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TC-FORUM (Technical Communicators' Forum) is a non-profit initiative supported by INTECOM, the International Council for Technical Communication.

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**Publisher:**  
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 Stuttgart, Germany

**Language & Style:**  
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 Lisa Moretto, Rochester, NY, USA

**Graphics & Illustrations:**  
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 Sweden

**Production:**  
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 Germany

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**Next issues:**  
 ▶ December (deadline 20 October)  
 ▶ March 2001 (deadline 20 January)

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\* Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example  
 • RU for Readability / Quality / Usability  
 • SA for Special Aspects

The contributions (articles or comments) are numbered consecutively through the different issues of TC-Forum. When commenting to any of the contributions, please refer to these "codes" for ease of understanding.



## Dear colleagues,

Forum 2000 is over - the international conference for technical communicators took place at the Commonwealth Centre in London on June 12 - 14, 2000. Some 320 delegates and 20 exhibitors experienced the

The two conference days offered 32 Information Sessions, 53 Idea Markets and several ad-hoc meetings: a huge program that made it necessary to decide which sessions to attend and which to leave out. The decision

other conference that is so widely documented as a Forum conference.

But I must admit that the wish to communicate personally with colleagues from other countries was so strong, and the program was so extensive, that I had a hard time combining sessions and personal talks within the conference's two days. So perhaps we can give some advice to the organizers of the next Forum conference: make it a day longer.



*Ulf L. Anderson, founder of the Forum Conferences, giving a presentation at the Idea Market.*

sixth Forum since 1975. The Commonwealth Institute in London provided a perfect venue, and the organizers from ISTC (UK), STC (USA), IEEE-PCS, and tekomp (Germany) gave their best to make it an effective and enjoyable conference. Congratulations and thanks to all who have contributed.

was helped by the conference handbook (the *Preseedings*) mailed to delegates a month ahead of the conference, which contained descriptions of most of the topics. There will be another conference handbook - the *Postharvest* - which will be distributed to conference participants towards the end of the year. It will contain the results of discussions during the individual active presentations. Indeed, there is hardly any

The presentations at Forum 2000 have shown that Information Technology, and with it the spectrum of tasks of TCs, have been exploding. Experience indicates a growing need for technical communicators with wider capabilities in the years to come. The keynote speaker, Graham K. Whitehead (UK), opened Forum 2000 with fascinating perspectives of "IP Packets Everywhere: Nothing moves without information".

*Hans Trünzger*

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## Impressions on Forum 2000

*by Mark Hanigan, USA*

Upon entering the Commonwealth Centre, the motif was set before the first word was spoken, before the first piece of literature was received. Lining the walkway were flagpoles, each adorned with one of the flags of the participating countries.

Truly, Forum 2000 was a global event. Technical communicators gathered from over 23 nations, representing many of the 15 member organisations of INTECOM, our confederation of technical communications societies. For me it was a pleasure to be a part of all this as a representative of my professional organisation, the Society for Technical Communication, STC.

It amazed me to learn, through my conversations and through participation in the sessions and idea markets, how much we have in common in pursuit of our chosen profession! Yet the differences are equally clear: different languages, products, cultures, and market places provide us each with unique challenges.

Of the many wonderful memories I took home, perhaps the most cherished was partnering with my friend and colleague, Anke Harris, President of the Institute for Scientific and Technical Communication, ISTC, on an idea market whose theme was globalisation. We heard a plethora of ideas and challenges for a wide array of individuals who stopped by our station.

May I offer this observation about my experience: If communication is the pathway to global peace, then we the technical communicators are among the peacemakers.

I thank Forum 2000 for inviting me to be a part of this.



**MARK HANIGAN**

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*By Ami Wright, USA*

The Forum conference, like most conferences, was a good way to find out about what is happening in the technical communication field outside the areas on which I usually focus. Unlike many other conferences, the Forum conference had a strong global emphasis. This was in evidence from the first contact: approaching the entrance to the conference centre and encountering the flags of every country represented at the conference with the word "welcome" in the language of that country. This continued throughout the conference: many nationalities were represented among the presenters and the participants, and the topics of the presentations often had an international perspective.

True to the original concept, I had numerous interesting encounters during the idea markets, breaks, and lunches. Sometimes these were conversations with presenters or activators on something related to the topic of their presentation. Sometimes these were with other participants like myself, on topics that we chanced upon. Many people have good ideas and interesting things to say; not everyone is inclined to create a presentation about them. The Forum is designed to make it easy for participants to interact with other participants and discover those interesting things that aren't in the presentations. I was also pleased to meet many people in person that previously I knew only via e-mail.

For me, the Forum 2000 conference was a continuation of the ideas and interaction found in TC-FORUM. For those people who attended previous Forum conferences, it was probably the reverse.

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## Impressions on Forum 2000

**By Judith E. Shenouda, USA**

Sharing impressions of Forum 2000 provides a wonderful opportunity to reflect.

I received the handy Planning Guide on Monday at Activator's Day and selectively checked off how I would spend my time. Tuesday was great. I followed my plan, which included Academy and Industry Relations by Brenda Sims and Neil Cobb and Information Mapping by Rebecca Smith, as well as opportunities to discuss Document Plans at the Network Luncheon and the Information Session.

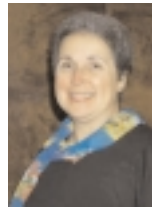
On Wednesday Ilona Bernhart, from Océ, presented the elements of Enterprise Document Strategy, which addressed information management, document management, and digital print-on-demand issues. The lively debate between Barbara Giammona and Bogo Vatovec on Technical Communication Quality struck me as the debate that occurs between the publications manager, who cares about standards and language, and the subject matter expert, who accepts work that is good enough, though imperfect.

Notes on the two flipchart sheets from Wednesday's Idea Market on New Product Development serve as reminders that a Document Plan for a new product can include a number of elements that I had not considered. These will be addressed in the Post Harvest.

