversity of attendees, and to serve the interest of more of our chapter members, the group is now the Independent and Lone Writer SIG. For information about the group, please contact Barb Stanton via Bstanton@SEEC.com, or 412-893-0383. The Pittsburgh Chapter is grateful to Barb for her enthusiasm in running the SIG.

Our annual employment roundtable in October continued its streak as one of our most popular meetings. The Pittsburgh chapter thanks all of the people who agreed to share their expertise.

The regular chapter meeting is on Wednesday, November 6. This month's meeting will feature a vendor presentation by Quadralay, a maker of tools to facilitate single-source publishing from FrameMaker and Microsoft Word. See the last page of the newsletter for meeting details. I hope to see each of you there!

Writing an Effective Résumé

By Mary Ann Pike

In today's market, there are so many people applying for each open position that it's necessary to make your résumé as attractive as possible to potential employers. To deal with the volume of résumés, many employers are resorting to computerized keyword matching. Even when the résumés are being reviewed by hand, the average human resources person only spends 20 seconds evaluating a résumé. Here are some hints for getting your résumé noticed.

Résumé Formatting Tips

- Put a summary of your experience and strong skills in a brief paragraph at the beginning of the résumé.
- List your technical skills at the beginning since, unfortunately, people are often looking at your tools experience instead of your writing skill. Be sure to include all of the technical skills you've

acquired, even if they are not directly related to writing (experience with Visio, Access, and Excel, for example).

- Put all of your contact information up front. If you have a web site that contains samples of your work, make sure the web address is on the résumé.
- List all awards, certifications, and educational experience you have. If you've been out of school for a long time, you probably want to put your educational background towards the end of your résumé, but if you have taken recent classes or seminars in new technologies, be sure to list them.
- Use emphasis effectively to draw attention to important items.
- Create a presentation package to leave with prospective employers.

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STC Offering Telephone Seminars

STC is offering ten telephone seminars in 2002 - 2003. Beginning November 7th, two seminars will be offered each month through March 2003. Telephone seminars have been very successful in bringing cost-effective training to STC members and others seeking to improve their skills and knowledge.

Seminar Schedule

In the first seminar, Constance Billé will discuss "Getting Into Instructional Design." The seminar will be held on November 7th, from 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time (see the notice below for details).

The second November seminar is scheduled for November 19th, from 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. Eastern Standard Time. Entitled "Looking, Finding, Searching...How Users Do It," the seminar will be led by Whitney Quesenbery.

Other seminars scheduled for 2002 - 2003 are:

- December 13, 2002, "Finding Work in Troubled Times." (Douglas Florzak)
- December 17, 2002, "A Brief, Comprehensive Indexing Primer." (Seth Maislin)
- January 8, 2003, "Organizing and Leading a Software User Interface Design Team." (Diane Feldman and Carla Merrill)
- January 15, 2003, "Using Personas to Bring Your Users Into the Development Process." (Whitney Quesenbery)
- February 5, 2003, "Creating Persuasive Executive Summaries." (Stacia D. Kelly)

- February 13, 2003, "Fast and Easy Time Management." (John Hedtke)
- March 12, 2003, "Making the Complex Clear and Pretty." (Phylise Banner)
- March 19, 2003, "Evaluating an Index (even if you only have five minutes)." (Seth Maislin)

Registration Information

The cost for each seminar is \$145.00 USD for U.S. sites and \$160.00 USD for Canadian sites. Overseas participants should contact the STC office. An additional \$10.00 will be charged for registration received less than five days before the seminar.

For details, including an explanation of how the telephone seminars work, or how to do on-line registration, please visit <http://www.stc.org/seminars.asp>. You also may complete the registration form in the October 2002 Intercom.

As cost-effective and time-efficient ways of improving your skills and knowledge, telephone seminars are much like a large conference call, but in a more controlled environment. Simply dial the 800 number from your telephone, enter the provided personal identification number, and you're connected. Then sit back and listen to the presentation and join in the discussions. For one registration, several employees at a company may benefit from the seminar presentation and develop their own interactive discussions.

Getting Into Instructional Design - STC Telephone Seminar

Constance Billé

November 7, 2002

1-2:30 PM Eastern Standard Time

Are you ready for a move into the challenging and creative field of Instructional Design? In this seminar we will use a self-assessment exercise to help you understand your current skill set and readiness for the move. How does Instructional Design differ from related careers? We will compare the skill sets associated with related fields and review sample resumes to illustrate a candidate's "fit" with Instructional Design. What organizations

can help you develop the skills and contacts you will need to make the career transition? What should you look for in higher education programs that can help you gain the knowledge and skills needed? What tools are most valuable for an Instructional Designer? How can you develop a strategy to move into the instructional design field from where you are right now?

This seminar is appropriate for any STC member interested in a career in instructional design.

