

## Authors or Experts Needed

A few months ago, many of you responded to the Suncoast chapter survey. The results have been tabulated and provide the focus for this issue's editorial.

If you find a topic near and dear to your heart among the suggestions chapter members have listed as important, think about writing an article that shares your expertise. If you haven't time, contact Phyllis Hunt to arrange a brief interview and let the friendly Suncoast ghost writer do the work.

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**Leaders Light the Way!**

J. Suzanna Laurent  
Director-Sponsor Region 5

## The Art of Recruiting Volunteers

When you need help with something, how do you go about finding volunteers? If you say, "I asked for volunteers, and no one offered to help," I can make several suggestions right away because this is the most frequently asked question I have as Director-Sponsor. The next question I hear the most is "How can I keep volunteers?" Now is the time when STC chapters hold their elections and start recruiting the volunteers who will lead their committees next year. Whether you are a chapter or project leader, a committee manager, or even a team leader looking for talented people to help, these tips should provide you with ideas about how to successfully recruit and keep those volunteers.

### Why People Volunteer

In order to persuade people to work with us effectively, we need to get to know and understand them better. It is through this understanding that we see volunteers as individuals and treat them as such as they interact with us—some help only once, while others are for a lifetime. In Sue Vineyard's book, *Secrets of Motivation: How to Get and Keep Volunteers and Paid Staff*, here are six of the characteristics she relates about today's volunteers:

- ◆ When individuals perceive that they are likely to learn something from a position, they are more likely to respond positively to a request to volunteer.
- ◆ Adults overwhelmingly (98 percent) believe that a great deal of satisfaction is gained by volunteering, and 76 percent think it is important to include volunteer activities in their lives.
- ◆ Most volunteers give an average of three to five hours a week.
- ◆ Time is one of their most valued commodities. Volunteers love to combine volunteering with other commitments so they can do good work, socialize, and model values to their children and co-workers all at the same time.
- ◆ Relationships are highly valued, so opportunities to work with those people they enjoy often are snapped up.
- ◆ Volunteers prefer to be creative as they solve problems. They believe in what they can do and want people to let them do it without red tape or hassles.

*(The Art of Recruiting Volunteers—Continued on page 3)*



## Leadership Message

### A Chapter on a Mission By Laura McGrover, President, Suncoast Chapter



The mission statement of the Suncoast chapter is to promote and advance the technical communication profession in the Suncoast area and support the professional development of technical communicators, current and future.

Our membership is diverse, but the chapter's purpose benefits technical communicators of all levels and disciplines. The admin council uses this mission statement to guide our activities and define our goals to ensure the chapter remains on course.

The Suncoast chapter is committed to delivering quality programs and opportunities that facilitate your continued growth. This past summer, you gave the chapter feedback about the services the chapter provides. In completing the survey and participating in the June Chapter Planning meeting, you indicated which topics, events, and activities interest you. As the admin council met to chart the year's programs, we made decisions based on your input and on how well a goal supported our mission.

Growth and development also follow getting involved in the chapter and Society. Work on special projects with the student chapter, become a mentor, present a topic at a monthly chapter meeting, enter the Florida Technical Communication Competition, or join a special interest group. These and other opportunities await. See "The Art of Recruiting Volunteers" (starting on page 1 of this issue) for ideas on how you can volunteer.

The most important investment you can make is in yourself. Take the time to pursue your professional development. I hope the Suncoast chapter will be a part of your volunteer effort.

*(The Art of Recruiting Volunteers—Continued from page 1)*

### Conveying What You Need

In order to tap into your chapter's volunteers, first you must know what needs to be accomplished. What responsibilities and deadlines are inherent in the project? How much time will it require? What guidelines are available that explain how to do the job? Is there ample funding for the project? How many people will be working on the project, and who will lead the team? What goals or awards will it help the chapter achieve? Once you have all of this information compiled, you are ready to find a volunteer. The challenge is to motivate volunteers to become involved and to work effectively to complete their project. By sharing this information with them, telling them what you expect of them, and sharing common goals and visions, you can often inspire them to volunteer!

