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IMPRESSUM:

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Soon in the www.:
TC-FORUM.org
 Try it!!

- 1) Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example
- CL for Controlled Language
 - TR for Translation Issues
 - RU for Readability/Usability
 - GI for Graphics/Illustrations
 - TO for Tools
 - CO for Consulting

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 technical communicators,

The number of TC-Forum subscribers is growing week by week, and we receive more and more comments, letters of appreciation, and good articles for publication - as you can experience in this issue. So let me thank again all those who have contributed to TC-Forum's success, in the past issues as well as in this one.

Yes, we have again received some VIPs (very interesting papers) and some inspiring comments. But we would be happy to receive many more comments, ideas, agreements or disagreements. We want to create more discussions on the topics offered - we want you to consider yourself as a discussion partner, not just a reader. So, please drop us a note as you read TC-Forum - either by email or fax (we accept handwritten faxes, too!).

We would
 be happy to
 receive
 many more
 comments.

Currently, TC-Forum is issued every three months. We realize that this is a very long time span for a discussion. By the time you read this we hope to have made the first step towards faster access to our information. We are still in the process of negotiating with a German service provider who has offered to sponsor our WWW-pages. We intend to inform you and other technical communicators via the World Wide Web about TC-Forum: i.e. new issues and their contents, the topics under discussion, professional events, etc. We will also offer links to the Internet pages of INTECOM members.

As a second step, we intend to provide mailing lists for our subscribers. With these mailing lists, all of you who have sent us your email address will be able to correspond directly with each other, and so get worldwide answers to your ideas and questions within a few hours.

As soon as the mailing lists have been installed, we will inform you how the procedure works. Please note that we will send this information only to those of you whose email address is available in our files. If you have an email address, but haven't sent it to us yet, now is the time to do so (and preferably by email).

In future issues we will inform you about progress in the preparations for Forum 2000. The first meeting of the organizing committee took place at the STC conference in Toronto in May, and is reported elsewhere in this issue of TC Forum.

Starting with this issue, you will notice a little cartoon technical communicator appearing on some of the pages. The figure has been created by Nils Petter Smeby especially for TC-Forum. "It" will, from now on, accompany our discussions thus adding a little touch of emotion to them. Together with Nils Petter, we are now looking for a name for "It". If you can think of a suitable name, please mail or fax it to me before September 20, 1997. A jury will determine the winner, and the best five proposals will receive a little gift. We will ask the National Contact Persons (NCP's) to act as the jury.

Well - I look forward to hearing from ALL of you soon.

Yours,



Hans Springer

What's my name?



This little creature turned up in our editorial offices the other day. "I hear you are looking for a cartoon character," it said. "Have you hired one yet?"

"No," we replied. "But Dilbert called and said he would get in touch with us the next time he gets outsourced."

"You don't want Dilbert," the little creature said.

"Why not?" we exclaimed. "Dilbert is famous! He's the most photocopied, faxed and downloaded cartoon character in the world!"

"Yes, but he is also a man. You want someone more generic. Someone with whom all your readers can identify. In other words: You want me."

"Well," we conceded, "you may have a point. But we can't make a decision here and now. There are many things to consider, such as ..."

"I'll work cheap."

"You're hired! When can you start?"

"From this issue."

"And what's your name?"

At this, the little character looked puzzled.

"Name? You know, I don't think I have one. I hadn't really thought about it. Maybe your readers have a suggestion?"

So, dear reader, if you have a good name for TC-Forum's new mascot, please mail, fax or email it to us. The first five winners get a T-Shirt with the mascot's picture and name on it - the first prize is in addition to that a box with 3 bottles of famous Württemberg (South-German) wine.

Comment on „Bulleled Text...” (CL 9)



by *Amo Fuchs*

The two examples mentioned in Dr. Johnson's contribution in TC-Forum 2/97, CL 7 are dissimilar in more than one way, and thus not really adequate to draw a conclusion from the only difference pointed out by the author.

For instance, the second example on page 9,

„Moreover ... translation.“

has a larger line spacing. Before I start to read the text and grasp the content of the words, I „know“ already that there is a difference, that something „limps“.

Then go to the bulleted text of the example on page 9,

„Well ... purpose“

The two bulleted sections are similar, beginning with the word *for*. The word *both* at the beginning of the first bulleted text is a residue of „linear writing“, as follows:

„more effective, *both* for .. *and* for ...“.

By bulleting you waive the *and*, and you could thus waive the *both* too, as follows:

... proven to be more effective,

- for the readers ...
- for translation purposes

(You also could have wirtten:

... proven to be more effective, *both*:

- for the readers and
- for translation purposes)

The two bulleted sections of this exmple are consistent.

Now let's go back to the second example. After the first „clash“ with the spacing, my eye catches a verb at the beginning of the first bulleted sentence and an elaborate clause at the second. If we reword the second sentence so that it is in line with the first one,

- facilitate machine translation of the thus simplified text.

the semantic remains the same, i.e. the message is the same, although what we could call the semiotic in a very wide sense has changed.

Here is the complete revised example:

„... on punctation etc. are established.:

Subsequently, SDD can

- perform an additional grammar check for these simplified texts
- facilitate machine translation of the thus simplified text.

Now for a question:

Is it still unwise to bullet the texts in this example?

Answer (very personal):

No. On the contrary.

Comment:

The first example presents an idea with two outcomes (objects) in parallel as alternatives, while the second one presents an idea with two elements linked together in series (sorry, I am an electrical engineer suffering from heavy *deformatio professionalis*).

Conclusion:

The problem with perceptualisation by bulleting is not a problem of the mean per se, but both of the correct wording first and then of the correct use and layout.

