Blue pencil

Employment Roundtable Offered Food for Thought

The chapter kicked off the new year by holding the annual employment roundtable meeting as the topic for the January meeting. The meeting, held on Monday, January 12 at Duranti's restaurant in Oakland, featured different presenters from all aspects of the job search, including networking, interviewing, résumés, portfolios, recruiting and management.

The following is a synopsis of each of the tables and some of the hints that each presenter offered all the attendees on the job search process.

Networking - John Gilmore, Employer Relations, Career Development Center
John discussed networking skills and stressed that you should always be networking, even if you currently are employed. He noted that many jobs are never posted internally or on the web, and that résumés may not ever make it to the desk of the decision-makers (although you should always pursue traditional job hunting methods in addition to networking). He suggested that you should set up networking meetings over coffee, because it is less expensive than lunch or dinner. John stressed that the keys to good networking are being proactive and being a good communicator.

The Role of a Recruiter in the Job Search - Gary Naranjo AC Coy
Gary discussed two main benefits of having a recruiter as part of your job search process. The first of which is a recruiter can tap into a lot of positions that you may never even know about. They have access to jobs that are not posted because companies know exactly what they are looking for and want an accurate match of can-

didates from someone like a recruiter. He also said that recruiters could get you more specific information about a position, including an accurate description of the position and the type of background of a potential candidate. When working with recruiters it is important that you keep track of where the various firms you are working with are sending your résumé. It is important that potential employers do not get your résumé from several different sources. It is also important that recruiters keep your information confidential.

The New Résumé for the New Economy - Rox Vanguard
The main point in Rox's presentation was that your résumé is your public face, your marketing brochure. The new style of résumés is achievement based. Your achievements should make up a substantial portion of the résumé and match your skills to the expectations of the position you are applying for.

Some achievements to include on your résumé include how you:

- were able to save money or reduce costs
- improve an existing system or process
- were able to generate income

You want to demonstrate what you have accomplished and how you can use those accomplishments to benefit a potential employer.

Résumé Review - Marlene Miller
At the Résumé Review Table, job seekers presented their résumés for a quick review and some constructive criticism by Marlene

Miller, an STC member who has been on both sides of the interviewer's desk. Résumés spanned the range from the job seeker who had several differently-formatted résumés depending on the advertised position, to the job holder who was thinking about a change and had just drafted the first résumé to that end. The most common suggestions for all résumés were addressed toward better organization ("Experience First!") and developing the skill to pull out professional achievements from ordinary lists of job tasks and highlight them in a separate section.

Opinions were mixed about putting an Objective on a résumé: some saw it as an exercise in futility since anything other than "Getting A Job" or "At Least Getting An Interview" was less than honest; others

Contents

Chapter Happenings

by Nancy Ott, President, STC Pittsburgh

It's been cold, snowy, and icy for the past couple months — a bit on the miserable side unless you're a Siberian husky! But that hasn't stopped the intrepid members of the Pittsburgh chapter. Despite the pick-up in the economy, many of us are still struggling to find work. I believe that part of our chapter's mission is to help each other out through good times and bad. Here's what our chapter has been doing lately to assist our unemployed members:

- We kicked off the New Year with our annual employment meeting (which had been rescheduled to January from October). Whether you're looking for a job or not, the employment meeting is a great place to get tips on improving your career. About 30 people braved the cold to share a buffet dinner, network, and participate in roundtable presentations on resumes, recruiting, portfolios, interviewing, and other job search and career related topics.
- WorkQuest™, our chapter's job-seeker's SIG and support group, is going strong. This group is a great resource if you're looking for work of any sort, whether permanent or freelance. Everyone is welcome, not just technical communicators. WorkQuest™ meets every Tuesday at 10:00 AM for informal discussions and reviews of their job searches. Locations vary depending on who's available to meet. For the latest scoop on meetings and group activities, check out the WorkQuest™ web site at http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest/.

