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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 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

# Ragged Left

The newsletter for the [Berkeley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication](#)

**Fall 2012**  
**Volume 25, Number 3**

## Editor's Notes

by Gwendolynne Barr

Dear readers,

In this issue, we continue our Global chapter series and introduce [STC India](#). To accompany our series, we have a [special art cricket](#), the most popular sport in India, by **guest writer, Sarika Sharma**. Sarika neatly explains how [cricket is played](#) and from baseball--you'll learn about overs, bowlers, strikers, creases, and wickets!

For the program notes, we are experimenting with a mix of styles including a book review and sound recordings. **Patrick Lufkin** reviews Randall Bolton's book, [Painting with Numbers](#), and introduces us to Bolton's invention of the word, "quantation." The first rec our August panel on [Lessons Learned from the STC Summit](#) and the second is of Richard Smith's excellent talk about [API Do](#) (and Spinal Tap's version of quantation, "[one louder](#)").

For our more traditional program notes, **Greg Hubbard** reviews Andrew Davis' talk on Emerging Roles and Hot (hot hot!) **Ma Patrick Lufkin** reviews Joe Devney's talk on the value of technical communication and the "costs and dangers of poor or mis documentation."

But readers, it is time to announce that this is my last issue as editor of Ragged Left. After a year and a half, I am passing the torch. It has truly been a pleasure and I thank all of you who have read or written for the newsletter during my tenure. I appreciate it.

As always, the Berkeley STC welcomes volunteers. Please consider volunteering to keep our chapter healthy and vibrant. You can find [descriptions of each position](#) in our previous issue.

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## Election Results

The 2013 election results are in!

- |                            |                               |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| • <b>Joe Devney</b>        | President                     |
| • <b>Madeleine Adkins</b>  | Vice President for Programs   |
| • <b>Patrick Lufkin</b>    | Vice President for Membership |
| • <b>Nicki Davis</b>       | Secretary                     |
| • <b>Richard Mateosian</b> | Treasurer                     |

Congratulations to the winners. And thanks to our outgoing officer, **Susan Jaeger**, who served as Secretary for two years. She put in long hours to support the chapter but also allowed us to use her home as a meeting space.

## Program Notes

### June 2012 Program Notes

#### Painting with Numbers: Presenting Financials and Other Numbers So People Will Understand You

Randall Bolton. 2012. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley. [ISBN 978-1-118-17257-5]. 322 pages. US\$39.95.]

Book review by Patrick Lufkin

Have you ever looked at a quantitative chart or table where the numbers seemed accurate enough, but where their meaning was confusing? Did you have difficulty finding the information you needed, understanding how the numbers related to each other, or identifying which might be the most important? If so, you experienced what Randall Bolton calls poor "quantation." Derived from "quantity" and "communication," "Quantation" is Bolton's coinage for "the act of presenting numbers, such as financial results, electronically or in written form for the purpose of informing an audience." Far too often, it is done poorly.

Bolton has spent more than thirty years as a financial executive for high-tech companies in Silicon Valley, where he has both used and consumed quantitative information. In *Painting with Numbers* he passes on what he has learned.

Bolton stresses that quantation is a communications skill that can be learned. He covers the rules and principles that one must use to effectively design, format, and present quantitative information to maximize its readability, effectiveness, and suitability for a specific audience.

Bolton says that small changes in the way numbers are presented can make a huge difference in how well they are understood. An audience finds them convincing, and even the conclusions the audience draws about you and your personal credibility.

Organized in four major sections, the book covers rules, tools, real mastery, and a wrap up. Rules covers the "nuts and bolts" of designing and laying out numerical tables, and, to a lesser extent, visual charts and graphs. It covers such things as selecting units of measure, degree of precision, alignment, and a myriad of other matters that can make or break quantitative presentations.

Throughout, Bolton presents alternative layouts to illustrate how each change impacts communication. To make the most important points easy to grasp and remember, he categorizes them as laws, deadly sins, and pieces of strong advice. For example, "De includes using "unclear, imprecise, or (worst of all) incorrect row or column captions," and "using visual effects for any reason other than clarifying, distinguishing, or adding meaning to information." For Bolton, it is all about communication, never about adding visual sizzle. Bolton also covers production issues, and includes tips on leveraging tools like Excel to improve your work.

True mastery covers issues related to content and audience, including selecting what to present, and delivering it in a form that maximizes its usefulness to a specific audience. The board of directors may need a different set of numbers or level of detail than managers setting production targets.

The wrap up brings it all together with a review, and discusses such things as ethical issues and the rare situations in which you might find it appropriate to break specific rules.

- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members

## Membership

[STC Membership](#) is open to everyone. Classic membership is \$215 per year with an additional \$25 per chapter and \$10 per SIG. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, email [membership@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:membership@stc-berkeley.org).

## 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](mailto: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. **The 2013 STC Summit will be held in Atlanta, May 5-8, 2013.** 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 sponsors research grants and scholarships in technical communication.

STC publishes the 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. These and a list of other local organizations in which STC members may be interested are included in *Ragged Left*.

## Subscriptions

This newsletter is free to the public.