### Motivating People to Volunteer

First, a quick idea about what motivating is NOT: it is not dishonest, manipulative, arm-twisting, bribing, threatening, or offering what you can't provide! Most of us have probably tried these things in the past, and they may work for a while, but they don't leave you or the volunteer in the best frame of mind. Now that we know these things don't work well, what works best? Try these ideas, because they could work for you.

Remember that volunteers who get their needs met participate and stay committed longer. Try to assign people to committees or projects that will help them meet their goals or learn skills they want to acquire. The work must provide value to the volunteer. Do you have people in your chapter who want to learn more about Web site development, public relations, or leadership? Perhaps they need to learn how to manage projects better, develop stronger organizational skills, or use their time more efficiently. All of these skills can be acquired or sharpened by participating in STC, then transferred to the office—and they also shine through on a resume.

Recognition is another powerful motivator. Rewarding successful performance along the way is a great catalyst! Everyone needs to feel appreciated. Sometimes a few well-chosen words of thanks can make all the difference. Rewards can include all kinds of things, verbal thanks in front of their peers, a certificate or plaque, nomination for a Society-level award such as the Distinguished Chapter Service Award, or a letter of appreciation sent to their employer that outlines their involvement. Be creative, but make sure they know they are appreciated!

Listening is an important way to support volunteers and one of the most effective ways you can help them achieve their goals. Invite people to come to you with any concerns they have after they begin work. The purpose of good listening is to get a better understanding of what is going on and what needs to be done to help them solve their issues. If you listen well, you can hear what is really being said!

A great resource for more information on this topic is the *STC Chapter Handbook*. If you haven't read the section entitled "How to Recruit and Keep Volunteers" by Judy Glick-Smith, do it as soon as possible. This volume of great information can be found on the STC Web site at <http://www.stc.org> under For Leaders, Reference Material.

When you encourage people to volunteer, you are offering them opportunities that can help them develop confidence in themselves and their own abilities. When you find out what motivates people, provide opportunities to help them meet their goals, listen to what they have to say, and recognize them often for their contributions, volunteers are more likely to return for new assignments as they continue on their mission to become the best they can be.

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## Structured Writing for Single Sourcing

JoAnn Hackos Workshop

October 29-30, 2001, Atlanta, GA

Learn how to design flexible structures for the types of information your users need. Discover how to write using XML tags, edit text for consistency, and manage the writing process in a single-source environment. Well-structured content is the key to single-sourcing and is a necessity for moving to an XML authoring environment.

When: October 29-30, 2001, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Where: Atlanta, GA

Fee: \$725, almost 40% off the standard rate

Register Online:

<http://www.usabledesign.com/03register/03register.htm> -or-

Register by phone: (303) 234-0123

Maximum: 25 seats

### You'll learn how to:

- Understand the importance of having a comprehensive Information Model with an integrated user model to meet customer needs
- Revise an Information Model to make it a usable tool for the entire life-cycle of the project
- Integrate information about users into the Information Model using the User Profile Matrices and other user modeling tools
- Apply the user model to make well-targeted decisions about information types and content units, writing the content units, and writing variations
- Apply minimalist principles throughout the information-development process
- Decide what information types are needed to support the Information Model, such as procedures, process, conceptual overviews, and so on
- Develop standard information types for each type of information that users require
- Create standard content units for each information type
- Learn to write content units consistently and ensure that the content is appropriate and well written
- Create standard authoring templates to produce the information types
- Learn to write variations of content units depending upon the single-source dimensions selected
- Learn to tag the variations with meta data tags so that information can be located for reuse and unique information can be delivered to user communities

You'll also receive a workbook amply illustrated with good and bad examples.

For JoAnn Hackos' bio or more information, visit <http://www.usabledesign.com>.

