Ragged Left

In this issue

September Meeting_____

Don't Be A Schmoe with SMEs
by Alison Gemmell

At the September 8, 2004 Berkeley STC meeting, Marianne Fleischer of Fleischer Communications, San Francisco, offered tips for improving our skills in three speaking situations. The full title of her presentation was "Don't Be A Schmoe with SMEs, and Other Tales of How Becoming A Better Speaker Will Make You a Better Writer." Fleischer understood that many technical writers often feel they shine best on paper. Using motivational anecdotes, jokes, and mantras, she made the case that better verbal communication leads to cooperation, problem solving, and decision making-all aids to better writing. In a surprise group exercise, we learned interesting things about STC members while practicing impromptu public speaking.

Presenting One-On-One

"Approach SMEs [subject matter experts] with conviction and realize that if you work for them, they work for you," said Fleischer. Do your homework so you can speak their language. All writers know the huge leap between first and second drafts, so manage expectations. Tell your SMEs that your first draft is your work-sheet. She challenged us, "Writers are always nosing around in everyone's business. So who is in a better position to ferret out company-wide problems? Keep your ear to ground so you can grow your projects, maybe uncover a dream project."

If you need to interview senior management, learn all you can about them before your brief time in the hallowed chamber. Interview their handlers. Read everything about them. Watch them on camera. Once there, remember these are big picture guys. Resist the temptation to show all you have learned. Instead stay on point. If you are in the big leagues, act like it. Be bold. Executives didn't get where they are by surrounding themselves with wimps.

Presenting To Teams

Whenever you can, write the agenda and lead meetings. At first, you may have to enter through the back door by volunteering to be a scribe. Leading the discussion will help you weigh it toward your needs. "Human nature being what it is, people would rather stay in the fun discussion stage than hard decision phase. So at the beginning ask permission to be the time cop and to push for closure," said Fleischer.

Separate difficult people from the problems. Go to the last place they expect-their side. Invite criticism so you can better understand their point of view. Ask what would they do in your shoes. At the onset, agree on objective standards-costs, technical metrics, and precedent-so you're ready if disagreements arise. Steer people to negotiate from mutual interests instead of conflicting positions. Fleischer said, "Get them to imagine that you're both seated on the same side of the table, staring down the problem on the other side."

Public Speaking

Ms. Fleischer, a former newscaster, is now a freelance writer-producer. For formal speaking situations she emphasized that preparation was key. "Before you write, clarify your intention and fuel your conviction. Conviction makes the listeners inflate your words with their breath," said Fleischer. Determine your audiences' prejudices and biases. Don't speak above or below their knowledge or you'll lose them forever.

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION (STC) has approximately 25,000 members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and students, employees and consultants.

STC strives to

• Advance the theory and practice of technical communication
• Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication
• Aid the educational and professional development of its members

MEMBERSHIP Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is $155/year, with an additional $15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is $56/year. To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or e-mail
• Send e-mail to membership@stc-berkeley.org
• Send mail to Berkeley STC, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007

INSURANCE Members of STC can apply for health, disability, and other insurance at STC group rates. For more information, contact STC office at stc@stc.org or (703) 522-4114.

WORLDWIDE ACTIVITIES STC's annual conference brings together more than 2,000 technical communicators from around the world for educational programs, seminars, and workshops conducted by experts in the field. Upcoming annual conferences: Seattle, May 8-11, 2005; Las Vegas, May 14-17, 2006. In addition the STC sponsors many regional conferences, which feature the same sorts of programs, seminars, and workshops on a more intimate scale.

STC sponsors international and regional competitions in all aspects of technical communication.

STC Special Interest Groups (SIGs) bring together members with common experiences and interests to share their skills and knowledge. STC SIGs include:

• AccessAbility
• Quality
• Canadian Issues
• Marketing Communication
• Education and Research
• Scientific Communication
• Illustrators and Visual Designers
• Environmental, Safety, and Health Communication
• Consulting and Independent Contracting

STC sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the quarterly journal *Technical Communication*, the newsletter *Intercom*, and other periodicals, reference materials, manuals, anthologies, standards, and booklets.