## Advertising rates

*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 15th of the last month in each quarter (March, June, September, December).

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.

Contact *Ragged Left* at [newsletter@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-berkeley.org).

[Painting with Numbers](#) is an important guide to an aspect of technical communication that is too often overlooked. Anyone who present quantitative information would benefit from reading it, probably more than once.

**Randall Bolten** runs *Lucidity*, a consulting practice in Menlo Park, California focused on short engagements with specific deliverables including business models, reporting packages, and incentive compensation packages. His 30-year career as a financial executive in Silicon Valley includes nearly 20 years as chief financial officer for both public companies (BroadVision and Phoenix Technology) and startups. He has also held senior financial management positions at Oracle and Tandem Computers. He received his AB from Princeton University and his MBA from Stanford University.

**Patrick Lufkin** is an STC Associate Fellow with experience in computer documentation, newsletter production, and public relations. He reads widely in science, history, and current affairs, as well as on writing and editing. He is VP for Membership of the Berkeley Technical Writers Association. He chairs the Gordon Scholarship for technical communication and co-chairs the Northern California technical communication

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## July 2012 Program Notes

## Emerging Roles and Hot Markets for Tomorrow's Tech Writers

Presentation Andrew Davis

Article by Greg Hubbard (reprinted from [ActiveVoice](#))

### A Recruiter's Perspective on Staying Marketable

For those technical writers looking to command top dollar for their work, or for those hoping to stay in demand, Andrew Davis presented a wide-ranging and informative presentation that focused on these issues, raising many questions and provoking much discussion.

Through his work as a recruiter serving some of the most demanding tech companies in Silicon Valley, Andrew is well positioned to understand the shifting currents of the industry. His presentation offered advice on how to stay competitive in an environment where many writing positions have been off-shored or eliminated, and where many remaining positions are underpaid and undervalued.

### Which Markets are Hot?

Andrew suggests that there are more opportunities for technical writers (and anyone who develops content) to stand out--in industries that are still expanding and haven't yet reached their prime. These markets are more likely to be innovative about their approach to content, so your skills are more likely to stay relevant.

Some of Andrew's top hot markets are:

- Data analytics (Splunk, for example)
- IP Security
- Big Data (like Hadoop, MapReduce, and NoSQL)

The tepid and cold markets can still be fine places to work. But don't expect top wages or an easy transition into a new market or if your job there ends. Andrew included healthcare, grant writing, and gaming--at least for companies like Electronic Arts and Light and Magic--in his list of tepid markets, but those assessments were challenged by some audience members.

### Attributes to Cultivate

Recruiters need mature, reliable, and resilient professionals. But there are many other attributes that Andrew feels are crucial to stay competitive:

- Understanding of a company's business goals and business model
- Entrepreneurial experience (seeing an opportunity in the marketplace and seizing it)
- Proven ability to understand your audience and deliver autonomously with minimal SME input
- Ability to visualize and design customized content deliverables (for example, exactly how will you use the structured content creating?)
- Understanding of translation/localization processes
- Experience making a business case (ideally for content-development initiatives)
- Understanding of tools available to achieve content-development goals
- Project management and consensus-building skills.

### Skills to Develop

When expanding your skill set, one of the fundamentals that Andrew suggests you keep in mind is that a skill or experience that generates revenue, rather than simply reducing expenses, will always be valuable. Find out what components of your content are most valuable, and stress those aspects when interviewing.

Andrew mentioned several desirable skills, including:

- eBooks conversion and delivery
- XML, XSL (and its variants), DITA, DocBook and related structured authoring technology
- Video production and/or screencasting (including scripting)
- Wiki implementation (not just wiki use)
- UX design (especially for mobile apps, where standards are evolving quickly)

### The Tools Debate

One recurring question for technical writers is, "What are the tools we need to know to stay relevant?" As the industry shifts, is an expert in structured FrameMaker enough to keep a technical writer working? Andrew says "no," or at least not if you want to stay at the top of the technical communication food chain.

Despite an audience comment pointing out that surveys show a huge percentage of companies still use FrameMaker, Andrew says dedicated XML authoring tools (like Arbortext Editor and XMetaL Author) are more useful if you want to stay in demand. He says most companies that start in structured FrameMaker end up leaving it, and that if they do keep using it those companies probably pay well. Andrew says Author-it and Madcap Flare have small user bases, but those tools aren't being abandoned as quickly as FrameMaker.

### The Hot Roles

Another approach to staying marketable is to focus on the technical communication roles that are more in demand. The roles that feel consistently hot include:

- Developer-oriented content creation
- Video scripting and creation

- UX Design
- Structured Content Design and Migration

Some audience members felt that technical training was still a hot role, though other audience members brought up the trend of companies moving away from the \$1000-per-person-per-day cost of instructor-led training towards less expensive e-learning.

Others mentioned terminology management and related roles, such as maintaining translation memories, optimizing machine and project-managing localization vendors. Andrew says these are not particularly lucrative at the moment, so he puts them in a separate category.

