By Melissa Clark

Technical communication is transported to another era through the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). SCA is a nonprofit organization that researches and recreates activities from the Middle Ages such as crafts, sciences, literature, martial arts, and traditions.

Skills Learned Help in Both Areas

Although one world exists only in fantasy and through the activities centered around SCA, skills and values learned in both SCA and the outside world overlap.

Pete Good, known as Lord Martin of Rivestar in SCA, is a manager of technical writers and instructional designers at Kudos Information, Inc. in Santa Clara. Good applies the skills he learned in technical writing and managing to his life in the SCA.

He says management skills come in handy. Writers always are willing to go beyond what they see, he says. “So it’s easy to stretch into that world of imagination,” says Good. “And research is another writer’s skill that extends directly into the SCA. I need to research history to understand what I’m doing. And in technical writing, research is everything because if you don’t have that basis of information, you can’t do what’s in front of you.”

Good, a member of the Shire of Cloondara, is a fighter in SCA and has participated in about 30 tournaments last year. Good has been injured in tournaments over the 12 years he has been involved. He has broken fingers and suffered concussions. However, most of the time fighters walk away with few injuries.

Good’s management skills were useful when he served as a marshall for SCA tournaments. Marshalls inspect each fighter’s equipment and armor before a fight to verify the fighter is safe to compete on the field.

Trish Blazina, known as Duchess Cyneswith (pronounced Kin-Es-with) in SCA, has been a technical writer for about 12 years and works for Syndeo, a pre-IPO company in Campbell that makes telephone networking equipment. Blazina uses the skills learned through technical communication to further her involvement in SCA. She serves as the Kingdom Arts Officer for the Principality of the Mists (the Bay Area). Blazina recently published The 2001 Arts and Sciences Adventure Handbook, which covers rules and guidelines for SCA members interested in entering into competition in the arts and sciences areas. Blazina previously served as a chronicler, writing, editing, and publishing the kingdom newsletter, The Page. That job allowed her to use her desktop publishing and editing skills.

The SCA also publishes a magazine, Tournaments Illuminated, combat manuals, and a guide to kingdom laws. Some art group guilds create SCA newsletters.

Using SCA to Get Ahead

Laureen Hudson, also known as Aeron Endellion O’Maoilbhrenainn in SCA, also served as the chronicler for two years. Hudson now uses some of the newsletters as samples in her portfolio.

“There are all kinds (of people) at any given event, and I think that keeps you from stagnating in the cube rat race,” said Hudson of SCA events. “I’ve done more job networking through the SCA than anywhere else.” Hudson obtained her first desktop publishing job through a mutual friend in SCA. She is now a technical editor at Sun Microsystems, working on the Java Developer Connection.

Blazina lists her work in SCA in her

(l to r) Duchess Shaheena with Duchess Cyneswith (also known as Trish Blazina)
Dara Golden—Volunteer of the Month

Dara had never heard of the term technical writer until about 10 years ago. After she realized that she could write and make money (without sacrificing for the muse), she became interested in knowing all about this field. She met people in the technical industry, who explained what these writers did, and she was hooked. It required a career change, but she hasn’t been disappointed—she still loves writing.

She worked at Genentech for a number of years in a nontechnical writing position. After graduating from the Cal State University Hayward with a liberal arts degree, she worked to get technical writing positions. She worked as a contractor for a number of years at companies including Intel, Amdahl, and DHL. She most recently worked at Red Hat as a permanent employee, doing technical writing, Web pages, and editing. In addition to writing, she is also interested in style guides, HTML, editing, and research. When not thinking about articles, writing articles, or editing her husband’s Java articles, she is usually knitting or reading—all while taking care of her six-month-old boy.

The birth of her baby brought her to another career change—a full-time stay-at-home Mom. She remains available for part-time telecommuting positions. It’s another career change that she hasn’t regretted—yet.

ViewletBuilder—Animating Online Help

By Dara Golden

Who should use ViewletBuilder? “Everyone should,” says Thilo Lutzeler, the director of marketing for Qarbon, the creator of ViewletBuilder. Lutzeler, along with Alexandre Chailleux, founder and CTO, demonstrated ViewletBuilder at the July STC SV chapter meeting.

ViewletBuilder is a Java-based animated online help system. It assists you in taking screen shots and adding a number of elements, including text balloons, notes, sounds, and web links. You also can make the online help interactive by creating hot spots in which users must click to continue through the help system. The Viewlets, which are what the individual animations are called, are accessed through automatically generated Web pages.

