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## IMPRESSUM:

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### Editor:

Hans Springer  
Bergstraße 56  
D 91443 Scheinfeld, Germany  
+49 (0)9162 92 38 00 (voice)  
+49 (0)231 90 70 254 (fax)  
editor@tc-forum.org and  
Springer.H@geod.geonet.de

### Publisher:

Brigitte Beuttenmueller,  
Stuttgart, Germany

### Language & Style:

Ron Blicq, Winnipeg, Canada,  
Lisa Moretto, Myrtle Beach SC,  
USA

### Graphics & Illustrations:

Nils P. Smeby, Oslo, Norway  
Johan Näsström, Enskededalen,  
Sweden

### Production:

Wolfgang Buchholz, Stuttgart,  
Germany

### Layout:

Birgit Klink, Matthias Scheurle,  
ViV Werbeagentur, Stuttgart,  
Germany

### Address administration:

Ami Wright, Cambridge, MA USA  
ami@ziplink.net

Webmaster [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org):  
Alexander von Obert, Nürnberg,  
Germany; avo@tw.h.nbg.de

### Next issues:

- June (deadline for input 10 April)
- September (deadline 15 July)
- December (deadline 15 October)

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This issue contains a special insert with a call for presenters for FORUM 2000.

\* Each Topic has a two-letter abbreviation, for example  
• CL for Controlled Languages  
• RU for Readability, Usability, Quality  
• SA for Special Aspects  
• TO for Tools  
• HL for Highlights from Prof. Events  
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:



Today, I have **good news** for you, for us, and for the future of TC-FORUM:

We have succeeded in finding sponsors who will enable us to continue publishing TC-FORUM free of charge throughout 1999. Daimler Chrysler will continue to be a sponsor, and we have found more organisations who share our enthusiasm about TC-FORUM and are willing to support its further existence.

In all our negotiations, we have been urged to maintain the printed version of TC-FORUM in its current form and with its excellent quality; no one wants us to sacrifice it in favour of the electronic version. We are very happy to be able to respond to this wish. And we are particularly happy that one of our generous sponsors is the world's largest organisation for technical communicators, STC, the Society for Technical Communication.

We intend to publish four issues of TC-Forum in 1999, to be distributed in March, June, September and December (for the deadlines see the impressum on the facing page). The Sep-

tember issue will specialise on translation and translation tools. We would appreciate it if experts working in any kind with and on translation and translation tools would share their experiences and opinions on this emerging new technology with us, and in time for this special issue (deadline for articles: mid-July 1999).

As announced in the most recent issue of TC-FORUM (3-98) we have installed the Web Site [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org). The next step with this Web Site will be to install an archive with the papers published in the printed TC-FORUM. We may also provide additional information on other papers published (such as those listed as references to the paper by Jeff Allen, now available in the Web Site). Authors of future papers may use this facility for providing additional information.

For faster discussion on the content of papers, we have already initiated the mailing list [tcf-gen](mailto:tcf-gen) for those who have given us their email-addresses. Unfortunately, the first experiments with these addresses created problems because more than 200 addresses were outdated

or invalid. When many error messages 'blocked the lines', we had to switch off the list.

Everybody who has given us his or her email address, and has not received an email from this list by March '1999 but who wants to become a participant, may subscribe as mentioned on p 26. The list is not moderated; every subscriber may send emails to the list, and they will be distributed to all other subscribers - an ideal means for fast discussion.

In summary: we now have three information-channels open for you:

- TC-Forum (the printed version, as the backbone).
- The WebSite [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org).
- The mailing list [tcf-gebn@listserver.tc-forum.org](mailto:tcf-gebn@listserver.tc-forum.org)

**Now it's your turn:  
become a contributor!**

Yours



## Thank you to the Sponsors of TC-FORUM:

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- ▶ **TWIN**, Technical Writers of India

## Different Types of Controlled Language (CL 15)

*by Jeff Allen*

There has been much discussion on the topic of Controlled Language (CL) in the past issues of TC-Forum. With several years of experience as a translator, as a trainer of Controlled English writing and translation post-editing, and as a developer of Machine Translation (MT) and Translation Memory (TM) systems, I would like to clarify some points that do not seem to have been presented in other articles. These points do not indicate all of the details of possible CL systems, but I hope that they open up the discussion to cover both past and recent developments in CL system and application research and development.

### Limited vocabulary CLs

Caterpillar developed Caterpillar Fundamental English (CFE) as a restricted vocabulary of a total of some 850 words back in the early 1970s as a way of simplifying their version of technical English so that non-native English speaking clients could read the documents more easily. This is similar to the work of Odgen's Basic English back in the 1930s (see <http://web.marshallnet.com/~manor/basiceng/beweb.html> ; <http://web.marshallnet.com/~manor/basiceng/ramble.html>).

**Past and recent developments in CL systems.** Boeing and the other airline industries have built upon the original work of Caterpillar's CFE. Emphasis is placed on creating a core of lexical items that can be used throughout the document. A certain number of general technical writing rules (e.g. write short sentences) are also promoted, but strict enforcement of the grammatical rules is not usual. If a conformance checker is used, it mainly checks for adherence to vocabulary items rather than overall grammatical structure.

### Extended vocabulary CL grammar conformance checker

Conformance checkers are the new wave of CL writing. The Simplified English Checker/Corrector (SECC) project was completed in 1994 and resulted in the creation of a basic conformance checker. It checks for grammatical structures that do not conform to SE examples. It is interactive in that it indicates where deviance occurs in the CL writing sample. In addition, Caterpillar's more recently developed Caterpillar Technical English (CTE), launched in the early 1990s, is quite different from the original CFE.

CTE started with a reduced vocabulary (8 000 general terms and 50 000 technical terms selected from a total of approximately 1 million terms) and a set number of constrained syntactic constructions in English that can be mapped into about 10 other languages. As indicated in a recent article on the subject (Kamprath et al., 1998), new technical terms are constantly being added to the CTE database for approval and then are submitted to human translators who then provide translations in their respective languages and add them to the multilingual database. The current number of English technical terms is approximately 70 000.

