

Contents

- 1 Warning: Microsoft Word Files Contain Hidden Information About You
- 2 Publication Policies
- 2 President's Message
- 3 Next Meeting
- 3 Editor's Desk
- 6 Chapter Contacts
- 6 "Words" of Wisdom
- 7 April Meeting Review
- 7 Easy Money for Area Students
- 8 Orange Juice: Membership News
- 8 OCSTC 2005–2006 Election Results
- 9 FrameMaker Tips
- 10 Society Pages
- 10 OCSTC Employment Information
- 11 Grammar Tip
- 12 Calendar of Events

Warning: Microsoft Word Files Contain Hidden Information About You

By Jack Molisoni, OCSTC Senior Member

Warning: Microsoft® Word files contain hidden information about you, your company, and the subject you are writing about—information that can be seen by anyone who receives a copy of your document.

Statistically, about half of the STC members in the U.S. have degrees in English, journalism, or some other writing-related field. The other half have degrees in other fields and transitioned into technical writing. I'm one of the "other" people—my degree is in Computer Engineering from Tulane University. While my engineering background certainly aided me as a technical writer, it also enabled me to do some interesting sidejobs along the way.

One of my professors from Tulane started a computer forensics consulting company a few years ago, and recently she had more projects to do than people to do them. (For those of you who don't watch TV shows on crime scene investigation, "computer forensics" is the field in which trained technicians search computers for evidence of wrongdoing.)

When my professor offered to train me on the latest tools and techniques in computer forensics so I could help her meet some delivery deadlines, I jumped at the opportunity. Somehow, I just knew this would be more interesting than typing review comments from subject matter experts.

About "Metadata"

One of the first things I learned in computer forensics is that operating systems and software applications record incredible amounts of information about user activity. This information is stored in various places (operating system files, application data files, etc.), and the information can be viewed if you know where to look.

While it takes special forensic tools to access most of this information, some of it is in plain view and can be seen without special tools. This article is about one of the "plain view"

continued on page 4 >

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



As I approach the end of one term as chapter president and begin the next, I want to thank all who have participated in chapter affairs and helped us steer through the tough times. I hope that all of you who helped during the past two years will continue to provide knowledge

and wisdom to our organization.

Last month, I mentioned that the chapter is working on rechartering. We are examining the services we should offer and the volunteer participation and monetary support we need. Senior member Steve Blossom will be leading this effort. You can contact him at steveblossom@juno.com. We need a Mission Statement, a Statement of Purpose, and then a set of goals and actions to implement those goals. To get you started thinking, here are some ideas I have:

Mission Statement

Influencing technical communication worldwide and providing services supporting the technical communication profession from our geographic base here in Southern California.

Statement of Purpose

OCSTC provides an environment for networking and mentoring, educational opportunities, and employment opportunities in the technical communication and allied professions. OCSTC works singly, in partnership with other STC chapters and communities, and with other educational and professional organizations.

Core Values

Display Authenticity by being open and accountable to others, willing to learn, and by maintaining integrity and trust.

Value People by serving others first, listening receptively, and trusting people.

Develop People by providing opportunities for learning and growth, modeling appropriate behavior, and building up others through encouragement and affirmation.

Build Community by developing strong personal relationships, working collaboratively, and valuing the differences in others.

continued on page 7 >

Next Meeting

Adding Panache to Your Procedures

Speaker: Leah Guren

When: Monday, May 23, 2005, 6:00–9:00 P.M.

Note: This meeting is on a **Monday!**

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 the deadline **\$31**
No-shows billed **\$31**

Reservations

Reservations are due by 12:00 A.M., Sunday, May 22, 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. TS

Editor's Desk

By Carrie Damschroder, *TechniScribe* Managing Editor



The 2004–2005 OCSTC year is wrapping up. We've elected new officers (see page 8 for election results) and we've identified new goals for the upcoming year (see the President's Message on page 2). The

TechniScribe, also, is looking ahead to the new OCSTC year. The June issue of the *TechniScribe* will be the last issue I publish as managing editor. I have thoroughly enjoying heading up our chapter's newsletter during the past two years, and although I'll miss interacting with many of you through the newsletter, I am looking forward to serving the chapter in other ways.

