BLUE PENCIL

Pick of the Issue

Ah, the life of a telecommuter! No traffic, no battling the weather, no hefty parking expenses. Did I mention no traffic? Jilda Apone's article on page six mixes some good suggestions with a healthy dose of humor, and will have you smiling all the way to your (home) office.

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Spectrum 2006 Call for Proposals
Mission Technical Communication: Learn it! Do it! Teach it!

You and your colleagues are invited to deliver a presentation at *Spectrum* 2006, in Rochester, New York on Friday, March 31, 2006.

Spectrum 2006 is the 47th annual educational conference sponsored by the Rochester Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication and is the longest running STC chapter conference.

Your mission, should you accept it:

Spectrum 2006 will be an opportunity for attendees to learn about the directions and new trends that are affecting contemporary technical communication, to share their experiences in its practice, and to teach their colleagues the skills, tactics and new techniques needed for success in this dynamic field.

The conference committee solicits proposals with your ideas for presentations that *Spectrum* 2006 attendees will find stimulating and valuable. The reach of technical communication has extended and presentations on every aspect of this broad field are welcomed. Can you share lessons learned when you or your organization embraced new techniques, new practices or new models? Do you have a skill or specialized knowledge that you can share with others in a tutorial session? Have you and your organization solved some communication or management problem that you can describe and discuss?   Have you done research or studies that technical communicators will find of interest? Can you help sharpen the writing, graphic, presentation, web or marketing skills of attendees?

We are particularly interested in presentations on freelancing, technical graphics, technical literacy, information design and architecture, usability, tutorials on software and other tools, documentation techniques, indexing, current trends, technical marketing, globalization techniques, training and online education. Think about what you know, what you can share, and send us a short proposal. You can play a significant part in making Mission Technical Communication a big success.

President's Column - Time to Renew for 2006
by Nicky Bleiel

It's STC membership renewal time, and I thought I'd take this opportunity to explain the 2006 membership options and benefits. You'll be receiving this information via e-mail and other sources over the next few weeks, but this is the only place you'll hear how your membership decision affects your STC opportunities at the local level.

First of all, there are three levels of STC membership:

- Classic $150
- Electronic $140
- Limited $130

"Classic" –specific benefits:
- Paper versions of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication* (plus access to online versions)
- Full access to the "members only" area of the STC web site (stc.org)
- The following Chapter/SIG options:
  - Two chapters **or**
  - One chapter and two (national) special interest groups (SIGs) **or**
  - Four SIGs
- The option to join additional chapters at $10 each and additional SIGs at $5 each.

"Electronic"-specific benefits:
- Online versions of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*
- Full access to the "members only" area of the STC web site (stc.org)
- The following Chapter/SIG options:
  - Two chapters **or**
  - One chapter and two (national) special interest groups (SIGs) **or**
  - Four SIGs
- The option to join additional chapters at $10 each and additional SIGs at $5 each.

"Limited"-specific benefits:
- Paper versions of *Intercom* and *Technical Communication*
- Full access to the "members only" area of the STC web site (stc.org)
- No chapter or SIG options

You can choose any of these membership levels and take advantage of the benefits STC has to offer. In addition to the items noted above you also get:

- Discounted registrations to conferences, programs, and seminars (including the 53rd Annual Conference in Las Vegas and the new STC Training Programs)
- Access to the annual salary survey and online Career Center
- The new STC online Forums (where you can get access to knowledgeable professionals who have similar interests).

The option to join STC at different levels (which started in 2005) gives you the flexibility to tailor your membership to meet your needs. If you choose to become a Classic or Electronic member, please make the Pittsburgh Chapter one of your Chapter/SIG options. Your choice to join the Pittsburgh Chapter enhances our ability to serve you.

Here are the benefits you'll receive on a local level:

- Monthly programming that reflects your interests and needs.
- The opportunity to network with your peers, and with the members of other local organizations with similar interests, such as ASTD, PRKMC, and SLA.
- You'll be on our chapter mailing list so you'll get updated monthly on chapter programs and training opportunities via US Mail.
- Discounted registrations to all chapter activities.
- Local SIGs, such as WorkQuest™

And lastly, you'll be a member of an STC Chapter of Distinction.