Lutzeler and Chailleux created a Viewlet as part of their demonstration. Lutzeler added balloons and notes to the slides and changed the position of the cursor, after taking four screen shots. Creating the demonstration took about twenty minutes, but that included explanations to the audience. Recreating the demonstration later took about seven minutes from start to finish. Lutzeler mentioned that, “Creating a Viewlet of one hundred slides may take a few hours.”

Frequently Asked Questions

How Long Does It Take to Learn ViewletBuilder?

“It does not take very long to learn ViewletBuilder, probably a couple of hours,” Lutzeler says. Qarbon’s Website has Viewlets answering the most frequently asked questions, which aids in learning the program. Probably the most complicated tasks in ViewletBuilder is positioning the cursor. Lutzeler also explained how the positioning is represented, and one of Qarbon’s FAQs addresses this task.

What Can You Capture?

Anything that appears on the screen. For instance, it can show menus between...
Diane Harrington—Web Design  
College of San Mateo  

Alice Lee—Graphic Arts  
City College of San Francisco  

Lori Tetrick—Web Design  
College of the Redwoods

The winners had a professional attitude toward their work and they seemed to understand the relationship between their work and the customer. The work was not all about them.
Abstract: The presentation will show how to prepare distinctive resumes and portfolios that help make a memorable first impression. Participants also can schedule half-hour sessions with Gelein and Watt Sept. 28 for individual advice. The coaching sessions are free to participants and are sponsored by the Silicon Valley Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

Speakers: Lance Gelein, STC’s past president, has been a technical communicator for more than 20 years and is an international speaker. He is involved in technical and marketing communication, usability testing, Web site development, project management, and content management. His list of clients is a who’s who in industry including Intel, Delta Dental, Hewlett-Packard, Palm Inc., Kaiser-Permanente, Apple Computer and Pacific Bell.

Carolyn Watt has been involved in clear communication and workflow charting for 20 years. She describes her work as “helping companies help themselves” by discovering opportunities for improvement hidden in their workflow. Her clients include: Petro-Canada, Sun Life Insurance, Scotiabank, American Express, along with a name more familiar to California residents, Pacific Life.

For more information on the meeting and speakers, visit stc-siliconvalley.org.
Silicon Valley STC October 2001 Chapter Meeting
XGen: TOTALLY COOL TIPS, TRICKS AND TECHNIQUES

Abstract: IXGen is an add-on utility to Adobe FrameMaker that enables you to build Frame indexes faster than you can in Frame alone. The core of IXGen’s functionality is an editable list of markers. You can perform any Frame edit function on this list, then apply the edited list to your source documents.

Arguably, IXGen’s widest use is in indexing. However, you can use IXGen to build lists of any defined marker, paragraph type, or character type. You also can build lists of instances of keywords.

Speaker: Anne C. Barrett is a senior member of STC and a long-time technical writer and indexer.

She works at Cisco Systems, indexing all documentation for one of Cisco’s business units.

In her spare time she plays with wild bears. Anne has no relationship with FSA Tools other than that of a fairly satisfied customer.

Schedule:
6:00 p.m. Networking/Jobs corner/Beverages
7:00 p.m. Announcements
7:15 p.m. Presentation

Location: Four Points Hotel by Sheraton, 1250 Lakeside Drive, Sunnyvale, CA.

Dinner Buffet
Caesar Salad with Parmesan and Garlic Croutons, Tomatoes, Cucumbers, & Feta Cheese
Antipasto Tray
Cheese Tortellini with Tomato Basil Sauce
Charbroiled Chicken on Pesto Linguini
Seasonal Fresh Vegetables
Assorted Cakes and Fruit Pies
Coffee and Tea

Chapter Meeting Reservation, October 25, 2001
IXGen: TOTALLY COOL TIPS, TRICKS AND TECHNIQUES

Name: ____________________________________________
email address: ____________________________________________

☐ $20.00 member/food   ☐ $12.00 member/no food
☐ $30.00 non-member/food   ☐ $15.00 non-member/no food
☐ $15.00 student/food   ☐ $ 8.00 student/no food

Mail form and check to:
STC Meeting Reservations
PO Box 1224
Mountain View, CA 94042-1224

To guarantee your space for the October 25 meeting, mail your reservation, paid in full, on or before October 11. Your reservation is guaranteed only if payment is received by October 14. A $5 late fee will be charged for any reservation received after October 14. The late fee also applies to walk-ins. We regret that scheduled speakers occasionally cancel. If that happens, we make every effort to find a suitable substitute program.

Chapter Ponders Whether to Eliminate Summer Meetings

By Melissa Clark

The Silicon Valley Chapter Administrative Council met July 5, 2001 at Selectica in San Jose, and discussed the following:

President Guy Haas asked the following people to coordinate chapter awards:

Chapter Achievement Award: Emmah Smyth
Distinguished Chapter Service Award: Helen Hegelheimer
New Associate Fellow: Helen Hegelheimer

Haas also continues work on scripting for the new, updated Web site.