During the past two years, my team of dedicated copy editors and proofreaders has delivered important and interesting chapter information to you at the beginning of each month. I am proud to say that we have published original material in every *TechniScribe* edition since taking over the helm from the previous managing editor. Some of the articles we published first in the *TechniScribe* were later republished in other STC chapter newsletters around the country, even in *Intercom!* We have also worked hard to lower printing costs and increase advertising revenue. And to top it off, we won an Award of Excellence both last year and this year in the STC Newsletter Competition.

Starting in July, I will be handing my responsibilities over to Suzanne Madison, a senior OCSTC member. Suzanne is very excited about leading the newsletter during the 2005–2006 OCSTC year. Recently, Suzanne started working full time for her own company, Madison Avenue Publications. She is dedicated, enthusiastic, and excited about working with all of you. Soon she'll be the one bugging you for articles! I'll let Suzanne tell you more about herself in the July Editor's Desk column.

I will be training Suzanne to take over my position during the next two months. Please feel welcome to send articles for publication to both of us at suzanne@madisonavenuepublications.com and carried@hotmail.com. TS

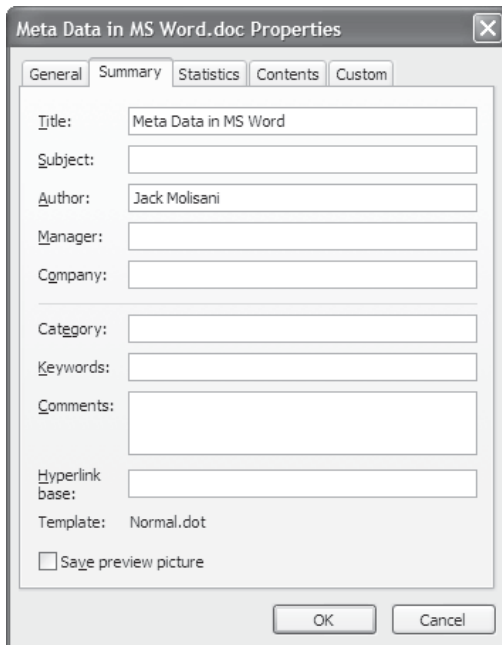
< Warning: Microsoft Word Files Contain Hidden Information About You from page 1

instances: information Microsoft Word saves about you, your company, and the topic you are writing about—all of which can be seen by anyone who has access to your document.

Microsoft Word saves information about a document in addition to the actual contents of the document. This additional information (called metadata, from the Greek word *meta* meaning “higher, beyond”) includes:

- Who created the document
- On which machine it was created
- Who edited the document
- If the document was saved under a different name
- More

To see a simple example, open a Microsoft Word file and select Properties from the File menu. A dialog box appears showing some of this information:

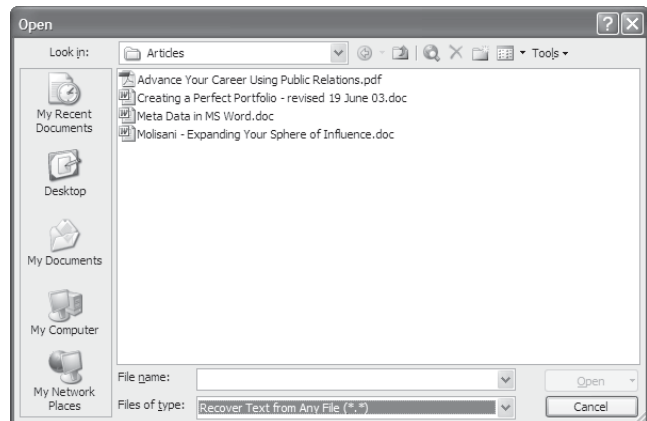


A document written on a corporate PC might display more information, such as the company name, the name of a corporate template (if any), and so on. Try this and see what your documents contain.