Chapter Archives are Updated

Our STC chapter's archives catalog has been updated. To see the catalog, see this website—<http://www.technical-writing.net/links/Contents%20of%20STC%20Archives.htm>

Or go to Janis Ramey's website (address below) and click on "Links".

technical-writing.net

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Chapter 188
Total 20,537

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Notes of the Employment Roundtable

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Résumés — Mary Ann Pike

By Nancy Carpenter

Mary Ann showed samples of printed and electronic résumés. Recommended content consisted of about six bullet points on your strong skills, a summary, then a concise list of experience in reverse chronological order. Include work that shows initiative, cost savings, quick learning, and unusual skills. An experienced worker can put education next, followed by publications and awards. Instead of an objective, tailor each résumé to the job for which you are applying. Include tools you use in publishing, the computer environment, computer languages, or other software. The job resource center at Carnegie Library's main branch has invaluable resources on résumés.

Mary Ann gave tips on how to get your résumé to be noticed in the 20 seconds that the average human resource person takes to evaluate it. She discussed formatting, content, accuracy, and meeting the job requirements. Her article entitled, "Writing an Effective Résumé" goes into detail on these topics and appears in this issue of Blue Pencil.

Medical Writing — Diana Mathis

By Nancy Carpenter

Diana discussed entering and keeping abreast of the medical writing field. Two organizations offer certification programs that can get you started: the American Medical Writers Association (www.amwa.org) or email amwa@amwa.org or the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences (www.bels.org).

You also should check some general and specific medical journals. Check their websites if you do not want to subscribe. Following are some resources:

- Stedman's or Dorland's medical dictionary
- *Physician's Desk Reference*
- *Pharmaceutical Word Book*, Saunders
- *Medical Abbreviations & Eponyms*, Sloane
- *Laboratory Tests and Diagnostic Procedures*, Chernecky and Berger
- *AMA Manual of Style*, Lippincott, Williams & Wilkins
- *CBE Scientific Style and Format*, Council of Science Editors, Chicago, IL
- *Medical English Usage and Abuse*, Edith Schwager, Oryx Press
- *Health Writer's Handbook*, Barbara Gastel, MD, Iowa State U. Press
- *How to Write and Publish Papers in the Medical Sciences*, Edward Huth, MD, ISI Press
- *How to Write and Publish a Scientific Paper*, Robert Day, PhD, ISI Press
- *Internal Medicine*, either Stein's 5th ed., or Harrison's of Cecil's
- Merck Manual
- *Anatomy and Physiology*, Martini or Gray's
- Council of Science Editors at <http://www.councilscienceeditors.org>

Life as a Technical Communications Consultant — Alan Houser

By Nancy Carpenter

Alan advises that your two biggest challenges at startup and throughout your career are finding work and deciding what to charge. Your first jobs will come from people you know, so if you do not know someone with work, do not start a consulting business. It is best to build up three to six

(Continued on page 8)

Four Chapter Members in the News

The weekly Pittsburgh Business Times interviewed four members of the STC Pittsburgh Chapter regarding the state of the economy for technical writers: Janis Ramey (Ramey Technical Writing), Alan Houser (Group Wellesley), Joyce Query

(TechWrite), and Trudi Miklos (Ansys). The article was published in the September 20 print edition (available at major newsstands), and on the Web at: <http://pittsburgh.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/stories/2002/09/23/focus3.html>

Extracting Document Content—With Style

By Robert P. Mohr

Do you ever have documents containing certain *content elements* that you wish you could extract without going through the agony of repeated copy and paste operations? For example, wouldn't it be nice to have the ability to extract just the requirements out of a Software Requirements Specification? Once extracted from the original document, the requirements could then be moved into a spreadsheet or imported to a database. But how do you extract them? The solution is surprisingly simple: All you need is style.

Word's paragraph styles and its configurable table of contents feature makes it relatively simple to extract paragraphs from a document. Naturally, a little preplanning will make the job easier. Let's suppose you are going to create a Software Requirements Specification. The spec will contain dozens of specific requirement statements scattered throughout a 50-page document packed with tables, graphics, and other paragraphs of text.

The first thing to do is to create the page layout and the styles for the basic structure, (i.e., headings, subheadings, body text, bullets, numbered steps, captions, etc.). Then create a style for the requirements paragraphs. This style can be as simple or as elaborate as you want. The key is that all requirements are formatted with the requirement style. If they're not, the extraction process will not work. With the document's basic design finished, the content can be added. For example:

Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here.

REQ-1001-022 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

REQ-1001-023 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

REQ-1001-024 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here. Requirements spec body text goes here.

Notice the tab and hanging indent separating the requirement number from the requirement text. This is very important and will come into play later on. Once the requirements specification document has been saved, and at any time thereafter, you can extract just the requirements paragraphs.

Several steps are necessary to set up a new document to hold the extracted requirement text. However, once the document has been created, "refreshing" it with updated requirement text requires only three mouse clicks. Here's how to set up a document to hold the extracted content:

1. Create a new document file.
2. Create the same Requirement style in this document as you did in the requirements specification doc.
3. Add any headers, footers, and content as needed.
4. Select **Tools > Options > View** from the main menu.
5. Toggle ON, **Field Codes** and **Hidden Text**.
6. Click **OK**.
7. Position the insertion point in the document where you want the list of requirements to begin.
8. Select **Insert > Field**. The Field dialog box is displayed.