You may have already received a postcard for "Writers Without Borders," the one-day conference that our chapter is hosting on April 17. Planning for this conference has not missed a beat despite the stormy winter weather. "Writers Without Borders" is now the official Region 4 conference for 2004 — an honor that will raise awareness of the Pittsburgh chapter in Region 4 (which we're a relatively new member of). We've lined up a great slate of exciting speakers:

- Keynote speaker Cheryl Lockett Zubak will talk about the return of content as a focus in web development, in software interface design, and in technical communication, and what this means for technical communicators. She also will talk about the new Windows "Longhorn" help system and what it means for help authors.
- Neil Perlin will host a session on simple steps writers can take to implement single-sourcing.
- Alan Houser will host a session on using Adobe FrameMaker for single source and XML publishing.
- Beth Williams and Lori Klepfer will talk about the essential consulting skills needed for career success.
- Mike Bates will host a workshop on preparing for and conducting usability testing and interpreting the results.
- Whitney Quesenberry will talk about how technical writers can be involved in the user-centered design process.
- Closing speaker John Hedtke will describe ways to enhance creativity, identify common creative blocks, and foster creative thinking in yourself and others.

"Writers Without Borders" will be held at the Holiday Inn Select, University Center, Pittsburgh, PA on Saturday: April 17, 2004 from 8:30 AM – 5:30 PM. Registration is $99 before March 15 and $119 after March 15. Early registrants get first crack at seats for our keynote speaker's address, so don't delay! The conference web site is now live at http://www.stcpgh.org/conference/index.html — check it out! Volunteers are still needed, especially those who are willing to help out the day of the conference. If you're interested, contact me at vielottfamily@hotmail.com.

# Adding Context-Sensitive Help to Access Database Forms

by Robert P. Mohr

This month's article is about adding context-sensitive help to an Access database application using RoboHelp's Map IDs. Context-sensitive help in this article refers to help text written for specific fields/objects on an input form and displayed when a user presses **F1** while the cursor is in that field or the object is highlighted. This article also assumes that you are the one creating the help system and the database. For those of you working with application developers, you can just pass along the topics' Map ID's (discussed later on) and leave the Access portions to the developers.

Once the database and its forms have been created, the real fun begins, starting in RoboHelp:

1. Create the help topics for each form field and object.

2. Double-click the **All Map IDs** option under the **Context-Sensitive Help** area in RoboHelp's Project pane to display the Edit Map IDs dialog box and create a new map file:
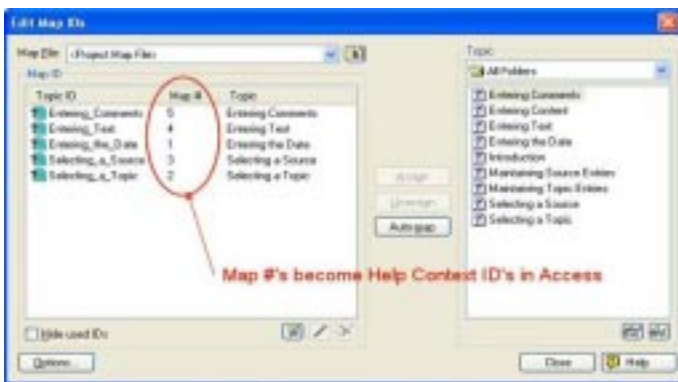
3. Select topics on the right and click **Auto-map** to let RoboHelp make map assignments on the left. (You don't have to specify a new Map File when generating .CHM help files because the IDs will be in the CHM file. You do need to be aware of the map file, which is a .h file, when you generate context-sensitive WebHelp files.)

There are a few important things to note here about Map IDs:

- All ID numbers must be unique within the same help system.

- A Map ID (in a map file) is really a combination of the topic title and its unique number preceded by a "#define" statement. For example, if you were to look inside the map file created for this article's sample help system you would see the following:

  - #define Entering_the_Date   1
  - #define Selecting_a_Topic   2
  - #define Selecting_a_Source   3
  - #define Entering_Text   4
  - #define Entering_Comments   5

- You can "seed" the numbers at whatever starting number you want. For example, instead of starting at 1, you could start the numbers at 100.
- You can prefix or suffix the numbers with text. For example, you could prefix the numbers with "CS" to create a number like "CS101".

4. Click **Close** when finished assigning the Map IDs.

5. Compile the help file and generate its .CHM file. I created a sample help file for this article and called it **Personal_Knowledgebase_Online_Help.chm**. This help file name will be referenced in the Access input form (as shown below in step 8).