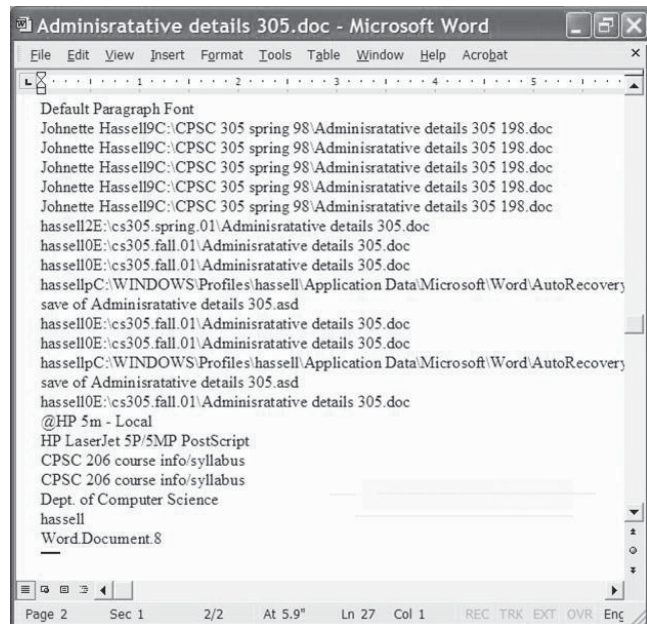
Accessing the Hidden Information

To see the hidden information stored in the hidden Word file, do the following:

1. In Microsoft Word, select **File | Open**. The Open dialog box will appear.
2. From the **Files of type** drop-down list, select **Recover Text from Any File (*.*)** and then select and open a Word document.



3. When the file opens, page down to see all the metadata:



In the illustration above, you can see the name of the original document (“Administrative details 305 198.doc”) and where it was located (on a machine named “Johnette Hassell9”). It was also saved under a new name (“Administrative details

continued on page 5 >

305.doc”) in a folder (“E:\cs305.fall.01”) on a different machine named “hassell0”.

There is more information you can recover, but this gives a good example of the type of data Microsoft Word stores.

Should You Care?

While you may not care if anyone knows how many times you saved a document or the name of the last printer on which it was printed (both are shown in the example), I’ll bet you can think of several examples of information that could be stored in metadata that you wouldn’t want competitors or others to have.

Let’s look at an example from a real forensic case.

A company suspected that an employee was taking home documents containing trade secrets and selling the secrets to a competitor. The company was granted a court order to image (make an exact bit-by-bit copy of) the hard drive on the employee’s home computer; the company turned the copy over to us for forensic analysis.

On the employee’s home computer was a document named “How To, Chapter 1.doc”. We opened the document and saw the following metadata:

```
Employer\Iran Project\Process  
Manual\Section 1.doc  
A:\New Manual  
Bob Smith7C:\Documents\Iran  
Project\User Manual\Section 1.doc  
Preferred Customer  
New Dell User  
C:\Indonesia\How To, Chapter 1.doc
```

Each new piece of information is appended at the bottom of the metadata, so you read the history from the top down. Looking at the above, you can see the following steps:

1. The employee opened the document “Section 1.doc” on his machine at work. (Name changed to “Employer” for this article.)
2. He then saved the document to a diskette in drive A.

3. Then he saved the document on his home machine under the name “How To, Chapter 1.doc”. (A forensic tool showed that the employee never changed the default name on his home PC so it still showed “Preferred Customer.”)

Pretty incriminating, huh?

How to Protect Yourself and Your Employer

While there is not much you can do to keep Microsoft Word from storing information in the document metadata, there are actions you can take to keep *others* from seeing it.

The easiest option is to just not share the original Word document—save or print the document as a PDF file and send that. (Metadata is not printed to the PDF file.)

However, if you must send the Word document itself, save the document in RTF (rich text format) and send the RTF file, or first save the document in RTF, convert it back to Word, and then send the new Word file. Converting a file to RTF saves the formatting in the document but not the metadata.

Note: Saving a file in RTF strips the document of metadata, but not the revision history if you are tracking revisions. I recommend always converting Word documents to PDF, just to be sure.

Epilogue

While it is pretty hard to destroy information in a computer to the point where it cannot be found by a competent forensic investigator, you can at least control how much information is made available to recipients of your documents.

When Jack Molisani is not saving the world from cyber crime, he runs ProSpring Technical Staffing (www.prospring.net) and is producing LavaCon: The Third Annual Conference on Technical Communication Management to be held this September in Honolulu, Hawaii. (See www.lavacon.org for program information.) Jack can be reached at 310.831.1929 or at jmolisani@ElectronicEvidenceRetrieval.com.