Emails I have since received from Maaïke Groenewege, Leena Pihlajamäki, Tim Ross, Ray Saffin, Kevin Thompson, and William Wright convey that technical communicators share common concerns. These colleagues requested a copy of Selling Your Comprehensive Document Plan to the Project Manager. How very nice to be able to contribute to their efforts.

Forum 2000 confirmed that Forum really is a great conference format.

*Lively debates during the conference are followed by email contacts afterwards.*



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*The exhibition stand of TC-FORUM (left) and an information session.*



## Impressions on Forum 2000

*By Peter Greenfield, UK*

My general impression was that it was a very useful conference and that the delegate list covered a wide range of knowledge and culture; therefore it was just what I paid my money for in an international conference. I do think it is a shame that the hotels were not a part of the conference centre as the talk in the bar is always useful, and indeed the basis of the Forum principle. That said, the evening events were very enjoyable, if a little rushed.

*What an excellent conference! But we should allow more time for everyone to get together and chat.*

The programme (and I have to declare here that I was a member of the programme committee) was very good and did cover the topics that I expected and hoped to see. However there was a very full programme and it was physically impossible to get to all the events that I wished to. In that view I thought that the lecture sessions could have been reduced to just the big issues to give time for the information sessions, or maybe the information sessions could be repeated and jumbled so that we had a second chance.

I enjoyed the debate session I managed to attend and think this is an interesting development - if the technology was available it would be fun to increase the audience on these sessions and maybe have a web bulletin board following the session. For me this added a bit of fun to the proceedings.

The venue was very good, ideally situated in a good area of London and close to tourist areas. The layout at first was a bit confusing and you did feel at times that you had to walk miles to the various rooms, but it did have the advantage that there was little interference between the various activities. I did hear criticism that the activator room was too large and noisy, but I think that is a main part of the idea market and that to have broken it down into smaller rooms would have lost the mobility aspect.

I am not too sure what success the companies in the exhibition had. Obviously the exhibition is a good revenue stream, but to be honest I did not find enough time to get to see the companies that were exhibiting. I do not know how you find more time without weakening the programme, and after all we only meet every 5 years; perhaps this is part of my point about using a venue where everything is together - what the size of such a place would be I do not know.

In general I thought it was an excellent conference and that the Forum style still works very well. We should be careful not to move too far away from the original format, to use technology more, and to allow more time for everyone to get together and chat.



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# Society for Technical Communication (STC), USA

**By Jeffrey Hibbard, USA**

STC is the largest and one of the oldest of the many technical communication societies worldwide. The history of the society dates from 1953, when two separate organizations were founded on the east coast of the USA: the Society of Technical Writers (STW) in New York and the Association of Technical Writers and Editors (TWE) in Boston. In 1954, a third organization, the Technical Publishing Society (TPS), was formed in Los Angeles on the west coast of the USA. STW and TWE were merged in 1957 to form the Society for Technical Writers and Editors (STWE), and in 1960 STWE and TPS were merged to form the Society for Technical Writers and Publishers (STWP). Finally, in 1971 the STWP changed its name to the Society for Technical Communication (STC).

STC is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. Located in 144 chapters (124 in the USA, 9 in Canada, and 11 in other nations worldwide), its more than 24,000 members include technical writers, editors, educators and students, documentation specialists, graphic artists, technical illustrators, information architects and developers, multimedia artists, trainers, translators, Web and intranet page designers, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Through the efforts of a small full-time staff and a large network of member volunteers, STC promotes the public welfare by educating its members and industry about issues concerning technical communication. Each year STC sponsors an international conference and several regional conferences, publishes a quarterly magazine, a scholarly journal, and a number of chapter and special-interest newsletters, and provides a variety of scholarships, internships, fellowships, and research grants.

Currently of interest is the 48th STC Annual Conference, which will be held on 13–16 May, 2001, in Chicago, Illinois, USA. The conference theme will be "2001 – A Global Communication Odyssey", and the call for presentation proposals has already been published.

More information about STC, as well as the Call for Proposals for the 48th STCAC and other STC publications and literature, can be found at the STC Web site, <http://www.stc-va.org>.

## Publications:

*InterCom* (a monthly magazine containing news and articles on practical topics)  
*Technical Communication* (a quarterly scholarly journal)



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## High-Tech Communication from Finland



*by Maria Lahti, Ulla Kujanpää, and Marjo Kuusto, Finland*

To the nature-loving world, Finland has traditionally been known as the land of the midnight sun and of a thousand lakes. Finland is also the home of sauna and of Father Christmas. Some people may be familiar with Finland's paper, wood and heavy industries. However, the recent years have witnessed a shift towards high technology, which has gained a more and more important role in our economy and a growing fame for Finland as a live laboratory for new media services. Finland is now widely known for its advances in Internet and communications technologies, and names like Nokia and Linux are recognized worldwide. We take pride in achievements such as the first ever GSM phone call made in the world.

The rise of high-tech companies has provided more work opportunities for technical communicators. Technical communication is still quite a young field in Finland, and only a few people have been in the field for more than a decade. The average age of a Finnish technical communicator is probably around 30, and most of us have four or five years' experience and an academic background in languages.

Estimates of how many technical communicators there are in Finland are hard to come by, but our guesstimate would be anything from 500 to 1000 (and growing). Even though most of us speak Finnish as our native language, English is the main language of technical communication, since most of the products are exported. Localizability is one of the key elements in Finnish technical communication.

*New emerging industries produce job opportunities for technical communicators.*

As the number of technical communicators started growing a few years ago, a need for a cooperation forum emerged. In 1997, a group of students in a technical writing course at the University of Vaasa decided to found the Finnish Technical Communications Society (Suomen Tekniset Dokumentoijat ry.). For a while the society was relatively unknown outside the town of Vaasa and had about 30 members, but they actively arranged meetings and seminars, and set up a Website and a mailing list.

Two years later in October 1999, the society's new board decided to organise a two-day seminar with the theme "Optimising Users: What Do Real Users Want From Documentation?" Some of us thought we were optimistic to expect 30 people to show up, but altogether 112 people attended, and not only from Finland but also from Denmark, Germany, and England! The number of members in the society also suddenly increased from 40 to 130. Quite a growth in a year! The feedback received from the seminar attendees was enthusiastic and encouraged us to make the seminar a yearly event. At the end of 1999, the society also became a member of INTECOM, and we hope that this will give us more ideas for activities and provide us with more possibilities for international cooperation.