Alternatively, my conclusion could als have been written like this: ... the mean per se, but

- of the correct wording
- of the correct use of the bulleting and graphic layout.

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Comment on „Bulleled Text ...“ (CL 10)

by *Sabine Wolf*

Dr. Lars Johnson provided in TC-Forum 2/97 a perceptual perspective on bulleted text. In his second example he showed that bulleting text doesn't work well when the text segments are not "linguistically parallel".

An alternative approach for those cases is chunking, i.e. combining text items into meaningful units of information by breaking the lines according to the content like I did in this letter.

In this way you can structure text for the reader without having to „paralyze“ it linguistically- the text looks a bit ragged at the right side but that doesn't slow the reading time because chunking helps the reader to comprehend. And from the viewpoint of a Technical Author I find this chunking technique also useful for checking the structure of my written text.



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Comment on „A Note on ...“ (CL 11)

by *Rodolfo Beceiro Mangold*

This comment refers to the article "A Note on Controlled Language", CL 4, TC-Forum 2/97, by Thomas L. Warren.

1. Controlled Language shouldn't just enable a higher efficiency of machine translation; it should help the reader understand the text, not only by controlled vocabulary but also by short and easily understood sentences.
2. Yes, I think each language should have its own version of controlled language, although it may be difficult. For example: Spanish in Spain is a different Spanish than the Spanish in South America; French in Belgium and Switzerland is different to the French in France; etc.
3. Who should develop and maintain it? That, dear Mr. Warren, is a very difficult question. First, I thought perhaps it should be by an organization such as Spain's "Real Academia Espanola", but that would take years! Perhaps the best way would be for every association (such as, for example, the German VDE-Verein Deutscher Elektriker) to work on the problem.

On the whole, if companies could leave the writing of manuals, for example, to experienced technical communicators, that would be a great help and would lead to success. To date, most of the manuals are written quickly by people who are inexperienced in language, grammar, etc. Often, they don't think that somebody else, who sees the machine or appliance for the first time, has to understand the text in order to work with it.

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Comment on „How to Save Money ...“ (TR 2)



by Amo Fuchs

This comment refers to the article “How to Save Money in Translation Cost”, TR 1, in TC-Forum 2/97.

Consider this statement:

Who is saving costs? i.e. making an economy?

Reword it to read:

How can texts and translations be made more "ecological"?

The allusion is to the widespread problem, particularly in medicine, of limited resources. The resources are limited, so use them sparingly. But the use of resources is also a source of well-being. Ecology means good husbandry with the available resources.

Let's be more explicit:

The Problem

You receive a non controlled text to translate. In other words: somebody made an economy in editing. But you deliver a controlled text, at least I do, maybe because it is my nature to formulate things the way the authors call controlled. (To quote Martin Luther : Hier bin ich und kann nicht anders.) You make something opposite to economical with your translating/editing.

If you translate uncontrolled, you earn roughly 15 to 20 DM (lines extended to have 50 keystrokes each, then counted), 50 to 100% more for very little more time (14 minutes vs. 13 1/2).

If you receive a controlled text, you still earn 10.00 DM, but in less than a third of the time, so you could make in the same time up to over three times as much.

Even if the above-mentioned 50% is too high, say the translation takes only 25%, you still make a loss.

A Question:

Is there an ethical problem, again similar to medicine, on how to find the right balance between producing a faithful job for the client and having the operator (editor/translator) earn a fair fee? You may be tempted to do an "undertreatment", which is what you actually do when you deliver an uncontrolled text (and it does not matter if that is what the customer expects: an oncologist has to treat a heavy smoker as equally as a non-smoker), and by doing so you do an "overtreatment" and so uselessly inflate the bill.

How do you tackle this ethical problem?

A Solution:

Any suggestion will be welcome!

Can texts and translations be made more ecological? For example, according to the authors it takes

- 8 minutes to understand the original source.
- 2 to 3 minutes to create a controlled text sink.

But in between it takes, say, 50% of the translation time from one language into another to translate into a controlled text in the original language, i.e. 3 minutes. Therefore, the total time of $8+3+2\frac{1}{2} = 13\frac{1}{2}$ minutes. Output: 4 lines (about 50 keystrokes) = 10.00 DM

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Minimal Quality (RU 2)

by Gabriele Bock

Companies invest a lot of time, effort, and money in certification. The neatly framed certificates, often displayed in companies' lobbies, impress customers, and have become an essential part of business relations. The process of certification is complex, complicated, and comprehensive. Therefore, some companies tend to think that the certificate simultaneously guarantees quality. In most cases, they are wrong.

Just Meeting Standards: not sufficient

Quality standards such as ISO 9000-9004 are supposed to support and facilitate international business. They define the framework of Quality Control (QC) Systems in detail. The result is an enormous bureaucratic and technical procedure focusing on administration and controls rather than on product and process improvement.

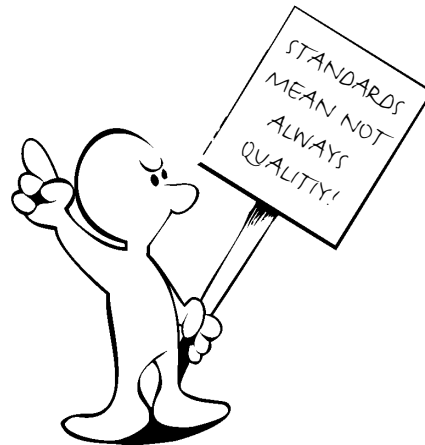
Certification is the application of these standards. Requirements and procedures to meet these requirements had to be established to guarantee quality. But what does quality mean in this context? Companies and standard creators usually mention product-based quality first, because products have always been subjected to quality control. Customer-based quality, however, is not as easy to define and to measure, and it will not automatically increase by considering standards. Sometimes it may even decrease, if the company engages more in administrative activities for getting certified than in caring for real quality.