6. Open the Access database and open the appropriate form in the Form Designer.

7. Double-click the form's Properties box (in the upper left corner of the form) to display the form's Properties.

8. Enter the help file's name (from step 5) in the **Help File** property as shown below:

People News
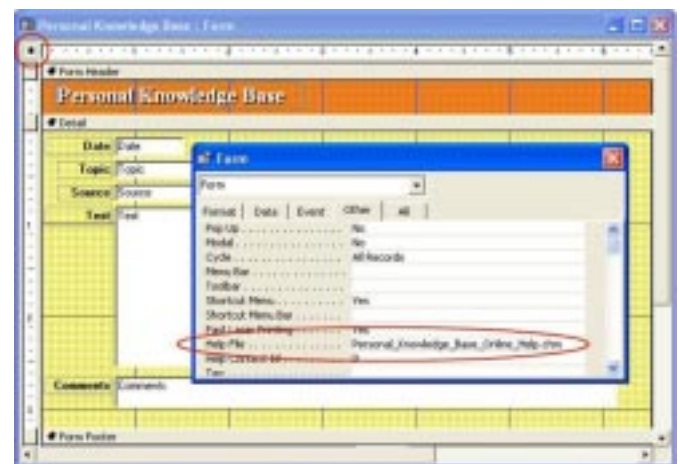
Membership at a Glance
(as of December 31)

National
Total Members: 20,568

Total Chapters: 150

Pittsburgh Chapter
Total Members: 164

New Members:

William A. Real

Marcy N. Robb

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter
P.O. Box 133
Pittsburgh, PA 15230
Contact: Alan Houser
Phone: 412-363-0387
arh@groupwellesley.com

National Office
901 North Stuart Street
Suite 904
Arlington, VA 22203-1822
Phone: 703-522-4114
Fax: 703-522-2075

Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars
Wednesday, February 11
Don't Make Me Do That!: Making Learning Fun – Lance Gelein (telephone)

This presentation will provide innovative training ideas, including using gaming technology, online learning systems, Web casts, quick reference materials, video, and whatever else it takes to engage the learner.

Wednesday, February 26
Designing Web Applications – Whitney Quesenbery (telephone)

This seminar will help those struggling to understand Web application design by presenting different kinds of Web applications, reviewing current trends in Web application design and usability, and suggesting some guidelines or design approaches for some of the thornier problems in this field.

All telephone/web seminars are held from 1:00-2:30 p.m. EST. Members can register for the seminars at www.stc.org/seminars.asp. Cost for a seminar is per site, not per person. Telephone: U.S. sites: $145; Canadian sites: $160. Telephone and web: U.S. sites: $160; Canadian sites: $175.

Upcoming Society Events
February 27-28, 2004
The Atlanta Chapter STC will hold its annual regional conference, **Currents,** at Mercer University in Atlanta, Georgia. Topic stems include learning new skills and tools, contracting, education/professional development, satisfying users, and management. For more information, please contact:

Cheri Crider
ccrider@optiosoftware.com
www.stcatlanta.org

March 26, 2004
The Rochester Chapter STC will hold **Spectrum 2004** at the RIT Inn and Conference Center in Rochester, New York. The conference theme, "Back to the Future," reflects the tension between basic technical communication skills and the knowledge needed

for future opportunities. For more information, please contact:

Denise D. Pieratti
(585) 615-1654
pieratti@rochester.rr.com
www.stcrochester.org

April 17, 2004
The Pittsburgh Chapter STC **(that's us!)** will hold a Mini-Conference with the theme "Writers Without Borders: Trends in Technical Communication."

Technical communicators today do the traditional - write books, online help, white papers and requirements and specifications documents - as well as the untraditional - serve as usability experts, user interface designers, marketing support and internal consultants. They also explore, embrace and implement new technologies to improve their product deliverables as well as their efficiency. This one-day mini conference explores some "out of the box" roles that technical communicators perform today, looks at the latest technology trends and examines aspects of technical communication that you may want to consider in the future. For more information, see http://www.stcpgh.org/calendar/index.htm#417

May 9-12, 2004
STC's 51st Annual Conference will be held in Baltimore, Maryland. For more information, please visit www.stc.org/conferences.asp.