## Managing Your Documentation Projects

Bill Hackos Workshop

November 28-29, 2001, Atlanta, GA

Learn how to control your projects so you can sleep better at night. Plan to attend "Managing Your Documentation Projects." Pleasant dreams!

When: November 28-29, 2001, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Where: Atlanta, GA

Host: Datalex

Fee: \$725.00, almost 40% off the standard rate

Register Online:

[http://www.usabledesign.com/03register/03register.](http://www.usabledesign.com/03register/03register.htm)

[htm](http://www.usabledesign.com/03register/03register.htm) -or- Register by phone: (303) 234-0123

Maximum: 25 seats

### How will this seminar benefit you?

If you can keep your projects under control in the midst of chaos, everyone will think you're a miracle worker. If you can bring a semblance of order into the chaos, you'll at least be a hero. This seminar gives you the tools to succeed.

### How will this seminar benefit your organization?

Organizations benefit when projects get done on time and on budget, but everyone benefits when the same projects get done well. This seminar gives your project managers the insight they need to know what to do and when to do it.

### You will learn to:

- \* Develop a plan and follow through
- \* Know what has to happen and when
- \* Avoid procrastination
- \* Track what everyone is doing and when they are supposed to be finished
- \* Appreciate the need to pay attention to the details

### Who should attend:

- \* Project and product managers
- \* Development managers
- \* Training and documentation managers
- \* Line managers with responsibility for projects
- \* Anyone who is responsible for setting up a project and ensuring that it comes in on schedule and within budget

For Bill Hackos' bio or more information, visit <http://www.usabledesign.com>.



## November Chapter Meeting & Workshop Previews

### Creating Documentation Plans

If you attended the STC meeting in March and heard John Hedtke's presentation via telephone on "Pre-emptive Project Planning," just imagine how exciting and informative he is in person. The Suncoast STC chapter is bringing John Hedtke to Clearwater for an in-person presentation of "Creating Documentation Plans." We look forward to seeing you there.

**When:** Thursday, November 1  
Dinner at 6:00 p.m.  
Presentation begins at 6:30 p.m.

**Where:** VeriFone, 300 S. Park Place, Clearwater

**Cost:** \$13.00

**Meeting Reservation:** Contact Heidi by October 29  
kelchner@tampabay.rr.com

### Captive vs. Freelance: Making an Informed Decision Workshop

If you have ever wondered whether you were cut out for the glamorous, high paying, and sometimes bohemian lifestyle of a freelance existence, then don't miss the chance to find out which lifestyle suits you on Saturday, November 3, at John Hedtke's workshop, "Captive vs. Freelance: Making an Informed Decision."

This day-long workshop will help you identify the lifestyle that suits YOU. You'll learn the pros and cons of working in a full-time job and the freelance environment, how to identify your personal employment goals, and how to fit these goals into each career path.

**When:** Saturday, November 3  
10:00 a.m.-5:00 p.m. (Lunch is included)

**Where:** VeriFone, 300 S. Park Place, Clearwater

**Cost:** \$35.00

**Workshop Reservation:** leargle@microd.com -or-  
(727) 372-0346.

To reserve a seat, send check or money order payable to Suncoast STC by October 27 to:

Lore Eargle  
4984 Wellbrook Dr.  
New Port Richey, FL 34653

(Walk-ins welcome but please RSVP so we can make sure we have a chair and lunch for you).