Formed in 1953, STC has today become the largest professional society in the world dedicated to advancing the theory and practice of technical communication.

LOCAL ACTIVITIES The six northern California chapters of STC conduct a variety of individual and joint activities. See page 6 for contacts for these chapters. See page 7 for a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested.

SUBSCRIPTIONS This newsletter is free to members of the Berkeley chapter.

ADVERTISING RATES The *Ragged Left* is not accepting advertising at this time.

SUBMISSIONS *Ragged Left* publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please talk with the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

The deadline for unsolicited submissions is the fifteenth of the preceding month.

Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from Ragged Left, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific Ragged Left issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the Ragged Left editor.

Letter from the Editor _____
by Joe Devney

This issue of the Ragged Left introduces a new column, "The Splice of Life," by Virginia Guest. (See below.) Virginia is a fairly new member of the chapter, and has volunteered to help out with the newsletter. She has a background in biology, and will use this column to introduce some of the concepts and practices of biotechnology to our readers. We hope that "The Splice of Life" will be a regular feature of the newsletter.

I would also like "Member News" to be a regular feature of the Ragged Left. Let's publicize new jobs, projects, and accomplishments of our members. To do that, I need STC Berkeley members to me know what is new in your profes-sional and personal lives. Please e-mail me your news by mid-December so it can be included in the January/February issue.

For the March/April issue, the editorial board has much more ambitious plans. We want to publish a "theme issue" on the subject of emerging technolo-gies. What will technical communicators be writing about in 2006 that they might want to start preparing for soon? Maybe you can help us. If you have inside information, I want to hear from you. We want to know what is moving from the laboratory to the marketplace. Are you in contact with scientists, technology entrepreneurs, or venture capitalists? Do you write for technology magazines? Please help us make this an especially informative, useful issue for our readers.

As always, please e-mail any comments about the Ragged Left to newsletter@stc-berkeley.org.

The Splice of Life _____

DNA-RNA Microarray Technology
By Virginia Guest

When a cell synthesizes a protein, it begins by tran-scribing a gene, or DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid), into many copies of a transcript, or RNA (ribonu-cleic acid). DNA is the permanent template tran-scribed into RNA for each protein-synthesis episode. RNA is the temporary recipe translated into a protein, and it degrades when demand for the protein subsides. Multiple copies of an RNA tran-script are made from its DNA template, so multiple protein molecules can be synthesized in very little time. If a cell requires 1,000 copies of a protein, then 1,000 transcripts may be transcribed from one (or a few) gene(s). When a gene is translated from DNA to RNA to protein, we say the gene has been expressed.

One tool used to study gene expression is a microarray. A DNA microarray is a surface, as simple as a glass slide, upon which single-stranded DNA (ssDNA) molecules are immobilized in a grid. Each square of the grid contains one gene. Each microchip usually represents all of the genes suspected to respond to a single stimulus (for instance, all of the genes responding to high blood sugar). A DNA-RNA microarray is a DNA microarray upon which RNA has been bound.

DNA-RNA microarrays are used to compare expression levels of genes in response to controlled stimuli. A gene's expression level determines the amount of its complementary RNA in the cell. If you need to determine how a drug affects the cellular response to a process, you may use a DNA-RNA microarray to compare the RNA produced by cells undergoing that process with and without drug treatment.

Using a DNA-RNA microarray

Like DNA, RNA is a double-stranded molecule composed of complementary strands. The strands of an RNA molecule are not only complementary to each other, but also to the strands of DNA that they came from. Just as adenine (A) pairs with thymine (T) in DNA, the adenine of DNA pairs with the uracil (U) of RNA. An ssRNA will stick to its complementary ssDNA if given the chance. The following is a rough protocol for using a microarray, starting with ssDNA microarrayed on a slide and a cellular RNA extract.