Please renew today at https://www.stc.org/duesrenewal/

Thanks!

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Society for Technical Communication

Pittsburgh Chapter

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Membership at a Glance

(as of November 1, 2005)

National

Total members: 16,719

Total chapters: 140

Pittsburgh

Total members: 135

Notes from the National Office

Upcoming Telephone/Web Seminars

Cost: $99 (STC Members), $149 (non-members). See stc.webex.com for more information and to register.

December 7, 2005

Mastering Metadata: Making the Most of Your Content Management System

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: Jack Danaher

For many organizations, moving into a content management environment can be a step into the Great Unknown. Whether you call it content management, single-sourcing, structured knowledge, or structured information, deciding on the tools, styles, and document structure is the easy part. Now, you've got to figure out how to put it all together to work most efficiently and cost-effectively. Knowing how to develop and use a robust metadata model can help. Metadata, or "hidden" data about content, helps an organization manage its knowledge efficiently by classifying and organizing data, facilitating the reuse of content in multiple outputs, and enabling dynamic content delivery.

January 11, 2006

Textual Bloopers and How to Avoid Them

1:00-2:30 PM ET

Instructor: Jeff Johnson

This seminar covers common textual bloopers that occur in computer-based products and online services. We'll

identify the most insidious types of bloopers, such as the following:

Too much text

Speaking Geek

Inconsistent terminology

Inconsistent style

Clueless error messages

A short quiz will provide practice in recognizing these errors. We'll also discuss techniques to keep them from occurring, particularly the importance of developing and adhering strictly to a project lexicon.

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Upcoming STC Events

March 24–25, 2006

The Atlanta Chapter STC will hold **Currents 2006**, its annual technical communication conference, at the Atlanta campus of Mercer University. For more information, please contact: Leigh Richardson lrichardson@intellisync.com www.stcatlanta.org

March 31, 2006

The Rochester Chapter STC will hold **Spectrum 2006**, an all-day conference focusing on coming trends and directions in technical communication, at the RIT Inn and Conference Center in Henrietta, New York. Keynote speakers will be Suzanna Laurent, president of Communications Design Group and current president of STC, and Jared Spool, CEO of User Interface Engineering. For more information,

please contact: Tom Moran tfmcad@rit.edu www.stcrochester.org

May 7–10, 2006

STC's 53rd Annual Conference will be held at Bally's Las Vegas Hotel and Paris Las Vegas Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. For more information, please visit www.stc.org/53rdConf/. Also, there is additional information in the November 2005 *Tieline* (www.stc.org/Tieline/issues/2005_11.pdf).

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STC Dues are Tax Deductible

I f you pay taxes in the United States, keep in mind that STC dues are tax deductible. Please note, however, that dues must be deducted from the tax return filed for the year in which they were paid. In other words, dues paid in 2005 may be deducted only from 2005 tax returns. Therefore, if you pay your 2006 dues on or before December 31, 2005, these dues can be deducted only from your 2005 return. Members who have questions should contact their local IRS office or their accountant.

You can claim dues as a deduction in several ways: as a charitable expense, a business expense, or a miscellaneous deduction.

See the November 2005 *Tieline* (www.stc.org/Tieline/issues/2005_11.pdf) for more detailed information about eligibility and deduction levels

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STC Offering 2006 Scholarships

The STC is offering scholarships for full-time, post-secondary students who are studying for a degree in the area of technical writing, editing, graphical design, interface design, or Web design. Four awards of $1,500 each will be granted toward school tuition and expenses. Two awards are granted to graduate students, and two to undergraduates. Applications must be received by February 15, 2006.

To obtain application forms and additional information, contact:

Society for Technical Communication

Attn: Scholarships

901 N. Stuart Street, Suite 904

Arlington, VA 22203-1822

(703) 522-4114

www.stc.org

Body Language and Mirroring, pt. 2 - *by Laurel Patterson*

This is the second part of a two-part article. Part one, published in the October 2005 Blue Pencil, examined body language.

The benefits of mirroring

The dictionary defines mirroring as "a method of reflecting the body language, speech style, and vocabulary of the other person." It is done as though the person is seeing him or herself in a mirror. If someone were leaning or crossing the leg to their left, you would lean or cross to your right, thus creating a mirror image for the person.