Fig. 1

9. Select the **RD** field and enter the name of the file containing the requirements in the **Filename** box. (Fig. 1)
10. Click **OK**. You should see a code in your document similar to the following:


```
{RD "SRS-01.doc" }
```
11. Press **Enter** to create a new line.
12. Select **Insert > Reference > Index and Tables**. The Index and Tables dialog box is displayed (Fig. 3).

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Writing an Effective Résumé

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- Send your résumé in something other than a plain envelope. Use a large envelope, color, Federal Express, etc. to stand out from the other applicants.

Résumé Content Tips

- List your work history. Chronological order is usually the accepted format, but if you feel that your length of experience would be a detriment to your job search, you can list your experience by function.
- List ways in which you've added value to the projects on which you've worked. If you have saved the company money or improved their production time, say so. Include examples of recognition you received.
- Use action verbs to describe your experience. Present the material in short concise sentences.
- Include information about skills not directly related to writing:
 - Are you good at public speaking?

- Have you conducted professional seminars?
- Do you have any articles published?
- Have been through management training?
- Have you supervised people? How many?
- Are you active in any professional societies?
- Did you initiate any new projects?
- Are you proficient in a foreign language?
- Are you a skilled photographer?

- Be honest, don't exaggerate, but remember that you are selling yourself.
- Try to emphasize that you are a team player, but can lead.

Refinement Tips

- Keep your résumé up to date.
- Make sure your résumé is correct in both spelling and grammar. This is critical when applying for writing positions.
- Have someone else evaluate your résumé and give you comments. Try the 20 second test and see what they remember most about you.
- Have different résumés adapted for different industries or different job positions. Put the experience that is most applicable to the job you're applying for at the front of your résumé.
- Look at the résumés of other people. See how they are formatted and what you remember from them.
- Have an online version of your résumé on a web site so that prospective employers can see more than just text.
- Put your portfolio (or selected items) on a web site so you can refer to them in an e-mail message or when speaking to prospective employers on the telephone.

Other Tips

- Submit your résumé in the format requested. Many people accept or even

require Microsoft Word format, but some people want a text version pasted into an email message because they are afraid of viruses. Prepare a decent looking text version of your résumé and keep it up to date.

- Whenever possible, create a custom cover letter for each application. Address the cover letter to a specific person if known.
- Keep track of where you have sent your résumé and what version you sent them, including cover letters.
- Use all available resources:
 - Carnegie Library Job & Career Education Center
 - Books from a bookstore
 - University career placement offices
 - Networking groups such as STC WorkQuest™, PAPEN
 - Professional organizations
 - Volunteer organizations

Employment Issues: Interview Tips

By Pam Schmidbauer

Area Manager, Aquent

In this uncertain job climate many people are looking for their next position. When interviewing for a job, give yourself every chance to make a good impression. Here are some guidelines to help make the most of every opportunity.

Be a little early

Make absolutely sure that you know how to get to the interview and how long the trip will take. Take traffic into account as well. Arriving about fifteen minutes before the scheduled time shows that you're punctual, reliable, and interested. Another reason to arrive at the interview early is the possibility that you will have to go through security or fill out an application. You don't want these procedures taking up important interview time. (If you can, find out about these issues in advance.)

Make a good first impression

The most important part of the interview is the first five minutes. One of the most powerful things you can do is to be strong, positive, and confident. Be aware of your body language and take care how you phrase

things when responding to questions. It may be beneficial to rehearse tough questions with a friend beforehand. Most important, be yourself and state, but don't exaggerate, your accomplishments. Another tip – don't give a "dead fish" handshake.

Dress for success

Dress appropriately; don't dress sloppily, over dress or under dress. Keep cologne, make-up and jewelry to a minimum. Prepare your clothing the night before. Inspect it for wrinkles, rips, or missing buttons.

Do your homework

Research the company before going on the interview. You can get excellent information from the Web or from people who work for that company. The more you know, the more you'll be able to discuss what's important to them and assess whether it's the right fit for you.

Avoid distractions

Make sure you get a good night's sleep. You don't want to be yawning during an interview. Eat before your interview as well. That way you won't be distracted by simply being hungry and worrying that your interviewer is going to hear your stomach growl.

Take extra résumés

Always take additional copies of your résumé with you so you have enough copies for every interviewer. Also remember to take a copy of your references so they can start calling them.

Take writing samples

It's not a bad idea to have additional copies of your writing samples. You don't want the interviewer to have to leave the interview to make copies.

Always ask questions

When you are given an opportunity to ask questions, make the most of it. Even if you're interviewed by five people, have some questions for each. It shows you're interested and observant. Always listen carefully to their responses.

Here are a few questions that may impress the interviewer as well as help you assess a job offer:

- What is the greatest challenge that a person moving into this position is likely to face in the first year?
- Why was this job created? Or, why is this job open?
- How would you (the interviewer) like to see this department grow and evolve over time?
- What are the company's and this department's top priorities now?
- Of all the responsibilities I would be assuming in this job, which are the most critical?
- If I were employed, where would you want to see me focus my efforts during the first few weeks?