The first steps are to denature the cellular RNA into ssRNA with an alkaline buffer, then label the ssRNA with a fluorescent dye. The next steps are to mix the labeled ssRNA with a hybridization buffer and immediately decant said RNA onto the prepared DNA microarray. The final steps are to rinse off the unhybridized fluorescent ssRNA with a stream of hybridization buffer and use a fluores-cence reader to detect any fluorescence on the microarray. Higher fluorescence corresponds to more hybridized ssRNA.

To identify the genes affected by a particular drug, hybridization must be performed on two identical arrays, using one array as a control. The control

President's Column _____
by Joe Devney

Sister Organizations

One of the goals of my second term as STC Berkeley president is to make connections with other Bay Area writers' organizations. To that end, I have been talking to Ron Fedore, president of the San Francisco chapter of the International Association of Business Communicators. IABC is an organization whose membership overlaps STC's, but whose members are more likely to work in the Public Relations department than the Information Technology department. Still, the events put on by each chapter may hold interest for members of the other group.

So the first practical result of my outreach to IABC is now in place: mutual discounts. Members of STC Berkeley can attend SF IABC meetings for the member price, and their members enjoy the same privilege at our meetings. We have worked out the details with the respective chapter leadership teams.

We will be publicizing SF IABC meetings to STC Berkeley chapter members. I hope that some of you can attend, and I hope you welcome any IABC members you meet at our events.

Volunteers Needed

As you know, STC Berkeley is a volunteer-run organization. If you have skills to offer, or want to build up some marketable skills by working with us, we'd be happy to have you. Here is a description of one volunteer position we would like to fill.

Arrangements manager. We need someone to handle the nuts and bolts of making our meetings run smoothly. This includes making sure dinner is set up on time, dealing with the hotel as necessary, and handling cash box duties when the Treasurer is unavailable. Doing this job would entail attending every monthly meeting and arriving by 6:00, and may also mean a few hours a month in addition—for example, you may want to spend some time tracking down new caterers to add variety to the dinner part of the meeting.

If you think you can help us out with this position, or have an interest in other aspects of running the chapter, please e-mail me (president@stc-berkeley.org).

October Meeting _____

Fitting Quadralay's WebWorks Publisher into a Publications Workflow
by John Lancaster

On October 13, Steve Homer Consulting talked to the Berkeley chapter about Webworks Publisher (WWP). This application converts high volumes of documentation authored in one source, such as FrameMaker or MS Word, into multiple formats. You do this by mapping tags in the MS Word or FrameMaker template to HTML or XML tags if you are converting to an online format. You can also however, convert to Portable Document Format (PDF).

WWP comes in two flavors, one for MS Word and one for FrameMaker. For a full description of their products, see http://www.quadralay.com/products.

Converting Documents with WWP

The first step to converting your document is to map the styles from your authoring tool to WWP styles. WWP has several pre-built styles depending on the output format. For example, you can convert your catalog of styles in FrameMaker to HTML tags and output your book to Microsoft HTML Help, or raw HTML with a Table of Contents and Index. Mapping tags consists of choosing your FrameMaker catalog tag on the left, and selecting the output tag on the right. For example, a body catalog style might map to the <P> tag.

Once completed, you can use the style designer to further control how the output is generated. The style designer employs a macro language, which can be learned without knowing prior programming languages. For example, you can write a macro that adds an abbreviation for index entries and issues a report if something goes wrong during the conversion.

Customizing WWP Templates

Depending on the output format, you can customize the output templates that ship with WWP to add links or buttons to view the PDF from the HTML page, or view code samples; insert breadcrumbs; automate pre- and post-processing tasks; and copy files PDFs, readmes, or Quick Reference cards.

Book Review _____

Designing and Testing Handheld Devices
by Joe Devney

Handheld Usability by Scott Weiss, 2002. West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons. 271 pages, including index.

If you are interested in the field of handheld devices—cell phones and PDAs—or want to learn about user-testing new technologies, you will find this book useful.

The author, Scott Weiss, worked on the design for both Macintosh OS 7 and Windows 95. He now heads a consulting firm called Usable Products Company that specializes in information architecture and usability testing for handheld devices.