For more information about computer forensics, see www.ElectronicEvidenceRetrieval.com. TS

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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 Shortcut Keys, Part 1. You can keep your hands on the keyboard and work a lot faster if you know some of the shortcut keys available to you in Word. This month's group of shortcuts is presented in alphabetical order.

Ctrl+A: Selects all of the contents of document.

Ctrl+B: Switches bold on and off.

Ctrl+C: Copies the selected text.

Ctrl+D: Opens the Font dialog box. (Why not Ctrl+F? Because Ctrl+F is used for the more frequently used Find function.)

Ctrl+E: Centers the paragraph. (Because Ctrl+C is already used for Copy, the second letter in "center" is used for the shortcut.)

Ctrl+F: Opens the Find dialog box.

Ctrl+G: Opens the Go To dialog box. (F5 does the same thing.)

Ctrl+H: Opens the Replace dialog box. (All of the letters in "replace" were already assigned to other functions!)

Ctrl+I: Switches italics on and off.

Ctrl+J: Justifies the paragraph (aligns left and right edges).

Ctrl+K: Opens the Insert Hyperlink dialog box.

Ctrl+L: Aligns the paragraph Left.

Ctrl+M: Increases the left paragraph indentation to the next manual or default tab stop. (This is a stretch but—think of "indent.")

Ctrl+N: Opens the New dialog box (Word 2000) or creates a New document (Word 2002 and 2003).

Ctrl+O: Opens the Open dialog box.

Ctrl+P: Opens the Print dialog box.

Ctrl+Q: Removes all of the paragraph formatting (but not character formatting) that isn't part of the assigned paragraph style.

Ctrl+R: Aligns the paragraph Right.

Out of space—more shortcuts next month!

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

Provide Leadership by envisioning the future, taking initiative, clarifying goals, and giving direction and support without suppressing initiative or enthusiasm.

Share Leadership by facilitating a shared vision; sharing power, releasing control; sharing status and promoting others, allowing anyone to become a self-reliant achiever on any given task.

Here are two specific examples of strategic items:

Goal: Provide comprehensive support for communicators seeking employment.

Strategy: Provide up-to-date employment information and résumé resources.

Action: Maintain Web-based job information and devote a members-only section of the OCSTC Web site for members to post their résumés.

Goal: Support the technical communication student community of Southern California.

Strategy: Provide leadership and advice to academic institutions through teaching or advisory committees, and provide monetary support to students.

Action: Have a seat on the advisory councils at California State University, Long Beach, and California State University, Fullerton. Provide at least one scholarship per year.

This process will help us focus as we head into the future and provide a roadmap for planning. Even if you don't have a strategy or action plan, you might think of goals. Many of you expressed them to me in the form of "We need to liven up the meetings—I have an idea," "We need to reach out to students," and "It would be nice to occasionally have meetings outside the John Wayne Airport area, like in Anaheim or Fullerton." Please keep the ideas coming.

In the next issue, I'll share information from the STC Conference in Seattle. TS

Colophon

The *TechniScribe* was produced using Adobe PageMaker 7.0 for PC. Modern and Palatino were used for text and heading fonts.

The PDF on the OCSTC Web site was distilled from an EPS using Adobe Acrobat Distiller 5.0.5.

April Meeting Review

By Dr. Adrienne Escoe, OCSTC Senior Member

An entire table of Ted Seastrom's coworkers from Ameriquest Mortgage Company (and one supporter from Washington Mutual) joined an especially large group at the OCSTC meeting on April 19 to hear him speak on managing writing projects. Seastrom, an information designer at Ameriquest, explained and then demonstrated solid project management (PM) processes that can help writers who feel overwhelmed by the number or complexity of projects on their plates.

Seastrom first presented five PM process groups (initiate, plan, execute, monitor/control, and close), then nine knowledge areas (integration, scope, time, cost, quality, HR, communications, risk, and procurement). However, what could have been a dry presentation was interesting because of 1) the tools Seastrom described that his teams developed to manage technical writing projects, 2) a real-time demonstration of those tools, and 3) his terrific presentation skills and wit.