### What to Do to Get Hot

If you are in a tepid niche where your skills may be atrophying, how might you reposition yourself to improve your marketability? Andrew's suggestions include:

- Download and learn the hot software tools (all have free trials).
- Contribute to open-source projects.
- Build an online portfolio, and link to it from your LinkedIn profile.
- Study others who are successful, and emulate them.
- Intern, sub-contract, or just volunteer.
- Do informational interviews (initiated via your LinkedIn network).
- Sell your services to very young companies (found via [linksv.com](http://linksv.com) or [silicontap.com](http://silicontap.com)).
- Network (via LinkedIn, meetups, STC, corporate alumni networks, etc.).

Once you're ready to look for the best quality job postings, Andrew recommends Indeed and Simply Hired (both of which aggregate postings), as well as LinkedIn's job search feature. The postings on Dice come primarily from recruiters, who are mostly concerned with making their numbers and offer little or no empathy. Andrew puts the quality of Dice listings on a par with the ones on Craigslist. For opportunities that never make it to the job boards, check out [linkup.com](http://linkup.com) and [VentureLoop.com](http://VentureLoop.com).

### Can Training Programs Damage Your Marketability?

One of the more controversial aspects of the presentation was Andrew's contention that most training programs in technical writing should be avoided. With a strong preference for workplace experience and peer-level references, he feels that tech companies largely lack the theoretical experience possessed by the graduates of these programs. And training that is disconnected from the needs of the marketplace can do more harm than good, in Andrew's opinion.

If you are considering a program, look for a faculty made up of respected industry professionals who are active in the field. I have had good results placing graduates from the programs at Carnegie Mellon and the University of Washington. He is an exception for the faculty at the UC Berkeley Extension program, though he remains skeptical about the marketability of content program graduates in general.

### Selling Yourself to a Higher Level

One way to navigate the globalized economy is to take the technical communication skills you have and repackage them. Andrew suggested many new job titles that are hybrids of what technical writers typically do but command more respect, and better compensation, in the marketplace.

Some of these positions function in a more global role than the typical technical writer:

- Content Strategist
- Community Liaison
- Corporate Storyteller
- Other positions involved specialization:
- Tools expert
- Terminology Manager
- Content Manager
- Search engine optimization (SEO) expert

Several audience members mentioned that their companies have replaced all technical writers with Community Liaisons and expressed frustration that they are not allowed to author content any more—all content is produced through crowd-sourcing. The Liaison moderates user forums, user groups, and any other mediums where customers congregate. Customers have limited access to company-authored content and often Liaisons can only point them to content created by other users, such as the knowledgebase. Whether this strategy will become more prevalent remains to be seen.

In a marketplace that is ever-changing and with the possibility of another global recession looming, Andrew's presentation was a reminder to look forward so as not to be left behind.

**Andrew Davis** has recruited technical communicators in Silicon Valley since 1995, first for Synergistech Communications and then at Content Rules (formerly Oak Hill Corporation). He is a former software industry Tech Writer and is well-known for both underestimating the role of content development. At Content Rules he recruits all kinds of technical and marketing communication training and globalization professionals. Andrew enjoys helping those who communicate complex information get ahead by redefining and refining their value to technology companies. He's candid and connected and, more importantly, he cares.

**Greg Hubbard** is a technical communicator in the San Francisco Bay Area.

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### August 2012 Program Notes

#### Lessons Learned from the 2012 STC Summit

Panel: Gwaltney Mountford, Romy Sinha, Lori Meyer, Bruce Poropat, Bobbie Dowling, and Gwendolynne Barr moderating

Instead of program notes, we present an [.mp3 recording](#) of this program.

Each of our 5 panelists attended the 2012 STC Summit in Chicago. They chose one presentation to discuss, first individually, then together as a group. It was an excellent, and lively, discussion on mobile usability. I encourage you to listen in. Even the PowerPoints are informative without seeing the slides.

The links below are for the original summit presentations.

**Gwaltney Mountford** on **Enabling Progressive Information Disclosure with the "Stages of Use" Model** [Andrea Ames]

- <http://stc.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=6677&SID=118648>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/aames/improving-the-user-experience-by-applying-progressive-information-disclosure>
- <http://www.stc.org/images/proceedings/STC2012SUMMITMOBILE.htm#/images/proceedings/Documents/enablingprog>

**Romy Sinha** on **Modeling Information Experiences: A Recipe for Consistent Information Architecture** [Andrea Ame Riley]

- <http://stc.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=6677&SID=118671>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/aames/modeling-information-experiences-a-recipe-for-consistent-architecture>
- <http://intercom.stc.org/2012/02/helping-us-think-the-role-of-abstract-conceptual-models-in-strategic-information-arc>
- <http://intercom.stc.org/2012/02/developing-abstract-conceptual-models-to-support-strategic-information-architecture>

**Lori Meyer** on **12 Key Mobile Usability Guidelines You Need to Implement Now** [Marta Rauch]

- <http://stc.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=6677&SID=118664>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/MartaRauch/rauch-mobile-usabilitystc-2012>
- <http://www.stc.org/images/proceedings/STC2012SUMMITMOBILE.htm#/images/proceedings/Documents/12keymobile>