The objective of CTE is for better standardization of English terminology, better comprehension of the English documentation by native and non-native English readers and more easily facilitated translation into 13 target languages (both by MT \*AND\* human translation processes). So the goal of CTE is quite different from that of its predecessor.

### Stop-and-Go Authoring

Most CL authoring systems today are called "Stop-and-Go" or "Red light / Green light" systems. The author works on the entire text and then submits it to the conformance checker. The checker then goes through each sentence one at a time and notifies the author of potential spelling mistakes, ambiguity pitfalls for translation, etc.

## Interactive Authoring Systems

Some research is being done (Hartley and Paris, in preparation) on the development of interactive authoring systems that could assist authors who are writing technical texts, similar to how Computer-Aided Translation (CAT) tools assist a human translator to produce the target translation of a source text.

## Destined or Chosen for Translation

I make a distinction between texts that are "destined for translation" (i.e. it has been decided before writing starts that the original will be translated), and texts that are "chosen for translation" after writing the source text. When a company such as Caterpillar or General Motors decides that all manuals that are produced are destined to be translated from the very inception of the document, it is easier to persuade management and technical authoring staff to implement writing principles that will improve translatability of the texts.

If a text is meant to be produced and read only in the source language (e.g., the Starr Report and Clinton Rebuttal), yet someone decides to take such a document and feed it through an MT system, as did AltaVista using the Systran Babelfish on-line translation service (Alberganti, 1998), the resulting text will most likely be quite unsatisfactory because the text was not written with the intent that it would be translated, and especially not by a machine. The objective of CL applications for technical writing is to foresee the need of document translation, and to create structural paradigms that allow a computational system to optimally retrieve equivalents in the target language for texts written in a controlled source language.

## Different Types of Translation Systems

I would be willing to discuss in a future issue the different types of translation systems (i.e. Fully Automated Machine Translation, Machine Assisted Human Translation, Human Assisted Machine Translation, etc.) and how CLs have contributed to the evolution of these translation strategies.

## Conclusion

Controlled Language is not a single, immutable entity. It has evolved over the decades and has taken form in different applications and for different purposes. Many companies have taken the general concept and then customized it within their own environments to make it profitable for their specific needs. It is only now in the late 1990s that the different CL players are starting to work together by forming the National Consortium to Advance Controlled Language and Computer-Aided Translation Tools (NCCAT). Their focus is to create general CL and training principles that will allow for cross-industry standards in this emerging field.

Five references to this paper will be available with the reproduction of this paper in the WebSite [www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org)

**CL is not a single, immutable entity.**



**Jeff Allen**

Directeur Technique/  
 Technical Manager  
 European Language Resources  
 Association (ELRA) & European  
 Language Resources Distribution  
 Agency (ELDA)  
 55, rue Brillat-Savarin  
 75013-Paris · France  
 +33 1 43 13 33 33 (voice)  
 +33 1 43 13 33 30 (fax)  
[jeff@elda.fr](mailto:jeff@elda.fr)

## Quality for Customers' Sake (RU 11)

by Gabriele Bock

Executives as well as customers demand quality from technical communicators. However, the requirements of both groups seem hard to combine: Executives want quality to be achieved inside the company by applying quality standards without causing any delay or additional costs. Establishing customer-based quality, on the other hand, usually demands extra money and extra time. Nevertheless both demands can and should be utilized for developing a user-oriented quality system.

### Content Quality Needs more Support

Quality must be designed into a project, not evaluated only at the end. Letting customers find weak points of a product during usability testing is very expensive and time consuming. Therefore companies should help their technical communicators produce quality documents by



- developing company-specific style guides and checklists,
- offering training in company-specific technical writing,
- implementing review processes, and
- establishing feedback procedures between writers, editors, and reviewers

Style guides and checklists are a common means for improving technical documentation. Large companies develop their own style guides which contain not only general rules for good technical writing, but also corporate writing standards. The style guide helps writers organize and write their documents, At the same time a style guide establishes standards for editorial reviewing.

Company-specific checklists are condensed versions of these standards. They are helpful tools in the hands of skilful experts, because applying those mostly abstract categories requires profound knowledge about their scope of validity and relevance. The use of both style guides and checklists requires training and experience. Managers tend to believe that writers only need to be told a few rules for clear writing, such as building short sentences or avoiding using more than two prepositions in the same sentence—if they are to produce documents that are easy to understand and translate into action by any user. If that were true, a lot of brilliant technical literature would be around, because by now many writers do know the basics of technical writing. What is missing is extensive training and – even more important – continuous feedback on the application of technical writing standards in everyday work. Many communicators think they consider these principles, but actually they do not.

### Editing and Reviewing are Indispensable

Executives should be aware that *reviewing* is absolutely indispensable. Economic cuts often result in the reduction or even cancellation of editing and reviewing processes, justified by the

argument that writers are supposed to deliver high quality documents anyway. Of course, any technical writer tries hard to meet this demand. But editing increases the quality of most documents, simply because someone else not only notices spelling errors and missing commas, but may also find omissions, vagueness, and problems in the sequence of operations.

Another important reason for editing is the necessity of adapting technical documents from different sources to one company standard. Documentation of large systems is usually produced by several communicators. Although all communicators are required to consider the company style guides, most guidelines leave room for interpretation and therefore the documents some (permissible) variation. On the other hand, users expect documents to be structured, written, visualized, and composed exactly according to the same principles. Neither style guides nor checklists can be a substitute for experienced editors and reviewers.

## End-Users Evaluate Quality

Only the user can tell you when your product is good enough. User satisfaction, the most important and most reliable indicator for quality, is frequently measured by simply asking how satisfied a person is with a product and its instructions. The significance of this measure is dubious, because you never know what users imply by "satisfaction": Are products and instructions actually meeting their demands? Are they judging by comparing your product to others with poorer performance? Are they happy they were able to manage at all? Do they want to please the company because they were awarded something? Maybe they just do not want to admit they did not understand the instructions and were not able to operate the product?