Some procedures in the process of certification may even contribute to customer-based quality. But employing standards as the only QC system will not suffice. Standards represent the smallest common denominator, the absolute minimum in customer care. However, if a company is really concerned about Quality Control, it will grasp the opportunity during certification to develop a more skillful QC-System.

Certification: Chance and Challenge

The certification procedures definitely demand a lot of controlling, analyzing, and reviewing by companies. Yet more and more companies are accepting the challenge to go beyond the requirements of certification and develop a QC System that fits not only their own processes and products, but also fulfills customer-based QC requirements.

Standards are essential for orientation and for defining the lowest possible level. But a company needs to employ more sophisticated methods if it is to maintain and increase quality, and particularly customer-based quality.





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Certified Technical Communicator?? (RU 3)

by Gjaermund Austvik

There seems to be an increasing call for certification of all sorts of trades and services. A few years ago the word on everybody's lips was "ISO 9000", implying that an ISO 9000 certified company was making better products or providing better services than those that were not certified.

Advertising boldly claimed that "Company such and such is ISO 9000 certified". Today we know that the ISO 9000 business basically means that

On every-
body's
lips was
ISO 9000

the internal procedures of a given company are supposed to be (well) documented for the auditors to inspect and for the company to follow. That's all well and good: the outcome could very well be better products and/or services, providing the procedures really were aimed at achieving that (among other things).

Now, why should Technical Communicators (TCs for short) be certified? This question elicits several more:

- Will the "Certificate" as such improve the quality or the workmanship of the individual TC?
- How is that quality and/or workmanship to be judged?
- Is it possible to document the work routines (or processes) of the TC?
- What constitutes a "shoddy", "good", "very good" or "excellent" TC?
- Does a higher degree of school education create a better TC?
- Who is to be the judge?

The following reflections are entirely my own. They are intended to start a discussion - hence the sometimes "pointy" suggestions and thoughts. Only don't shoot the messenger - do some thinking on your own!

So - here we go!

A very simple way of documenting the TC's routine would be this simple sentence:

"TC NN always does his very best."

Well, doesn't everybody? And who could blame the poor TC after that, realizing he could do no better? Then who am I to throw the first stone? Well, perhaps this was a cheap one.

Let's try again.

"TC NN conforms to the quality guidelines and routines established by the current client."

This shifts the responsibility for the routines from the TC to the client, assuming of course that the TC really does what he/she says. Sounds pretty good, too, doesn't it? But is it any better? Isn't this what we have always done? Which TC would really want to upset the client by delivering a shoddy product? Well - assuming that the individual couldn't care less - he/she wouldn't last long in the business anyway. Word travels fast around the world! Nevertheless, when we are working for one client today and for another client tomorrow, and so on, we will always have to consider the internal quality assurance routines of each and every client. This is a situation which could easily make our heads go spinning quite fast, but somehow we seem to cope with the situation.

Following the ISO 9000 Approach

I have had an opportunity to watch and take part in, from within a company, the procedures behind its ISO 9000 certification. The task was formidable, resulting in not one but several binders full of routine descriptions and tools to be considered, not to mention thorough inspections by the auditors. Is this the path to follow for the individual TC? Or have I missed the point entirely - that it is the TC's employer and not the individual who is to be certified?

Well, this brings me back to the everlasting question of the strength of a chain. As we all know, the chain's strength is determined by its weakest link, which in this case is the individual

TC. An employed TC delivering a shoddy work would in the short run be rather short-lived with his/her employer, and perhaps also in the business. In the long run the employer's reputation also would suffer, so I really think that and certification should start with the individual.

Consequently, if we are to establish a certifying routine, I do not consider the ISO 9000 approach to be the best path to follow.

Using Client Referrals

I have already touched briefly on one viable certification aspect: the judgment of our clients. I firmly believe that a TC who has stayed in the technical communication business for some time probably also is a good TC, providing he or she deals with matters that he or she is familiar with.

Well! Now I hear opponents claiming that a good TC really does not always have to be familiar with the topic to be handled. This belief has its parallel consideration: a good salesperson does not have to be a specialist on the goods to be sold. If a salesperson can successfully sell liquid soap, that salesperson can also successfully sell jet fighters (or whatever needs to be sold). Do you agree?

Well, I do not - at least not 100%. I have seen a linguistics man doing a good job with high tech matter, but I also observed (which he admitted) that he needed more support on the technological matters than an engineer would have needed. He wrote good and precise language, though!

Adopting the Swedish APT Approach

Besides being an INTECOM member, I am also a member of the Swedish Association of Professional Translators. This association has two levels of membership for individuals. In my opinion, the criteria used to determine membership eligibility could very well serve as a certification basis for TCs. I have taken the liberty to use my own words to describe four criteria rather than quote directly

from the applicable parts of the Constitution and Bye-Laws of the association:

1. Individuals who can prove a minimum of five years work as a professional translator, with references from three different persons, are eligible to apply for full membership.
2. Individuals who cannot prove this may nevertheless apply for an associate membership, which must be followed by an application for a full membership when the five years can be proven. The board of trustees may grant this associate membership if it decides that the applicant has other qualifications which would justify a membership.
3. Companies and institutions who can prove five years of experience in the business, with references from a minimum of three clients and/or vendors, may be accepted by the board of trustees as corporate members.
4. Associate and corporate members may be present but have no voting rights at annual and general association meetings.

Commu-
nicators
of two
levels?