**Bruce Poropat** on **Creating EPUBS: What's the Best Tool for Me?** [Scott Prentice]

- <http://stc.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=6677&SID=118654>
- <http://www.stc.org/images/proceedings/Documents/creatingepubswatsth.htm>

**Bobbie Dowling** on **Surfing the Perfect Storm** [Tristan Bishop]

- <http://stc.sclivelearningcenter.com/index.aspx?PID=6677&SID=118624>
- <http://www.slideshare.net/KnowledgeBishop/surfing-the-perfect-storm>
- <http://ffeathers.wordpress.com/tag/tristan-bishop/>

**Gwaltney Mountford** has 30 years of experience as a technical communicator focusing on solving the communication needs of users. She and her husband, Carl, own Mountford Group Inc., a consulting company specializing in developing custom web-business and data warehouse applications. An STC Associate Fellow, she is a past president of the East Bay chapter, a former Touchstone and the Region 8 Conference, and was on the Society's Nominating Committee. She has presented at the STC Air Conference and at regional events, and taught technical writing for 6 years UC Berkeley Extension.

**Romy Sinha** has 12+ years of combined experience as a technical writer and software developer in the computer software industry. Her deep understanding of technical material informs her work as a technical communicator and information developer. She specializes in documentation of enterprise software, APIs and SDKs. Presently, she works as an Information Developer with eMeter, a SaaS Business.

**Lori Meyer** is a technical communicator with more than 25 years of experience designing, writing, and editing software documentation and online user assistance. She is currently a senior technical writer in Cupertino, California. Lori is a member of eight STC chapters (including Berkeley) and five SIGs. She is currently serving on the councils of the Rochester and Carolina chapters, as well as of the STC Technical Editing Special Interest Group. In 2009, Lori received the STC Distinguished Chapter Service Award, and named an STC Associate Fellow.

**Bruce Poropat**, a Bay Area-based contract technical writer, has authored online and print documentation for the University of Wells Fargo, Charles Schwab, Williams-Sonoma, ERG, ZipRealty.com, and many others. He has worked on plain language communication projects for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) and the Port of Oakland.

**Bobbie Ohs Dowling** has been turning out great technical communications for decades, but only in the past five years has she proudly don the title of Technical Writer. A Senior Technical Writer for Navis, LLC, she creates how-to content and application help for managing container shipping terminals, and is on constant lookout for smart processes. Prior to that, she managed various CRM and consumer application projects for companies such as Autodesk, Toshiba, Standard & Poor's, and E\*Trade. From the selling her college class notes to the present, she relishes clarity, novelty, and empathy for the audience.

**Gwendolynne Barr** is a technical communicator and former software QA engineer who specializes in writing for software developers and testers. She currently works at Thomson Reuters in San Francisco.

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## September 2012 Program Notes

### Introduction to Documenting APIs

Presentation by Richard Smith

Instead of program notes, we present an [.mp3 recording](#) of this program. (Our apologies, but the very end is cut off because of a new at doing this.)

**Richard Smith** is a senior technical writer at Netflix. He specializes in writing developer documentation for embedded media applications on TVs, set top boxes, and mobile devices.

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## October 2012 Program Notes

### Tech Comm Value: Potential Costs of Poor or Missing Documentation

Presentation by Joe Devney

Article by Patrick Lufkin

In tight economic times every worker and department needs to demonstrate the value it brings to the business. A few can do that they directly generate income for the firm; others need to find less direct ways to demonstrate their value. For technical communicators a key strategy is to cite the costs and dangers of poor or missing documentation. But to effectively do so, you must know and understand the costs and dangers yourself.

In October Joe Devney gave a talk to the Berkeley STC covering the basics of what technical communicators need to know. Joe is an STC Associate-Fellow, is a past-president of the Berkeley STC, and holds a Masters in linguistics with a specialty in forensic linguistics. Devney kept the talk alive with lots of audience participation and real-world examples.

Devney led off with a personal story. He once bought a DVD player. He set it up using the instructions in the box. He turned it on and couldn't get a picture. After finding no remedy in the printed instructions, he called tech support. Tech support walked him through the procedures, but the problem didn't resolve. He returned the unit for a replacement. When the replacement unit had the same problem, he again called tech support. This time he was instructed to push a previously unnoticed button. Now the unit worked.

The problem wasn't with the units, Devney said, but with the documentation, first with the paper documentation, and then with the support person who didn't know the product.

And what were the costs? Both Devney and company's technical support people had to spend considerable time addressing the problem. Devney had to make an extra trip to the store, and the company had to accept the return of a unit that wasn't actually defective. Now, many years later, Devney is still telling the story about his bad experience. Poor documentation can have effects that are long lived.

Devney listed a number of ways in which documentation can go off the rails. It can be incomplete or incorrect. It can be poor or organized. It can be difficult to navigate. It can fail to be written for the right audience. And it can aim to be persuasive but instructive, for example when it contains marketing hype, verbiage that tells you how wonderful the product is, but neglects to show how to actually use it.