Avoid bringing up the subject of salary, benefits, or holidays. If the interviewer

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STC Member

Notes of the Employment Roundtable, October 8

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months of capital before you start, and to start while you still have a full-time job. Keep track of your network. Eventually, referrals will add to your business. To find an acceptable charge rate, find out what your present employer pays its consultants in related fields. One formula is (your annual salary) / 1000 = hourly rate.

Be conscious of how you present yourself. Do you want a distinctive email address, a business machine or fax line, a home office? Keep up-to-date with area business developments and attend networking events. Following are some resources:

- Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, business section (<http://www.post-gazette.com/>)
- Pittsburgh Business Times (<http://www.bizjournals.com/pittsburgh/>)
- T.E.Q., newsletter of the Pittsburgh Technology Council (<http://www.pgtech.org/news/teq/>)
- Making Money in Technical Writing by Peter Kent, 1998, Macmillan, USA
- Pittsburgh Technology Council (<http://www.techcenter-pgh.com>)
- Carnegie Library, Library Center, downtown business branch (<http://www.clpgh.org/clp/libctr/>)
- Small Business Administration (<http://www.sbaonline.sba.gov/>)
- Duquesne University Small Business Development Center (<http://www.duq.edu.sbdc>)
- Duquesne University Entrepreneur's Growth Conference held annually in June

The Chance to Fail: How to Get Started in Freelancing — Mary Ecsedy

By Nancy Carpenter

Mary described the way in which she has tried to systematically learn from mistakes. She approaches failure as a strategy. She keeps a log of mistakes, and here are a few of them:

- Never work without a written agreement.

- Never extend more credit (do more unpaid work) than you can afford to lose.
- Keep bookkeeping up to date.
- Make regular backups.
- Get out of the home-office occasionally.
- Eat and exercise regularly.
- Set money aside for taxes, savings, vacation, sick time.
- Request a test run on expensive printing jobs.
- Minimize your on-site visits.
- Spend time every week on activities that generate job leads.
- Keep control or review power over the final product.
- Limit your preliminary discussion, especially if it amounts to free work.
- Don't indulge in false economies such as cheap but bad office furniture.
- Bill for good honest service. Don't nickel and dime the client.

Mary advises that we learn from small steps. For instance, set up interviews to practice that skill. Take a part-time contract to see if freelance work suits you. This teaches you two things – how to do two different types of work simultaneously, and how to tolerate working a lot of overtime.

Chapter SIGS — Barb Stanton (Lone Writer and Independent Contracting), Janis Ramey (WorkQuest)

By Nancy Carpenter

SIGs that are registered with the national STC office receive space on the website, publish a newsletter, and maintain a listserv. All this for a membership fee of \$5 per year.

Barb chairs the combined Lone Writers and Independents SIG. The group has been meeting regularly and educating one another on how to run a successful small business. The meetings alternate between a formal presentation on a key issue, and an

informal discussion among members. Last month Walt Becker, from the Pittsburgh chapter of SCORE (Service Corp of Retired Executives) discussed starting a home-based business, developing and writing a business plan, marketing and networking, accounting and invoicing, paying taxes, and continuing growth. Following are some resources:

- Pittsburgh Small Business Association (<http://www.sba.gov/pa/pitt/>)
- Small Business Association (<http://www.sba.gov>)
- SCORE – Service Core of Retired Executives, Pittsburgh Chapter (<http://www.scorepittsburgh.com/index.htm>)
- The Entrepreneurs Help Page (<http://www.tannedfeet.com>)
- Entrepreneurs Guide – Starting a Small Business in PA (1-800-280-3801)
- Andrew Neft and Mitchell Letwin, Northwest Mutual Financial Group (provide insurance and retirement options for the self-employed)
- Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications, a complete guide for end use documentation
- Developing User Interfaces for Windows, a complete checklist of standards for user interfaces
- Microsoft Visual C++ for creating icons

Janis initiated WorkQuest recently by emailing the listserv to gauge interest and suggest a meeting. As you might have learned from the Business Times article, this group is very active and enthused. Its objective is to become obsolete as its members get jobs. The members are running all programs, assisting each other to structure their job searches and share winning techniques and resources. Job searching is a full-time job. And WorkQuest members are getting jobs and contracts. This SIG is not registered with STC national.

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WorkQuest Meetings Provide Valuable Information for Writers, Job-Hunters

By Mary Ann Pike

The Pittsburgh Chapter's WorkQuest group continued to meet through September. Janis Ramey started the WorkQuest group in mid-August to enable unemployed technical writers (and friends) to exchange ideas and job-hunting experiences. At each weekly meeting, the people who attend talk about what they did in the previous week to find employment. In addition, each meeting has a theme, with one or two members volunteering to do a presentation or lead a discussion on that theme. The goal is to have different volunteers host each meeting, and hopefully, to have the membership changing constantly as some members get jobs and new members join.