The only way to find out about usability, which is the prerequisite for user satisfaction and user performance, is usability testing. Committing to a user-centred design means incorporating usability engineering methods into product development

*right from the beginning*, not waiting until the product is about to be marketed. Usability tests have already become common practice in many organizations. The tests should be performed by typical end users in their natural work environments. Test labs are second choice because working conditions in the real world are hardly as undisturbed and uninterrupted as in a quiet lab.

In addition to the user, a test manager, preferably an independent communication specialist, and a person recording comments, actions, and problems, are required for a reliable test performance. Technical writers should not be involved in final usability testing, because they will be tempted to explain the information they wrote and thus bias the test results.

Technical communicators need to keep in mind the demands of the users *while they are writing*. And they should realize they are supposed to write their sentences so that the user will be able to understand and act appropriately.

High quality documentation will be achieved only if sufficient means (staff and funds) are allocated to produce and control content quality:

"Ensuring quality means building the time for reviews into the project plan – both the technical and the editorial reviews. It means taking the time to assess the needs of the user and setting aside time to meet and come to agreement on how quality will be measured and by whom it will be measured."<sup>1)</sup>



**Dr. Gabriele Bock**  
 bcc bock communication consult  
 Rotter Str. 35  
 D-86911 Diessen am Ammersee  
 +49 8807 9 43 52 (voice)  
 +49 8807 9 43 54 (fax)

<sup>1)</sup> Steele, Karen: In Search of Quality, DocQment, Newsletter of STC's Quality SIG, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1998, pp. 3 and 11.

## What Is More Important in Technical Writing: Obeying the Standards and Regulations or Following the Customer's Needs? (RU 12)

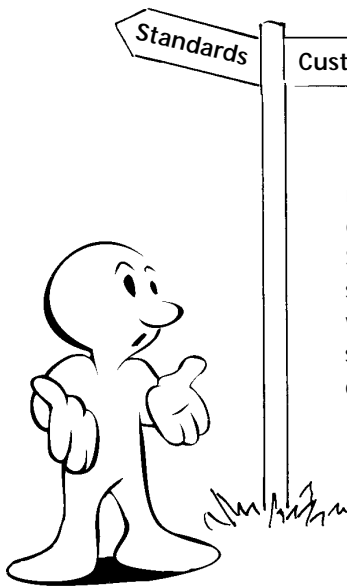


by Ulrich Thiele

In one of the standards committees for a new guideline for technical documentation, we recently discussed the recommendations we could give regarding the minimum contents for user manuals that are to be translated into foreign languages. Most of the members of the

commission voted for a reduction of the contents to be translated, down to the requirements given by the

appropriate standards and regulations according to the EU directives valid for the product. Since most of the directives are safety-related, the user manual would basically consist of the safety instructions for the product. The requirements that customers expect to find instructions for installation, and for the use and maintenance of the product, did not arise as a topic in the discussion.



If you understand the function of a committee that deals with new standards and regulations, then this attitude against the customer's needs can be easily accepted. However, if you as a manufacturer have to consider the field of technical documentation as part of a customer-oriented marketing strategy, it might be imprudent to just follow the directions given by law. The customer certainly can expect more from a user manual than the minimum (i.e. just safety instructions!).

More and more I read user manuals that obviously are based on the documentation-related norms and standards. I find these manuals are hard to read and understand, but they are law-proof! Yet by using a "lawyerish" style and wording in your technical documentation you might never achieve any lasting customer relationship. In this respect it is also not such a good idea to use the software tools now available for automated documentation assistance, where the techni-

cal writer just gives a short description of the product to be described and out come all paragraphs extracted from the appropriate norms and standards. You just fill in some product related details and your user manual is done!

Simply following the valid standards and regulations prescribed by European laws certainly does not result in good technical documentation. The "soul" of a manual, the apparent identification of the technical writer with the product, and neat workmanship in user-oriented structure and language, leads to the customer's satisfaction with the product.

**Remember:**

*"The explaining of products to somebody, showing how they can benefit their users, and doing this in the most effective way with the appropriate means, this is art."*

Abraham J. Hamilton (1870)

**Dr.-Ing. Ulrich Thiele**  
 Technical Writer,  
 specialized in visualization and  
 multimedia documentation.  
 THIELE Documentation + Media  
 in den Mühlgärten 52  
 D-63755 Alzenau  
 +49 (0)6023 3 21 12 (voice/fax)  
 THIELE-DOCUMENTATION@t-  
 online.de



## Are You Drowning in Email? (RU 13)

by Ron Blicq

Diane Kunde, writing in the *San Diego Union*, reports that 71% of managers, professionals, and support staff feel overwhelmed by the volume of email they receive.

We can't halt the flow of incoming email messages, but we can give you some suggestions that will help you become a better email communicator.

### Write "Pyramid Style" <sup>1)</sup>

Try using the pyramid method when you write your next email message:

1. Start with what you **most** want your reader to know and, if appropriate, what action you want the reader to take.
2. Follow with any background information the reader may need to understand the reason for your message, and provide details about any point that may need further explanation.

### Keep Messages Short

Busy readers want the messages they receive to be concise yet complete. Check that each message contains *only* the information your reader needs to respond or to act. Before writing, separate essential *need to know* information from less important *nice to know* details.

If you are writing to multiple readers, send two messages rather than a single all-embracing message:

1. Write a short summary for readers who will be interested only in the main event and the result.
2. Write an in-depth message for readers who need all the details.

But remember: email does not give you a license to

- write snippets of disconnected information,
- write incorrectly constructed sentences,
- forget about using proper punctuation,
- ignore misspelled words, or
- be abrupt or impolite.

Neither is it a forum for telling long stories and anecdotes.

### Be Prudent

Proofread your email *very* carefully: the informality of the medium and the speed with which you can create and answer messages invites carelessness! Email is not a good medium for conveying confidential information. Your messages can too easily be forwarded to other readers, and then you have no control over who else may see what you have written.