Devney said that poor documentation can have many causes, including time constraints and inexperienced writers. But, he said, the root cause is often poor management decisions and interference. Management caused problems include insufficient budget, telling writers to do the writing, mandating the wrong tools (Word for large manuals), or enforcing personal quirks—such as a management demand that all text be right justified—not based on industry best practices for promoting understanding and usability.

“Managers should not make writing or design decisions,” he said. He also stressed that sometimes writers need to stand up for professional standards and educate their managers.

While poor documentation can cause external problems by alienating customers, it can also lead to serious internal problems: the expense of time wasted searching for information in documentation that is poorly written, organized, or indexed, or not located. Time is also wasted when poor or missing documentation must be re-created.

Devney cited a study showing that a medium sized organization with 1,000 knowledge workers could easily waste \$2.5 to \$3 million a year because of poor internal documentation. Devney said that the opportunity cost, that is, the money lost by having not spent on something more productive, could reach an additional \$15 million or more.

Drawing on his training in forensics, Devney said poor documentation often leads to serious legal problems.

In regulated industries such as pharmaceuticals the government mandates strict requirements for documentation. In some cases, especially where public safety is involved, he said failing a document audit can be very expensive, potentially resulting in fines of millions per day.

Documentation is often considered part of the product, and can play a role in product liability cases. Devney quoted legal estimates saying that litigating the meaning of poor documentation could easily run to \$500 thousand or more.

Devney showed a clause from an insurance contract which had been intended to limit the company’s liability. A judge found it to be so confusing due to its inept wording that he threw it out of the case, effectively stripping the company of whatever protection the clause was intended to have afforded.

Poor and missing documentation can also lead to grave human tragedies.

In one case Devney cited, a family of carnival workers (who slept in their RV) was poisoned by carbon dioxide from a generator that had not been properly installed and vented. The ensuing court case revolved around the quality of the documentation for the generator. Problems were found. Perhaps the most serious was an incomplete and poorly worded warning which mentioned possible danger from the vehicle, but neglected to mention the danger to people.

In another case Devney cited, poor documentation led to an airline tragedy.

A plane had been retrofitted to replace the canisters that supply oxygen to the overhead masks that passengers pull down for use in emergencies. Devney explained that the canisters produce oxygen using a chemical reaction that is started by pulling a pin on a hand grenade. In addition to oxygen, the chemical reaction produces considerable heat. The old units that were being replaced were still “live,” quite dangerous, and required special handling to render them harmless. But because of poor documentation, this information was lost, and the old units were boxed up and shipped on a second passenger plane. During the flight, pins dropped out and the plane exploded, which caused the plane to crash and more than 100 lives were lost.

Devney had us look over the documentation. Many problems were found.

Perhaps the most serious problem was structural; the installation and removal procedures had been combined and conflated into a complex procedure, and the need for safely handling the removed units was lost. But the writing was also problematic. It appeared robotic, as if it had been done by someone copying from engineering specifications, but who really didn’t understand what he was doing. Important information was buried in opaque language, for example the fact that the units were dangerous was buried in the phrase “contain live ignition trains.” It also didn’t help that the poorly drafted instructions had been given to workers with no English. This is a classic case of failing to understand the audience.

It was a very interesting evening, with lots of user participation and an important take away that could help technical communicators stand up for the importance of their profession: poor and missing documentation can be very expensive, and even a matter of life and death.

*Joe Devney, delivered a number of presentations through STC and other organizations, and has sat through over a hundred presentations by others, analyzing what works and what doesn't. He also has a Master's degree in Language and Communication as formal training in public speaking and fifteen years' experience in technical communication. Devney is an STC Associate Fellow.*

*Patrick Lufkin is an STC Associate Fellow, Chair of the Kenneth M. Gordon Memorial Scholarship for Technical Communication for Membership of the Berkeley Chapter. He is currently co-manager of the 2012-13 Northern California Technical Communication Competition.*

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## Special Series on STC Global Chapters

### STC India

By Gwendolynne Barr

In the second article of our series on global STC chapters, I investigate [STC India](#) and what it is like to be a technical writer. I talk with D’Cruz, the current STC India president, and Rajdeep Gupta, the immediate past president, for taking the time to talk to me.

### Local Chapters

Like [STC France](#), STC India is a single chapter that serves a large geographical area. [Bangalore is 1400 miles \(2200 km\) from Paris](#), which is not very convenient. In France, they try to solve this problem by holding virtual meetings when they can. In India, they create local chapters.

The main chapter is in Bangalore and local chapters are established in cities such as Mumbai, Chennai, Hyderabad, etc. This is done depending upon the volunteers available. Each local chapter has its own representative who is nominated in January by the members and board of officers. City chapters conduct monthly training sessions to keep members engaged and learning.

### Number of Writers

[Naveen D'Cruz](#), the current president of STC India, tells me that there are roughly 5,000 technical communicators in India. [Rajdeep](#), past president, thinks that number could be as high as 10,000. In 2006, [Tom Johnson interviewed Sandeep Balakrishna](#) who is and growing.

My understanding is that the Indian government does not gather statistics on technical writers as does the [U.S. Department of Labor](#) inferred by the membership of [TWIN](#) (Technical Writers of India). In early 2010, there were [5000 registered TWIN users](#) and a list.