Now read "TC" instead of "translator", "certificate" instead of "membership", and decide for yourself if this would be a practical path to "certification".

Accounting for TCs' Education

The certifying discussion also voices that formal education should be accounted for. This might mean that an applicant with a college or a university degree (in "Technical Communication", whatever that may be) would be more eligible for a certificate than an applicant with less formal education but with a great many years in the technical communication business - perhaps (and very likely) with a brilliant reputation as a tradesperson.

Certified Technical Communicator ?? (cont.)

This is a delicate matter indeed. How would we account for "common sense"? Or the ability to absorb complex new information and translate it into a good manual? Or social adaptability (not to complete self-annihilation, though!)? Or a good sense of linguistics? And a great many other things so vital in the life of a TC? What does an academic degree in Technical Communication really encompass or mean?



Well, now, just hold your breath, Ms or Mr. Academic! I do not mean to say that your degree is of no importance - quite on the contrary! The big difference is perhaps only that with differences in formal training we may be able to undertake different jobs - although the jobs we do we also perform to everybody's satisfaction.

Other Factors

There is an old saying that computer programmers should not be allowed to compose the program user's manual. In many cases this is true, simply because a programmer who knows his or her code lines inside and out may take short cuts which are not apparent to a "normal" user. But in other cases - especially if the programmer also is a good linguistic - he might do a superb job!

There is another saying about translating: that just about anybody can do a perfect translation of any text simply by using a good dictionary! This has given rise to the somewhat derogatory term "dictionary translation". Examples of these translations do abound, I'm afraid, many times only because the person ordering (or commissioning) the translation does not fully appreciate the

importance of the translator having at least some familiarity with the subject. This, I think, applies equally to the writing of technical manuals - the primary work of a TC!

There is one additional aspect to consider: Would a certified technical communicator (automatically?) be entitled to higher fees than a non-certified TC? And, if so, how should we present (and justify) that claim to our clients?

To Sum Up...

Do we really need to have Certified Technical Communicators (CTCs?), and, if so, how should we proceed? (Perhaps we should also have a Euro-CTC - like so many other Euro-oddities!). Or would that annoy or offend our friends and colleagues on the other side of the Atlantic - and in other non-European countries?

Or would we be creating a lot of fuss about matters that have little or no importance? Now, sharpen your pencil, bring out your writing pad (a very old term meaning that you should boot your computer and load the word processor software), and submit your views to our esteemed editor-in-chief for publication!

Hey - **that means YOU!!!** I would simply hate to see this subject simply die like a flat balloon!



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How do you Layout a Table to Increase its Usability? (RU 4)

by *Thomas L. Warren*

When authors prepare text for readers, they have a lot of information they can use to make the text usable. Analyzing their target audience allows them to decide such matters as style, level of technical content, organization, and word choice so as to help their readers understand. They can draw on the target group analysis research of Pearsall and others to determine these things. They can use Pugh's categories of how readers read text (for example, do they skim or scan or search?) to help them understand how much to emphasize summaries, headings, details, and the like.

But when it comes to designing tables, what research can an author draw on to help the reader understand? Authors such as William S. Cleveland and Stephen M. Kosslyn have done recent work to help us understand how readers read and understand graphs, and Patricia Wright has talked extensively about using tables rather than text and how is the best way to prepare a table. What I find missing in the literature is how you should organize a table if you want your reader to compare values. Let me use two rather simple examples, drawn from Gerry Cohen, formerly of IBM.

Consider the two tables below. If you want your readers to compare the values for, say, porosity across the three rocks, would you use Table 1 or 2?

Table 1: Characteristics of Three Rocks

Characteristics	Rock A	Rock B	Rock C
Porosity (%)	1	2	3
Permeability (md)	4.5	5.5	6.5
Grain Size (mm)	0.02	0.04	0.08

Table 2: Three Rocks and Their Characteristics

Rocks	Porosity (%)	Permeability (md)	Grain Size (mm)
A	1	4.5	0.02
B	2	5.5	0.04
C	3	6.5	0.08

Table 1 has you read the table as a sentence from left to right, comparing the values for porosity as you go along. You locate the appropriate characteristic in column 1 and read across the row. Table 2 has you read vertically, finding porosity in the row heads and reading down the column.

Certainly, a consideration in how you design a table is its use. Tables have, fundamentally, three uses:

- (1) to support assertions;
- (2) to archive data; and
- (3) to suggest places where you need data.

Supporting Assertions

This use is the most common. You make an assertion about the Rocks based on data. The table you include shows the data - the numeric values obtained in the tests.

The question you must decide before designing that table is how much of the data you will need to include. Too many authors include all the data, and so confuse the first use with the second. They need to ask: Are all the data in the Rocks table relevant to the assertion? If so, include them.

Archiving Data

Perhaps you are not sure which data will be important to your reader and you want to include all of it. That is the archival function. When a table functions to archive data, placing it in the body of the document means that the reader will have to scan all the data to find the support for the assertion--even if you point to it in a comment following the table. In my experience, readers do not want to hunt for the relevant data; they want that data presented so that they can easily process it. That means being selective in what you include.

How do you Layout ... (cont.)

Identifying Missing Data

The most common example of using tables to determine if there are missing data is the periodic table in chemistry. Until it was developed, researchers had little in the way of logical help to determine new elements. With the table, they can predict the characteristics of an unknown element and then look for it.

These are the issues I suggest we discuss in these pages:

- (1) Is there any research to confirm which of the table layouts is best for comparing data? (And, as a side issue, would the layout be different for an engineer than for an accountant?)
- (2) What is your practice when designing tables? Which layout do you follow and why? Have you had feedback from your users?