## PCOC (Practical Conference on Communication)

**When:** Friday, November 2

**Where:** Knoxville, TN

**Cost:** \$100.00; students \$25

**Reservation:** See Events at <http://www.stc-etc.org>

This Region 3 program includes many well-known speakers and relevant topics:

- JoAnn T. Hackos—Single Source and Content Management Trends
- Frederick M. O'Hara, Jr.—Art in the Service of Science
- Ginny Redish—Making Information Visual: Creating Effective Web Pages
- Julia S. Kelley—Project Management: A Practical Tool for Communication Professionals
- Donald C. Samson, Jr.—Scientific Writing vs. Scientific Communication: Audiences, Purposes, and Styles
- Jeanne Dole—ORNL Publishing Services

Even if you know your career choice, you'll find the workshop relevant. Hedtke will guide you through such topics as:

- **Captive vs. Freelance.** The specifics of choosing one over the other.
- **Finance, Taxes, and Insurance.** The things you need to know to be financially secure.
- **Setting Up a Home Office.** Your home office needs, whether captive or freelance.
- **Hey, Kids! Become an Author at Home in Your Spare Time and Earn Bucks!** This is probably the best thing you can do in either a captive or freelance career and here's how.

By the end of the workshop, you'll not only be on your way to learning the career path that suits you, but you'll also leave with Hedtke's tips on finding work, writing documentation plans, and managing projects.

- ◆ For additional information and a John Hedtke biography, see <http://www.stc-southeast.org/suncoast/meetings.htm>
- ◆ A complete list of books, articles, projects, and awards can be found at John's Web site <http://www.hedtke.com>.

# Suncoast Chapter & FTCC

By Jodee Earnest

The Suncoast chapter is actively seeking judges to participate in this year's Florida Technical Communication Competition (FTCC). According to Scott Havens, the judges recruiting chairman, about a dozen people have submitted applications for judging so far. Two dozen more are needed to ensure that there are enough judges for each category in the competition.

There are 17 print publication categories, including promotional materials, quick reference guides, hardware and software guides, training materials, annual reports, organizational manuals, magazines, newsletters, technical reports, books, and scholarly/professional articles and journals.

Online categories include online help, demonstrations, online books, tutorials, reference materials, technical marketing materials, and user support tools. Please note that this year's FTCC will NOT include an art competition. Art entries may be submitted to the Atlanta chapter competition.

For more information,

- ◆ Visit <http://www.stcatlanta.org> -or-
- ◆ E-mail [kitty@automatedlogic.com](mailto:kitty@automatedlogic.com).

"Don't worry if you've never been a judge before," Scott says. "If you've been in the business for a year or two and you know good documents when you see them, then you should consider applying to be a judge. It's informative, fun, and a great thing to have on your resume!"

"The benefits of being a judge are numerous," Scott adds. "Judges get to see the best of what's being produced across Florida, as well as the opportunity to validate their own critical skills by comparing their evaluation with those of others. In addition, judges can garner new ideas for their own projects based on the entries they evaluate."

In an effort to make the judging process easier this year, the FTCC committee is providing remote judging opportunities. This is particularly helpful for those who will be judging the online entries.

In addition, two one-hour training sessions will be held via teleconference on September 29 and October 6. These sessions will cover the judging process and provide tips based on the past experiences of previous judges.

Judges are typically assigned to teams of three, with one team assigned to each category. Each team evaluates all of the entries for that category. Entries will be distributed to the judges in early October.

Judges will have approximately one month to review their assigned entries and prepare their comments. Each entry is judged based on its own merits against a set of objective criteria.

For all entries, judges will conduct their own remote consensus sessions (via teleconference or other mutually agreeable means). There is one lead judge on each team. The judges from each team will reach a consensus for each entry by early November. The results from those sessions will then be sent to the FTCC Committee for Best of Show judging.

For additional details, see the FTCC Web site <http://www.stc-southeast.org/Suncoast/FTCC.htm>

## STC Early Renewal for 2002

STC is asking for your help. The 2002 dues renewal season is here, and you can help us conserve STC funds by renewing online and early.

Renewing online is quick and convenient. If done early, it allows us to save money on printing and postage costs for paper renewal forms. Not only does renewing online and early help us conserve STC funds, but it reduces our use of paper—thus helping the environment.

Renewing online is easy—you pay by credit card on STC's secure Web site. The Web form will ask you for your postal/zip code and your membership number.

If you decide not to renew at this time, a renewal form will be mailed to you in late November.