Finnish universities have also noted the growing demand for technical communicators, and some have started to offer education in technical communication. This gives a wonderful new choice of career for language students, who have traditionally ended up working as teachers or translators. Since its beginning, the society has cooperated closely with universities. Last year's seminar was organised together with the University of Tampere, and in April 2000, we had a joint training event where Ginny Redish gave an excellent lecture and a workshop on the secrets of producing user-friendly documentation. Technical communication students attended both events.

One of the society's main purposes is to provide a forum for cooperation and communication for its members. Our activities for achieving this goal include a general yearly meeting, board meetings that are open to all members, as well as unofficial

local gatherings. Because our members are spread all over the country, we also have other interaction channels: a mailing list, a Web site (under construction at <http://www.uwasa.fi/std>), and an electronic newsletter, Näkymä (= "View"). Näkymä comes out every month as a PDF file and is distributed through the society's mailing list. It contains lots of interesting reading such as reviews on books, articles, conferences and training, interviews with people working in technical communication, and information on open positions and forthcoming events.

*Our objectives:  
more active  
members  
and more  
cooperation  
with the world  
outside Finland.*

The main challenges that the society faces today are finding ways to attract new members and to spur participation in arranging common happenings and events. We do our best to promote interaction and discussion within the Finnish technical communications community, and aim to be active in larger circles than just among close friends and colleagues. From and through INTECOM, we hope to find new stimuli and interaction channels to other countries' societies in order to share experiences and to gain new ideas about developing in our field. Let's keep in touch!

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## Results of a Study Into Establishing Guidelines for English-

*By Ron Blicq, Canada*

### Abstract

At Forum 2000 I was the activator for an Idea Market session in which I asked conference delegates whether they felt INTECOM should establish standards for English-language international technical documentation. I have combined the delegates' responses with those from technical communicators attending other conferences and meetings around the world. The results show that

- over three-quarters of technical communicators recommend that INTECOM does so,
- most would prefer that INTECOM establishes guidelines or recommendations, rather than sets standards, and
- there is considerable uncertainty among technical communicators whether INTECOM should recommend adopting British or American spelling and word choice practices.

I recommend that INTECOM sets up a working group to further research technical communicators' preferences and then establish guidelines.

### Background

For many years technical communicators whose native language is not English have had difficulty deciding whether they should use British or American standards when spelling words such as analyse/analyze, centre/center and colour/color. As Anneli Haini wrote from Finland, when she heard about INTECOM's proposed study:

*I have been struggling at my office to get someone to understand the importance of a decision to use either British or American spelling, and sticking to that decision.*

The response I hear most often is simply: "If the product or software is being sold in America, then use an American dictionary; if it's being sold in the UK, use a British dictionary."

That's valid if the product is being sold only in one of those two countries. But if it will be sold worldwide, what dictionary should technical communicators in countries such as Finland, Sweden, France, Spain and Italy choose? (The problem also applies in predominantly English-language countries such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, where culturally they are influenced by British standards but—especially in Canada—are affected by their proximity to or working relationship with the United States.) The delegates attending INTECOM's 1998 annual general meeting discussed whether INTECOM should establish a "language research project," which would be carried out in two stages:

1. Stage 1 would involve conducting initial research to determine whether there is a need to set standards.
2. If the initial research showed there is a need, then Stage 2 would involve conducting a follow-on study to identify which spelling and word choices INTECOM should recommend to its member societies.

Stage 1 of the project was assigned to me in mid-1999. In this document I am reporting the results of my research.

### Research Approach

The research started in September 1999. To obtain as broad a response as possible, I planned a three-prong approach, which involved

1. publishing a short article and questionnaire in TC-Forum,
2. presenting short information sessions to conferences and meetings of technical communication societies in Norway, Germany, New Zealand, Australia, USA, and Canada, each time eliciting members' views, and
3. presenting an Idea Market session at the Forum 2000 conference in London, and eliciting responses from delegates.

Steps 1 and 3 drew opinions from technical communicators in many countries, and particularly from those in Europe. Step 2 targeted specific groups.

## Language International Technical Documentation · RU 23

At each meeting I discussed the difficulties technical communicators were facing, and presented those present with a short questionnaire containing three main questions:

1. Should INTECOM be researching spelling and word choice, and then establishing standards?
2. If so, should the standards be based on British or American practices?
3. Which way should the following words be spelled:
  - Grey or gray?
  - Sulphur or sulfur?
  - Spelled or spelt?
  - Caulk or calk?
  - Recognise or recognize?

I chose these words because some are clearly spelled differently between the US and the UK (*grey/gray*, for example), while others are sometimes spelled both ways within the individual country. For example, *sulphur/sulfur* and *caulk/calk* are spelled both ways in the US. Similarly, in recent years there has been a trend in the UK to spell *recognise* with a "z" and to choose *spelled* rather than *spelt*. For that reason alone, these words pose a problem for technical writers in European countries and Asia.

### The Responses

I received 198 completed questionnaires from technical communicators working in six different countries or areas:

- Europe
- USA
- Canada
- New Zealand
- Australia
- UK

To save space, the numerical responses are omitted from this TC-Forum article. Readers wishing to review them will be able to find them on the Web site: [www.intecom.org](http://www.intecom.org). The responses are summarized below.

#### Question 1:

**Should INTECOM conduct a study and make recommendations to establish standards for English-language international technical documentation?**

Overall, 79% of technical communicators said "Yes." However, many commented that, although they would welcome INTECOM establishing guidelines and making recommendations, they would be unhappy if INTECOM were to try to set standards.

The response from Europeans for whom English is not their native language was even more positive: 91% said "Yes."

I also decided to identify the responses from technical communicators in Canada, Australia and New Zealand, who, although their natural language is English, also have to decide which dictionary and practices to follow. In this report I will refer to them as the "Commonwealth" group; 87% of them also said "Yes."