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TOPIC: CONSULTING

Is Independent Consulting a Growing Trend in Technical Communication? (CO 1)

by Ron Blicq

In Canada – and particularly in Winnipeg, where I live in the midwest prairies – I have watched the number of technical communicators who operate as independent consultants increase markedly over the past ten years. Is this the experience of technical communicators in other countries?

The reason for this trend is threefold. There is increased awareness among Canadian manufacturers that their products sell better when they are accompanied by effective, user-oriented documentation. Many manufacturers have realized that good product documentation also means fewer after-sale service calls, which decreases their product support costs. And there is a trend in all but the major companies to "outsource" their technical documentation needs—not to do the technical writing in-house. The result has been an extraordinarily healthy work environment for independent technical communicators.

I would like to start a world-wide dialogue on these pages among technical communicators who are operating independently. For a start, let me ask two questions:

- Have you noticed an increase in independent technical communication consulting where you live?
- How receptive are product manufacturers in your country to hiring independent technical communicators on short-term contracts?

I look forward to reading your comments in a future issue of TC-Forum.



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Using cartoons in technical manuals – It's easier than you think! (GI 1)

*Text and Illustrations by
Nils Petter Smeby*



Today the trend in cartoons is towards simplicity. Highly detailed, elaborate drawings are out; minimalistic, icon-like figures are in. This is good news for technical writers who want to use cartoons in their manuals. Simple drawings are inexpensive and easy to produce. You can even sketch them yourself!

I heard a story about an American movie producer who started his career as a small boy by directing an 8-mm war epic in his parent's backyard. To make the film look more authentic, he located an old army jeep, dressed his mother in a uniform, and had her drive past as he was shooting a scene. "It made all the difference in the world," he later said. "Suddenly my ten dollar movie looked like a fifteen dollar movie!"

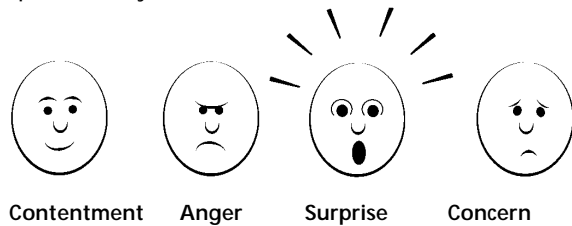
This is what is known in the trade as the production value. In a movie or TV show, a high production value simply means that the viewers have a lot of interesting things to look at: lavish sets, beautiful costumes, great special effects, etc. All these things make the audience enjoy the show more – they feel they get value for money.

Even in technical manuals, the production value can play an important role in affecting the reader's attitude towards the manual and the product. Remember that your readers are not always willing readers. Often they are reluctant readers, sometimes even hostile readers: "Why do I have to learn this new version of the program? I'm quite happy with the old one!".

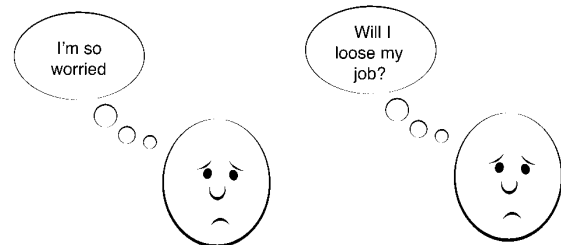
One way to make a reader more positive and willing to read, is to add "that little extra touch" – for example, a friendly cartoon. A cartoon character showing how to do things can also help reduce reader resentment and minimize keyboard-phobia. "Hey, if that little character can do it, I can too."

Cartoons transcend language barriers

The cartoon "language" has a range of symbols that are easily understood. Drawings can be very simple, yet still convey feelings and emotions quite clearly:



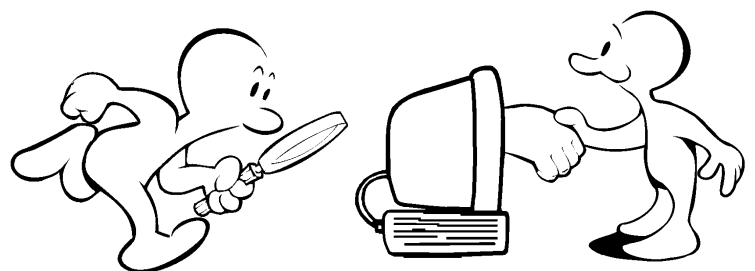
With cartoons you can also use speech balloons. This is often a good idea since a combination of words and pictures is an excellent way to present information. But remember the golden documentation rule: The text should add information to the drawing, not just repeat the message.



This text just repeats something we already know; we can SEE that this person is worried.

This text adds information to the picture; now we know WHY the character is worried.

You can use a cartoon in many ways: to explain, to emphasize or simply as decoration.



The 'Search' function

Say hello to your new PC

Using cartoons in technical manuals... (cont.)

What should your cartoon character look like?

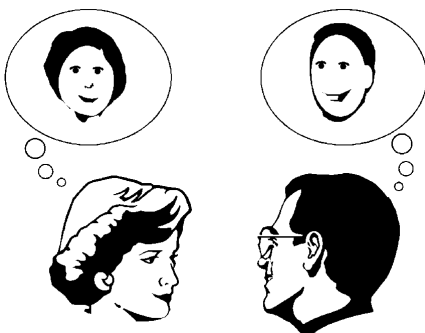
In his ground-breaking book "Understanding Comics", Scott McCloud ¹⁾ claims that we identify more strongly with simple feature-less cartoon characters than with highly detailed figures. This bears closer examination.

Think about what happens when you talk to a friend. You can see the other person's face quite clearly, and he or she can see you in the same way:



How we see each other.