July 25-27, 2004
The Sacramento Chapter STC will host the STC Region 8 Conference at the University of California, Davis. The conference will feature seminars, a regional leadership summit, and a trade show and career expo. For more information, please contact:

Eric Butow
ceo@butow.net
www.stcregion8conference.org

Notes from the National Office

(continued from page 4)

Redesign of STC's Web Site
Our Web site, www.stc.org, is undergoing a complete redesign using CSS (cascading style sheet) layout techniques. This will allow Web designers to update content without changing a site's formatting. STC's webmaster will be able to control the entire redesigned site with a single style sheet, resulting in timelier updates, greater readability, enhanced navigation, and reduced page size. Work on the new site should be completed early this year.

Due to the redesign, many URLs on the STC site will change. In late December, the STC office e-mailed to chapter web-masters a list of the most heavily visited pages whose URLs will change.

The new site will be 100 percent compliant with the World Wide Web Consortium's (W3C) standards for CSS. (For more information on the W3C, please visit www.w3.org.) Screen readers can more easily interpret standards-compliant sites, so users with disabilities will enjoy greater access to information on STC's new site.

Over the years, the STC office has collected many user suggestions on improving www.stc.org. Many of these suggestions have been incorporated into the new design. The office will conduct an ongoing usability study of the new site, and users will be able to submit feedback through a form on the site. We hope you enjoy the new design and we look forward to your feedback.

STC 51st Annual Conference – Leadership Day Schedule
Chapter leaders are reminded to plan to attend STC's Leadership Day event on Sunday, May 9, immediately preceding STC's 51st Annual Conference. Leadership Day features a host of networking activities, workshop sessions, and presentations that are designed to help chapter and SIG leaders execute their duties more effectively. All Leadership Day sessions will be held in the

Hyatt Regency Hotel. Following is a list of Leadership Day events.

  8–8:45 AM - Continental Breakfast and STC Mall
  8:45–10:15 AM - Leadership Forum
    Celebrating the Year's Successes
    Keynote Speech: "Leadership: The Real Deal"
  10:30–11:45 AM - Leadership Workshops and Sessions
    Creative Solutions for Chapters and SIGs
    Innovative Chapter Development Ideas
    Real Leadership
    STC@50: Wrapping Up the Celebration
  11:45 AM–1 PM Lunch on your own
  1–2:15 PM - Leadership Workshops and Sessions
    Local SIGs and Local Chapters Working Together
    Managing Chapter Competitions
    The Marathon of Chapter Presidency
    Uncovering Leadership Potential

Leadership Day is a free event, and all chapter and Society leaders are encouraged to attend. If you are interested in attending Leadership Day, please contact Nancy Ott (vielottfamily@hotmail.com).

STC 51st Annual Conference
STC's 51st Annual Conference will be held at the Baltimore Convention Center in Baltimore, Maryland, on May 9-12, 2004. Conference Registration rates are as follows:

Category	Before 4/23	After 4/23
Member	$495	$570
Non-member	650	725
Student/Retired	120	175
One Day Attendance		
Member	255	330
Non-member	335	410
Student/Retired	120	175

Much more information on the Annual Conference can be found in the November 2003 Tieline (www.stc.org/tieline/issues/), including a comparison of the five official conference hotels in the Baltimore area; or at the conference website (www.stc.org/51stconf). A preliminary program for the conference will be included in the February issue of *Intercom*.

Reminder: Candidates for STC's 2004 Election
The annual STC election will be held in early 2004, and only members who have paid their dues by February 28, 2004, will be eligible to vote. An option on the dues renewal forms and new membership applications for 2004 allows members to receive election materials via e-mail. In March, members who selected this option will be e-mailed the slate, candidate biographies, and voting instructions. Members who did not select this option will receive these materials by first-class mail. The election closes April 15. Be sure to renew by February 28 to have a say in STC's future!

Reminder: Dues Renewal
Dues renewal invoices for the 2004 Society year were mailed in late November to all STC members who had not renewed their memberships online at www.stc.org/renew.asp. Dues payments must be received by January 1, 2004. (A grace period extends to February 28, 2004.) Note that only members who have paid their dues by February 28 will be eligible to vote in STC's 2004 election.

If you pay taxes in the U.S., part or all of your STC dues may be tax deductible.