STC India, on the other hand, has 122 members, says Naveen (with 1500 subscribed to their mailing list says Rajdeep). That accurate number for the number of technical writers in India. By comparison, there are just less than 6,000 technical writers in the U.S., or 16%, are members of STC.

### Salaries

One reason for low membership in STC India has been [the cost](#). Technical writing salaries in India are roughly 1/4 that of U.S. salaries (see [STC India Salary Survey for 2012](#)). Imagine paying US\$1,000 for an STC membership rather than US\$250—you wouldn't

Technical communicators in India are paid about 1.6 lakh multiplied by years of experience. A [lakh](#) is a unit of measurement used in Southeast Asia, 1,00,000). That means, if you have 5 years of experience as a technical communicator, you earn, 8,00,000 INR (rupees). That's just under US\$15,000. To help encourage membership, STC international under Alan Houser charges chapter fees to US\$60 (3300 INR), about 1/4th of what we pay in the US.

### Chapter Challenges

Being an international chapter has unique challenges (as I discovered when I wrote on STC France). In 2011, the STC India chapter had about those challenges with president, Alan Houser. Not surprisingly, half of them are about money.

In fact, a big problem for our international chapters is usually their inability to receive funding from a foreign source, namely the United States. In India, an [NGO](#) (non-governmental organization) must have an [FCRA](#) (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) permit if it receives funding from a foreign source. STC India doesn't have one, probably due to heavy-handed [bureaucracy](#) on the part of the Indian government.

### Chapter Successes

Despite these challenges, STC India is one of our more vibrant STC chapters. On 1 December, they concluded their [14th annual](#) increasingly international event. I was surprised to learn from Rajdeep that the conference is free to STC members. They had a [summit in May](#) with 30-minute rapid-style presentations.

Another sign of their health is the [mentorship program](#) currently headed by Ramesh Aiyangar. This program only runs for 1 summer, allowing mentors and mentees the ability to time-box their work together. While the program leaders do not micro-manage relationships, they do their best to guide both in their expectations. In the last 3 years, Rajdeep estimates that there are been about 100 mentees.

### 22 Languages

Technical communication is often an exercise in English, even in countries where English is not the dominant language. This is true for 82% of us call [English our mother tongue](#) and 96% claim to speak English "very well." English or not, the majority of Americans speak English as a second language.

In India, the majority of people speak one or more of [22 constitutionally recognized languages](#) and use 11 scripts. Hindi (in fact, the official language) but only 41% speak standard Hindi and [only 5% read or write English](#). (Apparently, not even [Rahul Gandhi](#) speaks Hindi well.)

### The 5%

I found the statistic that only 5% read and write English on a [government website](#) and also in a [presentation](#) by [Swaran Lata](#) appears to be the head of the group behind that website. I also found a [study by the U.S. Library of Congress](#) (probably from 2006) that only 3% (which would be consistent given the time passed).

Let's do the math to determine if these numbers make sense. According to the 2011 census, India has a population of 1.21 billion (1,210,000,000) with 63.2% rural (833,087,662) and 31.2% is semi-rural and urban (377,105,760)—by the way, I pulled these numbers from [the actual census](#) which seems to conflate the 2001 and 2011 censuses.

You can juggle the numbers infinitely, but if only 1% of the rural population (8330877) reads English, then only 14% of the total population does so for the overall number to be at 5%. The urban figure seems extremely low; but the fact that it mixes cities and town studies were using older data when the rural population was even higher. If we dramatically raise the urban (town-city) figure to 24%—still a low number if you are trying to disseminate information.

### Translation

All this said, both Naveen and Rajdeep tell me that technical writing in India is distinct from translating so that linguistic communication in India, technical documentation begins in English and is then translated as necessary (unlike, *to some degree*, [in France](#) where technical communicators who work in French").

Even so, it affects the Indian federal government if the majority of Indians cannot understand one language and have to rely on translators. To meet the challenge, the [Department of Electronics & Information Technology](#) (DeitY), is funding a program called [for Indian Languages](#) (TDIL). TDIL aims to develop machine language software for translating and disseminating information for Indians who cannot read English.

### Offshoring

Outsourcing and offshoring can be [sensitive subjects](#) in the U.S. To outsource is to hire a 3rd party to do work in-country or work done in another country whether in-house or with a 3rd party vendor. When offshoring is done by a 3rd party, it's called offshoring.

India has been an offshore outsourcing hub for some time, creating a boom in technical writing jobs there. [As one blogger put it](#), "India has three job offers waiting for them (on an average). When I last looked for a position in India, I received four job offers and I was only applying to big companies."

It's not all grim for American technical writers, however. Department of Labor [statistics tell us](#) that "In 2011, employment for technical writers increased in three years, regaining almost half of the 3,470 lost since 2008." It also appears that the form of [outsourcing is changing](#) that only looks at cutting labor costs to a long-term model that aligns business strategies with outsourcing services. Of course, there is [opinion](#). But in general, it appears that the world is becoming truly global as companies learn to incorporate their offshore sites.