#### Question 2:

**Should such guidelines be based on British practices or American practices?**

The responses to this question are much more scattered. Although US technical communicators, who made up almost 25% of the total respondents, stated they predominantly preferred American practices, the combined response from all delegates still showed that 34% preferred the British dictionary and 26% the American dictionary. However, a significant 40% still said they were undecided, thus underscoring technical communicators' worldwide difficulty in dealing with this question.

Within the "Commonwealth" group the results were surprisingly diverse. New Zealand technical communicators, particularly, favoured British spelling practices (74%), while Australian technical communicators were less sure (50% for British, 10% for American, and 40% undecided). The Canadians had a division of opinion within their own community, with 38% of practicing technical communicators—but only 10% of technical communication teachers—preferring British



## Results of a Study... (cont.)

spelling; yet 82% of the teachers stated they were undecided rather than say they preferred American spelling practices.

Because there were only 5 responses from the UK, plus 1 from Eire, their responses formed too small a group to be considered representative of the views of technical communicators in that area. One can, however, predict reasonably confidently that technical communicators in the UK would favour British rather than American spelling practices.

### Question 3: Which Way Should the Following Five Words Be Spelled?

Here is a summary of the responses for the five words, plus some comments on anomalies that became evident.

**Grey/Gray.** The European and Australia/New Zealand respondents clearly preferred *grey* (79% and 77% respectively). Predictably, most American respondents preferred *gray*, but at 57% this was not the great majority I had expected; surprisingly, 29% of the Americans selected *grey* and 14% were undecided. The Canadian respondents, affected by their cultural heritage with Great Britain but influenced by their close geographical proximity to the US, were middle road: 50% chose *grey* and 35% chose *gray*.

**Sulphur/Sulfur.** Here, Europeans, Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders all preferred *sulphur*. Again, surprisingly, 41% of American respondents also chose *sulphur*, against 55% preferring *sulfur*.

**Spelt/Spelled.** This was the most predictable word: all groups preferred *spelled*.

**Caulk/Calk.** With one exception, respondents from all countries clearly preferred the British-based *caulk*; the exception was the Europeans, 39% of whom reported they preferred *calk* (compared to 9% of Americans).

**Recognise/Recognize.** The European vote was split almost evenly. There was also a clear difference between the Americans and Canadians,

who preferred *recognize*, and the Australians and New Zealanders, who preferred *recognise*.

These variations show there are more differences than one would expect. They also support the answer to Question 1 (that nearly everyone would like INTECOM to conduct a study and make recommendations), and the answer to Question 2 (that everyone feels unsure about which dictionary to rely on).

### The Next Step

The information gathered so far leads me to recommend that INTECOM continues with stage 2 of this project. I suggest that INTECOM sets up a working group to research language practices and prepare guidelines (rather than standards) for technical communicators worldwide who have to prepare international English-language technical documentation.

### Conclusions

I have welcomed carrying out this study, for it has brought me into contact—sometimes in person and sometimes by email—with technical communicators in numerous countries, from whom I have learned a lot about the different cultural and work conditions that affect them. Taking part in the Idea Market at Forum 2000 was like “finding icing on one’s cake,” for it drew a stream of conference delegates to my session, from whom I received many personal comments that echoed the delegates’ frustration when having to decide how to spell and choose particular words that differ between British and American usage.



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## Comments on "Facilitate Reading" · RU 24

### 1. Comment from Amo Fuchs, Israel

I would like to comment on point 1 of Ake Rullgard's contribution in TC-FORUM 2/2000, in which he wrote:

*"Stop using hyphens for breaking words at the end of a line!"*

The underlying reasons for his request are clearly rooted in the English language, for two reasons:

- a) English words are much shorter, on average, than in most European languages (at least those I know).
- b) Writers have the freedom to break words where they wish.

Re point a): In German, keeping words unhyphenated impairs readability. Columns will have many deep fjords like the Norwegian shore. But this is true not only in German: see TC-FORUM 2/2000 on page 7, 6th line (besides the title) in the right column:

*"46% perform the role of user advocate/understanding the users' perspective."*

**Whatever rule for**

**hyphenation**

**you apply: keep**

**readability in**

**mind.**

Is that one or two things?

Re point b): In most languages I know, there are (almost) clear rules for hyphenating: you keep the individual parts either with a sense (lexemes – which are partial words) or break the parts into phonetically independent parts (phonemes).

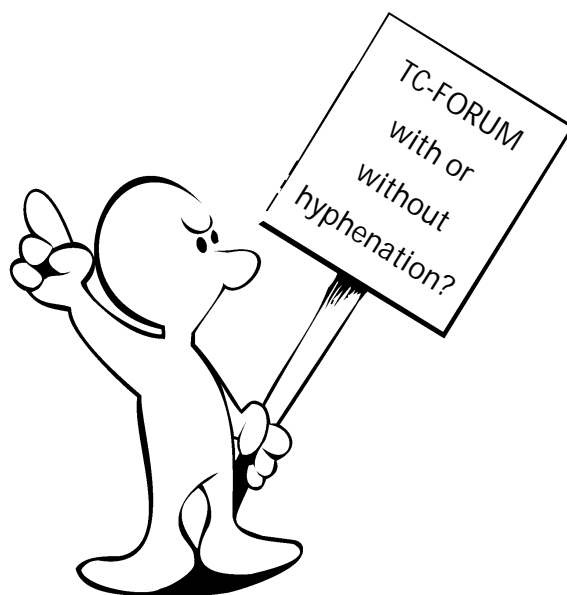
Sometimes I see English texts with words similar to other languages which are broken in a way that distorts completely any meaning, in a way that in German or Italian would be an anathema. I agree with Ake that in this case a Norwegian shore is preferable. For example, on the same TC-Forum page, a few lines later, I would never break up contributi-on (tion being a phoneme). But Kontribu-tion (well, in German I would choose another word) or in Italian, contribu-zio-ne, but then in Italian there are two phonemes in this suffix.

