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Et Tu, Technical Communicator?

By Dave Fonseca, OCSTC Senior Member

When the French-speaking Normans invaded southern England in 1066, they brought with them their language, enriching the existing Anglo Saxon language with a new vocabulary. The end result was the synthesis of Germanic and Latin linguistic elements that we now call English.

The Norman royal court and the rest of the elite preferred the Latin-based words. These words can be a little more formal and indirect than their Anglo Saxon equivalents. The multisyllabic Latin-based words now make up a large part of English vocabulary despite the fact that the basic core of the language still remains German in origin.

The original Anglo Saxon words are more forceful and direct—and direct language is powerful. Replacing multisyllabic Latin-based words with short, clear Anglo Saxon words gives your writing a clearer, more forceful tone.

When writing technical materials, there is almost *always* a better Anglo Saxon alternative to a Latin-based word. These shorter and more concrete words should be used for clearer and more to-the-point writing. A Latin-based word doesn't always convey the same concrete or familiar meaning to most readers as its Anglo Saxon equivalent.

Nontechnical users (who are native English speakers) may feel more comfortable with words of Anglo Saxon origin because these are the words of everyday speech. Use short, simple words. Tell readers to "do the setup steps first." Don't indicate to readers to implement the setup procedures initially. While these rules might seem like a replay of Technical Writing 101, even the most experienced technical writers need to be reminded that removing multisyllabic Latin-based words and replacing them with stronger, shorter Germanic words packs a more powerful punch.

Show is better than *indicate*. *Do* is better than *implement*. *See* is better than *visualize*. It's better to tell a user to do something *first* than *initially*. Saying that something is *sufficient* is somewhat vague, but saying that it's *enough* makes it clearer.

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Publication Policies

The *TechniScribe* is published 11 times a year as a benefit to the members of the Orange County Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. The goal of the publication is to reflect the interests, needs, and objectives of OCSTC members. The *TechniScribe* strives to be an advocate for, and an inspiration to, technical communicators by keeping them connected to each other and to opportunities for professional growth.

Articles published in this newsletter may be reprinted in other STC publications if credit is properly given and one copy of the reprint is sent to the *TechniScribe* Editor.

Submission Information

The editorial team retains and exercises the right to edit submitted and requested material for clarity, length, and appropriateness.

When submitting material, please remember to

- Include a 25-word biography about yourself.
- Send articles in Word format, RTF (Rich-Text Format), ASCII, or in the body of an e-mail message.
- Send material to the editor (carried@hotmail.com) five weeks prior to the date it will be published.

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President's Message

By Jeff Randolph, OCSTC Chapter President



During my tenure as chapter president, we have weathered the storm fairly well. Yes, our membership has declined, as has overall STC membership. We have weathered all of the various facets of STC's Transformation initiative. The new

membership options you have, including multiple chapter memberships, have stimulated membership in Orange County STC. We have stabilized the finances, and we have worked with meetings in various ways. At the March meeting, I experimented with a slightly earlier starting time. If you remember a meeting that really didn't get started until 7:00 P.M. and did not end until after 9:00 P.M., come on down! Jobs continue to flow through the pipeline and we have a steady group of employers looking for people and announcing job opportunities at chapter meetings. It's time to get back on the move again.

STC Rechartering

One of the STC Transformation items, sprung on chapter leaders at the STC Conference in May 2004, was "rechartering." My first thought was, *Oh no, not another slogan*. Well, yes it is jargon—it isn't in my Microsoft Office 2003 dictionary (however, the suggested alternatives are "recapturing" and "retargeting"!"). Until a couple of months ago, the only thing I knew was that it did not mean coming up with a new set of bylaws. I equated rechartering with literally dissolving the chapter and starting from scratch. Thanks to my fellow chapter presidents, Sherry Michaels from the Phoenix Chapter and Brian Martin from the TransAlpine Chapter, who clarified the facets of rechartering.

Peeling back the jargon, rechartering is asking

- What is your chapter mission statement?
- What is your chapter statement of purpose?
- What is your chapter strategic plan (what are your goals and how do you plan to implement them)?

STC Rechartering—Request for Comments

We need to reflect your needs. As we proceed, please send us your comments. I already have an idea from one member—to publish a book that will be "owned" by the chapter. The past few years, we have concentrated on improving the basic services. If

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Next Meeting

Project Management for Technical Writers

Speaker: Ted Seastrom

When: Tuesday, April 19, 2005, 6:00–9:00 P.M.