But neither of you can see your own face. All you have is a vague feeling of your eyes, nose and mouth, much like a very simple cartoon:



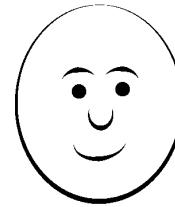
How we see ourselves.

¹⁾Scott MacCloud
Understanding Comics
HarperPerennial USA 1994
ISBN 0-06-097625-X

This is why it is easier for us to identify with a generic character. When we see a meticulously drawn cartoon of a middle-aged man with glasses, we see a stranger. But when we see a simple representation of a face, we see ourselves. In other words: The simpler the character, the broader its appeal.



This is a stranger



This is you

The best proof of this is to look at what the professional cartoonists are doing. One of the finest young talents around is Jeff Smith, whose comic book series "Bone" (published by Cartoon Books, Columbus, Ohio) has won critical acclaim and a long string of awards.

Smith renders his supporting characters in loving detail. You can see every strand of hair, every wrinkle in their clothing. But the star of the series – a small white creature named Fone Bone – is drawn so simply that he consists of little more than a few circles and two black dots for eyes. It is not even clear whether he is a human being or an animal.

Yet he probably has the most loyal and devoted fans of any comic book character around today.

Drawing your own cartoon characters

You may chose to hire a professional artist to prepare the final illustrations, but you should always make the sketches yourself to ensure that your ideas are conveyed correctly. Even if you don't see yourself as an artist, you are a COMMUNICATOR, and sketching ought to be part of your vocabulary.

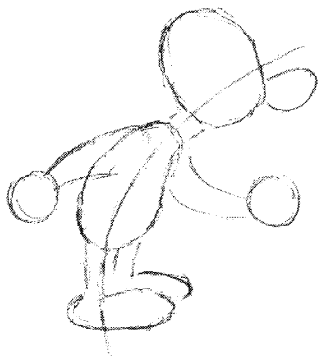
Use pencil and paper. This is much faster than trying to draw with the mouse, and you have

TOPIC: GRAPHICS / ILLUSTRATIONS

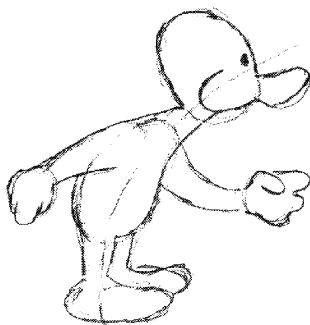
better control. Simple stick figures will take you a long way, but if you feel really adventurous, you might want to teach yourself a little bit cartooning. Here is how you do it:

Decide on a simple, basic shape for your cartoon character. Draw the figure soft and rounded. That way, there is less chance that anything will look "wrong".

First draw a line that indicates the general posture.



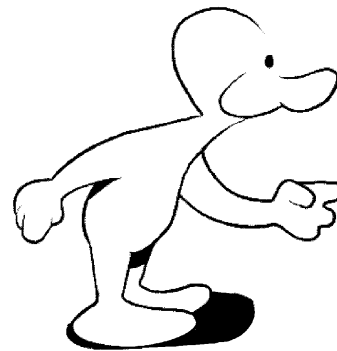
Then add the different body parts using simple geometrical figures. In our example, the torso is pear-shaped, while the head and nose are oval. Also note that the head is tilted backwards. The hands start out as circles. Place them where you want them, and connect them to the top of the torso with "garden hose" arms (no elbow joints).



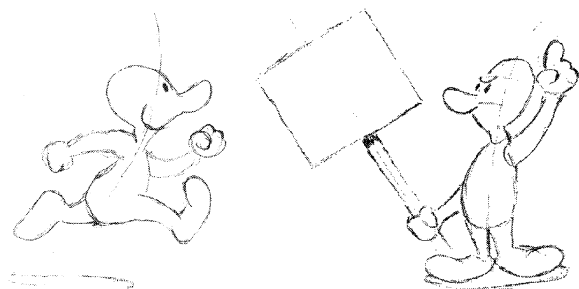
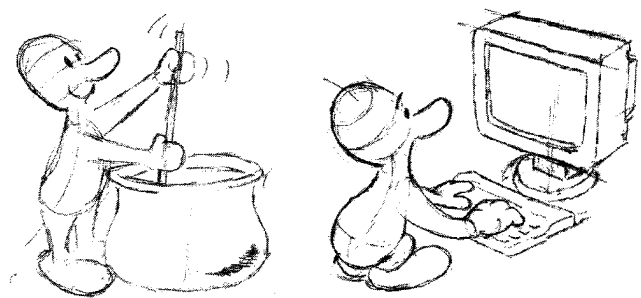
Fingers are difficult to draw, so avoid them if possible. Instead, think of the hand as a mitten. If you need fingers for some reason (for example if the character is pointing) make them short and rounded. Beginners always draw the fingers too long, and this looks awkward.

Think of the feet as rounded triangles. Remember that the heels protrude backwards.

To reproduce clearly, the pencil drawing must be traced in black ink. Professional artists use brushes or steel pens, but if you want to ink the drawing yourself, you may prefer a thin felt-tipped pen. I like the PILOT™ Fineliner because it lets you change the line thickness by varying the pressure on the pen.



Use a little shadowing to add weight to the figure and make it look more "real". Typical places to shadow are under the arms and torso and on the ground.



Using cartoons in technical manuals... (cont.)

Scanning and vectoring

When you are satisfied with your drawing, you can use a scanner to transfer it from pad to PC. The scanner program saves the drawing as a bitmap image. This means that if you want to change something, you must do it pixel by pixel. This is slow and tedious work, so my advice is to change your drawing from bitmap to vector format right away. This is quite easy if you have a good graphics program, for example CorelDRAW™.