September 3: Portfolios

Nancy Ott started the month off with a presentation on portfolios. Nancy suggested having both an on-line and a hardcopy portfolio. On-line portfolios can be used to showcase on-line help, websites, etc. You should have writing samples that can be distributed on CD-ROM or emailed to prospective employers. Nancy discussed having several portfolios targeted toward different industries or positions (marketing materials, technical documentation, proposals, etc.). Some employers ask for send-ahead samples, so it's good to have something ready for them.

Nancy stressed that you should save copies of documents you've produced because future versions of the documentation may be altered by someone else. She suggested using excerpts, such as chapters, for your samples, although an on-line portfolio allows you to present your entire work in an easy to access format. Here are some ideas of what should be included:

- Before and after examples
- Source materials and final product examples
- Awards
- Résumés
- Testimonials
- List of clients

For each portfolio sample, Nancy includes an abstract that describes the project, how it was created, and any special challenges that were involved. She puts each page of her sample document in a separate sheet protector so that the document can be read without pulling it out of the portfolio. Nancy also has an on-line CD-ROM portfolio. She has her samples organized by document type. She provides annotation that describes each sample in a side frame next to the sample.

September 12: Coping with Unemployment

Before the featured topic at the September 12th meeting, Jim McCarty mentioned the Pennsylvania Professional Employment Network (PAPEN) group as a resource for job hunting. They have four meetings a week throughout the Pittsburgh area, and have featured speakers who discuss topics related to career advancement. More information about PAPEN can be found on the WorkQuest website (<http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest/>). Also in pre-topic discussion, a suggestion was made that you should copyright your résumé so that agencies can't sell you as a prospective project member to their clients without your permission, then substitute someone else. In addition, you should explicitly state in your inquiry letter to agencies that they cannot send out your résumé without your approval.

At this meeting, Diana Mathis shared coping strategies to help you deal emotionally and physically with your unemployment. Diana, who has a background in the healthcare industry, had a wealth of information on dealing with the emotional and physical stress that can occur during long periods of unemployment. Stress occurs when we are put in a situation over which we have no control, or when we feel we don't know how to manage the situation. Long-term stress actually causes health problems because of the body's physical reaction. You can learn to manage your re-

action to a situation, even if you can't improve the situation itself. Diana's suggestions included:

- Remembering who you are, what you've accomplished, what people think of you
- Maintaining a balanced daily schedule of rest, work, exercise, and leisure
- Developing a means of keeping a positive attitude
- Being aware of unhealthy coping mechanisms (drugs, alcohol)
- Expressing yourself creatively (painting, singing)
- Doing volunteer work, spending time with supportive people

Diana also provided a list of resources for dealing with stress and developing coping skills. The notes from her talk can be found on the WorkQuest website.

September 17: Cold Calling

Rick Lohmeyer discussed the difficult activity of cold calling. Although it is not the job search technique of choice for many people, cold calling can result in job leads and good future contacts. Before beginning your cold calling, Rick suggests having a short introductory speech ready. In two or three sentences, you should introduce yourself, summarize your experience, and ask if you can have five minutes of the person's time to discuss possible opportunities.

Finding the right person to talk to is one of the most difficult parts of cold calling. You almost never want to talk with the Human Resources department. You should aim to reach the person who would make the hiring decision for your desired position. A friend in the company, a receptionist, or someone in the purchasing department may be able to supply the name. If the hiring manager's calls are screened, don't say you're looking for a job, just say that you're self-employed or representing your company and you can often get through. If

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Notes of the Employment Roundtable, October 8

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Miscellaneous Topics — Bob Reitman

By Chuck Lanigan

There are marketable skills that professional communicators bring to the table (beyond writing & editing):

- Interviewing skills (vital for task-analysis, documenting workflows and knowledge engineering)
- Ability to make connections among relevant ideas
- Suspension of judgment & gathering of facts before making decisions

Pittsburgh offers a few unique opportunities for technical writers and editors in medicine, bio-engineering and related fields):

- Medical writing
- Gathering and documenting statistical data (for medical and other studies)
- Teaching and training
- Interpreting and writing medical reports and articles (especially as patient and public advocates)

Professional communicators contribute value to their companies and organizations:

- We don't just write and edit; we solve communication problems. (Including reducing information overload and making efficient use of communication technologies)
- Companies can pay up front for clear and efficient writing and document design, or pay later as a result of poorly-written and ill-conceived procedures.
- If involved early, professional communicators can apply their skills toward improving product usability, facilitating clear and efficient communication, project management testing, training, etc.

Portfolios

By Darlene Mullenix

Why should you have a portfolio?

- It expands on your résumé and your work experience.

Should I use an on-line portfolio or a hard-bound copy, or both?

- Both types are useful; let your personal preference guide you.
- You can use both types.
- If you use both types, be sure they are comprehensive and mirror each other.
- It is a good idea to have a sample piece of your best work to leave behind.

How do I start to put together a portfolio?