Weiss says that *Handheld Usability* was written for "designers and developers of handheld devices" (p. xii). But as technical communicators, it is helpful for us to have this background information if we are to work with these designers and developers.

Handheld Usability starts out with a detailed explanation of how Weiss distinguishes handheld devices from desktop computers. He addresses not only size, but functionality and connectivity. Handheld devices, he says, must be small enough so that they don't have to sit on a table to be used comfortably, must operate without cables (except for recharging, and synchronization with a desktop computer), and must either be able to connect to the Internet or allow the addition of new applications. By his definition, handheld devices include only cellular phones, two-way pagers, and personal digital assistants, or PDAs.

Weiss explains how the limitations of handheld devices affect the way they are used. Compared to desktop computers, handheld devices have cumbersome data entry methods, much smaller display screens, very slow Internet access, and very little memory and storage capacity. Most of them also do not have a shared file system.

All of these limitations must be taken into account by people who design hardware and software for these devices, and Weiss addresses their jobs specifically. He explains in detail how phones, pagers, and PDAs differ, and talks about the standards, or lack of them, in communication protocols, interface design, and operating systems. Then he discusses the hardware interface elements, navigation controls, and data input technologies with which the hardware designers must work, and how to make the best use of them from a usability point of view. This section of the book includes both drawings and photographs to illustrate the topics under discussion.

Information architecture—what underlies the software design—gets two chapters to itself. "Information architects need to work and play well with all the departments of a product company" he says at the beginning of chapter 3, "Information Architecture: Process." He means the marketing, graphic design, and engineering departments. Before addressing the design considerations for handheld devices, he describes the design process, from audience delivery to the delivery of a finished product to the marketplace. This process is not unique to the field of handheld devices: this is one of the sections of the book in which the lessons can be applied to many software and hardware projects. Still, there are many issues specific to designing a user interface for a handheld device, and Weiss provides guidelines for dealing with them. Several pages on how to define the product's audience are followed by sample navigational flowcharts

Next comes a chapter called "Information Architecture: Practice." This gets into the special challenges regarding handheld devices: guidelines for designing a news reader interface as opposed to a game interface or an e-commerce site, how to handle synchronizing of data with a desktop PC, how to work with the limitations of WAP (Wireless Application Protocol), and issues specific to certain handheld platforms. This the part of the book, I believe, will be of special interest to technical writers, since we constantly consider how our readers will interact with the products we write about.

Weiss's consulting firm, Usability Products Company, performs usability testing for their clients who make handheld devices. In the second half of *Handheld Usability*, the author seems to be giving away all his secrets.

In the chapter called "Prototyping" Weiss explains in detail how to set up paper prototypes for handheld devices. He provides a list of supplies needed, illustrations and instructions for creating the display

September meeting *continued*

When writing, speeches must grab the audience-repeatedly, even more than print-so use evocative language. Let one key idea dominate. People want to feel authentic presence. Her tip: After the first draft, comb to see if you have communicated the 4Cs: Credibility, Candor, Clout, and Caring.

Alison Gemmell is a senior technical writer with a chemical engineering degree. As a writer, she writes FAQs that address customer concerns; as an engineer she helps companies clean up polluted sites and comply with air, water, and hazardous waste regulations.

Other STC chapters in Northern California

East Bay
http://www.ebstc.org/

North Bay
www.stc-northbay.org

Sacramento
www.stcsacramento.org

San Francisco
www.stc-sf.org

Silicon Valley
www.stc-siliconvalley.org/

Upcoming STC Berkeley Meetings

No December Meeting

Happy Holidays!

Creating Context-Sensitive Help Using Single-Sourcing

Speakers: Debjani Sen and Roger Dearth

January 12, 2005

The Art and Science of Table Design

Speaker: Kathy O'Donnell

February 9, 2004

SEE THE CHAPTER WEB SITE FOR MORE DETAILS.