## Conclusion

It is a good time to be a technical communicator in India, it seems. Salaries are low but increasing steadily and jobs are plentiful. TWIN is bustling with participants willing to help "freshers." And at 3300 INR, the STC is suddenly much more accessible membership, many more can attend the free annual conference as well as sign up to work with a mentor. And in this global U.S. technical communicators to reach out and work with our Indian colleagues, perhaps even visit India itself. The 15th Ann 11 months away!

*Gwendolynne Barr is a technical communicator and former software QA engineer who specializes in writing for software development. She currently works at Thomson Reuters in San Francisco.*

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## An Introduction to Cricket

by Sarika Sharma

Cricket is a popular game in many countries of the world, especially India. It is so popular, in fact, you would never know the sport. What baseball is to America, cricket is to India.



Both cricket and baseball belong to the same genre of bat and ball game in which you bat and bowl (or pitch). The batting team attempts to make as many runs as possible before being dismissed (out); and the bowling team attempts to dismiss the batsmen and prevent scoring. The team that scores the most runs wins.

But there are differences between cricket and baseball--in terminology, for example, in cricket, there are two batsmen up at once--one who bats and one who holds a bat (the non-striker). They stand at opposite ends of the pitch.

And to score, the batsmen don't go around four bases but run back and forth. The difference is that there are generally only two innings each of which can last for a day.

Click the link for a detailed tabular view of the [differences between cricket and baseball](#).

## The Rules of Play

There are different types of Cricket matches but all share the same rules. The only real difference is the length of play.

### Game structure

In a cricket match, the duration for which one team bats and the other bowls is known as an innings (in the plural). An innings is a set of six deliveries by one bowler.

A One-day match has 2 innings of 50 overs each. A Test match has 4 innings of 90 overs each and is played over 5 days. The popular Twenty20 (T20) match has 2 innings of 20 overs each.

Except for the test matches, an innings continues until 10 players of the batting side are out or all the allotted overs in an innings are bowled. After the completion of the first innings, there is a break. The teams switch batting and bowling roles and play resumes.

A game of cricket continues until all the overs in the second innings are bowled or if the batting team beats the score of the first innings. If the bowling team bowls all the overs, the total runs scored by both the teams are tallied and the team with the higher score wins the game.

### Field Arrangement

The field is oval-shaped with a rectangular pitch in the middle where most of the action occurs. At each end of the pitch are two wickets called creases.



Two batsmen from the batting side take the crease. The first one in the batting side stands at the striker's end; the second batsman is the non-striker and stands at the other end, known as the bowling crease.

Two players of the bowling or the fielding team take the position of the bowler. One stands at the bowler's crease at the non-striker's end. The wicket-keeper stands at the striker's end.

The other nine players occupy positions around the field in relation to the bowler. The field, in relation to a right-handed batsman, is called the On-side, and the opposite side is called the Off-side. The reverse is true for a left-handed batsman.

There are many more positions than players, but the primary ones are Leg slip, Leg side, Mid-on, Mid-off, Cover, Point, Gully, Slips, Square leg, and Square off.

Fielding positions are not fixed and fielders are placed based on the attacking or defending strategy of the bowling team captain.

### Playing and Scoring Runs

Play begins when the bowler delivers the first ball of the first over to the striker batsman. If the striker hits the ball and after a run is scored, the batsmen must run between wickets toward their opposite creases.

One run is scored when both the batsmen have some part of their body or bat inside the opposite popping crease. The batsmen continue to score runs until it is no longer possible to do so without getting out. Each run scored is added to the individual score of the batsman.

Whichever batsman ends up at the striker's end, faces the next delivery; play continues in this manner until a batsman gets out. The next batsman in the batting order takes the crease. If both batsmen are not out by the end of an over, they switch places to the opposite crease.

There are other ways of scoring runs such as by hitting boundaries. A batsman scores four runs if the ball hits the ground behind the cricket field and six runs if the ball crosses the boundary without touching the ground.



Some runs, called extras, are added to the batting team's total score and are not credited to the batsman. The batting team scores extra runs when the bowler delivers a ball that is not a legal delivery (e.g., a no-ball or a wide ball).

A wide ball is a delivery wider than the width of the crease or higher than the batsman's head (when the bowler does not place any part of his front foot within the crease in front of the bowling crease). A leg bye is a delivery that hits the batsman or evades the ball.

### Getting Batsmen Out

Both batsmen must stand within their respective creases until the bowler delivers the ball. A batsman can move forward to hit the ball, but if he misses and does not return to the crease before the wicket keeper hits the wicket with the ball, the batsman is out.

On every delivery, the bowler tries to target the wicket behind the batsman. If the bowler misses the ball and it hits the wicket behind him, the batsman is bowled out.

If a missed ball hits the batsman's leg pad while it is headed straight toward the wicket (leg-before-wicket). However, the decision of the umpire is final.

If the batsman hits the ball and it is caught by a player of the fielding team (caught out), the batsman is caught out.

A batsman is run out if a fielder hits a wicket while the batsman is running within the crease.