### 2. Comment from Amy S. Bryant, Germany

Hi Amo,

The problem in TC-FORUM is that an English hyphenation program seems not to be used as it contains quite a few hyphenation errors. An English hyphenation program would not produce "contributi-on", for example.

Yet the thing done in German which impairs readability to my way of thinking is the tendency to hyphenate anywhere in the word, even if it's only the first two letters. In comparison to other languages, German texts are overhyphenated, probably because of the German preference for justified text.



## Comments on Facilitate Reading (cont.)

### 3. Comment from Udit Chaudhuri, India

In school (my education was all in the English language), we followed a cardinal rule not to hyphenate (to break) a word of seven letters or less. If one had to write a word of up to 7 letters and reached the end of a line, one went to the next line and left the end space blank.

After starting with the word processor, in the early ones where (at least for me) it was not possible to set hyphenation on or off, I found them close to following that rule. And 'justify' setting seemed to fill the gap caused by carrying 5-7 lettered words to the next line.

All in all, where space is not a constraint, I observe (also from reader responses) that readability is better with unbroken/ unhyphenated words. However that can make it tiring to read large text or bigger words in small lines. Word distribution per line can become uneven. The trick is to select a smaller font, tighter track or higher line length as the situation permits.

Of course, in German or other European languages where you have larger words, you can perhaps do with a higher 'threshold limit' than 7 letters to break a word by hyphenation.

*Where is the word processor with a globally accepted hyphenation program?*

### Reply from the Editor:

Thank you for making us aware of this problem.

In this issue of TC-FORUM, we therefore follow Åke Rullgards advice "Stop using hyphens for breaking words at the end of a line!"

We realize however that Amo Fuchs' comment ("... many fjords...") is also valid.

May we ask you, dear colleagues, to let us know your opinion: shall we produce TC-FORUM in the future without hyphenation or shall we use a hyphenation program? And, if you prefer the latter, which program would you recommend?

We appreciate receiving your opinion.

Hans Springer

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# Pollie Want a Portal · SA 18

## Communicating Specialist Information to the Australian Parliament

*By Margaret Mitchell and  
Greg Baker, Australia*

### Introduction

To keep abreast of current issues, Australia's federal parliamentarians need timely information, analysis and advice. This is used not only within the Parliament itself, but also by Members and Senators when undertaking their electorate duties.

A large and vital part of this service is provided by the Parliamentary Library. The particular characteristics of clients and their diverse needs means the Library's communication issues differ from those faced by other libraries. From a myriad of manual techniques the Library has increasingly moved into using electronic sources and dissemination methods, which are being enhanced and expanded regularly and will soon include a comprehensive intranet portal to Library services.

### Issues in Communicating Specialist Knowledge

Although federal parliamentarians of all parties take part in debates related to science, technology, the environment and resources, most of their energies are directed to other specialist areas including economics, statistics, politics, law, social policy, defence and foreign affairs.

Each has its own specialized technical knowledge and vocabulary, and its own need for experts to communicate that knowledge to an audience who may well be expert in other fields. To meet this need the Library has approximately 80 information and research specialists with knowledge in seven specialist subject groups including Economics, Science, Technology, Environment, and Resources. The primary client group, and the focus of most of the energies of Library staff, are Senators, Members of Parliament and their staff. Consequently, clients cover a broad cross section of education, background and interests.

The Parliament has, for example, several parliamentarians with doctorates and several with no formal qualifications at all. And they may be economists, teachers, lawyers, journalists, scientists, surveyors or tradespeople. This variety highlights the importance of the interaction that occurs between the client and the Library staff, particularly when a request is made for specialist knowledge—there is no point in providing specialist information or an analysis to a parliamentarian if that person cannot understand what they have been given or if the specialist has not addressed exactly what is needed.

For example, a parliamentarian may ask one of their staff to locate information on a particular topic or to commission research, so the staff member telephones the Library's Central Enquiry Point. If the request is straightforward it is answered immediately, but if it is more complex it is passed to a specialist. Thus, Library staff must be able to determine the context in which each enquirer is asking a question; that is, find out if the requested response is needed for a media interview, for background information, for a speech, or for a briefing prior to overseas travel. They also need to determine the timeframe, which can dictate the depth of analysis they will provide.

Any material, information, analysis and advice provided to clients is usually tailored specifically to suit that client; confidentiality and impartiality are integral to this process.

### Library Staff

The Library employs over 50 research specialists, each qualified in a particular subject area. They also are skilled communicators who can provide written and oral responses of a very high standard.

There are also about 30 information specialists, all with librarian qualifications, who respond to requests for information. All have specialist skills in the information sciences and in search and retrieval methods.

## Pollie Want a Portal (cont.)

The above are supported by 30 staff who are responsible for acquiring, cataloguing, indexing, and maintaining the collection, and an 8-member Information Systems team who support, maintain and develop departmental systems, and ensure electronic access is available to other resources.

### Library Resources

In addition to normal library services the Library offers special services designed particularly for the unique client group. These include the selective dissemination of information via an information alert service; electronic media monitoring; transcriptions of electronic media coverage; newspaper clippings and press releases; replays of significant radio and television current affairs programs throughout Parliament House; orientation sessions; and a vital-issues seminar program.

Additional resources include a wide range of data CDs – currently over sixty CDs are available on-line, including over thirty law CDs – and access to on-line news services such as Reuters and Dow Jones.

### Anticipating Client Demand

Although much of the information and analysis is provided on demand, Library staff also try to anticipate future requests. Twice a year specialists from across the Library come together to try to forecast developments in their particular fields. This provides information for librarians to make acquisition decisions, and for information and research specialists to prepare themselves for possible future questions. The process provides the latter with topics to research, from which they write papers known in the Library as General Distribution Products (GDPs).

*Important:  
development  
forecasts for  
particular  
fields.*

There are several series of GDPs:

- Research Notes are short summaries designed to provide an introduction or overview of a topic; they are no longer than two sides of a single A4 sheet.
- Current Issues Briefs are short papers designed to provide a quick response to current issues and are useful as briefing documents.
- Research Papers provide in-depth analyses of issues of interest to the Parliament, or provide essential background information.