Where: Doubletree Club Hotel
7 Hutton Centre Drive
Santa Ana, CA 92702
714.751.2400

Cost: Members with reservations **\$21**
Students with reservations **\$16**
Nonmembers with reservations **\$23**
Walk-ins or those registering after deadline **\$31**
No-shows billed **\$31**

Reservations

Reservations are due by 12:00 A.M., Monday, April 18, 2005.

Registration

Register online at www.ocstc.org/dinres.asp.

Directions to Doubletree Club Hotel

From the North 405

Exit at MacArthur Blvd. and turn right. Continue on MacArthur Blvd., passing over the 405 Freeway, and later passing under the 55 Freeway. At the second stoplight beyond the underpass, turn left onto Hutton Centre Drive. At the stoplight (for Sandpointe Ave.), turn left into the hotel entrance.

From the South 405

Exit at MacArthur Blvd. and turn right. Continue on MacArthur Blvd., passing under the 55 Freeway. At the second stoplight beyond the underpass, turn left onto Hutton Centre Drive. At the stoplight (for Sandpointe Ave.), turn left into the hotel entrance.

From the North 55

Exit at MacArthur Blvd. and turn left, passing under the 55 Freeway. At the second stoplight beyond the underpass, turn left onto Hutton Centre Drive. At the stoplight (for Sandpointe Ave.), turn left into the hotel entrance.

From the South 55

Exit at MacArthur Blvd. and turn right and then move quickly into the left lane. At the first stoplight, turn left onto Hutton Centre Drive. At the stoplight (for Sandpointe Ave.), turn left into the hotel entrance. τs

Editor's Desk

By Carrie Damschroder, *TechniScribe* Managing Editor



I recently entered the *TechniScribe* in the 2005 STC Newsletter Competition. Last year, the *TechniScribe* team won an Award of Excellence. We are hoping to do just as well—or better—in this

year's competition. I'll know the results of the competition in a few months and will pass the news along to chapter members. Keep your fingers crossed!

In addition to entering the 2005 STC Newsletter Competition, I also participated as a judge. This was my first time judging in a newsletter competition. The experience made me feel like I was a teacher again—staying up late grading papers and writing endless comments to justify the scores. I judged five newsletters—two printed student chapter newsletters and three online professional chapter newsletters. It was interesting to look so closely at other STC newsletters. I was able to get some great ideas for our own. One chapter hosted a few small writing contests to drum up content for their newsletter—a poetry contest and a humor in writing contest. One chapter had a technical writing advice column that made me laugh out loud! Another chapter published columns on office health, telecommuting, and SIGs. Although I will only be managing the *TechniScribe* for two more months, I will definitely pass these ideas on to my successor (to be announced next month!). So, look for some enhancements to the newsletter in the coming months—we're working hard to bring you monthly chapter information that is informative, timely, and fun to read! τs

Search your document drafts for words that end with the suffixes *-ality, -ation, -ence, -ization, -ize, and -ocentrism*. Some of these Latin cognates might have made your high school French tests a breeze, but they often clog up your writing with too many syllables and vague concepts.

Use a thesaurus to help you replace words with shorter and more forceful ones. *Speak, talk, or tell* read better than *communicate* or *describe*. *Like* is more concrete than *similar*. Should something be a *procedure* or does *steps* work just as well?

Despite the good advice to make your English as Germanic as much as possible, there are some valid arguments against doing so. One is that the large number of Latin-based words in English often makes translation and localization easier and cheaper. Some also argue that keeping the Latin cognates makes your writing easier for that huge population of non-native English speakers whose first language is Latin-based. While this is an important consideration, it should be noted that anyone with a good working knowledge of English, no matter what their native language, is certainly familiar with the basic Anglo Saxon building blocks of English. In fact, even though approximately 60 percent of English nouns are of Latin/Norman French origin (though many with Anglo Saxon equivalents), the core of English remains the Anglo Saxon of Old English.

So, remember to use Anglo Saxon words wherever appropriate. There are some occasions where a Latin-based or a Greek-based word might work better; sometimes it might be appropriate to give your writing a more formal or ambiguous tone but if not, shorten and clarify your writing with good old-fashioned Anglo Saxon words.