Don't put it off—please renew online today at <http://www.stc.org/renew.html>

## Chapter Survey Feedback

By Sheryl Nowak

The Suncoast chapter surveyed its membership earlier this year and achieved better than the often-quoted 10 percent average for returns. Despite the lack of free gifts or reduced costs, 18 percent of you (49 of 266 members) responded to our request for information and provided the new officers with important feedback for the coming year.

Some of your suggestions have already been implemented. For example, *WriteUp* is once again being mailed to members, and several of the requested meeting topics are in the planning stages. Other responses require more time or study to implement (such as the satellite chapter in Sarasota).

Most of the 18 percent who responded have been STC members for quite some time – more than seven years on average. Surprisingly, most of you have also been Suncoast members for more than six years. While the Tampa/St. Petersburg area may have many transient workers in some areas, technical communicators who maintain professional ties with STC are not transient.

Thirty-one of the 49 respondents are also members of various Special Interest Groups (SIGs) within STC. If the Suncoast chapter sponsored a SIG, you would prefer it to be centered around Instructional Design and Learning, Consulting and Independent Contracting, Online Information, Policies and Procedures, or Usability in that order.

Many of you are occasional attendees at Suncoast meetings, with 33 of the 49 attending six or fewer meetings per year. Apparently the quality of the chapter programs is acceptable (scoring 4.96 out of 7), and the cost is reasonable (scoring 3.43 where a lower score indicates less expense).

Your suggestions for improvement were varied and helpful: Get the meeting notices out in a timely fashion; start and end meetings on time; be sure equipment works; provide name tags and receipts; pick better locations suitable for the program and viewing ease; move some meetings closer to Sarasota; put more emphasis on quality speakers and value-added programs.

The Suncoast-sponsored workshops fared better in the scoring but were also considered more expensive, proving that quality sometimes comes with price. Thirty-four of the 49 have attended an STC conference.

Most of you cited values of the Florida Technical Communication Competition (FTCC), but many of you do not enter, primarily because of the proprietary nature of your work. Perhaps this area requires more employer education from you and the Suncoast chapter. Most of you would like to see the winners of FTCC and the International competitions, too.

*Intercom* and *WriteUp* are more widely read than the SIG newsletters or *Technical Communication*. The Suncoast and STC national Web site are more frequently visited than the Region 3 Web site. You are looking for new ideas, how other members work, new technology, and software updates when you surf or read the magazines or newsletters.

While many of you value your membership in STC and the Suncoast chapter in particular, you also pointed out some issues that need to be addressed. Welcoming new members and inviting them into “the club” is an important and on-going task that should engage all of us (officers and general members).

Without the infusion of new members, chapters do run the risk of becoming social organizations and, sadly, cliques. Without new members who are encouraged to participate, chapters must rely on the same rotation of officers (and sometimes ideas).

Just as important as new members are our retiring members who often lose touch with former acquaintances and newer technology. Welcoming retired members is also important because they have valuable experiences to share, if only they felt comfortable with the younger crowd. Focusing on technology to the exclusion of communication can shut out the retirees who understand communicating but perhaps not the latest and greatest software or gadget.

STC and the Suncoast chapter rated 5.58 and 5.1 out of 7, respectively in member satisfaction among those who participated in the survey. That’s quite a respectable showing, but together we can make it better.

Keep your ideas coming. Become a *WriteUp* contributor. Volunteer to help with a project. Consider becoming an officer next year. Most important, get to the meetings and talk to everyone. Don’t isolate yourself – invite someone you don’t know to join you at your table, and make the meeting enjoyable by sharing your friendship and knowledge.

## Getting a Heads Up— September Meeting Recap By Karlene Robinson

At the September meeting Diane Gentile, an operations documentation specialist at TSI Communications, demonstrated how an understanding of the product development cycle and the documentation produced can give us all a "heads up."