Similarly, be just as sensitive when deciding to copy a message to another person. Be sure that the original sender would want his or her message distributed to a wider audience.

### Avoid Complex Formatting

Avoid creating columns and indenting subparagraphs, because what you see on screen most likely will not be what your readers see. If you need to format columns, consider creating the message as a word-processor file and sending it as an attachment to an email message.

Your formatted screen may look like this:

Facilities are located as follows:		
Facility	Location	Distance
Master Control	Calgary	3.6 miles south of transmitter
Remote Site 1	Red Deer	City center
Remote Site 2	Edmonton	2.5 miles north of university

But your reader will probably see something like this:

Facilities are located as follows:		
Facility	Location	Distance
Master Control	Calgary	3.6 miles south of transmitter
Remote Site 1	Red Deer	City center
Remote Site 2	Edmonton	2.5 miles north of university

<sup>1)</sup> The "Pyramid Style" of writing was developed by Ron Blicq 20 years ago and is featured in depth in three books he and co-author Lisa Moretto have published with Prentice Hall: *Guidelines for Report Writing*, "Technically-Write!" and "Communicating at Work", and one published by the IEEE Press: "Writing Reports to Get Results". There is more information on their Web page: [www.rgi-intl.com](http://www.rgi-intl.com).

## Comment on "To Serif or not" TC-Forum 3/98

*by Amo Fuchs*

I believe that the preference for the Arial font is European. Most American texts are set in Times New Roman - save for headings, where they too use a non-serif font.

I have the same problem with Hebrew. I found out that for a short document, a letter, or a short instruction manual, serif is ok, but for a long document, especially if it is formatted, the "panaches" of the serifs strain your eyes.

The problem with the authors of texts is that they read their texts again and again, almost memorize them - so that they are not really aware of what is going on in the virgin eyes of a new reader. Try to read some extensive manual, say 20 or more pages, written by others, and printed in serif. Where the switch from serif to sans serif happens (i.e. a few pages to 20+ pages), is probably an individual choice.

There is another point which merits investigation. Maybe it has been done, but I do not know if it has: Diacritics. If you take American texts of 30 or 40 years ago, you still may find some diacritics are used, namely in quotations. In British texts, you will find find even more. However, in German and French texts, they are an integral part of the language.

But since the advent of Microsoft diacritics have disappeared. Probably, this is one person's preference. And maybe the American preference for Times New Roman is just again one person's preference - and everybody else has to comply with it.

I would be glad to hear others' opinions too, particularly on the default color of PowerPoint.



**Amo Fuchs**

P. & A. Fuchs  
P. O. Box 20535  
Raanana 43515, Israel  
pafux@internet-zahav.net  
+972 9 7714072 (voice)  
+972 9 77140711 (fax)

## Spelling in TC-Forum (RU 15)

*Letter by David Dobsen*

*Dear Hans:*

Thank you for including my comments about humor in technical writing and TeeCee in the March issue. I rather think that TeeCee will quickly become the mascot of TC-Forum. ....

Another subject: Spelling. (And this is, perhaps, directed into the hands of my very good long-standing friend, your Language & Style Editor, Ron Blicq.) There are several ways of spelling English - the English/Canadian style, and the American style. Both are correct.

Thirty-four years of producing the IEEE Transactions on Aerospace & Electronic Systems has taught me that a very good way to convey the flavor of the nationality of an author is to permit the variations in spelling and grammatical construction to be reflected in the final journal appearance of a contributed item.

An example: Color vs. Colour. The reader can, perhaps subliminally, conclude from the selected spelling, something very definite about the author.

When I see the word 'defense' (American spelling) as 'defence' over Tom Warren's name, it just strikes me as incorrect. I wonder if the editor will change my 'humor' to 'humour' in the next paragraph! I would be interested in your readers' comments.



Please also note that I prefer to use the final sentence period outside of the quotation marks for clarity – I know that this may raise some eyebrows, but I feel that [‘humor’.] is clearer than [‘humor.’]

Thank you for listening. I look forward to the next, always interesting, issue.

Sincerely,

**David B. Dobson, PE**  
 4500 North Park Avenue  
 Chevy Chase, Maryland 20815 USA  
 email: d.dobson@ieee.org

*Comment by Ron Blicq on David Dobson’s Letter*

**Dear Hans:**

In his letter commenting on editing style in TC-Forum, David Dobson states: “There are several ways of spelling English – the English/Canadian style, and the American style.” He is correct, except for one assumption: that Canadian spelling is the same as English (British) spelling.

Editors in Canada are probably affected more by the spelling nuances prevalent in their country than editors in any other English-speaking country. Historically, Canadians learned to spell the British way. But geographically, Canadians have been influenced by their very large and influential neighbour to the south, the United States. In what other country can children say that last year’s teacher insisted they spell ‘harbour with a ‘u’, but this year’s teacher marks them wrong if they insert the ‘u’!

So what do Canadian writers and editors use as a Canadian style guide? If they turn to the Funk and Wagnalls Canadian College Dictionary, they

find the spellings are almost entirely US-based. By comparison, if they delve into a very recent arrival on the scene —The Canadian Oxford Dictionary —they find the contentious words are spelled the British way. (However, the C.O.D. does state definitively that words like ‘tire’ [for a wheel] and ‘program’ [without the extra ‘me’] are entrenched in Canadian standard English). Alternatively, they can turn to the Canadian Press Style Manual, which is used by most newspapers in Canada. But even it contains anomalies, spelling words ending in ‘or/our’ with the American ‘or’ (as in labor and neighbor), and words ending in ‘er/re’ with the British ‘re’ (as in centre and theatre), as if its editors couldn’t reach a consensus!

So what can we do? Personally, I decide where my report, proposal, letter, or article is going, and spell and punctuate it to suit that market. If I am writing to a company in Dallas, Texas, I spell the American way; if I am writing a technical paper for a British or Australian journal, I spell the British way. And if I am writing to an audience entirely within Canada? Until recently I used the Canadian Press Style Manual. However, now The Canadian Oxford Dictionary with its thorough examination of the Canadian language has arrived on the scene, I am encouraged to adopt it as my personal style guide.