More information on dues, including deductibility and prorating, can be found in the December 2003 Tieline (www.stc.org/tieline/issues/2003_12.pdf)

Notes from the National Office

(continued from page 5)

Reminder: Guidelines for Distinguished Chapter Service Awards

New guidelines for the distinguished chapter service award (DCSA) have been posted on the STC Web site at www.stc.org/admin_docs.asp. The guidelines contain two important changes: Members may not receive the award more than once from the same chapter, and student members are not eligible for the award.

Reminder: Scholarships for Technical Communication

STC is now offering four scholarships (two for undergraduates and two for graduate students) for the 2004-2005 academic year. Each scholarship is worth $1,000, paid directly to the school attended.

More details are available in the November 2003 issue of the Blue Pencil or on the STC website (www.stc.org). Application packages must be received by February 16, 2004.

The Blue Pencil will publish submitted statements from any candidate running for STC office. The presence of a candidate's statement does not imply endorsement by any members of the Blue Pencil editorial staff or the Pittsburgh chapter STC.

Nancy Hoffman Running for 2VP

By Nancy J. Hoffman
Fellow
Southeastern Michigan Chapter

Early in 2004, you will elect a new STC Second Vice President (2VP). After serving as 2VP, that person becomes First Vice President, then President, and finally Immediate Past President. Whoever wins the upcoming election makes a four-year commitment and performs a lot of volunteer work on behalf of STC and its members. I'm one of the candidates and I will be very happy and very proud to make that commitment of time and effort to our Society.

I have several areas in which I want to make a major contribution to STC, several ways in which I would like to "make a difference" if I'm elected to the position of 2VP.

Improving Communication

I want to improve communication in all parts of our organization. At a given point in time, there are many (possibly hundreds of) activities being planned, organized, and carried out in STC's chapters, regions, and SIGs. I believe that there are many untapped avenues for sharing information about STC's activities and the work associated with providing them. I believe there are many additional ways in which we can use current technology to share that information within our organization, with industries that are related to our field, and with academic programs that support technical communication.

I believe that improved sharing of information will help STC members get jobs, get *better* jobs, and be better trained for performing their jobs. Providing information about the value of STC to the outside world will bring increased recognition of our field and show that we are a valuable resource to businesses and industry.

Increasing Scholarships

STC's future lies in the abilities of upcoming technical communicators of all ages and

all levels of education, and we must strive to better support those future professionals. One key way we can do this is to greatly increase the dollar amounts and number of scholarships that STC gives to technical communication students of all ages. By better preparing those who are entering the technical communication field, we can help ensure that our field and our organization remain relevant and vital as the technical and business environments grow and evolve.

Increasing Research

We need to keep up with—no, get ahead of—technology related to our field. STC needs to greatly increase its support of pertinent, new, technology research in technical communication. Along with our increased support of research, we need to receive from our researchers regular, timely reporting of the status of these projects so we can use the results of their findings as soon as possible.

Increasing the Value of Membership

We need to expand services for our members. We can offer members more training—through STC meetings, seminars, and

Nancy Hoffman Running for 2VP

conferences, for example—so they can get better jobs. Some members are unemployed or think they might be facing unemployment soon. We can and we must provide help to members who are in those positions.

How To Pay for These Things
In an era of shrinking budgets and financial restraint, where can we find the money to support expanded services, increased scholarships, and new and relevant research? I believe that much of the needed funding can come from external fundraising activities. We can and should set up programs for soliciting contributions from industry and academic institutions. We also can solicit funding from STC members who are willing and able to provide additional

support for specific projects, such as research or scholarships. STC's new and expanded efforts need not result in increased membership or conference fees if untapped, external funding sources are found and used.

My Background—and Your Vote
I have many years of experience in STC as a member and an active volunteer at all levels, including chapter president, Region 4 Director-Sponsor, and Assistant to the President for Communication. I also have served for three years as Communication Director on the board of another non-profit association. It has given me experience that will, I believe, benefit STC as we move forward.

I worked as a technical writer, editor, project manager, and manager of other writers for twenty years. Now I have my own business, editing many different kinds of documents for many different kinds of companies. I also edit doctoral dissertations. I have experience in the business world—working as both a full-time employee and as an entrepreneur in the field.