The council will hold a strategic planning meeting to discuss the coming calendar year and improvements in service to the chapter membership.

Bonnie Clark was elected as Memberships and Volunteers Manager. Bonnie plans to keep a chapter calendar of events to make it easier for members to plan volunteer commitments.

Public Relations Manager Beau Cain has formed a committee of volunteers to develop an informational brochure for the chapter.

The council discussed whether to hold chapter meetings during the summer, citing poor attendance during these months. Some members want to continue to holding meetings in the summer to keep a sense of consistency. The council will further discuss this issue at its strategic planning meeting.

Melissa Clark is a technical writer for Kudos Information, Inc. and is the chapter SIGs manager.
**Touchstone 2001 Technical Communication Competition Seeks Entries, Volunteers**

By Patrick Lufkin

Touchstone 2001, the California technical communication competition, is seeking both entries and volunteers. Sponsored by the Northern California STC chapters, the competition is expected to draw several hundred entries. Over the coming months, dozens of volunteers will be needed to process and judge entries, and to perform the many other tasks needed to make the competition a success.

Touchstone takes its name from a technique used in mineral assaying. Ores are scratched against a fine-grained stone, and judged by the color of the streak they left. “Touchstone” has come to mean a criterion used to assess value.

Each year Touchstone works to promote the profession, foster excellence in technical communication, and ensure that outstanding work gets the recognition it deserves. In past years, Touchstone has been primarily a Northern California competition, but this year it covers the entire state.

Entries will be judged in the fall, and awards will be announced in a celebration to be held in March 2002. Distinguished winners from Touchstone are automatically entered in the international competition, which presents its awards at the international STC conference in May.

**Entries Sought**

The competition is open to all those who strive to make technical information understandable regardless of how the communication is delivered. The competition seeks entries in 24 print and online categories—computer manuals, training materials, magazines and newsletters, technical and annual reports, online help systems and more.

Experienced technical communication professionals evaluate and provide written feedback for every entry. Winning entries earn awards and professional recognition.

Entrants need not be STC members. The deadline for entries is September 21, 2001.

**Volunteers Needed**

Touchstone also needs experienced professionals to help judge entries. Judges receive training and work in teams under a lead judge to evaluate entries, make awards, and provide feedback to entrants.

Judges see some of the best work being produced, hone their skills, add to their résumés, and meet and work with many of the leaders in the profession.

Proceeds from Touchstone support the Kenneth Gordon technical communication scholarships.

**To Volunteer**

To volunteer, call Richard Mateosian at 510-540-7745 or send email to xrm@pacbell.net.

Additional information about how to enter or volunteer is available on the Touchstone Website at www.stc-touchstone.org.

Patrick Lufkin is a senior judge for the competition and a past president of the San Francisco chapter of STC.

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**Richard Lederer to Keynote Region 8 Conference 2001**

Richard Lederer, linguist and author of scores of books and articles on the English language, will give the keynote address at the STC Region 8 Conference at the Marriott Hotel in Irvine, California, November 1-3, 2001.

The most recent additions to Lederer’s career are his post as Usage Editor of The Random House Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, Unabridged, and his regular guest slot on the radio show “All Things Considered,” hosted by Lisa Simeone. He also writes a syndicated column, “Looking at Language”; hosts his own radio show, "A Way with Words"; and maintains a busy schedule of speaking engagements with various educational and corporate groups.

Lederer’s career as a wordsmith began when, after earning a master of Arts and Teaching at Harvard University, he became a teacher of English and media at St. Paul’s School in Concord, NH. While he taught at St. Paul’s, he earned a Ph.D. in English and Linguistics at the University of New Hampshire and began writing books about the English language. The success of his books, starting with “Anguished English,” enabled him to explore other career opportunities. After his days at St. Paul’s, Lederer has written numerous additional books; contributed to such diverse publications as Writer’s Digest, Annals of Improbable Research, Mensa Bulletin, and Farmers’ Almanac; and appeared on numerous television and radio shows. For his speaking prowess, the San Diego Toastmasters awarded him the Leadership and Communications Award (1999) and the International Platform Association (the oldest speaking organization in the United States) awarded him first place among their showcase speakers (1994).

This year’s STC Region 8 Conference has a timely and exciting theme, “The Guerrilla Conference.” The conference will be packed with information to help you thrive professionally during the uncertain economic times ahead. For more information about the Region 8 Conference—including proposal submittal, conference pricing, conference registration, and hotel accommodations—visit the conference Website at stcregion8conference.org. Be sure to return to the site frequently, as it will be updated regularly.
Frequently Asked Questions

find previous issues.