So let’s hear from you: I would like some strong arguments in favour of one spelling over the other!



**Ron Blicq**  
 Senior Consultant  
 RGI International  
 569 Oxford Street  
 Winnipeg, Canada MB R3M 3J2,  
 +1 204 488 7060 (voice)  
 +1 204 488 7294 (fax)  
 rgi\_ron@compuserve.com

## Technical Writing in India (SA 1)

*by Guru Kamath*

I said to my technical writing friends: "I guess there are at least 50 technical writers in Bombay," But no one believed me. I extrapolated my estimate and calculated there must be at least 500 technical writers in India today. Then I corrected myself: "It is quite possible there are 500 technical writers of Indian origin all over the world, but in India there are hardly 500."

The reason for the relatively low number of technical writers in India is because India has been concentrating mainly on doing projects. It is only in recent years that many top multinationals have set up their development factories here. This has dramatically increased the technical writers' population in India. In some companies in Bangalore and Pune, one gets to hear of teams of 10 and 20 technical writers. Otherwise, India is no different to other countries: a large number of technical writers work alone in their companies. Today, all these technical writers have come together to share information and ideas through TWIN, the Technical Writers of India mailing list.

### State of Technical Writing

Thanks to TWIN, one gets an idea about the state of technical writing in India. I would regard it as a few fountains of excellence in a desert. A desert because locally technical writing is hardly known or practised. The excellence comes from multinationals and large organisations which employ experienced technical writers. They have had the benefits of seminars, STC Conferences, etc, and contacts with established technical writers. Most other writers however are home grown.

Our best writers are journalists, teachers, and computer professionals - people from different walks of life - who have built careers in technical writing on their own. Our newbie "technical writers" are not even aware of the basics of technical writing. In many cases they comprise "writers," or those with "good English," and programmers who claim to be "tech-

nical writers" (yet it is years before they can be truly called that). In India, because there are very few formal courses on technical writing, most technical writers simply learn the skills on the job. Some are fortunate to have peers and seniors for guidance.

Online technical writing, web writing, and web help are virtually unknown. Usability Testing, Information Mapping, Minimalism, Instructional Design, and Information Design are new terms for Indian technical writers. A lucky few of our technical writers (typically 2 or 3) manage to attend the STC Annual Conference and other training forums. I do not know of a single technical writer from India who attended Forum 95.

### Translation/Localisation

In the field of translation and localisation again we are far behind: the field has just started emerging and machine translation is totally unheard of in India. Many of our writers are aware of such tools but none have actually used them. Currently, the issues of globalisation and localisation do not affect our technical writers as there are very few companies with that kind of reach. Thus there are very few writers who understand these issues. The issues of American English versus British English are, however, a reality for Indian writers.

### Education

The technical writing educational scenario in India is bleak. Few universities or institutions offer education in technical writing, and any online courses available abroad are too expensive for Indian technical writers. In contrast, mailing lists like TECHWR-L, TechComm, and TWIN are like daily online seminars for Indian writers.



Fountains of excellence in a desert.

A few established writers and companies occasionally conduct seminars, but in general they are poorly attended. It is as though India is just waking up to the technical writing field. There are hardly any local books or reprints available on technical writing, and only a few universities and institutions have developed a curriculum on technical communication. Consequently, Indian technical writers find it difficult to develop and polish their skills.

### TWIN - Technical Writers of India

The Technical Writers of India (TWIN) mailing list has been instrumental in building a network of technical writers in India. I set up TWIN on October 2, 1997 with the help of Matthew Richardson in the UK. The list has over 250 members spread all over the world: in India, UK, USA, Germany, Australia, Israel, China, France, Singapore, Guam, South Africa, Slovenia, etc.

TWIN is a platform for sharing problems and helping each other grow. TWIN posts requests for help on tools (Word, RoboHelp, the Web, etc), techniques, grammar, etc. It also posts jobs wanted and jobs available.

TWIN Forum provides discussion areas to anyone interested in expressing views on technical writing and related topics. TWIN Forum also provides a facility to chat. Unlike the TWIN mailing list (where you need to subscribe), anyone with a free Delphi account can access the TWIN Forum and read and send posts on technical writing. The posts are available in the Topic areas for Delphi members to view and respond. Responses can be sent to the message board or to individuals.

As an extension to the mailing list, there are TWIN Chapters in Pune, Bangalore, Mumbai, and Delhi. Chapters hold activities such as meetings, seminars, chat sessions, site visits, and training programmes. TWIN celebrated its first year by holding the first Annual Conference of TWIN in Pune, India. Interestingly, many papers from the US and Germany were posted in absentia. A presentation on TC-Forum by Hans Springer also was made in absentia.

### Future

India is recognised for its software and good English language skills. Yet the same recognition for Indian technical writing does not exist. Our manuals and documentation may compare with the best in the world, but our skill in producing them is not yet recognised. Companies and technical writers must take the lead to correct this anomaly.

TWIN is making efforts to affiliate with international technical writing organisations. For a start, we want to form a chapter of the Society of Technical Communication in India.

TWIN URLs:

TWIN home page:  
<http://members.tripod.com/~Kamath/>

TWIN Mumbai Chapter:  
<http://members.tripod.com/~Kamath/mumbai.htm>

TWIN Pune Chapter:  
[http://members.tripod.com/~Makarand\\_Pandit/](http://members.tripod.com/~Makarand_Pandit/)

TWIN Delhi Chapter:  
<http://www.angelfire.com/tx/twindelhi/index.html>



#### Guru Kamath

TC-Forum National Contact Person  
India,  
703A River Park, Dattani Complex,  
Borivili East  
INDIA Mumbai 400 066  
+91 22 8862183 (voice)  
guru@bom5.vsnl.net.in  
Host of TWIN pages at  
<http://members.tripod.com/~Kamath>

## Technical Communication in Israel (SA 2)

by Leah Guren

They call Israel the land of milk and honey, but it is also the land of high tech, where the demand for TCs (technical communicators) has increased significantly in the past few years.