I encourage you to vote in the upcoming election. I believe our field is very important to industry and that STC is very important to our field. I'm ready to make major contributions of time and effort to help STC grow and prosper and to promote STC as the premier professional association serving the technical communication field.

Grammar Game: English as a Foreign Language

By Meg Papa, Blue Pencil Managing Editor

This time of year for me, work-wise, means one thing above all else: Annual Report time. I am responsible for compling and editing my group's annual report to our industrial sponsors. The bulk of this report comprises individual technical summaries for the many ongoing research projects, and these summaries are written by graduate students and postdocs.

Here's the challenge: a great number of our students are non-native English speakers. Now, I am NOT making fun of their abilities: their English is a thousand times better than my Chinese, Japanese, or Korean. I admire the fact that they leave their families, friends, and cultures to travel halfway around the world for an education. However, the arbitrariness of English does give them some problems, and my job is to interpret and rewrite the problematic passages. I thought I would share some of the gems from this

year's reports with you. Can you help me fix them? (You don't need to be familiar with the technology to successfully rewrite these examples.)

- "However, these three methods are special cases of the BTE, and as such, they either lack accuracy or require extensive computational efforts, which is beyond their inability to successfully simulate multi-length and multi-time scales phenomena."
- "We have developed numerical techniques based on BTE, which has a sound physical base but a computationally intensive solution. The numerical technique, which we are working on is called lattice Boltzmann method (LBM), is require lesser computational effort, as compared to BTE but retains almost same information as in the BTE."

- "The goal of this research is a better understanding of the friction in disk drive rotary actuator pivot bearings. The research is developing a new easy to use higher order friction model for a prediction of hysteresis behavior."
- "Spacing dependent of recording characteristics due to the surface roughness of substrates were investigated using an anisotropic magnetoresistive (AMR) head."

There are six intentional errors in the above piece, including some in the report excerpts. The first person to respond to me with all the corrections will have their name listed in the next issue of the Blue Pencil. The "answer" will also be published. Please send your corrections to me at mv0t@andrew.cmu.edu by Monday, February 16. Happy hunting!

Answers for January Column: Recommended Reading Material

Due to some technical difficulties with getting the Januarty Blue Pencil posted, the only person who was able to read the column before the response deadline was Nancy Carpenter, our layout editor. She found all the problems!

For Christmas this year, my best friend gave me a book that has been on my wish list for some time: Anguished English, by Richard Lederer. Little did she know it would be the inspiration for a column. This small paperback contains over 1,000 examples of grammar gaffes, word substitutions, strange sentence structures, and mixed metaphors that appeared in student essays, accident reports, billboards, newspaper headlines, and other documents. Each example in the

book serve [serves] up both sidesplitting laughter and a cautionary tale. Here a few choice bits, to wet [whet] your appetite:

- From the section *Two-Headed Headlines*: "Police Begin Campaign to Run Down Jaywalkers" and "Drunk Gets Nine Months in Violin Case"
- From the section *Modern Day Malapropisms*: "We can't be a pancreas to the whole world's problems" and "The monks sang gregarious chants in honor of the Lord's annotated" (two goofs for the price of one)
- From the section *Accidental Bloopers*: "One wheel went into the ditch. My foot jumped from brake to accelerator, leaped across the road to the other side,

and jumped into the trunk of a tree," and "I was on my way to the doctor with rear end trouble when my universal joint gave way, causing me to have an accident."

Are you laughing yet? Or, perhaps you are cringing.

This book, along with Darrell Huff, who wrote the [Darrell Huff's] 1954 gem How to Lie with Statistics, are must-reads for anyone who communicates information. Lederer's book, meant to be humorus [humorous], also happens to be instructional. Huff's book, meant to be instructional, is also a scream to read.

Employment Roundtable Offered Food for Thought

believed in a well-crafted Objective that would catch an interviewer's eye. Whether an Objective was part of a résumé or not, everyone agreed that a Professional Skills or Professional Achievements section was mandatory in the current job market to give the job seeker an edge.

Portfolios - Nancy Ott
Nancy Ott discussed the different kinds of portfolios you can create to provide writing samples to employers and show-case your work during an interview. Table participants could examine both a traditional, hard-copy portfolio and an online portfolio that included HTML and PDF documents. Although some people downplay the importance of the traditional portfolio in an online era, many people find that they need both types of portfolios. (If nothing else, you'll have some samples to show employers if technical problems keep you from showing your online portfolio!) Nancy discussed the different kinds of writing samples that you can include in each type of portfolio and the most appropriate way to present them.