- What you put in your portfolio is limited only by your imagination.
- Start by evaluating your work. Make sure that it is worth including. Remember: People will evaluate you by what they see.
- If you're a student or are just starting, include samples of student projects, any volunteer work that you have done, or personal projects.

- If you have updated a document, include before and after samples of the document to demonstrate how you have improved it. Remember: Always ask permission to use documents before you include them in your portfolio.
- Include a logically-organized and annotated table of contents.
- List your best pieces first, but save one best piece for last.

Hard-bound Portfolio

- Use a professional-looking zippered portfolio. Include sheet protectors, tabs and other aids that make it easy for the reader to navigate through it.

On-line Portfolio

- Use a laptop or a CD-ROM.
- Research the facilities before you go to the interview. If your portfolio is on a CD-ROM check with the person interviewing you to be sure that there is a PC available to use. Otherwise, make arrangements to bring a laptop.
- Bring batteries to operate your laptop in case an outlet is not available.
- Test your portfolio on different types of computers so that you know how it will be displayed and if you will encounter difficulties on a particular PC.
- If you use a CD, make it look attractive.
- Important! Virus scan your CD.
- Make your CD auto run.
- Use a web site to display your portfolio, if appropriate.
- Check for bad links or missing pieces.
- Make sure files are compatible- Netscape, IE.
- Use HTML or PDF file formats.
- If you use annotated links, give a brief explanation (what you did and why).
- Make sure that the ToC is available on every page.
- Use ALT-Tab to toggle.
- Include a documentation plan.

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Extracting Document Content—With Style

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13. Click the **Table of Contents** tab.
14. Select **Simple** from the Formats list.
15. Toggle OFF **Show Page Numbers**.
16. Reduce the number of **Show Levels** to 1.
17. Click the **Options** button to view the Table of Contents Options dialog box. (Fig. 2)

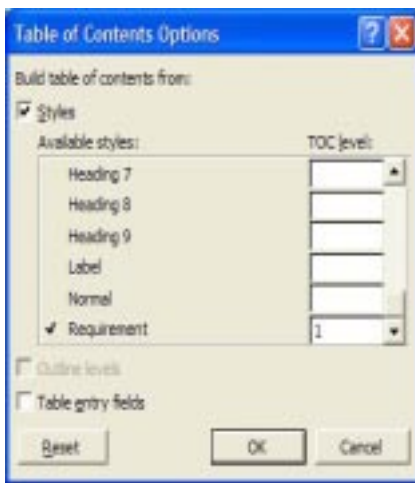


Fig. 2

By default **Heading 1** is identified with a 1 in the TOC level list.

18. Remove the Heading 1 designation and place a **1** in the **TOC level** box associated with **Requirement**.
19. Click **OK** to close the box. The Index and Tables dialog box now resembles Fig. 3:

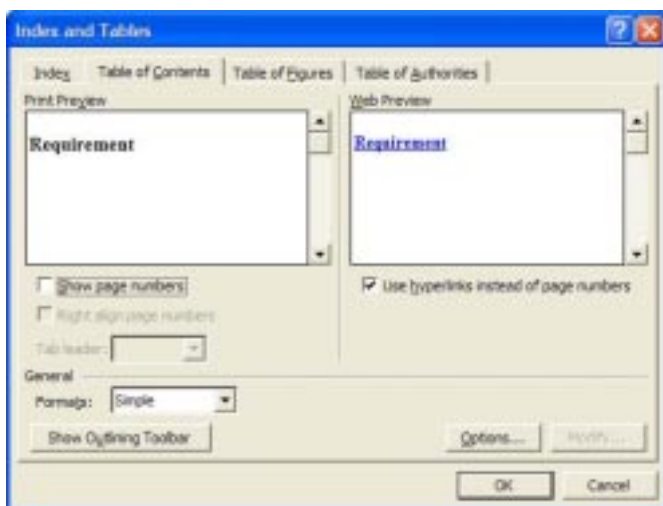


Fig. 3

20. Click **OK** to generate the table of contents. Your document now displays a field code representation of the table of contents—something like this:

```
{TOC \n \p "" \t "Requirement,1" }
```

21. Select **Tools > Options > View** from the main menu.
22. Toggle OFF the **Field Codes** and **Hidden Text** options. This causes the RD field code line to become hidden and the table of contents field code to transform into the referenced paragraphs:

REQ-1001-022 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

REQ-1001-023 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

REQ-1001-024 Requirement text goes here; apply "Requirement" style.

All of the requirement paragraphs appear in the same sequence as they appear in the original document. The requirement numbering has no effect on how the requirements are ordered here.

Notice in the example above that the tab character between the requirement number and requirement text was retained. Because the tab is there, you *could* highlight all of the requirements, copy them to the Windows clipboard, then paste them into an Excel spreadsheet for additional processing. Excel will recognize the tab character as a delimiter and will place the requirement number in one column and the corresponding paragraph text in the adjoining column. Of course, each requirement paragraph becomes its own row in the spreadsheet.