Dave Fonseca is a technical writer at IndyMac Bank Home Lending. He previously worked as a technical writer at Oracle Corporation and as a content manager/ editor for Intraware. He can be reached at dave_fonseca52@hotmail.com. TS

we want to go further, we need to write down what we want to do.

- What is the mission statement of the chapter?
- What is the statement of purpose?
- What are the three to seven goals of the chapter?
- What strategies do you have to implement the goals?
- What programs will you offer to implement the strategies?
- What has been the cost to operate your chapter over the last three years?
- What members do you hope to attract to the chapter?
- How will your chapter provide value to the larger STC community and further the goals of STC? (Note: I think we should look to the wider technical communication community when considering this question, which would benefit STC by expanding the community of technical communicators.)

Let's make it happen this year! TS

OCSTC 2005–2006 Election

By Julie Dotson, OCSTC Nominating Committee Chairperson

A big thank you to everyone who voted this year! At the time of printing, we do not know the results. To view election results, go to the OCSTC Web site at www.ocstc.org/election/default.asp or look for an e-mail announcement.

A special thanks go to our candidates, our members who considered running for office, and the current Nominating Committee members **Jean Gabriel, Bruce Alexander, and Steve Blossom**.

Others recognize our willingness to volunteer, which makes our chapter high energy and of consistent benefit to members. TS

What To Do For Lunch

By Michael Opsteegh, OCSTC Chapter Treasurer

If you're like me, you occasionally eat lunch at your desk. Let's say, hypothetically, you have a deadline staring you right in the face, and your manager is breathing down your neck. So, you decide to scarf down your ham and cheese hold-the-mayo sandwich in your cubicle and roll up your sleeves. Take my advice, don't aggravate your ulcer: forget about your deadline for five minutes and point your Web browser to the Q&A page of the *Chicago Manual of Style* Web site (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/cmsfaq.html>). Each month, the editors of the CMS field questions submitted by users of the book. The questions range in topic from usage to capitalization, from prepositions to punctuation, and they usually seek to elaborate on what can be found in the printed version or resolve an office debate over how to handle some obscure situation. (And you thought *you* were the only one to get into those heated arguments over the proper use of a semicolon!) Generally, the editors' answers are smart and witty. The examples they give are clever and entertaining—and helpful. And they often refer to resources outside of CMS to clarify their explanations. Though it's a quick light read, you might learn something, and it's a great way to relax for five minutes. I highly suggest that you check out the questions users ask. You may find answers to questions of your own. Then, dig into that sandwich.

TS

March Meeting Review

By Steve Blossom, OCSTC Senior Member

At the March chapter meeting, noted FrameMaker expert Lisa Jahred demonstrated how to create navigation links on the master pages of a FrameMaker document, which are automatically converted to a navigation bar on each page of the generated PDF file. She also discussed some of Acrobat's options, such as:

- Generating a separate PDF file for each FrameMaker source file, so that users can download a smaller file more quickly from the Web
- Generating an Acrobat "index" to enable searching across multiple documents
- Using the Articles option to improve the accessibility of documents that have a multi-column page layout

Information related to Lisa's presentation is available on our chapter's Web site at http://www.ocstc.org/meeting_archive.asp; much more information about other topics is freely available at her Web site (<http://www.LisaJahred.com/>) and the InformIT Web site (<http://www.InformIT.com/>).

After the presentation, Lisa was able to get reacquainted with several former colleagues and clients. She noticed my employee badge from QLogic Corporation, and mentioned that she had worked with Carla Felsen-Nierlich to help the company convert from Interleaf to FrameMaker.

As the only technical writer for one of QLogic's business units, one of my many tasks is to overhaul the old FrameMaker templates. An important resource for me is Lisa Jahred's book *FrameMaker 6: Beyond the Basics* (ISBN 0-7357-1108-9), which includes advanced information for experienced users. (For beginning FrameMaker users, I recommend reading *The Masters Series: FrameMaker 6* by Thomas Neuburger, ISBN 1-930597-01-0.) TS

Colophon

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"Words" of Wisdom

By Vivian Carroll, Certified Microsoft Office Specialist, Master

Hints on the Use of Microsoft Word 2000–2003

This month's topic is page numbers—a feature that often has people pulling out their hair until they understand it. Below I describe the two primary ways of inserting page numbers. (*Page numbers are generally put in document headers or footers. If you aren't familiar with headers and footers, refer to last month's article.*)

Insert | Page Numbers: When your cursor is in the main document, select **Insert | Page Numbers** and a dialog box will appear where you can choose the number's position and alignment and whether you want a number on the first page. When you click the **Format** button, the **Page Number Format** dialog box appears (see below). This method puts a page number code in the header or footer. The number is in a frame that can be dragged to any location in the header or footer. (Note: This method may be easier for beginners but I recommend the method below.)