What Managers are Looking for in Technical Writers - Ray Janicko
Ray discussed what managers are looking for when they interview technical writers. He stressed that writers should come to an interview able to describe their writing skills in detail and they should provide samples of both written and online documentation. On the subject of managers looking for skills with a specific tool, he noted that you should use generic terminology on our résumés - "page layout software" as opposed to "PageMaker." But, if you don't have experience with any tools in a specific area (for example, online help) you should get a copy of that software and create a few sample projects to gain experience, or take a classes. Ray also noted that writers should come to an interview with a sense of "normalcy"-you should not spend too much time discussing home life and hobbies, etc. You need to be able to show that you know the

boundaries between home and work life. Lastly, Ray discussed that it is very important to demonstrate your commitment to the job and honesty.

Ray suggested that the article "Employment Trends: Industries and Qualities" in the January 2004 issue of *Intercom* is a good source of information on this subject.

Managing Remote Writers - Marcy Robb, Ansys, Inc.
Before working at Ansys, Marcy managed a team of five writers in Los Angeles solely from Pittsburgh. All of the management responsibility was handled from Pittsburgh, without ever going out to LA. With this experience, Marcy was able to offer some insight on what managers are looking for when hiring remote writers. The most important quality to demonstrate is good communication skills. This is important when you are remote because you do not have the face to face contact with your manager, as would when you are in an office. Most correspondence is

done via email, instant messaging and tele-conferencing. With these mediums, it is important that you know how to communicate effectively in order to keep everyone on the team in the loop with respect to the projects you are working on. From a management standpoint, the most important goal for managing a team of remote writers is to manage by objectives.

Leading a Documentation Team - Dennis McCarthy, Technical Writing Team Lead, FreeMarkets
Dennis discussed his experience balancing his managing and writing responsibilities as a Team Lead. When he was hired at FreeMarkets, it was estimated that he would spend 40 percent of his time managing and 60 percent writing-however, it has turned out to be a 70/30 breakdown. His writing responsibilities include user guides, online help, and API documentation; his management work consists of coordinating people, coordinating meetings, spec review, update plans, and forging relationships with the UI design, Training, and Product Support groups. He finds the mix of work satisfying, because he has knowledge and control of the process but can still continue writing.

WorkQuest™ Group Shares Information, Ideas

STC WorkQuest™ is a support group for technical communicators (and others) looking for work. It's sponsored by the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

We concentrate on the specifics of job hunting such as résumé writing, interviewing skills, networking, motivation, etc., and we encourage people to share their successes and frustrations.

We try to both guide the newly unemployed and motivate the ones languishing in their search. It's also for people who are underemployed or thinking of changing jobs. People other than STC members may also be involved.

We meet every Tuesday morning at 10:00 am. For more information and resources, plus our weekly calendar, see our website http://home.earthlink.net/~workquest/, or contact Janis Ramey, ramey@technical-writing.net .

Adding Context-Sensitive Help to Access Database Forms

(continued from page 3)

9. Close the form's Properties box.

10. Double-click on a form element to display its properties, and enter the Map # of the appropriate help topic (defined in step 3) for the form element. The following graphic highlights the **Date** field as an example:
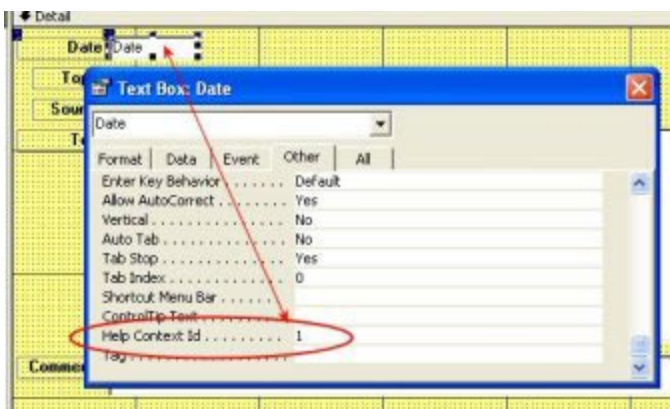
11. Repeat steps 9 & 10 as needed for all remaining form elements.