Maintaining this document after changes occur in the requirements specification is simple:

1. Highlight the entire list of requirements.
2. Right-click and select **Update Field** from the shortcut menu:



Fig. 4

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Extracting Document Content—With Style

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Word regenerates the entire table of contents, replacing the old requirement text and numbers with new requirement text and numbers.

Using Word's styles and the table of contents generator, you can extract any number of items from one or more documents, regardless of how interspersed those items may be within those documents.

Bob Mohr can be reached at rpmohr@writemohr.com

Employment Issues: Interview Tips

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brings up these issues, don't give a specific amount. Keep focused on the company and the position. It will leave a better impression with the interviewer.

Use the PAR method

When answering behavioral-based interview questions, use the PAR method.

- **Problem** - Consider the problem circumstance and explain it and provide background information.
- **Action** - Describe what steps you took.
- **Result** - Describe what occurred because of your actions.

Send a follow-up letter

Send a brief letter or e-mail to your interviewers to thank them for their time and to express your continued interest in the position. Make sure you spell their names correctly. It is also a good opportunity to overcome any objections, stress your skills and reaffirm your interest in the job.

Pam Schmidbauer is Area Manager of Aquent's Pittsburgh office and can be reached at pams@aquent.com or 412-322-4940. Aquent (aquent.com) is a global professional service firm delivering Creative and IT solutions. Through a network of nearly seventy offices in twelve countries, Aquent provides staffing, consulting, and outsourcing services in the areas of print and Web design and production; application and database development; and project management. In its fifteen-year history Aquent has made over 200,000 matches of independent professionals with client companies worldwide. Aquent is headquartered in Boston, Massachusetts and is privately held.

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you get the hiring manager's voicemail, leave your introductory speech and phone number. If they are interested enough to call you back, then they are probably a good prospect.

Rick keeps a database of contact information for all of the people he calls: the company, the contact person's name, position, and phone number, and how much interest they showed. Remember that when you're cold calling, you're a telemarketer, and we all know how we feel about telemarketers! Be polite and to the point. Ask if they have a few minutes to talk, or if you could call them back at a more convenient time. Don't call on Monday mornings or Friday after-

noons. Good times to call are usually 9:30 to 11:00 a.m. and 2:00-3:00 p.m.

Do some research on the companies you contact. You can get company names and information from the Pittsburgh Technology Council (PTC), Pittsburgh Business Library, Thomas Registry, Chamber of Commerce, and Carnegie Library website, among other resources. Look for articles about the companies in the local papers and look at their websites. Rick usually looks for companies of 30 people or more to indicate some stability, but others said they have worked for much smaller companies that often don't have their own writer and will hire freelancers.

September 24: Healthcare Coverage

Diana Mathis and Dennis McCarthy gave an informative talk on the different ways you can find health coverage when you are unemployed. A rule of thumb is that basic benefits should cover 75% of the expenses for illness and injury. Depending on your family situation, they suggested seeing whether two individual policies might be cheaper than one single policy. Keep in mind that you may incur significant expenses if you have a pre-existing condition and you change insurance coverage.

There are many local options for purchasing group insurance. The Small Manufacturer's Council (SMC) and the PTC

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WorkQuest Meetings Provide Valuable Information for Writers, Job-Hunters

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both offer group policies to members; many chamber of commerces do the same. Highmark directly offers group insurance. Pennsylvania offers insurance depending on your income. There are two different programs for adults (Adult Basic) and children (CHIP). COBRA is available to people who are laid off, but is usually very expensive.

October 1: Working with Recruiters

Marsha White and Dennis McCarthy presented information about working with recruiters and agencies. Marsha White asked a recruiter she knows to give her some reasons why you should work with a recruiter. The recruiter's responses included:

- Recruiting firms have relationships with existing clients
- Recruiters can sometimes find short-term work for you to keep you going until you find a full-time position.
- Recruiters talk directly to hiring managers and can get your résumé past the Human Resources department.
- Recruiters will handle problems that may come up with the management at the company where they've placed you, and salary negotiations.
- Recruiters know more information about a position than an advertisement usually provides.

Other suggestions included:

- Develop a relationship with some recruiters before you lose your job
- Ask friends for names of recruiters they've worked with
- Make sure the recruiter understands your concerns (e.g., confidentiality)

Some negative points that were made:

- 90% of people find their jobs through networking, and only 10% by interviewing with companies where they have no connections.

- Recruiters often don't want to work with unemployed people or new graduates because they are less attractive to employers.
- Recruiters can't help you change careers, they can just find you a new position in your current line of work.

Care should be taken when working with firms with whom you are not familiar:

- Avoid firms that want to charge for creating your résumé or helping you search for a job.
- Avoid firms that charge for placing you or have a clause that requires you to pay the placement fee if you leave the company before a specific amount of time has elapsed.
- Don't give references to a recruiting firm unless they have scheduled an interview for you and need to give a company the references. Recruiters may call the managers you gave as references and try to get them to hire other ..

tion (like your social security number) unless you absolutely must (e.g., when filling out an employment application).