Essentially, five teams comprising over 40 writers developed and deployed a "cheap and cheerful" custom design based on an Access database with a RoboHELP front end. The result is a PM system for technical writing projects that is easy to use and maintain; generates a wide variety of management reports yielding metrics on project status, cycle time, productivity, and other data; and can be scaled up for future needs.

To download Seastrom's presentation, please visit the OCSTC Web site at http://www.ocstc.org/meeting_archive.asp. For additional information, you are welcome to transmit an e-mail message to tseastrom@ameriquest.net. TS

Easy Money for Area Students

By Kathey Schuster, OCSTC Scholarship Committee Chairperson

If you are currently enrolled at an area college or university and plan a career in technical communication, you are eligible to participate in the OCSTC annual scholarship contest. One of your class assignments probably meets the contest requirement for a writing sample. There are two scholarships this year just waiting for someone to claim them.

The deadline for submittal is May 15. So inquire soon about details at wwwords@mindspring.com. TS

Orange Juice: Membership News

By Pamela Armstead, OCSTC 2nd VP Membership

OCSTC Members: 253

STC Members: 14,233

Greetings! Please welcome a few new members into the fold, while taking a moment to honor those who have been with us for quite some time. New members **Li Bin Liu (Annie)** and **Rob Rohm** are both introduced below, and we will conclude with a list of our distinguished senior members for this year.

Annie L.B. Liu is a new member with a well-traveled background. Born in Beijing, China, Ms. Liu immigrated to Canada in 1996 and now resides in West Covina. Her undergraduate studies span China and Canada, but also include CSA and WHIMS training. She has worked for the Canadian Standards Association and for Nestle in China as a translator/interpreter, and feels these experiences were what led her to technical writing. Annie discovered STC through an Internet search. Her hobbies include reading and music, "especially meditation music, from which I can enjoy and explore the world of spirit."

Rob Rohm started working at XDimensional Technologies, Inc. in Brea just this past December. His career in technical writing started at Kingston Technology, where he started out in tech support but took the initiative to write a manual for network adapters that greatly impressed management. He eventually moved up to senior writer in the company. Rob became a member of STC through the support of his new company, XDimensional. His manager, Mark Attew, is "a very strong believer in the benefits of STC membership." XDimensional generously pays for membership and will cover the upcoming STC conference in Seattle. Born in Orange, CA, Rob has lived there his entire life. A musician and "baseball fanatic," he lives only a mile away from the Angels stadium and, in 2003, created a video that won him a trip to Texas and batting practice with Nolan Ryan! E-mail Rob at rob.rohm@xdti.com.

New Senior Members

The Society grants senior membership status to those who have held membership in STC for five years. We are pleased to announce that the following members of our chapter have attained the rank of senior member:

Pamela Armstead
Megan Elizabeth Chillemi
Carrie Damschroder
Julie Dotson
Gwendolyn Gregg

Katalin Langi Heilig
Gregory Kays
Robert Lee
Suzanne Madison
Dayna Santiago
Ann Shogren

Please join me in congratulating our newest senior STC members!

See you at the next meeting! Please e-mail me at pamelarm@pcmagic.net. TS

OCSTC 2005–2006 Election Results

By Julie Dotson, OCSTC Nominating Committee Chairperson

The results are in and the winners are:

Jeff Randolph – President
MaryAnn Howell – 1st Vice President-Programs
Betsey Malone – 2nd Vice President-Membership
Michael Opsteegh – Treasurer
Linda Phillips – Secretary
Bruce Alexander – Nominating Committee
Jane Baker – Nominating Committee

Thank you to everyone who voted this year! We had a total of 44 chapter members vote in this year's election. Special thanks go to our candidates, our members who considered running for office, and the current Nominating Committee (Jean Gabriel, Bruce Alexander, and Steve Blossom).

We are recognized by other chapters for our willingness to volunteer to make our chapter one of high energy and a consistent benefit to members. TS

FrameMaker Tips

By Mary Ann Howell, OCSTC Senior Member
FrameMaker MIF Documents

Where MIF Files Come From

A FrameMaker document is a binary file. As the spiky-haired intern can tell you, a binary file is made up of ones and zeros and maybe a bunch of other weird symbols. If you open a FrameMaker file in NotePad, you won't be able to make much of it.