These papers are internally and externally refereed through a stringent publication process. Where the Library does not have sufficient expertise in-house, external consultants are briefed to write the GDPs.

The production of GDPs has several advantages. One is that client demands can be met more quickly and easily than is the case when a paper is commissioned. Another is that authors are as a result more familiar with such topics and are in a much better position to provide oral briefings and written research papers.

### Where To Go From Here?

There have been two main driving forces in moving the Library to greater use and reliance on electronic sources of information and electronic means of dissemination. One has been the growing cost of Library hard copy resources, particularly those sourced from overseas, coupled with a continuing squeeze on material acquisition funds. The other has been the increasing need for clients to have access to Library resources 24 hours a day, seven days a week, from wherever they happen to be. This has led the Library to make more services available on-line.

Since the beginning of the 38th Parliament in early 1996, all GDPs plus a large amount of parliamentary information paralleling the Library's Parliamentary Handbook, have been available through an internet site which includes many hundreds of pages of information. In addition, information from all Parliamentary departments, including Library information

sources such as the catalogue, is collected into a single repository called ParInfo.

The mobility of the client group has led to the development of a remote and mobile capability which allows parliamentarians access to the same on-line facilities that are available in their Parliament House offices. To ensure the integrity and security of the Parliamentary Computing Network, only accredited equipment can be used and strict log-on procedures have to be followed. The Library has also developed an intranet site, a public portion of which is available to parliamentarians and all staff of the five parliamentary departments. Because the intranet is not available to the general public, it can be used to publish material which for copyright or other reasons needs to be restricted to Library clients.

### Intranet Portal

The Library's Intranet portal, which is the next big advance toward providing specialist information to clients, will become the future electronic gateway into the Library. However, this method of disseminating information, analysis and advice brings its own communication considerations:

- While one-on-one contact can elicit precisely the content and format required for particular client requests, the design of the portal must lead clients easily and quickly to what they need. The portal must still maintain client satisfaction, but that will be harder to gauge without direct contact.
- The mixed profile of Library clients still exists so the portal has to be all things to all people.
- Those new to Library services must be guided through the site without excluding experienced users from quicker routes to the information they require.

The initial stage of the portal is an on-line guide to information and research services. This features an extensive searchable subject listing directing clients to relevant information and research specialists and groups. Further stages will involve incorporating access to a large collection of data available at an electorate

level—parliamentarians are perennially interested in facts and figures about their electorates—and possibly the inclusion of annotated guides to internet resources and links to existing Parliamentary and Library publications. Facilities will be available for placing on-line requests, which will be emailed to the appropriate research or information specialists.

*Faster access to facts and figures about electorates.*

### Conclusion

Although the basic issues confronting the Parliamentary Library in communicating specialist information have not greatly changed with the move to more self-help access, Library staff now need to anticipate the client's searching methods as much as consider the client's information needs.



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**Ever heard about Pollie?  
Please let us know.**

## A Day in the Life · SA 19

**By Carmel Priore-Garlock, USA**

*(Reprinted with kind permission from Shenouda News, June 2000)*

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be a contracting technical communicator? What is a typical day like? What background brings someone to technical communication, and how does that experience play out on a daily basis?

Here are some glimpses into the professional lives of Shenouda associates Beetsy Christiansen (BC), Van Kurtz (VK), Lisa Syed (LS), and Charles Wilkinson (CW).

**CPG: Can you describe a typical day in the work life of a technical communicator?**

**BC:** Gathering information by researching and interviewing Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), then writing, editing, incorporating feedback, and desktop publishing.

**VK:** Typically, I spend most of any given day on a single project. While I may be working on more than one project, I do not devote some time to each project every day. A typical day is spent at a computer, doing whatever is necessary to complete the project, whether it is drawing, capturing screens, or putting it all together with a page layout program.

**LS:** I'm probably not a typical technical communicator these days. I work from home because I want to stay with my toddler. When I have work to do, I schedule it around my daughter's sleep times.

**CW:** Working for Shenouda Associates Inc. means, typically, each day is different. I may draft or edit a manual (operator, installation, service), procedures (operating or service), a guide (style or business), a training program, or desk-edit product localization (translation) material. Typically, I do any fun project Judy has accepted for the business.

**CPG: What part of your background most closely relates to what you do on a daily basis?**

**BC:** I have always loved reading and writing. I discovered I'm not a creative writer; my strength is in taking facts and making them understandable to many people. This led me into journalism in high school and college. I didn't know technical writing even existed! I worked in business communications for 10 years before switching to technical writing.

**VK:** My background is science, and I have been using computers, in one way or another, since college 31 years ago. Therefore, I am very comfortable using a computer and can easily learn new applications. Over the years as a technical writer, I have had to learn several programs in order to get the job done.

**LS:** My background as an educator helps me most. This background includes knowing how to assess the reading audience and select appropriate format and terminology, organize information in a logical way, edit, speak and write several languages, and learn from and enjoy other cultures.

**CW:** The ability to use both my graphics and writing experience to create an efficient communications package; not just chunking text and drawings. I am accustomed to being an advocate, and sometimes the only advocate for the audience!

**CPG: What would you have done differently to prepare for a career as a technical communicator?**

**BC:** I probably would have taken a computer science course.

**LS:** I can transfer a lot of the skills I've learned while teaching adults in North America and abroad and those I learned about planning and writing while working on my M.Ed. However, for work as a technical writer, I'd have taken courses in using the various writing tools.

**CW:** I would have a more formal education in communication, although having worked through the ranks may give me a different viewpoint regarding technical communication.

**CPG:** What aspect of your work day do you like the most?

**BC:** Once I have the information in hand, I like it when I get in a good writing groove and the words just flow. Unfortunately, this doesn't happen every day!

**VK:** I like learning new things. Working freelance provides me with a variety of projects, some interesting some not so. I like the change.

**LS:** I like it when I need to think about how to improve the way the material is presented. I love finishing a document, doing the last spell-check, and getting it sent off to where it needs to be.

**CPG:** How does your work make an impact?

**BC:** I hope that end users are able to understand the technology I have documented and consequently are more productive.