Header and Footer toolbar: When your cursor is in a header or footer, put your cursor where you want the page number (e.g., center-align your paragraph). Then, click the **Insert Page Number** button on the Header and Footer toolbar. This inserts a code for the page number in line with text (i.e., it is not in a frame so you can't drag it). The easiest way to insert words and other codes that you might want is to click the **AutoText** button and then make a selection from the drop-down menu (e.g., "Page X of Y"). After inserting your page number, you can format it as described below.

Page Number Format dialog box: Each document section can have a different number format and can start with any number that you want. First put the cursor in the header or footer that contains the page number that you want to format. Then click the **Format Page Number** button on the Header and Footer toolbar.

- **Number format:** Select the type of numbers that you want (1, 2, 3...; i, ii, iii,...).
- **Include chapter number:** If you used outline numbering linked to a style to create your chapter number, you can include that number before the page number by making selections in this section.
- **Page numbering:** "Continue from previous section" means that if the previous section ends on page 8, this section will continue with page 9. "Start at" allows you to specify what page number this section will start with.

STC members are welcome to contact Vivian at vcvc@aol.com or 714.996.1409. TS

Writing Your First Novel, Part III

By Victory Crayne, OCSTC Senior Member

[In Part II published in February 2004, we covered starting with a character with conflict, designing a simple plot, developing your characters, and writing scenes.]

Writer's Block

Invariably there'll come a time when the words won't flow, no matter how hard you try. You've shut the door. You've cleared your desk of everything else. Your computer is open to the right file, or your pencil is sharp with a clean pad of paper.

But nothing happens.

Writing is easy. All you do is sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.
- Gene Fowler

Writer's block is likely more of a problem with beginning writers than with experienced ones. Perhaps the reason you are hung up is that you have not prepared your materials sufficiently. Yeah, that's it, you say. You open up your old notes and reorganize for the sixtieth time. Still, no flow.

Try turning off the editor in your head and just banging out some words. The best cure for writers block is to write. Anything. Remember,

The worst thing you write is better than the best thing you didn't write. - Unknown

I used to freeze up when I sat down at the appointed hour and nothing would come to mind. What to do?! That's where the outline of the plot comes in handy. Review where you were before, look for an event note for a character, and dive into the character's mind. Become him. Feel his emotion. And write his mini-story for this scene. Don't worry about your first draft; you can edit later. Just bang out some copy. (Try a glass of wine to loosen your inhibitions.) The flow will come.

Join a Writer's Group?

Writing fiction is a solitary endeavor. It can't be any other way. But, there will come a time when you want to talk about your writing and will find that those around you who are not fiction writers are of little help. That's the time to seek out other writers. You can learn from them, but be aware that creative people have opinions. *Lots* of them. Just because someone has been writing for years or has written a

book does not mean they know how to help you write your book.

Some writers won't even get published but love to attend writer meetings. There will always be folks who like to hang around writers. (Who knows? You might be one of them.)

But keep this in mind: Don't spend too much time visiting writing groups. You are not writing at this time; you are writing when you are actually putting pen to paper, or clicking away on your keyboard.

That said, you'll find that participating in a critique group can be of great value. Such groups get together to read parts of their stories and get feedback from others. I highly recommend you give it a try; the feedback you get will be invaluable. You will also learn how to prepare a critique. One great benefit of critiquing the words of others is that it makes you more aware of the weaknesses in your own writing. I have participated in several groups and have critiqued the works of perhaps 150 other writers so far. I can testify that it is worthwhile.

The single most important value in criticizing is in having someone shine their flashlight on outright errors or weak spots in your writing. It's amazing, but no matter how hard you try, you simply cannot see the weaknesses in your own writing in the way that another person can. It's that writer's high. It blinds you.