Dennis McCarthy discussed his experiences working with agencies. He said that you should find an agency that specializes in the type of work you are seeking. You can use an Internet search to find agencies and do on-line research on their businesses. A recruiter gave him some advice on how to get noticed when you apply for a job:

- Get your résumé noticed by using an 8x10 envelope and overnighting it. It shows that you have put some effort into delivering your résumé.
- Send in your résumé using multiple methods. Email, fax, and mail your résumé if the company gives you all of those contact methods.
- When sending a résumé through email, put something catchy in the subject line like "referred by so-and-so," a summary of what you bring to the job, or a summary of the job posting.

To find someone who specializes in your industry, you may need to work with a recruiter in another part of the country. Dennis found a recruiting firm in Oregon that places technical writers in Silicon Valley. They have an interesting statement on their website that says because of the current economic condition, they are only working with writers that have uncommon skills, but you can send your résumé to them and they would be glad to critique it and return it to you as time permits. More information about working with recruiters can be found on the WorkQuest website.

WorkQuest was formed as a resource for you. Although the meetings are geared toward writers, everyone who is looking for work is welcome to attend the meetings. Many interesting topics are planned for the next month. Notices of the meetings can be found on the WorkQuest website:

<http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest/>

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Quadralay Webex Demonstration, November 6

The Pittsburgh chapter meeting will feature a software demonstration by Quadralay. Join us on Wednesday, November 6 in the training room at the Pittsburgh Technology Council.

Reminder: 2002 Region 4 Conference

The Central Ohio Chapter of the STC is hosting the 2002 Region 4 Conference on November 8 and November 9, 2002.

The Leadership Conference will be held on Friday afternoon, November 8, 2002 at Chase Manhattan Mortgage Corporation in Easton, OH. The Region 4 Conference will be held on Saturday, November 9, 2002, at Columbus State Community College.

The half-day Leadership Conference is \$50 for non-members, \$40 for members, \$35 with corporate discount (3 or more from the same

company), \$20 for students. The Region 4 Conference is \$95 for non-members, \$85 for members, \$75 with corporate discount, and \$25 for students. To attend both the Leadership and Region 4 Conference, the costs will be: \$135 for non-members, \$115 for members, \$100 with corporate discount, and \$30 for students. For more information, contact Brenda McGuire at mcguireb@battelle.org or Sue Wolford at sue.wolford@chase.com, or visit our conference Web site at: www.centralohiostc.org/region4conf.

WHEN: Wednesday, November 6, 2002, 6:30-8:30 pm.

WHERE: Pittsburgh Technology Council Training Room, Second Floor.

COST: No cost. light refreshments will be served.

RSVP: Please reply by Friday, November 1, 2002 to Darlene Mullenix by emailing her at: dmullenix@federatedinv.com or calling at: 412 288-8676. Include your telephone number.

Independent and Lone Writers SIG November Meeting

The next meeting for the Independents and Lone Writers SIG will be Tuesday, November 19 at 6 p.m. at the Church Brew Works on Liberty Avenue. This month's meeting is a happy hour/networking meeting with a discussion on how to get free press to market your business.

One key issue that independents face is marketing. Not all marketing has to be costly; it is a matter of targeting the right publications and other media and taking advantage of public relations opportunities. The meeting discussion will focus on some of the trade publications in the Pittsburgh area and other media outlets and how to effectively use them to promote your business. Everyone is invited to bring some of their own experiences about working with publications and the media and some tips

on how to get your name and business in print without a huge expense.

The cost of the meeting is \$7 and includes the Church Brew Works famous pizza and veggies; drinks are on your own. Please RSVP by Monday, November 18 to Barb Stanton at Bstanton@seec.com or call (412) 893-0383. For directions and information about the Church Brew Works visit www.churchbrewworks.com.

The name of the SIG has changed to include Lone Writers. There seems to a large number of lone writers in companies, as a result of budget constraints and a change in the corporate atmosphere. If you are a lone writer, please join us at our meetings to be among others in the industry. Also, any suggestions on meeting topics or venues are always welcome. Simply send an email to Barb Stanton (Bstanton@seec.com) with the information.

STC Chapter Meeting Schedule

Mark your calendars! Here are topics and tentative dates for the remainder of the 2002-2003 meeting calendar. More details on each meeting will be published as the dates draw closer.

2002:

November 6 (Wednesday) — Quadralay demonstration (Andy VanConas)

December 7 (Saturday) — Usability lab (Mike Bates); Joint chapter meeting with Cleveland in Youngstown OH

2003:

January — Winter Party (date to be determined)

February 11 (Tuesday) — Frame 7 (Kay Ethier)

March 11 (Tuesday) — Chapter 50th Anniversary Party and Awards Banquet (Janis Ramey)

April 8 (Tuesday) — Robohelp (Leslie Johnson)

May — Spring Fling Party (date to be determined)

Article Deadline

The deadline for the next issue of the Blue Pencil is Thursday, November 7. Please send your submissions to Meg Papa at mv0t@andrew.cmu.edu.