**VK:** When I do the job right, it helps those who use my products learn their tasks quickly and easier.

**CPG:** How many hours do you work on a typical day? In a typical week?

**BC:** Six hours in a typical day, 25 to 30 hours per week.

**VK:** Six to eight hours per day. In a typical week? 30 to 45 hours.

**LS:** I like to work 2-3 hours per day. I can manage 10-15 hours a week, but I've done 20 when needed.

**CW:** Some weeks can be long when working on several projects for several clients. You've heard of "we need it yesterday"?

**CPG:** With what subjects or content are you typically working?

**BC:** In the past year, healthcare telecommunications, photographic equipment, and information technology for the most part. I have written a newsletter, software user guides, and training manuals. I have delivered training on Microsoft Office products—Word and Outlook, primarily.

**VK:** The subjects vary enough so that nothing is typical. Most of my work is writing user manuals for various types of users.

**LS:** Lately, I've been working with content that is aimed at international audiences. Sometimes the material will undergo translation and other times it will be used by speakers of English abroad. This group includes non-US speakers of English as well as speakers of English as a foreign language. One client converts material I've edited in Word into multimedia format for Internet-based self-instruction.

**CW:** My Shenouda portfolio indicates my specialty is operating and maintenance procedures, process guides and training programs.

**CPG:** What tools do you typically use?

**BC:** Gateway computer and Xerox printer. Microsoft Word, AOL, Adobe Acrobat and FrameMaker.

**VK:** Word, FrameMaker, FreeHand, Photoshop, Acrobat, and PageMaker.

**LS:** Lately, I've been using Word and PowerPoint.

**CW:** MS Word, MS Excel, Visio Technical, and Lotus Notes.



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# Time-consuming Email Communications

## SA 20

*By Ulrich Thiele, Germany*

Our documentation and advertising bureau mails five emails with attachments on the average per day to different customers, partners and other service organisations. The sizes of the attachments vary roughly from 50 KB up to 2 MB. About 60 % of our emails with attachments don't

create any problems with the addressee. However, 40 % need additional attention. This fraction comprises the following causes for communication problems during the past six months:

Problems with email attachments	Fraction of unsuccessfully delivered emails with attachments	Additional average time, that we have to spend to solve the problem
Addressee cannot find the attachment on his computer after saving it	15 %	Telephone support (average five minutes)
Attachment did not reach the addressee due to company fire wall systems and other restrictions within the company intranet or internal distribution system.	55 %	Resending the mail to a different email address; mostly at least two more phone calls to system administrators and others. Average additional time for us: 10 to 20 min.
Major time delay due to internet transportation (from 6 hours up to 5 days!)	15 %	Resending the mail. Discussions on responsibilities.
Problems with opening of Winzip archives due to lack of experience in handling Winzip; no unzipping software installed on the PC	5 %	Telephone support (average 10 minutes)
Problems with extracting the attachment from the mail due to lack of understanding of email client.	10 %	Telephone support (average less than five minutes)

For me it is a very interesting aspect that, by far, most of the problems are created by our customers, and only a few by other service organisations or our partner companies. We suppose that the employees at our customers' on the average are less educated regarding electronic communications. And beyond that, we think that service bureaus and companies that are cooperating with us might have a different understanding of partnership, compared to the usual customer-to-supplier relationship. That automatically puts the responsibility for any communication problem down to the supplier, independent of what actually has caused the trouble.

A couple of our partners (not customers, however) switch now to direct point-to-point

data transfer instead of Internet-based email attachments. The reliability and the speed of the "Fritz-" or "Leonardo-" cards compensate for the higher phone costs due to the non-local calls. Besides, the data volume to be transferred is not restricted in any respect.



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## On My Little Planet... · SA 21

*by Jean-Paul Bardez, France*

Recently, I sent an email that started with a reference to one of the first books I enjoyed reading, *Le Petit Prince*. It was a way of setting the general tone of my message as playful, so that the receiver would not take the serious part of my reply personally. But I was being serious. The message that triggered this reaction dealt with a technical communication issue: the use of uppercase letters. I have subscribed to two technical communication lists and am amazed at the amount of traffic that deals with typography or terminology. Very few messages address what to my mind are the real issues: usability, project management and the measuring of quality.

### The Starting Point: What We Really Do

Let me start with a somewhat provocative statement: nobody reads user manuals for pleasure. And yet we all make our living from them, and hope that what we produce is at least useful, if not actually enjoyable.

However, my job as a technical communicator does not consist solely in producing paper or electronic documents - this is just the visible part of the iceberg - but in taking part in project management meetings, interviewing people, testing products, analysing customer feedback, suggesting ways for making the product more user-friendly, trying to make designers communicate better, etc. The element that is common to all these invisible activities seems to me to be the key question in our job.

I am now working on web project management, and writing is an even smaller part of my job, but I still use the set of skills I learned when I had to write. Of course, I also have to use specific tools (DreamWeaver, FireWorks, etc.), but there are training courses to learn them. And sometimes I'm not sure of the spelling of a word, but this is no big deal with present day tools. What I'm always on the lookout for is more information on "the direction I should be digging in," i.e. what information system is required in the context in which I'm working. This is where I'm getting serious...

### How to Know What is Required

To answer this central question, after a period where things always seem to lead nowhere, I usually find some kind of a tool to measure the current level of customer satisfaction. Either by visiting real users or, in my present job, by analysing the webmaster's e-mails and the visitors logs. Occasionally, though, I have been in a situation where it was forbidden to contact customers...

### How to know what we are doing is right

Before implementing a new "information system" (meant as an information tool and not as a technological solution), I test it. Products are tested (or they are said to have been tested) before being marketed. Documents must be tested as well. For example, I recently had a homepage project tested and received a lot of useful usability suggestions.

### How to Keep in Line with the Target

I found project management easier when I worked as a consultant. There was no hierarchical background noise, and I could justify my action by the fact that I got paid to produce the documentation within a certain timeframe. Project management tools don't need to be complicated. What is required are regular meetings where you maintain a list of to do's, work done, and issues to be resolved. It's interesting that this is where I experienced the most resistance.