What Do You Do When You're Done With Your Novel?

If you stick at it long enough, you may be one of the three percent who finish a novel. That's when you get the second kind of high—the satisfaction of having finished the damned thing.

It's a rush, I tell you. Never before have two little words like "The End" had such feeling. Enjoy it. You've earned it.

Rewriting

But it's not over yet...

First drafts are for learning what your novel or story is about. - Bernard Malamud

You'll think it is the best novel ever written; every first-time novelist does. Sorry, but the real work lies ahead.

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Orange Juice: Membership News

By Pamela Armstead, OCSTC 2nd VP Membership

OCSTC Members: 340

STC Members: 18,692

Hello members, and welcome Spring! Dare I say the job market seems to be picking up a smidge? In any event, I received lots of great responses from new members who wish to tell you about themselves. Please welcome **Guy Ball**, **Greg Beiser**, and **Joy Osaka-Lu**. Be sure to give them a warm welcome at the next meeting if you happen to meet them!

Guy Ball is a name that most of us recognize as a frequent contributor to this publication, as well as a published author and community historian. We are happy to see that he's joined our ranks once again! Guy got his start as a technical writer at Hughes Aircraft, where as an electronics technician, he noticed that "the engineering test procedures were extremely complicated and unclear." He found that he really liked "translating engineering-speak into clear, concise directions," and he names one of our previous presidents, Don Pierstorff, as "the single most influential person" in his career as a technical writer. The rest, of course, is history! Another long-time interest for Guy has been the history of electronics. He is Webmaster of several collector/research sites such as www.ledwatches.net. After working at Unisys for the past nine years, Guy is now looking for a full-time position while juggling Web site assignments as well as a book on the city of Arcadia that will be published in December.

Greg Beiser attended ITT Technical Institute where he earned an AA in Electronic Engineering Technology. He subsequently spent 21 years traveling the country "carrying a tool bag" for companies like Sorbus Inc., United Systems Corporation, Infodetics, Filenet, Odetics, and ATL Products. He returned to school in the mid-1990s to earn a certificate in technical writing from California State University, Fullerton. Greg used his degree to land a job in the Technical Publications Department of ATL Products, specializing in authoring field service manuals. Greg chose technical writing as a career change in order to put his experience as a long-time field service engineer to good use while coming in from the road. "I saw a lot of the country while carrying a tool bag, but I love the relative comfort of seeing the same computer screen in the same office every day. Course development is a creative outlet that leaves me with a good feeling at the end of the day. I truly enjoy writing." Greg now

works as the System Administrator and main content developer for the Quantum Learning Web site. View his site at <http://learning.quantum.com>.

Joy Osaka-Lu was born in Pasadena, California, and graduated from UCLA. Joy joins most of us in earning a degree not especially related to tech writing—a BA in Sociology and a minor in Psychology. She got into technical writing after writing the policies and procedures for "every job I ever held before I found out you could do that for a living!" She's worked in a wide range of industries, including retail, travel, research, education, abnormal psychology, finance, and entertainment, as well as for the U.S. government—all of which she credits in helping her to be a better technical writer today. Joy decided to join STC after her aforementioned "discovery" and realized that the best way to learn about the industry was to join the professional organization that promoted it. She declares that she was "not disappointed" and continues to be thankful for all of the benefits and the kind fellowship with OCSTC members. Joy is currently an employee of Citibank.

See you at the next meeting! If you wish to get in touch, e-mail me at pamelarm@pcmagic.net. TS

< *Writing Your First Novel, Part III* from page 7

There is no great writing, only great rewriting.

- Justice Brandeis

After you've attended the critique group, gotten someone to give you feedback on every chapter, and spent the long hours rewriting, you finally come to the third writing high. You're done fixing the darned thing.

What Do You Do Next?

The glow from writing that novel will be terrific. You'll walk around with a swelled head for weeks. But eventually the glow will dim. The rush will go away. And a void will appear in your life. After all, you gave that novel the best years of your life. What do you do next?

Simple. Start another novel. Keep the writer's high going!

Victory is the Founding President of SFNovelist, an online critique group at www.sfnovelist.com. E-mail her at victory@crayne.com. TS

FrameMaker Tips

By Mary Ann Howell, OCSTC Senior Member
Filling Out File Information

Filling out the file information for FrameMaker documents is an important step often left out by writing departments.