When mirroring, you help others perceive you as someone who fits in. People generally like people who are similar to themselves. You accent your message and help those you are communicating with feel comfortable with you.

Subtlety is key when mirroring. If you immediately copy the exact movements and gestures of another person, it would probably be construed as mocking or at least odd. When mirroring, allow a time lag of a few seconds to several minutes and then imitate the body language slightly.

Types of mirroring

You can incorporate mirroring in your communication through body positioning, vocabulary, and verbal mirroring. When mirroring body position, imitate another's actions in a slight manner. For example, simply tilt your head to the left to reflect the other's leaning to the right. Respond with similar body movements, not an exact copy. If the other person's body language is negative, mirror it very slightly, if at all. You don't want your message to be perceived as negative.

Vocabulary is mirrored by matching verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. If the person you are communicating with uses multi-syllable adjectives, add them to your conversation. If someone uses simple, one syllable words, try to keep yours on a similar plane.

> **"Your knowledge of body language and mirroring can help you to read others more accurately and adjust your delivery to bring about understanding."**

Verbal mirroring is an interesting method where you "approximate someone's voice tone and repeat the last few words or word, sometimes with a questioning inflection." So, if someone were to say to you, "This job requires a special format." Instead of simply saying, "Okay," you would respond by repeating, "Special format."

When communicating with others, note if they are mirroring you. Use what you perceive to clarify, pacify, or seal the deal. Your knowledge of body language and mirroring can help you to read others more accurately and adjust your delivery to bring about understanding.

Applying body language and mirroring techniques

If you'd like to improve in this area, there is plenty of information available. As you learn more about body language and mirroring, apply it to your communication style.

One very revealing exercise you may want to try is taking a Body Language and Mirroring Field Trip. Go to a restaurant or mall; sit back and observe the body language. Can you see who's in love? Who's angry?

Tips for the Too-Focused Telecommuter
by Jilda Apone

Telecommuting offers great opportunities to avoid icy roads, dry-cleaning bills, and 5 am risings in order to be at work by 8 am. For some, it also requires a degree of self-discipline higher than what may be needed in a traditional office setting.

I do not have that problem. Attribute it to Catholic guilt or a compulsive personality but the mere fact that my employer allowed me to telecommute meant that I worked even harder at home than I did at the office. Not having to make decisions about what to wear every day, ironing clothes, packing lunches, or hearing about office politics saved a lot of time and energy, which got re-channeled into work. Once I began a project, it was easy for me to concentrate on it to the exclusion of almost everything else. With no children in the house, I was able to work long hours without interruptions. In fact, just about the only interruptions I ever had were the phone calls that broke through my dial-up connection to the Internet.

I would wake up at 6:45 am, turn on the computer, and become so intent on what I was doing that I would forget to stop and eat breakfast. Deprived of the smells wafting from the office kitchen as my colleagues heated up their lunches, I often forgot to eat lunch as well. I rarely scheduled a lunch out with friends because my boss expected his staff to eat at our desks whether we were working at home or in the office. A couple of times, when I was facing short deadlines, it would be 8 pm before I realized that I hadn't eaten anything at all that day. I would also forget to stand up and stretch or just walk around a bit.

> "...the mere fact that my employer allowed me to telecommute meant that I worked even harder at home than I did at the office."

Telecommuting can be lonely and I found that I needed to be out of the house nearly every evening, even if it was only to go to the grocery store. I began to fill my weekends with more activities and events than ever to make up for my solitary days.

Even so, I love telecommuting and recommend it highly. However, if you are thinking about working at home and your work style is similar to mine, consider these suggestions.

- Set an alarm clock to remind yourself to eat breakfast and reset it for lunch.

- Do some bends and stretches while you are away from your desk.

- Have lunch with a friend once a week if you can. It's a nice reminder when you are looking at your weekly calendar to eat on other days as well.

- Join a gym and have a trainer develop an aerobic, stretching and weight training program. You will reduce the number of visits to the chiropractor.

- Fill your weekends with lots of activities even if you have to do them with people whose company you do not always enjoy.