Israel rates as one of the highest per-capita technology consumers in the world, but its actual market size is small, as the total population is only about six million. This means that most high tech companies here must find additional markets outside of Israel. Therefore, most technical writing is in English, which is accepted in many countries and is also a more practical source language (for localization) than Hebrew.

### Education and Professional Acceptance

The demand for English-language documentation means that most TCs in Israel are originally from English-speaking countries. Many of them retrained as TCs simply because of their English skills. However, as the high tech market has become more sophisticated and demanding, employers have begun to expect professionalism and technical expertise from their TCs. In return, TCs earn respectable salaries and are treated on par with the engineering staff.

This increased respect and recognition exists only within the high tech community; outside of it, few people have heard of our profession or understand what it is. One colleague had difficulty convincing an insurance clerk that a TC was not a secretary!

One side effect of the demand for TCs has been an increase in the number of courses in technical communication. This has led to a surplus of people trying to break into the profession, causing fierce competition for entry-level positions.

### Our Strengths

The Israeli TC community has several special strengths:

- People are willing to help others getting started in the field, with more experienced writers providing informal mentoring to novices. There is a very active local list server for TC issues.
- Israeli TCs are serious about professional development, skills, tools, and keeping up with changes in the industry.
- The TC community is still small enough that people know each other. This means that an incompetent TC cannot easily hide.
- Israel has one of the highest per capita rates of TCs in the world.

### Our Challenges

Our cultural environment leads to several interesting challenges:

- We write in English and speak in Hebrew, as Hebrew is the common language among engineers who may have grown up speaking Hebrew, Russian, Arabic, Spanish, or any of a dozen other languages. In addition, we often have overseas customers or business associates with whom we speak English.
- We deal with multiculturalism. As a country of immigrants, we must learn to communicate among ourselves as well as to the outside world. Many Israeli companies now train their engineers how to behave when working on projects in other countries.
- We are geographically remote from our markets. Customers in the US are seven-to-ten hours behind us, making it difficult to coordinate conference calls and meetings.

### The Israel Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC)

STC Israel dates back to the 1960s. For almost 30 years, our chapter remained small (fewer than 20 members throughout the country) and sometimes went through periods of near-dormancy. During the active periods, however, we were often on the cutting edge of both technical and professional development. For example, our chapter sponsored the first word processing and DTP conferences in Israel.

**Comment on  
„Technical Writers influencing  
Software Development“**

*by Jeff Allen*

Sheila Black (TC-Forum 2-98, pg. 22) disagreed with the statement "Of course, no company will allow a TW to contribute to this part (the User Interface) of the developing process."

I would agree with her assertion that some R&D groups do in fact seek the comments and advice of the users.

For example, when I worked as the trainer of controlled language technical writing and translation systems at Caterpillar, we strongly encouraged the technical authoring users (i.e. writers, editors, translators, translation post-editors) to participate in sessions on interface and system design and enhancement. When some of them found through much use that the already developed applications were inadequate for the tasks to be done in a production environment, they took the initiative to push for enhancements that have consequently greatly improved the usability of the applications.

Translators were also included from the very beginning, in the design of the translation side of the Workflow management system. This inclusion resulted in significantly fewer changes to the Translation Workflow modules than to the Authoring Workflow modules.

Get the users involved from the beginning!

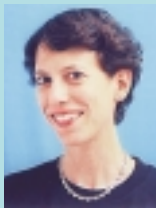
In 1994, our chapter began to grow and enjoy increased activity. We now have just over 100 members, making us the third largest chapter outside of North America (only France and Japan have larger chapters). The chapter is very active:

- About every two months we host an event with one or more local or overseas speakers. Events—panel discussions, lectures, or informal presentations—are grouped around a theme, ranging from new tools and technology to management issues. They are held in the late afternoon or early evening and are open to everyone; non-STC members pay a small fee (about 4.2 euros) while STC members attend free.
- Our newsletter, i-contact, was redesigned two years ago. We are also starting to place some of the newsletter articles on our Web site.
- This year we are planning a major membership drive using a Hebrew-language brochure targeting R&D managers and personnel directors.
- We are also hosting our first-ever international competitions (Technical Publications, Online Communication, and Technical Art); our president, Mark Levinson, was one of the judges of the final entries at last year's international competition in Houston.

**What's Ahead**

I have watched our profession mature here over the past seven years. I predict continued growth in the field, but with higher expectations on the part of employers (specifically in areas of technical skills and tool experience). I also predict that STC Israel will continue to grow in the coming years.

I hope to meet more of our international colleagues at conferences and through other venues such as this. For more information about TC in Israel, or about STC Israel, please contact me



**Leah Guren**  
Vice President STC Israel  
Manager, Technical Publications  
Better On-line Solutions  
+972-4-990-7533 (voice)  
lguren@boscom.com



**Jeff Allen**  
Directeur Technique /  
Technical Manager  
European Language Resources  
Association (ELRA) & European  
Language Resources Distribution  
Agency (ELDA)  
55, rue Brillat-Savarin  
75013-Paris FRANCE  
+33 1 43 13 33 33 (voice)  
+33 1 43 13 33 30 (fax)  
jeff@elda.fr

## The Current Demand for Style Guides (TO 9)

*by Andreas Baumert*

I have been tasked with devising a style guide for a few departments in my company. I have seen style guides, in fact I use a couple on a regular basis. But I am really at a loss to know how to start writing a company-specific one.

Where does one start?

From time to time technical writers ask similar questions in one of their mailing lists. The answers show the different attitudes companies take toward style guides. Some argue that it is enough to use the Chicago Manual of Style. Others discuss their experiences in developing or maintaining style guides written for their department or as part of a company-wide Corporate Style Guide (CSG).