But you can convert a FrameMaker document to a readable text file if you save the document as a MIF (Maker Interchange Format) file:

1. From the **File** menu, select **Save As**.
2. From the **Save as type** drop-down menu, select MIF (*.mif).

Now when you open the MIF file with NotePad, you can read it easily (but it might be rather slow going).

To convert a MIF file back into a FrameMaker file:

1. Open the MIF file in FrameMaker (double-click it in Windows Explorer or use **Open** from the **File** menu).
2. From the **Save as type** drop-down menu, select Document 7.0 (*.fm).

Anatomy of a MIF File

If you look up MIF in your FrameMaker Help, you get this terse explanation:

"...a text file containing FrameMaker statements that describe all text and graphics."

And that's exactly what you find in your MIF document—page after page of lists of document properties, parameter settings, and graphics broken down and described, with the text that you wrote buried between tags.

A new FrameMaker document starts life with a set of default objects (such as paragraph and character formats and preference settings). Even a MIF file made from a blank FrameMaker document will have all the same default objects (and their properties), including lists of

- Paragraph, character, table, and cross-reference formats
- Condition tags
- Color definitions
- Graphic line and fill patterns
- Master page descriptions
- A reference page description
- Document preferences (such as ruler settings)

All this goes on, page after page. If you would like to see a birdseye view of how the MIF file is organized, open and download "MIFBrowse," a nifty little utility from Graham Wideman (free) from <http://www.wideman-one.com/gw/tech/framemaker/mifbrowse.htm>.

What a MIF File Can Do for You

Checking out a MIF file can give you a good clue about how FrameMaker works. MIF files are used by many third-party tools (such as Mif2go and WebWorks Publisher) to convert FrameMaker files to other formats or to populate databases.

Use MIF files for problem solving, but be very careful when editing. Software scripts have no sense of humor; you must keep all syntaxes, spacing, and bracketing absolutely kosher.

Some Problems You Can Solve

If your translators in Outer Slobovia have only FrameMaker 5.5, save your FrameMaker 7 document as MIF. They can open the MIF file and save it as a FrameMaker 5.5 .fm file.

Repair ghost broken cross-references. If your book error log says you have a broken cross-reference and your Find/Change search says "oh no you don't," save the problem file as .mif, then re-open it and save as .fm, overwriting the original. The problem disappears. This trick also works for stubborn color definitions that won't delete.

If you have a huge document of centered graphics, and you want left-justified graphics, save the document as .mif, open it in a text editor (such as NotePad), and do a Find and Replace, "AnchorAlign Center" with "AnchorAlign Left" (carefully). You'll have to do it for each graphic, but still, that's easier than editing each one in FrameMaker. (A FrameMaker programmer can write a script that does the editing.)

More Information

For more information about MIF files and using MIF files for databases, read Seraphim Larsen's article "FrameMaker Batch Processing and Automation Using MIF" at http://www.stc-siliconvalley.org/newsletter/2002_11/MIF.htm.

If you installed FrameMaker using the default location, read the "MIF Reference Online Manual" in your Program Files folder: C:\Program Files\Adobe\FrameMaker7.0\OnlineManuals. *TS*

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 15,000 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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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: Value Every Word

By Rosemary Hulce, TechniScribe Copy Editor and Proofreader

Long before I became a technical communicator, I adopted the following words of T.S. Eliot (from “Little Gidding” in the *Four Quartets*) about “every phrase and sentence that is right” as a personal guide and goal:

...where every word is at home,
Taking its place to support the others,
The word neither diffident nor ostentatious,
An easy commerce of the old and the new,
The common word exact without vulgarity,
The formal word precise but not pedantic,
The complete consort dancing together...

The goal, I discovered, is lofty. In technical writing, every word must ensure accuracy and simplicity and help translators. But hurry, tiredness, and—least forgivable—ignorance, open conduits of carelessness through which familiar, extraneous words pour in to cloud the meaning of our writing.