WWW.STC-BERKELEY.ORG

Splice of Life *continued*

array uses RNA from untreated cells, and the other array uses RNA from cells treated with the drug undergoing study. If square K76, for example, from the control microarray fluoresces more brightly than square K76 from the treated group microarray, then the gene represented on K76 was inhibited by the drug.

Virginia Guest is a technical editor with a background in academic science and biotechnology.

Meetings

STC local chapters hold monthly meetings, which normally feature some combination of eating, job networking, and listening to speakers. S

Our chapter holds a dinner meeting the second Wednesday of each month at the Shattuck Plaza Hotel, 2086 Allston Way, just west of Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. The Hotel is across the street from the BART station at Allston and Shattuck. The cost for dinner and meeting is $18 for members, $15 for student members and $21 for non-members. For those attending the meeting only, the cost is $12 for members and non-members, $10 for students.

6:00	Check-in, conversation.
6:30	Dinner.
7:15	Chapter business and announcements. Anyone can announce jobs that they know about.*
7:39	Formal program. Usually we have a speaker or panel of speakers on a topic related to the business or technology of technical communication.
9:00	Conversation, offline questions for the speaker, follow-up on job announcements
9:30	Clear the room. Move conversations to the sidewalk.

*Recruiters are welcome to attend meetings, place literature on a designated table, and talk with attendees one-on-one during the informal parts of the meeting. We ask them not to announce specific jobs during the formal announcement period, but they are free to stand up and identify themselves.

Similarly, we ask anyone else with commercial announcements to confine themselves to calling attention to the availability of literature on the designated table.

Student Membership Redefined

The STC board of directors has adopted a more stringent definition of student membership. To be eligible for student membership, a member must now be a full-time student. Previously, professional technical communicators enrolled in part-time continuing education classes could qualify for student membership. The new definition ensures that the benefits of student membership are available, as intended, only to students.

The new definition amends Article III, Section 2B of the STC Bylaws and reads as follows:

"Student Member. To be eligible for student membership, an applicant must be (1) enrolled in an accredited university, college, community college, or technical school; and (2) be considered a full-time student according to the criteria of the school he or she is attending; and (3) preparing for a career in technical communication."

Choosing a Documentation Conversion Tool

When choosing a documentation conversion tool for your organization, ask yourself questions like these. What platforms do you deliver on? WWP can be most beneficial when your product is delivered on multiple platforms and you need different formats for each platform.

Do you produce hard copy manuals?

Do you have time to tweak the formatting? Making adjustments to the output formatting has the potential to throw off your schedule if done late in the game.

Do the writers use style catalogs or overrides to format text? You must have named styles for your document to map correctly to WWP styles.

What is the source material? WebWorks Publisher works best for high volume page counts. It requires that your writers observe

grids and the dummy device to be used in testing, and even includes photographs of his own hand-drawn menus and dialogs. Then he discusses how online prototypes are different, and provides guidelines for creating them.

The next chapter, "Usability Testing," describes all that goes into usability testing for handheld devices. This is the most detailed chapter in the book. There is a diagram of a focus group facility—including where to put the video cameras and the one-way mirror—and six pages on how to find and screen testers (here called "respondents"). This is followed by several more pages explaining exactly how to conduct the usability tests, and more illustrations of how to arrange the testing facility. The final section of this chapter is another area that may be especially meaningful to documentation specialists: six more pages describing the structure and content of the findings documentation.

Both paper prototyping and usability testing get even more ink in the appendices. Appendix B is "Paper Prototyping Applications for the Palm OS" and Appendix C is the documentation for an actual usability study.

The other two appendices are a history of handheld devices and an extensive glossary.

If your work relates to the design of cell phones or PDAs, this book probably contains a lot of information about the field that you should know. If you are involved in product design for other electronic hardware or software, you can probably still learn valuable things from this book. And if you want to set up your own handheld usability consulting firm, Weiss, perhaps unwittingly, has given you a blueprint.

Joe Devney works in the wireless phone industry.

a structured authoring environment.