During my research for a book project<sup>1)</sup>, I have found style guides in a wide variety of forms. Some are only a couple of pages. Others consist of hundreds of pages, delivered in ring binders. Some companies produce well-printed and bound books (for example, Microsoft and Sun). A lot of style guides, differing in quality and size, are in the Internet. Most of them cover the design of web pages; only a few deal with document design in general. From one company I received a multimedia CD containing their style guide. It is a well-designed piece of software, presenting graphic arts, sound and video.

There are many forms of style guides!

### A New Challenge

Many small and medium sized companies in Europe face a challenge new to them: Think global, prepare for your presence on markets world-wide. Globalization is not a mere buzzword of modern economy - it is reality, even for small companies - the so called "global players" - are experienced in thinking beyond the boundaries of national markets.

Smaller companies often lack these experiences. For international markets, they now need to bundle their resources to create a unique corporate design world-wide. They require one source for all employees concerned with the company's behaviour in public. To them the CSG will

- serve as the backbone of corporate design,
- save money, and
- improve quality.

### Backbone of Corporate Design

Most style guides I have seen start with the logo. They explain how the logo should be used. A CSG may contain many rules for the logo, depending on the logo's proportions and form as well as on the colours it uses. Where do we place our logo on a page? Do we want the logo to be placed within the text? What colours do we use in print? What colours replace these colours in screen design? Which parts of the logo must be translated for which cultures, languages, religions, or nations? Can we use our logo on a telefax or do we need a different version?

Similar issues are the use of typefaces and colours in general. Defining document types and their grid systems are key questions to be answered by the CSG.

Beside these 'classics of CSG design', more and more companies worry about language use. They want to establish some kind of company wording to be used by marketing people as well as by engineers, developers and technical writers. You can find very good examples in "The Microsoft Manual of Style for Technical Publications." To talk about words is not a matter of marketing alone. Think about words that may - in some markets - weaken a company's position in a lawsuit dealing with a problem, failure, etc.

<sup>1)</sup> Baumert, Andreas: Gestaltungsrichtlinien: Style Guides planen, erstellen und pflegen. Reutlingen: doculine, 1998. ISBN 3-9805770-5-8



### The CSG Saves Money

First the bad news: The CSG costs money and takes time. Many people spend hours and hours discussing document design, wording and the like. It becomes genuine project management with all the bits and pieces!

The good news: Successful style guides save more money than they cost. All these discussions occur anyway. In some companies, writers again and again discuss the benefits of selected formatting issues. "Do we need two spaces following a period, or don't we?" "Wouldn't it be better to have that heading formatted 24 point?" "Where do I place notes on trademarks and copyrights?" The time wasted in such discussions ends when an organisation has a CSG.

The CSG also reduces the costs for localization and translation. The better the rules for language and artwork, the faster, better and cheaper localization specialists will do their job. That issue alone encourages companies to think about a CSG when entering international markets.

The CSG may serve as a tool for training purposes. It shows new employees how certain tasks need to be done. In this respect it saves the time of experts who have to train the newcomers, and so helps the company save money.

### Improving Quality

A CSG can also assure quality. By defining rules for development, documentation, etc, it also sets company standards for quality. "We produce our online help that way" can be read as "if you don't do it that way, it is not according to our quality standards."

It is also a guide for jobs contracted out to the service industry and freelancers. It helps them to do their business the way the company wants them to. For example, once the company's wording has been read into a translator's workbench or database, documents can be translated more efficiently and less expensively.

### There is no Other Choice

No company has the time to re-invent the wheel. So it does make sense to write down rules for corporate design. More: some CSGs also deal with project management and document management. I could find only a few arguments against CSGs. To me, the most important negative aspects are that the CSG may hinder creativity and that it can take bureaucracy to excess.

These dangers are real if management starts to develop a CSG without involving the employees concerned by it. A well designed CSG balances creativity and regulations. It also requires release cycles to take into account what experience the CSG users have. This 'updating' will never be "really" finished and will always be subject to changes.

Today, the successful CSG is more than one binder. It is a concept as well as an unobtrusive assistant, a collection of templates, files, forms, and binders. The CSG is a must for small and medium sized companies entering international markets. If it has been planned carefully, the CSG will strengthen the company's position.

The CSG will strengthen the company's position.



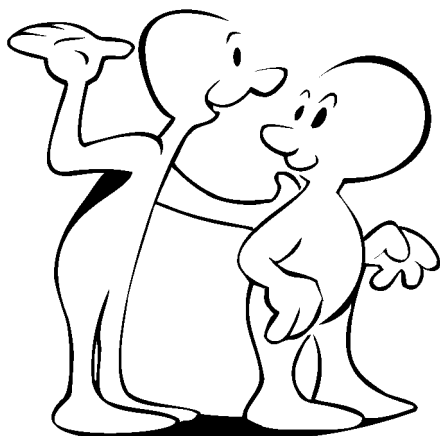
**Andreas Baumert, Prof. Dr.**  
 Fachhochschule Hannover  
 Studiengang Technische Redaktion  
 Ricklinger Stadtweg 120  
 30459 Hannover  
 ++49 511 92 96 758 (voice)  
 ++49 511 92 96 610 (fax)  
 andreas.baumert@ik.fh-hannover.de  
<http://www.ik.fh-hannover.de/tr/menschen/baumert/baumert.htm>

*This topic is intended to have a twofold purpose:*

- *To inform you about the outcome of recent international professional events which might be of interest to the technical communication community.*
- *To stimulate organisers and participants of international professional events to send us relevant information on the outcome of such conferences, with which to initiate discussions - adopting the Forum concept.*

*We will decide whether to publish such reports / postharvests / minutes either in the next printed TC-Forum and/or in our electronic services*

- *webSite*  
[www.tc-forum.org](http://www.tc-forum.org)
- *mailing list*  
[tcf-gen@listserver.tc-forum.org](mailto:tcf-gen@listserver.tc-forum.org)



## Blurring the Boundaries: Bringing Students, Faculty and Business Partners into

*Notes from the Idea Market at  
IPCC 98, Quebec*

*by Bernadette Longo*

This idea market session explored five questions:

1. How can teachers negotiate, mediate, and moderate sometimes conflicting expectations and needs in an industry/academic partnership for classroom projects?
2. How can teachers design projects that enhance course content when projects encompass so many diverse skills and levels of knowledge?
3. How can teachers and industry partners schedule classroom projects, when industry schedules tend to be so much quicker than academic schedules?
4. What skills do industry partners want students to learn from industry/academic partnerships?
5. How can these partnerships facilitate multi-directional communication among all participants?