Diane Gentile

### Product Development Cycle

The Product Development Cycle provides a timeline with a predictable series of events necessary to take an idea and make it a reality. The different steps can be broken down into three main phases:

1. Business Case Development
2. Product Definition and Development
3. Beta and/or Implementation

### Phase One: Business Case Development

This phase establishes whether it is feasible to get a product to market and when. It involves the writing of the business plan and the development of a project plan. The documents typically produced during the business case development phase are concept proposal outline, work plan outline, opportunity assessment outline, business case outline, and strategic requisition. This documentation is of least relevance to technical communicators.

*(Getting a Heads Up—Continued on page 9)*

## Web Site Weaknesses— August Meeting Recap By Karlene Robinson

At the August meeting John Arnaldi, principal of Usability Specialists (<http://www.UsabilitySpecialists.com>), discussed:



John Arnaldi

- ◆ Ten common Web site problems that reduce usability
- ◆ An effective methodology for testing and evaluating Web sites

### Ten Fatal Flaws

John identified the following ten "fatal flaws" and associated principles for effective Web design:

1. Major Malfunctions
  - Web sites must be functional and stable.
2. Slow Response Time
  - Web sites must respond quickly.
3. Illegible Text
  - Maximize the legibility of text by:
    - ◇ Using legible fonts and font sizes
    - ◇ Maximizing contrast between the text and backgrounds
    - ◇ Keeping lines of text under 60 characters wide

*(Web Site Weaknesses—Continued on page 9)*

## Mingling Over Margaritas—Recap of Chapter Summer Social By Karlene Robinson

This year's summer social attracted a lively crowd of technical writers from around the area. The venue for the gathering was Dan Marinos—a bustling restaurant and bar located in the recently completed BayWalk complex in downtown St. Petersburg. Everyone seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to meet new faces and catch up with some of the more familiar ones over wonderfully decadent cocktails.

The margaritas are a house speciality at Dan Marinos and were both eye-catching and delicious!

Our thanks to Heidi Kelchner, the chapter's new Area Program Coordinator, for organizing this event.



From the left: Dina Stenz, Karen Bachmann, Martha and Jerry Collins, Karin Carlan, Carrie Campbell, Suzanne Norman, Karlene Robinson, Carlene Cobb, Mark Lewis, and Heidi Kelchner

## Phase Two: Product Definition and Development

The purpose of this phase is to move from general concept to specific design, development, and testing. It involves writing system requirements, high level design (HLD), detailed design (DD), coding and unit testing, and system testing.

Following is a list of the documents typically produced during this phase:

- Product Plan
- Product Requirements
- High Level Design Document
- Detailed Design Document
- Code and Unit Testing
- Product Support Plan
- Product Delivery Work Plan
- Pro Forma Statement

## Phase Three: Beta and/or Implementation

The purpose of phase three is to test all components of the system within a production environment and then proceed to sales and installation. The documents technical communicators are typically responsible for producing are detailed design, system documentation, operations documentation, application support documentation, user documentation, system release notes, training materials, and customer notifications.

## The Challenge

Now that we all have a better understanding of the product development cycle, Diane challenges us all to get more involved. She recommends asking for copies of specific documents, requesting that your name be added to the mailing list, and making sure you are included in development meetings.

If you are able to gain access to the information you need early on in the process, you can potentially avoid the last minute panic so often associated with document production!

4. Windows Don't Fit
  - Windows must fit the screen of the average user in your target audience without horizontal scrolling.
5. Hoop-Jumping
  - Clear the path between the users and their goals.
6. Nightmare Navigation
  - Buttons must use clear and consistent terminology and be placed consistently throughout the Web site.
  - Links must be recognizable as links and be used sparingly throughout the document.
  - The number of options in a navigation bar should be limited to five to eight choices.
  - Don't use pull-downs or mouse-overs to display additional navigation bars.