Bitmap drawing



Vectored drawing

A vectored drawing can be edited in any number of ways. For example, you can ...



... stretch it



... color it



... change the shapes



... use special effects



... add and combine



... move around

This sort of manipulation is also great for changing clipart drawings. With a little practice you can "fine-tune" a drawing to exactly match the topic you want to illustrate. If you have chosen a popular, often-used clipart drawing, chances are your readers will not recognize the edited version.

Good luck!

Whether you take pencil in hand, use clipart, or hire an artist, I hope this article has inspired you to consider using cartoons in your next writing project. By doing so, you show the reader that you have put a little extra care and effort into your work. Suddenly your ten dollar manual looks like a fifteen dollar manual, and worth every penny to the reader.



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Nils Petter Smeby works mostly as an instructor, teaching technical writers to communicate more efficiently in words and pictures.

Comment on "Using Cartoons" (GI 2)

by Ron Blicq

I was privileged to read an advance copy of Nils Petter Smeby's article *Using cartoons in technical manuals – it's easier than you think!*, and I loved it! He has such a simple yet refreshing way of presenting his ideas, and he has created a technique we can all adopt.

Smeby was correct to suggest using an artist if one is not adept at sketching (and I am not!). I'm concerned that if I create poorly rendered illustrations I might inadvertently weaken the credibility of my information in readers' eyes.

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TOPIC: TOOLS

To Use Word, or Not to Use Word... (TO 1)

by Ulrich Thiele

Sure, Microsoft Word is one of the most popular word processors. But that doesn't make it the best choice for technical authors who work on technical documents.

Advertisements make us believe that with Word we can do everything in type and page design we want, or at least our job wants us to do (except for skiing through a revolving door, I guess).

To Use Word ... (cont.)



Besides, some magazine articles list Word in the same row as INTERLEAF and FRAMEMAKER, as a capable tool for technical writing. And some of our best colleagues and most appreciated customers work with Word as well, and seem to be very happy with it.

However, evaluation studies on the state-of-the-art in publishing software, conducted by the German renowned Institut für Technische Literatur, show that Microsoft Word is still very limited to fit the requirements of a technical writer.

What are the special requirements that make technical documents so different from the letters I write to my mom? Primarily, it's the graphics: Technical documents have to contain bitmaps and vector pictures, as demanded by our European guidelines and standards.

For a technical author, inserting graphics is the weakest point about Word. Try to handle a Word document containing one piece of graphic per page (either embedded or linked, no matter)! Even Microsoft recommends, on page 273 of their manual, not to work on documents longer than 20 pages, if work is to be done efficiently. Our last job was 28 pages with a lot of graphics: we have never done a job more inefficiently!

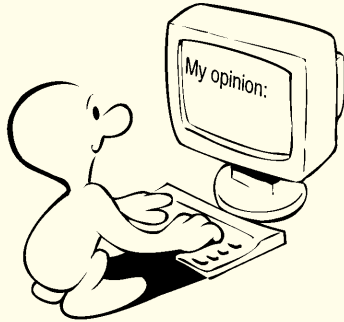
Fortunately, we knew about Word's limitations long before, and over the years we have rarely been persuaded by a customer to actually use Microsoft Word.

TC-Forum readers: Who had similar experiences?



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Letters to the Editor:



Hans,
 I have taken the two editions of TC-Forum, that I have received so far to our monthly meetings of the ASTC (Australian Society for Technical Communication) and the response was excellent. Many members have requested copies and have taken them home with them.

Often Australian technical communicators feel isolated in the profession because of our distance. We are a small society of only 500 odd members Australia wide with 150 in Victoria. Our gatherings are small but enthusiastically attended. It is so very important for members to be able to meet and discuss issues. The profession is not well recognised in this country. Most of our members are the only technical communicators in their organisation so they have little opportunity within the workplace to discuss issues relating to their work. Communication with other societies is very important, well received and much appreciated.

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Dear Hans,
 While we have been using TC-Forum as a platform for discussing various aspects of simplified English, others have been concerned with the vagaries of English orthography. I'm sure that you and your readers know of the failed attempts in the various English-speaking countries to simplify spelling. Perhaps more attempts should be (or are being) made?

The following was found on the Internet and forwarded to me by a fellow technical communicator:

European progress

The European Commission have just announced an agreement whereby English will be the official language of the EU rather than German, which was the other possibility. As part of the negotiations, Her Majesty's Government conceded that English spelling had some room for improvement and has accepted a 5 year phase in plan that would be known as "EuroEnglish":

In the first year, "s" will replace the soft "c". Certainly, this will make the sivil servants jump with joy. The hard "c" will be dropped in favor of the "k". This should klear up konfusion and keyboards kan have 1 less letter.

There will be growing publik enthusiasm in the sekond year, when the troublesome "ph" will be replaced with the "f". This will make words like "fotograf" 20% shorter.

In the 3rd year, publik akseptanse of the new spelling kan be expekted to reach the stage where more kompli-kated changes are possible.

Governments will enkorage the removal of double letters, which have always ben a deterrent to akurate speling.

Also, al wil agre that the horrible mes of the silent "e"'s in the language is disgraceful, and they should go away.

By the 4th yar, peopl wil be reseptiv to steps such as replasing "th" with "z" and "w" with "v". During ze fifz year, ze unesesyary "o" kan be dropd from vords kontaining "ou" and similar changes vud of kors be aplid to ozer kombinations of leters.

After zis fifz yer, ve vil hav a reli sensibl riten styl. Zer vil be no mor trubls or difikultis and evrivun vil find it ezi tu understand ech ozer.