12. Save and close the form.

To test the form and help file, be sure the help file is in the same folder as the database application, then navigate to a form field and press **F1**. The help file and the appropriate help topic should display on top of the database application window, similar to this example:

Map IDs can be used to create context-sensitive help for practically any application. RoboHelp makes it easy to create and maintain those Map IDs. Applications made with MS Office and Visual Basic will generally use the method outlined above. Applications created with C, C++, Java, and other languages will rely more on the #define statements listed in the map (.h) file.

On large applications where you might have multiple help projects and multiple help outputs, you may want to seed the Map IDs and prefix them with identifiers that readily differentiate the help content. Consult with your developers and project leaders to determine how your help system should integrate with the application.

You can download the sample database application and the sample help file created for this article from my Access Database Primer page at www.writemohr.com.

Robert Mohr is a senior STC member and the author of The Elements of Word. He can be reached via e-mail at rpmohr@writemohr.com.

February brings XML and Single Source Evangelizing

You write, therefore you format. Not quite cogito ergo sum (I think, therefore I am), but it does seem that writing and formatting have become nearly indistinguishable. If you use any of the popular tools for creating text, MS Word or FrameMaker for instance, you format the content as you write. Taken a step further, products like DreamWeaver and FrontPage enable you to create formatted Web content by design. It may be that in the future, technical writing will be much more about creating content and much less about formatting that content. What are some of the issues that make this change in focus possible and probable?

The February chapter meeting will feature Rob Frankland, President and CEO of Rascal Software, with an explanation of why database publishing is such a hot topic and why it is not for everybody. What drives the decision to treat content as data and what are the benefits of this approach? It includes some drawbacks of current solutions and a suggestion of what the right solution should be.

Rob founded Rascal Software in the summer of 2002. He began his career in publications as an editor at Houghton Mifflin Co. He has been working in software development, chiefly in the documentation area, for over twenty years. He started as a technical writer at Software Arts (VisiCalc) and as a documentation manager at Lotus. He has been involved in a wide variety of software startups, including Exa, Marathon Technologies, and Millennium Pharmaceuticals. He has consulted for a number of large and small companies, including Sun Microsystems, Microsoft, Rational, AT&T Wireless, and Onyx Software. He was also a founding partner of RFK Partners, a well-known CAD consulting company. Rob has been a judge for Puget Sound STC competitions for the past two years, and he is a frequent speaker at STC events throughout the country.

Rascal Software is committed to developing quality XML-based software for content creation, editing and multichannel publishing. Based on industry standards and featuring superior ease of use, Rascal Software products enable professionals to be more productive in a shorter period of time. Rascal Software's first product, Veredus, an XML-based single source authoring tool, is targeted at documentation professionals and allows content to be transformed, formatted and rendered on the fly. Rascal Software is headquartered in Seattle, Washington.

For more information on Rascal Software and their various products, please visit http://www.rascalsoftware.com.

WHEN: Tuesday, Monday, February 16 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

WHERE: Technology Council, 2000 Technology Drive, off Second Avenue. Directions to the Technology Council can be found at http://www.pghtech.org/contact/directions.html.

COST: Members: $5.00. Non-Members: $2.00. Students/Unemployed: $2.00. Make checks payable to STC-Pittsburgh. Pay at the door or mail to STC Pittsburgh Chapter, PO Box 133,Pittsburgh, PA 15230. A light dinner, snacks, pop and desert will be served, plus all those in attendance will be eligible to win the door prize raffle drawing.

RSVP: Please reply by Thursday, February 12, 2004 to Darlene Mullenix at:

dmullenix@federatedinv.com

or 412 288-8676. Include your telephone number. Please remember that you are expected to pay if you RSVP and do not attend.

Editorial Calendar

Meeting Date	Blue Pencil Publication Date (Monday)	Article Submission Deadline (Monday)
Week of March 8	February 23	February 9
Week of April 12	March 29	March 15
Week of May 10	April 26	April 12

Meg Papa contact information
        Email: mv0t@andrew.cmu.edu (em-vee-zero-tee)
        Home phone: 412-243-3026
        Work phone: 412-268-8520