- Cancel your dial-up provider and invest in a DSL line. The monthly charges are virtually the same, and your connection to the Internet will never be broken by an incoming phone call. Because you will be online in a matter of seconds, you can start to work sooner.

My sister said to be sure to include something that would pacify adults living in the same house as a telecommuter.   She feels that an occasional gift for those who must deal with buses that seldom appear on time, miserable weather, daily sartorial decisions and other aggravations that commuters face would go a long way toward easing the jealousy that inevitably results when they contemplate the life of a telecommuter.

STC SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

Dates to remember:

December 19, 2005 - Proposal due

January 20, 2006 - Acceptance date

February 17, 2006 - Paper due date for proceedings

March 31, 2006 - *Spectrum* Conference, RIT Inn and Conference Center, Rochester, NY

To submit a proposal:

1. Choose your topic. Share the work you are doing with the participants in *Spectrum* 2006. What have you learned recently that can help others? What is exciting to you? The possible topics are limitless.

2. Choose your format.

Discussion (1 hour)

By yourself or with one or more colleagues, present information and insights with audience participation. Present a paper on something you or your organization has done or organize a panel to discuss a topic of general interest to technical communicators.

Tutorial (60 to 90 minutes)

Provide an instructional session or workshop that helps attendees understand how to use tools and applications that are needed in the world of technical communication. Is there something you can teach others?

3. Email the following details by December 19, 2005.

- A 100-word summary of your proposed topic and presentation format.

- A brief biographical sketch (100 words or less) about you and anyone else that is making the presentation with you. Email to: Tom Moran tfmcad@rit.edu

Questions: Call or email Tom Moran: 585-475-4936, tfmcad@rit.edu.

Who's afraid? Can you see confidence? Have you noticed signs of poor self-esteem? When you see a couple, are their limbs and torso facing each other? Or is one of them pointing away? What kind of gestures do you see? Can you see who will win the fight? Who wants to get away? Can you predict the outcome of a situation, based on body language?

Taking the seven percent of communication with words and consciously adding body language and mirroring enables you to improve your communication and rapport. Understanding these concepts can make interviews or meetings of any sort far more productive.

Some references for more information

Brenner, Robert C. "Body Language in Business—How to Sell Using Your Body." http://www.brennerbooks.com/bodylang.html, 1998.

Carey, Kristin. "Secrets of the Opposite Sex." http://womencentral.net/bodylanguage.html

Clabby PhD, John & O'Connor, MD, Robert. "Teaching Learners to Use Mirroring: Rapport Lessons from Neurolinguistic Programming." Department of Family Medicine, www.stfm.org

Marwijk, Frank van. "Body language during a Job Interview." www.lichaamstaal.com/english

Wheeler, Liz, et al. *Illustrated Oxford Dictionary.* New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2003.

Laurel Patterson, an active WorkQuester, is a consultant specializing in writing and speaking on human relations, diversity, customer service, and environmental issues.

December Meeting & Holiday Party: Adobe Acrobat: The Technical Communicator's Swiss Army Knife

Speaker: Alan Houser

Date: Monday, December 12, 2005

Time: 6:30 – 8:30 p.m.

Many technical communicators are only familiar with the Adobe Acrobat Reader or FrameMaker's Acrobat Distiller. If so, you may be surprised by the capabilities of the full Acrobat product. During this session, Alan Houser, an Adobe Certified Instructor, will demonstrate how you can use Adobe Acrobat Professional to improve your efficiency and improve the usability of your documents. Alan will demonstrate how to:

- Create and modify Acrobat bookmarks.

- Create online-only navigation links.

- Add hypertext links within Acrobat documents.

- Embed multimedia content in Acrobat documents.

- Use Acrobat's review and collaboration features to replace conventional hardcopy reviews.

- Use Acrobat's security settings to protect your documents.

- Create simple forms for getting feedback from your users.

This meeting will also be the chapter's holiday party!

Place: Pittsburgh Technology Council - for directions, see www.pghtech.org/aboutus/directions.asp

Cost: $12.00 members/$15.00 non-members/$10.00 students/unemployed (dinner/beverage included)

RSVP: by Dec. 7 to Beverly Spagnolo at 412-766-7200 or bspagnolo@klauscherarchitects.com.

2005-2006
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