*Working without hierarchical background noise is more efficient.*



## On My Little Planet... (cont.)

### Last: How to Ensure We will be Allowed to Proceed

This is certainly the most difficult part of the job. Whereas it is easy to convince an administrator or client at the start of a project, using presentation tools and nice graphics, things get complicated as time goes by. We need to develop rhetoric to convince the project team and management that the ongoing implementation of project management processes leads to success.

### On My Little Planet...

...tools and techniques are not the big issue. But the message itself is still a challenge. Information remains political and my colleagues are split into two groups: decision makers and technical experts, both of whom I must convince with different words, both of whom do not always give priority to awareness of customer requirements, and both of whom are not even necessarily convinced by figures or rhetoric...

*How can we  
put our  
theoretical  
know-how  
into practice?*

We all know what is required to effectively manage an information project but... sometimes fail to set it into practice. This has happened to me on many occasions, and I am not particularly happy about it. Maybe sharing thoughts on why projects did not turn out well could help members of the technical communicators' community to improve their approach. This is what I'm trying to say in this article. That maybe we should admit we can fail, even if it is painful, and not always pretend each project was a success story. This was also the philosophy that led to the creation of the French association "Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques, CRT", and I believe it is still a value worth building on.

### Final Remark

If anyone is interested in sharing experiences like "how I convinced my boss the team should meet an hour every week" or "how I convinced the engineers to give us their product to test," please share with us your winning rhetoric to leverage our efficiency. These are situations where peer support is invaluable.



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# European Association for Terminology

## SA 22

*by Lynne Bowker and  
Susanne Lervad*

The European Association for Terminology (EAFT) was formed in 1996 and the first few years of its existence were largely taken up with organisational issues. Recently, however, the EAFT has become more active setting up a European Terminology Information Server (ETIS) and co-organising conferences. The EAFT has also established a number of special interest groups, including SIGs in terminology training and in minority languages.

The EAFT is a non-profit professional organisation that acts as an umbrella organisation to which national or regional terminology associations belong. Individual and corporate members are also welcome. The Board of the EAFT consists of six volunteer European experts in terminology, and they are assisted by an Advisory Council comprising eleven European experts from the education, language, industry and research sectors.

The general aims of the EAFT include furthering plurilingualism through terminology, providing a European platform for promoting and raising awareness of terminological activities, facilitating the exchange of terminological information, and liaising and co-operating with other organisations, institutions and associations that have an interest in terminology.

One of the most concrete developments of the EAFT has been the establishment of the European Terminology Information Server (ETIS), which provides multilingual information about terminology (e.g. calendar of events, information on training, biographical, institutional and bibliographical information, and links to terminology databases, etc.).

In addition, the EAFT has helped to organise a number of conferences on terminology, including a "Conference on Co-operation in the Field of Terminology in Europe" held in 1999 and a "Conference for a Terminology Infrastructure in Europe" in 2000.

A Terminology Summit is scheduled to take place in Strasbourg in 2001.

New members are always welcome, as are ideas for collaborative terminology activities or suggestions as to how the EAFT can further address the needs of terminology and related disciplines.

For more information about the EAFT and its activities, please contact [eaft\\_aet@unilat.org](mailto:eaft_aet@unilat.org). See also:

<http://www.unilat.org/dtil/aet/indexaet.htm>,  
for information about EAFT

<http://www.unilat.org/dtil/etis/index1.htm>, for  
information about ETIS

<http://www.unilat.org/dtil/conference.htm>, for  
information about the 2000 Conference for a  
Terminology Infrastructure in Europe

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*Looking for  
new members  
and new  
ideas.*

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Please feel free to contact either the Editor or your NCP for any questions concerning TC-Forum.

For further details contact our Web-site [www.tc-forum.org/](http://www.tc-forum.org/) Professional Events or the addresses given below

October 10, 2000  
Mision del Sol, Cuernavaca, Mexico

### Machine Translation Users Workshop

in conjunction with AMTA-2000  
*Machine Translation Users: From Old Guard to Vanguard 60*

Even more than MT developers, users are at the forefront of innovation in machine translation applications. The proliferation of Internet, intranet and speech applications of MT, including translated search, cross-language information retrieval, and translation of e-mail, chat and real-time news has been driven by users responding to the market's increasing demands for globalization of information. The profile of the MT user in the year 2000 is very different from what MT developers envisioned as recently as 10 years ago. Internet applications have received the lion's share of press attention and development focus from MT vendors in recent years, perhaps to the detriment of more traditional applications.

Deadlines and Submission Instructions:

Submissions are due August 11, 2000 to:

### Mary Flanagan

Mt4all@compuserve.com and  
Laurie Gerber Igerber@usc.edu  
Main conference site:

<http://www.isi.edu/natural-language/conferences/amta2000>

Venue site:

<http://www.misiondelsol.com.mx>

Call for papers:

20-22 November 2000  
Exeter, United Kingdom

### MT 2000 - Machine Translation and Multilingual Applications in the New Millennium

The Natural Language Translation Specialist Group (NLTSG) of the British Computer Society (BCS) and the University of Exeter announce an international conference to be held at the University of Exeter (UK) on 20-22 November 2000.

Details have been published in TC-FORUM 2-2000 already.

Further information:

### Derek Lewis,

D.R.Lewis@exeter.ac.uk, or

### David Wigg,

wiggjd@bcs.org.uk

Conference web site:

<http://www.bcs.org.uk/siggroup/nalatrán/mt2000/index.htm>

Exeter University web-site:

<http://www.exeter.ac.uk>

### tekong Conferences in 2000<sup>1)</sup>:

November, 23-24

Rhein-Main-Hallen Wiesbaden

### Annual Conference

Further details from  
info@tekong.de or the Website  
[www.tekong.de](http://www.tekong.de)

with one track in English language.

Proposals for presentations welcome

mailto:m.fritz@tekong.de

Further details from

info@tekong.de

or the website [www.tekong.de](http://www.tekong.de)"

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