ZE DREM VIL FINALI KUM TRU!

Does the unknown author of this humorous essay know something I don't know? Are governments really working on a new English orthography? I would like to learn what other technical communicators have heard about progress towards "akurate speling" in English.

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"Magazine has started well, good luck for the future.

Anything planned on Voice-Recognition? I'm just setting this system up."

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National Contact Persons (NCPs)

Professional Events

Dear Brigitte,

Congratulations on your long-awaited TC-Forum magazine. As the Associate Editor of Intercom I will support you fully on a global STC level. I do have a few comments.

Under "controlled language" you have had good articles, but they still miss a basic but important factor: the ratio between the quantity of controlled terms/words/concepts and the "corpus" total amount of words in a document. This is a crucial issue that I will describe in more detail in a forthcoming paper. I also plan to prepare a basic paper on Machine Translation (MT) and Computer-Assisted Translation (CAT).

Here are some suggestions for improvement:

- There needs to be more careful proofreading.
- There must be diacritical marks.
- The paper by Tom Warren is tops.
- Do not repeat paragraphs about the same topic (e.g. controlled language) by three authors. More editing and coordination is needed here.
- Graphics are great.

Continue the good work!
(I hope you do not mind my open, undiplomatic words).

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

TC-Forum provides information about upcoming events for technical communicators. These include conferences, seminars, calls for papers and other information of professional interest. TC-Forum accepts information about non-profit events only. Send information to the Editor (address see the Impressum on page 3).

September 1997:

ISTC Annual Conference, UK

Next year's ISTC conference is being brought forward to middle/late September 1997. Those wishing to participate as a presenter, sponsor or delegate should contact the ISTC administrative secretary (see below¹).

10-11 October 1997:

Abbaye de Royaumont, France

COMTECH '97

International Congress organized by the Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques (CRT)

International Congress organized by the Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques (CRT)

COMTEC'97 is a communication congress based on the concept of live forum, perfected by Ulf-L.

Andersson in 1974. There will be very few "speeches" as such in this conference, for the emphasis is on the exchange of ideas. Interaction will be encouraged through an "Idea Market" including open discussions and other events that do not fit into the conventional "conference" format. However, participants write formal papers that are collectively published in the "Preseedings" and serve as a background to communications. The texts produced during the conference will be included in the "Postharvest". All texts will be translated so the entire set will be available in both French and English. Rather than a reflection on breakthroughs in technology,

Professional Events

COMTEC'97 re-orientes the debate towards the aim of technical communication: user satisfaction. The following are possible directions to explore:

- Ergonomics, design and usability.
- Is there such a thing as "culturally neutral" in documentation?
- Creative freedom v. industrial and commercial interests.
- Orthodox or innovative?
- New approaches to documentation.
- Is standardization in documentation a contributing factor in effectiveness?

Further information is available from²⁾.

22 - 24 October 1997 Provo, Utah, USA
and 23 - 25 September 1998 in Quebec, Canada:

IEEE/PCS IPCC 97 / IPCC 98 Technical Communication Conferences

The Professional Communication Society (PCS) of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Inc (IEEE) holds an annual conference each autumn, in different locations across the USA and Canada. Two teams of volunteers are currently planning the 1997 and 1998 conferences.

IPCC 97 will be held at the Snowbird Ski Resort in Provo, Utah, in the western USA (Unfortunately, it will be too early for skiing!). For information, contact IPCC 97 conference chair Karl Smart at karl-smart@byugate.bye.com
IPCC 98 will be held in picturesque Quebec City on the banks of the St Lawrence River in Canada, from 23 to 25 September 1998. For information, contact IPCC 98 conference chair Ron Blicq at 71604.1535@compuserve.com.

15 - 16 January 1998

Terminology in Advanced Microcomputer Applications TAMA '98

Organized by the International Network for Terminology (TermNet), Supported by the International Information Centre for Terminology (Infoterm)

Latest developments in selected terminology-related (i.e. tools for terminology management, translation, text management and analysis, concordance and localization) will be presented and discussed. Individual demonstrations and mini-workshops offer a unique chance to get fully acquainted with innovative products, as well as services and publications.

Further information is available from TermNet.³⁾

3 - 6 June 1998

Winnipeg, Canada:

TCI 98

Third Annual Educational Institute for Technical Communicators

A strong educational program is being developed for the third Technical Communication Institute - TCI 98. Topics already planned are

- Usability Testing
- Online Documentation
- Indexing
- Incorporating graphics into technical documents
- Proposal writing

More topics are being prepared.

The final list will be reported in TC-Forum No. 4. The course leaders are recognized specialists in technical communication, and they will present advanced rather than basic courses. For more information contact the program coordinators: Ron Blicq and Lisa Moretto⁴⁾, or http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/con_ed/partners/tci

Autumn 2000 in the UK:

Forum 2000

During the 44th Annual Conference of the STC (May 1997, Toronto, Canada) the planning committee took the next steps toward establishing Forum 2000.

1. It installed the primary Organizing Committee, consisting of Gerry Gentle, ISTC President, UK; Brigitte Beuttenmüller, tekcom, D; Ron Blicq, IEEE/PCS, CDN; Jeffrey Hibbard, STC, USA
2. Gerry Gentle, as Forum 2000 General Chair, approached interested societies to identify conference partners. An outline agreement has been approved from the societies with the following specific responsibilities:
 - Project Development and Control, including Administration and Finance ISTC, UK
 - Program STC, USA
 - Public Relations, tekcom, Germany; CRT France
 - Conference Operation IEEE/PCS, USA/Canada

Further announcements about Forum 2000 will be published in TC-Forum as they become available.

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