Other Navigation Features:

  - Use consistent page titles.
  - Clearly indicate the user's location within the site.
  - Eliminate redundancy of navigation items so you don't lead user back to the same place.
  - Minimize number of clicks needed to reach their target.
  - Topics and navigation must be well organized.
  - Provide effective browse and search.
  - Provide a way for each user type to focus on his or her needs.
  - Provide a site map for larger sites.
7. Weak Content
  - Content must be detailed, helpful and compelling.
8. Reprehensible Rhetoric
  - Avoid promotional hype.
  - Content should be concise, easy to scan and objective (Markes and Nielsen, January 6, 1998).
9. Information Overload
  - Keep it simple. Less is more.
  - Avoid promotional hype.
  - Desired content must be easy to find.
  - Present content in easy-to-read chunks.
  - Balance content with white space.
10. Virtual Reality
  - The purpose of the site must be made clear on the first page.
  - Contact information must be complete and easy to find.

## Web Site Evaluation

The "use case" approach to Web site evaluation is a very effective alternative where you have limited resources. In a use case, you:

- 1) Identify and describe each user type.
- 2) Choose at least one task for each user type.
- 3) In the user's words, describe the actions that would be required to complete that task.

Note: If you would like a copy of the handout for this presentation, please contact John Arnaldi (jarnaldi@gte.net).

## Where Do You Look for Inspiration?

By Rob Houser, Region 3 Director-Sponsor

Read any good technical manuals lately? What is your favorite online Help system? Who is your favorite brochure designer? Have you ever started reading a proposal and just couldn't put it down until you finished it? When is the last time a newsletter made you cry tears of joy?

No, these are not nerdy pick-up lines for technical communicators. They may, in fact, be legitimate questions that we sometimes forget to ask ourselves as technical communicators. Okay, maybe not that last one.

When I was in high school, my favorite English teacher always said, "If you want to learn to write, you have to read, read, read." Of course, she was talking about writing and reading fiction, but shouldn't we approach technical information the same way?

How can we improve our ability to write and design if we don't seek work by our peers and analyze it critically? I don't mean critically in the sense that we point out the shortcomings of a writer under real-world constraints (most of us instinctively do that). Rather, I mean that we should read and reread examples of technical communication and try to identify what makes them effective.

We should study the winners of our publications, art, and online competitions. We should dig out the manuals that came with the products we bought recently and look at the documentation more closely to see if we can learn anything new. We should grab those brochures about different illnesses and diseases on the wall at the doctor's office; however, make sure nobody's watching you get them all or nobody will want to sit next to you.

If you can't keep the helpful manual you're using, make a photocopy of a few representative pages. Make screen shots of well-done help systems. View the source of that Web-based training with the creative effects.

We need models of effective communication to study and even emulate to improve our skills and set professional standards. I recommend dedicating a box or drawer for storing these examples. Keep them close. Thumb through them when you're stuck or brainstorming to solve a new communication problem.

If you haven't read a good piece of technical information lately, let me encourage you to seek out some of those that I like so much.

### Where Rob Looks for Inspiration

#### User Manuals

- Getting Results with Microsoft Office 97 (<http://office.microsoft.com/downloads/9798/gresults.aspx>)
- Assembly instructions from Sauder office furniture  
(check out the supplemental tips at <http://www.sauder.com/Tips>)
- HP CD-Writer Plus User's Guide (delivered online with product)

#### Help

- Microsoft Works (for early, user-centered embedded help)
- TurboTax (for blending different levels of information/instruction)
- PowerPoint (for well-written field-level Help)

#### Web Sites

- Immunization Information on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site  
(<http://www.cdc.gov/nip/>)
- NASA for Kids (<http://kids.msfc.nasa.gov/>)

#### Training

- Epson Knoware University (<http://knoware.epson.com/>)
- Lotus SmartSuite Tutorials (on CD with product)



## Help System Maintenance

By Jim Sands,  
Chicago STC

In today's downsized environment, with its accompanying workloads and deadlines, maintenance is often overlooked. Face it, we barely have time to meet scheduled production needs, let alone look for things to do.