The file information you fill in transfers when you convert the document to a PDF or an XML file. When you build an XML database or a PDF catalog, the file information is used for searches.

Even if you're not using this information today, chances are good that someday you will, in which case updating all your legacy documentation will be an onerous chore.

To add the file information, select **File Info...** from the FrameMaker **File** menu.

The information fields include text fields for

- Author
- Title
- Subject
- Keywords
- Copyright
- Web Statement
- Job Reference

There is also a selection field titled **Marked**. Choose **Yes** if your document is copyrighted, **No** if the document will be in the public domain.

Once you convert to PDF, the information is transferred to the Document Properties fields in the PDF file. To find the information, open the PDF in Acrobat, and from the **File** menu, select **Document Properties**. Select **Description** to see most of the information, and select **Custom** to see the rest.

Caution: Be careful when you import formats from another FrameMaker document. If you have the Document Properties box checked, the File Info fields you so carefully filled out will be replaced with the File Info from the document you are importing.

Mary Ann Howell is an Adobe Certified Expert in FrameMaker 7 and Acrobat 6. You can reach her at maryann@hikaripub.com. For more tips, check out her Web site at www.hikaripub.com. TS

The screenshot shows the 'File Info' dialog box with the following content:

Author:	Mary Ann Howell
Title:	Filling Out File Info
Subject:	filing out the information fields in File/File Info
Keywords:	FrameMaker, metadata, Acrobat Search, file info, doc info, file information,
Copyright:	2005
Web Statement:	FrameMaker Tip: Filling out File Info
Job Reference:	April 05 TechniScribe
Marked:	Yes
Create Date:	2005-02-25T17:17:49.0Z
Modify Date:	2005-03-01T22:55:21.0Z
Metadata Date:	2005-03-01T22:55:21.0Z

Buttons: Set, Cancel
(No Undo)

Society Pages



STC Mission Statement

Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Positioning Statement

STC helps you design effective communication for a technical world through information sharing and industry leadership.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is the world's largest organization for technical communicators. Its more than 20,000 members include writers, editors, illustrators, printers, publishers, photographers, educators, and students.

Dues are \$125–140 per year. Membership is open to anyone engaged in some phase of technical communication, interested in the arts and sciences of technical communication, and in allied arts and sciences.

Society for Technical Communication

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703.522.4114 (voice); <http://www.stc.org>

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If you do *not* already receive e-mail announcements of upcoming meetings, visit <http://lists.stc.org/cgi-bin/lyris.pl?enter=stcocc-L> and click Join. This list is not spam and will only send out monthly meeting and other STC-related announcements. TS

OCSTC Employment Information

Our job listing is entirely online at the OCSTC Web site, and the pages are updated as jobs are submitted.

Staff Jobs

www.ocstc.org/employe.asp

Contract Jobs

www.ocstc.org/contractme.asp

If you have an inquiry or a job to post, e-mail Mary Ann Howell at maryann@hikaripub.com.

A limited number of printed copies of the OCSTC Web site listings are available at monthly chapter meetings.

Society Level Job Listings

STC maintains job listings on the Internet. You can download the listings from the STC Web site at www.stc.org/jobsdatabase.asp. TS

Grammar Tip: Debating the Comma

Prepared by Barbara Young, TechniScribe Copy Editor

This excerpt is taken from Eats Shoots & Leaves, a book that, instead of acting as a guide for hard-and-fast rules, provides a discussion (and good examples) about grammar that informs and sometimes challenges our way of looking at commas, apostrophes, and semicolons. Not to mention the amusing historical anecdotes peppered throughout. It's a clever read—the author is British, which means we can't use the book as a reference for punctuation. Instead, it's something you might put on your nightstand, to breeze through or snack on as you like. Here's a taste.

When the humorist James Thurber was writing for *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross in the 1930s and 1940s, the two men often had very strong words about commas. It is pleasant to picture the scene: two hard-drinking alpha males in serious trilbies smacking a big desk and barking at each other over the niceties of punctuation. According to Thurber's account of the matter, (in *The Years with Ross* [1959]), Ross's "clarification complex" tended to run somewhat to the extreme: he seemed to believe there was no limit to the amount of clarification you could achieve if you just kept adding commas. Thurber, by self-appointed virtuous contrast, saw commas as so many upturned office chairs unhelpfully hurled down the wide-open corridor of readability. And so they endlessly disagreed. If Ross were to write "red, white, and blue" with the maximum number of commas, Thurber would defiantly state a preference for "red white and blue" with none at all, on the provocative grounds that all those commas make the flag seem rained on. They give it a furred look."