Tips for Simplifying the Process

Update your Frame or Word Template. (Single source can be drawback where manuals have a lot of fancy formatting.) Get buy-in for style standards, create a style guide to control content. Use named styles in your source documents. Make sure your source files are "clean," that they have no deviations from the style guide.

Finding More Information

You can download the slides of this presentation from http://www.homertech-pubs.com. For help authoring tools, see http://Groups.yahoo.com/group/HATT. See http://www.helpstuff.com/help-stuff.html for a tool comparison.

John Lancaster is a Bay Area technical writer who has both set up and used single-source authoring tools to publish CAD and enterprise software manuals.

Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. http://www.amwancal.org

American Society for Training and Development, Mount Diablo Chapter. Meets monthly in Danville. http://mtdiabloastd.org/.

American Society of Indexers, Golden Gate Chapter. http://www.asindexing.org/site/chapters.shtml#golden

Association for Women in Computing, San Francisco Bay Area chapter http://www.awc-sf.org/

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. A network of professionals committed to improving the effectiveness of organizations through strategic interactive and integrated business communication management http://sf.iabc.com/

National Writers Union (UAW). A labor union for freelance writers of all genres. http://www.nwu.org

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings and other events. http://www.ncswa.org

Ragged Left

Berkeley Chapter
The Society for Technical Communication
P.O. Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701

November Meeting

If I Only Had Two More Weeks...

Strategies for helping your writing teams put down their pencils when the release date arrives

Wednesday, November 10, 2004

Location
Shattuck Plaza Hotel
Allston Way at Shattuck Avenue, Berkeley

Agenda
Networking 6:00 Dinner 6:30 Program 7:15

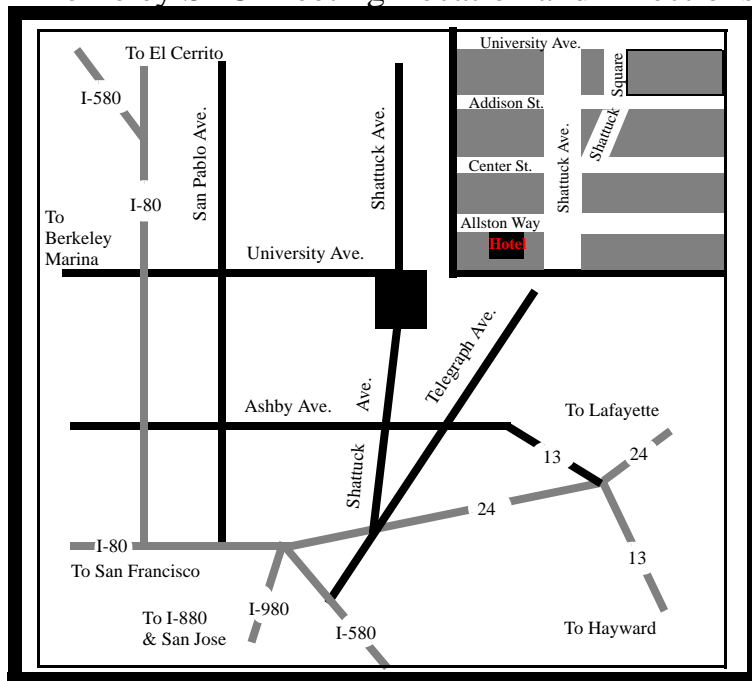## Berkeley STC Meeting Location and Directions

By BART:
Get off at the downtown Berkeley station (Richmond line) and walk south to Allston Way, the first street. Cross the street and turn right.

By Car:
From north of Berkeley on I-80, take the University Avenue exit (east). Turn right on Shattuck Avenue. Allston Way is three blocks south.

From south of Berkeley, take 880 north from San Jose. Continue through Oakland on 880. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges in) and becomes 980. Continue on 980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley and Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st and make an immediate left onto Shattuck. Proceed north on Shattuck 2.3 miles to downtown Berkeley. Allston Way is immediately before the BART station.

Walking to your car or BART?
We can't guarantee you an escort, but we'll try.