Another way of getting a batsman out, although rare, is a hit-wicket. If the bat or any part of body of the batsman hits the ball, or if the batsman is taking the delivery stride, the batsman is out.

## Go Out and Play!

This is the game of cricket in a nutshell. If you want to play, contact the Bay Area Cricket Alliance: <http://www.bayareacricke>

*Sarika Sharma is a technical communicator in the San Francisco Bay Area.*

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## Upcoming Programs

### January: Annual Chapter Party and Touchstone Awards

Join us on Saturday evening, January 19, to relax with fellow communicators, enjoy a buffet dinner, and celebrate excellence.

Every year Touchstone, the Northern California Technical Communication Competition, receives many fine entries. We send the winners to International Summit Awards competitions. We will announce this year's winners and display their entries throughout the evening.

During the evening we will also recognize and honor competition judges and Berkeley chapter volunteers for their contributions to the profession.

Our yearly raffle: Once again, the generosity and support from the wonderful vendors in our professional community allow us to have a raffle.

Hope to see you there!

**Date:** Saturday, January 19, 2012

- 5:30 to 6:00 pm: Networking and conversation, view the award-winning entries
- 6:00 to 7:00 pm: Buffet dinner
- 7:00 to 8:00 pm: Awards and recognition (and raffle)
- 8:00 to 9:00 pm: More conversation, view the award-winning entries
- 9:00 pm: Clear the room; move conversations to the sidewalk

**Location:** Highlands Country Club, 110 Hiller Drive, Oakland, California

**Cost:** \$25 in advance, or \$35 at the door (though we highly recommend that you reserve in advance)

**Reservations:** Reserve a spot by paying online at our [reservation page](#). If you prefer to pay by cash or check, please reserve details to [reservations@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:reservations@stc-berkeley.org) and pay at the meeting.

Note: If you do not reserve in advance, dinner may or may not be available on a walk-in basis. We order dinner for the number of walk-ins.

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## Meeting Logistics

The Berkeley STC meets the second Wednesday of every month. Each meeting consists of an optional dinner, short business program on a topic of interest to technical communicators. All are welcome.

### 3-Tiered Pricing

- **Lowest prices:** Anyone for whom the higher prices are a hardship--students, unemployed, underemployed. This applies to "student/low income." Anyone can choose to pay this price. We trust that nobody will abuse the privilege.
- **Discounted prices:** STC members.
- **Regular prices:** Non-members (except those who choose the student/low income price).

Former STC members who intend to renew when their finances improve can choose whichever of the three rates they feel most comfortable with. We do not want anyone to feel shut out of the STC Berkeley community.



[Reservations](#) must be made at least one day prior to the meeting. Walk-ins also welcome, however, dinner may or may not be the number of reservations plus a few for walk-ins.

#### Program and Dinner (Reservation / Walk-in)

- Students/Low Income: \$6/\$10
- Members: \$12/\$16
- Non-members: \$20/\$24

#### Program Only (Reservation / Walk-in)

- Students/Low Income: \$3/\$10
- Members: \$6/\$10
- Non-STC-Members: \$10/\$14

#### Special cost notes

Non-member students are welcome at the *member* student rates.

Non-members are always welcome to STC meetings at non-member rates.

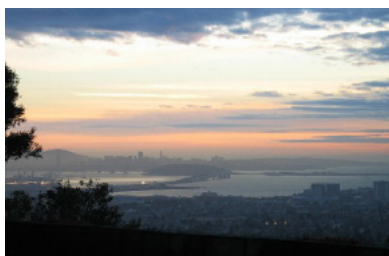
All members of the San Francisco Chapter of the IABC are welcome to register for Berkeley STC General Meetings at the mer day before the meeting.

### Location and Directions

**Highlands Country Club 110 Hiller Drive Oakland, California. [\[Google Maps\]](#)**

Information at <http://www.stc-berkeley.org/MonthlyMeeting/directions.shtml>

If you need a ride from BART, email [rides@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:rides@stc-berkeley.org) at least one day prior to the meeting.



*View from the Highlands Country Club  
Photo courtesy of Rhonda Bracey*

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## Local STC Chapters

Berkeley: [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org)

East Bay: [www.ebstc.org](http://www.ebstc.org)

North Bay: [www.stc-northbay.org](http://www.stc-northbay.org)

Sacramento: [www.stcsacramento.org](http://www.stcsacramento.org)

San Francisco: [www.stc-sf.org](http://www.stc-sf.org)

Silicon Valley: [www.stc-siliconvalley.org](http://www.stc-siliconvalley.org)

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## Other Organizations

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) of Northern California. Meets periodically at various Bay Area locations. [www.amwa.org](http://www.amwa.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/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3616#golden>

Association for Computing Machinery. <http://www.acm.org>

Association for Women in Computing. <http://www.awc-hq.org>

Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE). <http://www.ieee.org>

International Association of Business Communicators, San Francisco chapter. <http://sf.iabc.com>

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

Northern California Science Writers' Association. Quarterly meetings & other events. [www.ncswa.org](http://www.ncswa.org)

Tekom. <http://www.tekom.de>

Writer's UA. <http://www.writersua.com>

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