You know it’s true. Have you typed, “end result” lately? Or “on a regular basis” or “has the effect of...”? These phrases roll off our keyboards and what is easy for us to write is easy for others to read—until the reader realizes that he or she has been lulled into not paying attention and must backtrack to uncover precise information that we may or may not have provided.

In *The Dictionary of Concise Writing*, Robert Hartwell Fiske provides “10,000 Alternatives to Wordy Phrases” in a zealous attempt to tackle the thoughtless extras that blunt our prose. Fiske is the editor and publisher of *The Vocabula Review* (www.vocabula.com), whose tagline reads, “Society is as lax as its language,” and yes, he is a zealot. “Today, the style is prevalingly shoddy,” he writes in Chapter One of *The Dictionary*. “In almost everything we read and hear, there is complexity instead of simplicity and obscurity instead of clarity. This is particularly inexcusable in written material, where words can be reworked.” He blames habit, ignorance, and imitation.

Does Fiske go too far? In my opinion, yes. He lists “keep in mind” and “is based on” as wordy phrases that should be replaced, but such phrases have their roles when used with thought, and surely dullness will result from too much limitation just as it results from wordiness.

But if you browse through *The Dictionary of Concise Writing*, you are sure to recognize some bad habits of your own and to pick up some practical reminders about paring your prose and keeping it sharp. I selected the following excerpts as examples that I see regularly in technical writing:

due to the fact that *because; considering; for; given; in that; since*. This procedure is impractical due to the fact that the game tree for any interesting games [sic] is extremely large. *This procedure is impractical because the game tree for any interesting games is extremely large.*

has the effect of -ing delete. Such a slowdown would have the effect of easing inflationary fears. *Such a slowdown would ease inflationary fears.*

on a regular basis *bimonthly; biweekly; daily; hourly; monthly; regularly; weekly; yearly*; delete. Does it mean we should all start taking aspirin on a regular basis? *Does it mean we should all start taking aspirin regularly?*

potentiality *potential*. All these tools have the same power sources, materials, and styling, and most important, each has identical market potentiality. *All these tools have the same power sources, materials, and styling, and most important, each has identical market potential.*

preplan *plan*. In short programs, much of the cognitive input or preplanning takes place on the trainees’ own time... *In short programs, much of the cognitive input or planning takes place on the trainees’ own time...*

up to a maximum of up to. If set to Yes, text wraps around the box (up to a maximum of 20 boxes per page). *If set to Yes, text wraps around the box (up to 20 boxes per page).*

Fiske, Robert Hartwell. *The Dictionary of Concise Writing: 10,000 Alternatives to Wordy Phrases*. Marion Street Press, Inc., Oak Park, Illinois: 2002. *ts*

Calendar of Events

- May 3 OCSTC Administrative Council Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Airport Executive Suites, Irvine
May 9 Los Angeles STC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., KJ's Diner and Restaurant, Westchester
May 11 San Diego STC Chapter Meeting, 5:30 P.M., Marriott Courtyard, Kearny Mesa
May 19 Inland Empire STC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Carrows, Rancho Cucamonga
May 23 OCSTC Chapter Meeting, 6:00 P.M., Doubletree Club Hotel, Santa Ana

OCSTC May Meeting Topic: Adding Panache to Your Procedures



Like most technical communicators, you've probably written countless procedures. But have your procedures fallen into a rut? Are they good but not great? Do you know how to provide that something extra that can turn a mundane procedure into a great piece of technical product documentation?

This seminar covers all aspects of writing effective, powerful procedures. Participants will cover the purpose and theory of procedures and review the basic elements before moving on to advanced aspects of creating added value, using effective design elements, and testing. Throughout, you'll see examples of both good and bad procedures.

Leah Guren entered the field of technical communication in 1980. Her experience as a writer, editor, technical publications manager, and consultant has allowed her to develop a variety of training programs in the field. Leah currently trains new technical communicators through the course she developed for In Other WORDS, one of Israel's leading technical communication companies. She also conducts seminars and in-house training for experienced technical communicators, engineers, and managers internationally.

As a professional speaker, Leah is known for her dynamic and motivational style. Her ability to bring dry theory to life with practical examples (and lots of humor!) helps consistently place her in the most popular 10 percent of STC conference speakers. A senior STC member, Leah is a regular speaker at STC and other international technical communication conferences. TS

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