Feedback
Send any feedback by the first Friday of the following month to curly@best.com. If your feedback is used, your name will appear along with your contribution in the next month’s issue.

Linda O’Maley has degrees in electrical engineering technology, sociology, and library science. She has been a technical writer for 15 years, a manager for 1 year, and has worked at nine companies. She currently works at Intel.

Document Definition: Frequently Asked Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience</th>
<th>Company Application Engineers, Design Engineers, and Marketing personnel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source Contributor and Materials</td>
<td>Customer Application Engineers, Design Engineers, and Marketing personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition</td>
<td>A Frequently Asked Questions document is a list of questions about and answers for common problems or queries that originate from customers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope</td>
<td>A Frequently Asked Questions document includes a series of chunked, brief information on solutions to low-level problems that can be easily solved. It can also include reference material and limited information on items such as required drivers and tested accessories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
<td>A company issues a Frequently Asked Questions document to decrease support costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use</td>
<td>Customers use a Frequently Asked Questions document both as a quick way to resolve problems and misunderstandings they have when using a company’s product and to learn about the product.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| General Outline | A series of comments in this format:
I. Question
II. Answer (if any exists)
Questions-and-answer pairs can be grouped by topic. |
| Distribution Schedule | • Initial releases can occur as soon as the answers to questions are solid and reliable.
• Re-releases occur as often as necessary, as a situation warrants.
• Typically, Application Engineering drives the release schedule, as it is Application Engineers who receive calls when there are problems or questions concerning a product. |
| Security | Typically, none is required. |
| How Writers Add Value | A Frequently Asked Questions document saves a company money by decreasing calls to the support staff. |
Cal State Hayward Offers New Program

By Peggy Lant

Cal State University Hayward now offers an Online Certificate in Technical and Professional Communication through the Division of Extended and Continuing Education.

Courses Available to Global Audience

The 28-unit program, comprised of eight graduate-level English courses, and is offered entirely online and takes about four quarters to complete. Because students work online, they can complete the certificate from anywhere in the world—as long as they have an Internet connection and a reliable computer. Course materials are provided by means of a course website. Students hand materials in electronically and receive feedback from their instructors and from other students by means of email, threaded discussion, and chat rooms.

Focus on Writing, Technology, and Professional Ethics

While many online programs offer self-paced, individual instruction, Cal State’s courses involve students closely with their instructors, with professional writers, and with one another. All courses are instructor led, and students begin to form professional networks as they complete the certificate. The program prepares students for entry-level professional writing positions. The curriculum is structured in such a way that students learn about the tools and the electronic protocols necessary for the well-prepared technical writer at the same time as they learn about more substantive issues of document design, appropriate presentation, and effective writing.

The four core courses cover introductory topics in technical and professional writing, and advanced courses offer preparation in subjects as disparate as copyright issues, document design with FrameMaker, technical editing, and report writing. All students are required to compile a capstone portfolio in three formats (online, CD or floppy, and hardcopy) with resumes, references, and work examples. When they complete the certificate program, students have a clear sense of how to apply for a position, where they can find online and onground assistance with their job search, how to manage a job interview, and how to flourish.

The Future

Directors and faculty of the Online Certificate in Technical and Professional Communication will continue to work with their Advisory Board of technical writers from the Bay Area to ensure that the program keeps pace with the changing needs of business and industry. The members of that board have guided the development of the program, and they have offered their help with classes, with marketing, and future directions. Directors hope to provide content-rich courses that also offer students practice with the software tools they will use. For instance, this summer a course in Document Design with FrameMaker was offered, and students discuss relevant issues about design, typography, layout, readers and users, while they learn to use the powerful document production tool, FrameMaker.

Online at Cal State Hayward

The Online Certificate in Technical and Professional Communication is not the first fully online program to come out of Cal State Hayward. The Division of Extended and Continuing Education also offers a fully online certificate in Online Teaching and Learning and an accredited Masters in Education with an option in Online Teaching and Learning through the Cal State School of Education and Allied Studies. Cal State faculty and staff are nationally recognized for their ability to forge online classroom experiences for their students. Other online courses include Spanish for teachers and an online English writing class for students in Cal State overseas MBA programs.

Further Information

Those interested in the program in any way—in being a student, in offering advisory board services, in serving as an instructor—are invited to consult the program website at www.online.cshayward.edu or to call 510.885.4384.

Peggy Lant is a professor of English at Cal State University, Hayward.