If you want to know about editorial "commaphilia" as a source of chronic antagonism, read *The Years with Ross*. Thurber once went so far as to send Ross a few typed lines of one of Wordsworth's *Lucy* poems, repunctuated in *New Yorker* style:

She lived, alone, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be,
But, she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference, to me.

But Ross, it seems, was unmoved by sarcasm, and in the end Thurber simply had to resign himself to Ross's way of thinking. After all, he was the boss; he signed the cheques; and of course he was a brilliant editor, who endearingly admitted once in a letter to H. L. Mencken, "We have carried editing to a very high degree of fussiness here, probably to a point approaching the ultimate. I don't know how to get it under control." And so the comma proliferated.

Thurber was once asked by a correspondent: "Why did you have a comma in the sentence, 'After dinner, the men went into the living-room?'" And his answer was probably one of the loveliest things ever said about punctuation. "This particular comma," Thurber explained, "was Ross's way of giving the men time to push back their chairs and stand up."

Why the problem? Why the scope for such differences of opinion? Aren't there rules for the comma, just as there are rules for the apostrophe? Well, yes; but you will be entertained to discover that there is a significant complication in the case of the comma. More than any other mark, the comma draws our attention to the mixed origins of modern punctuation, and its consequent mingling of two quite distinct functions:

- To illuminate the grammar of a sentence
- To point up—rather in the manner of musical notation—such literary qualities as rhythm, direction, pitch, tone and flow

This is why grown men have knock-down fights over the comma in editorial offices: because these two roles of punctuation sometimes collide head-on—indeed, where the comma is concerned, they do it all the time. In 1582, Richard Mulcaster's *The First Part of the Elementarie* (and English grammar) described the comma as "a small crooked point, which in writing followeth some small branch of the sentence, & in reading warneth vs to rest there, & to help our breth a little". Many subsequent grammars of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries make the same distinction. When Ross and Thurber were threatening each other with ashtrays over the correct way to render the star-spangled banner, they were reflecting a deep dichotomy in punctuation that had been around and niggling people for over four hundred years. On the page, punctuation performs its grammatical function, but in the mind of the reader it does more than that. It tells the reader how to hum the tune.

Excerpted from Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*, Gotham Books, 2003. 15

Calendar of Events

- April 5 OCSTC Administrative Council Meeting, 6:00 P.M., ProSpring Inc., Irvine
- April 6 STC Web/Telephone Seminar, "Building Brand Into Your Product or Web Site," by Robert Barlow-Busch, 9 A.M.-10 A.M.
- April 12 Los Angeles STC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., KJ's Diner and Restaurant, Westchester
- April 13 San Diego STC Chapter Meeting, 5:30 P.M., Marriott Courtyard, Kearny Mesa
- April 19 OCSTC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Doubletree Club Hotel, Santa Ana
- April 20 STC Web/Telephone Seminar, "Magical Numbers," by Jean-luc Doumont, 9 A.M.-10 A.M.
- April 21 Inland Empire STC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Carrows, Rancho Cucamonga

OCSTC April Meeting Topic: Project Management for Technical Writers

The April dinner meeting will feature a presentation on project management by Ted Seastrom. Ted helped develop an application, Project Manager, for a team of 40 technical writers. He will discuss Project Manager's unique requirements definition, collaborative development, and implementation process. He will also address project management, technical design, and cultural change. Ted's presentation will include a demonstration of Project Manager as well as handouts highlighting key project management concepts.

Ted Seastrom is an information designer. He combines technical writing, Web design, and application development skills to create knowledge portals and productivity applications. Ted, who specializes in being a generalist, started with AT&T in telecommunications. Next, he worked in advertising and public relations as a copywriter, account executive, and media relations specialist. Then he claimed his "inner geek," studied computer science, and worked as a programmer. When the dot-com boom busted, he transformed himself into a technical writer. Ted is a member of the Orange County chapter of the well respected Project Management Institute (PMI). TS

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