However, Help systems can erode over a period of time and reflect badly on your department. As always, an ounce of prevention is better than a pound of cure in the long run. I've listed a few suggestions that can provide maximum results with minimum effort.

### At Release Time:

Contact your Help Desk and establish a communication link for receiving problem resolutions. Use this information to create content for future troubleshooting topics, and to modify other Help topics as needed.

### Every Month:

Take a few minutes to run applications you have written Help for, to ensure that the Help still works. This will allow you to catch file management problems that sometimes occur during "patches" or upgrades.

### Every 3 Months:

Schedule a client meeting to discuss future enhancements and upgrades. This keeps you in the development loop and prevents planning panic later.

### Every 6-12 Months:

Upgrade your authoring tool(s) to the latest version, and upgrade all of your Help projects. This keeps your writers and Help systems current with the latest technology, and makes technical support easier to get when you need it.

In summary, monitor each Help system after release, and keep in touch with your clients. Listen to their comments, because your users are the driving force behind future changes and new projects.

### Have a question about Help?

Jim Sands is an independent Help consultant and welcomes your questions and comments. Send questions via

- ◆ <http://www.help101.org>,
- ◆ [jsands@help101.org](mailto:jsands@help101.org), -or-
- ◆ call (847) 918-8761

All questions will be answered in *Help 101* rather than individually.

## USF Educational Outreach May Reach Your Writing Needs

By Martha Lakis,  
University of South Florida

We've been busy here at USF! One of our missions is to provide timely training for professional development. Here is an overview of our writing courses.

Certification for Technical Communications has blossomed! We are now running this 10-week course (24 sessions—all inclusive, no open enrollment) on an ongoing basis. Subjects include Writing for Technical Fields; Product Development Cycle; Graphical Communication; Information Architecture; Writing Project Management; Technical Editing; Publishing with Word 2000, and Developing Print Documentation. A portfolio is due at the end of the course.

We also offer the following open-enrollment courses: Reviewing Basic Grammar, Writing for the Web, Effective Business Writing, and Writing Effectively.

For those creative authors, starting in September we are offering Advanced Situation Comedy, Writing Short Fiction II, Creativity for Writers, Improvisation for the Writer, Writing Popular Novels II, Screenwriting, Marketing Your Writing, Writing Your Life Stories, and Writing and Selling Magazine Articles.

All courses are held on the Tampa campus, but we also offer contract writing classes customized for corporate needs.

If you have any questions about these courses, please contact Martha Lakis at (813) 974-8021.



## STC Contact Details

### Society for Technical Communication

901 N. Stuart St., #904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1822  
(703) 522-4114

E-mail: [stc@stc-va.org](mailto:stc@stc-va.org)

Society: <http://www.stc.org/>

Region 3: <http://www.stcregion.org/region3>

Suncoast: <http://www.stc-southeast.org/suncoast>

# WriteUp

**Suncoast Newsletter**

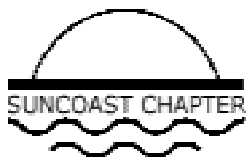
6465 142nd Ave. N.

Apt. J-101

Clearwater, FL 33760-2714

*Address Correction Requested*

**First Class Mail**



## Calendar of Events

*Subject to Change*

**WriteUp Copy Deadline  
for Next Issue:  
November 10, 2001**



**Mission Statement:  
Designing the future of  
technical communication.**

**Obtain meeting updates at our Web site:**

<http://www.stc-southeast.org/suncoast/>

November 1	Creating Documentation Plans with John Hedtke 6:00 p.m. Dinner, VeriFone, Clearwater RSVP to: kelchner@tampabay.rr.com
November 3	Captive vs. Freelance: Making an Informed Decision Workshop with John Hedtke See page 5 for details.
December 6	Social, Location Pending
January 19	FTCC Banquet, Feathersound, Clearwater (no January chapter meeting)