**In response to question 1**, participants suggested that expectations be negotiated early and be thought of as a contract between the class and industry partner. Some discussion followed on the following management and pedagogical issues raised by this contractual model:

- Are students to be treated the same as employees? There was a consensus that students cannot be thought of as employees because they are not compensated for their project work, neither are they contractually bound to work a set number of hours on the project.
- Meeting production deadlines cannot be seen as equal to learning. Therefore, production of a deliverable cannot be the only course objective in this type of partnership. Student learning must remain the focus of the classroom.

**In response to question 2**, participants generally agreed that course projects should be as close to "real life" as possible. In other words, these projects should mirror industry situations, demands, and skill levels wherever possible. In this type of

## Mutual Learning Spaces (HL 1)

partnership, it is the teacher's responsibility to ensure that projects help students to meet course learning objectives and enhance course content. In this case, teachers and industry partners need to negotiate expectations early, as recommended in the previous question. In these negotiations, teachers need to keep their course objectives in mind and shape projects that will work with those objectives. If teachers and industry partners cannot accommodate course objectives, the resulting project will probably not be beneficial to student learning.

**In response to question 3**, participants did not resolve this scheduling issue. There was discussion on the difficulty of accommodating industry and academic schedules, raising the possibility of multi-semester or multi-quarter projects. In those cases where teachers need to plan for projects months in advance of the course, industry partners may only be able to offer a limited range of projects, since industry turn-around can be on a tighter schedule than academic terms.

**In response to question 4**, participants agreed that students need to learn directly applicable job skills from these partnerships. Many participants saw these industry/academic partnerships as an effective way to teach students current industry practices. They are also an effective way to help teachers stay current with industry practices.

**In response to question 5**, participants saw these partnerships as extending beyond one semester and one classroom. Instead, they recommended that industry/academic partnerships become an ongoing relationship that can flourish in areas other than classroom partnerships. Some of their suggestions for more permanent partnering include the following:

- Talk often, not just before or during a course. Make the partnership a routine aspect of academic and industry life.
- Create corporate advisory boards for professional communication programs and keep in close contact with these boards. Give board members meaningful roles to play in the academic program.
- Explore the possibility of industry partners

contributing financially to the academic program in ways such as equipping facilities to enable in-class partnerships.

- Collaborate on grant proposals to provide a framework for ongoing partnerships.
- Create opportunities for industry representatives to teach university courses.
- Create corporate internships for faculty to work in industry settings.
- Work with professional associations to provide organizational support for ongoing partnerships. Request that a Web site for industry/academic partnerships be developed and maintained by a professional association.
- Use industry partnerships as focus for cross-disciplinary projects.

In these responses, participants emphasised the need for industry and academic partners to maintain routine and ongoing lines of communication among industry representatives, teachers, and students. These open lines of communication will provide the most effective pathway for ensuring that the needs of all partners are addressed and accommodated to the best of their abilities. This communication pathway can lead to the spaces where mutual learning can occur for everyone involved.

### **Bernadette Longo, Ph. D.**

Assistant Professor, Department of English  
Clemson University, Clemson,  
South Carolina 29631, USA  
blongo@clemson.edu  
+1 864-656-3457 (voice)  
+1 864-656-1345 (fax)

# Technical Communicators: How Do You Contribute to Inter

*A summary of participant's idea market contributions*

*by Julie Fisher*

Research I recently conducted highlighted the high level of involvement technical communicators have in the design of user interfaces. Most technical communicators make some contribution, ranging from comments to developers if, from their perspective, something on the interface does not work, to actually designing the interface elements. This led me to propose a question for an idea market for IPCC 98 in Quebec. The question I asked participants was:

**Consistency is a major issue in interface design.** *How do you, as technical communicators, contribute to interface design?*

The question generated a lot of interest, with technical communicators sharing their experiences and providing many examples of what they do and how they contribute. Here is a summary of the points they raised.

**Consistency.** This proved to be a major issue and one that particularly concerns technical communicators. In many development projects, different programmers work on different aspects of a system and each programmer is responsible for the screens for their part of the system. Often no one sees the whole system until it is nearly finished. Participants suggested that often the technical communicator, during the process of documenting a system, is the first person to see the system in its entirety. The technical communicator sees the inconsistencies and is in a position to draw them to the attention of the developers.

Consistency of spelling was highlighted as a problem, particularly with systems which might be used in both Canada and the United States. Which spelling convention is to be used? The participants said that often no decision is made on which spelling to use. The interface then ends up with text that uses both spelling conventions!

A third issue was the lack of consistency between the printed information and the wording on the screen. This, participants suggested, happens when systems change after the documentation has been written. However, the technical communicators said they are raising these issues with developers and encouraging developers to involve them earlier in the process.

**Contributing to Different Interface Elements.** One participant described how she had been involved in the development of a menu structure. She suggested that the menus could be simplified and should contain fewer options for users, and she also helped in the design of the links. Another person mentioned that they helped with the design of the system workflow, the order in which users perform certain actions. This technical communicator helped to ensure that the system workflow more accurately mirrored the users' workflow.

Other technical communicators said they suggested changes to icons. A good-news story for technical communicators was that in one case the developer, after usability testing the icons of a new system, concluded that they were not working and called in the technical communicator to help. The technical communicator of this system said that usability testing the documentation had led the developers to test the system more thoroughly. The developers were pleased with the results and now they involve the technical communicator more.

## face Design? (HL 2)

**Error Messages.** Not surprisingly, these were raised as a problem by many participants. Some said they are now consulted by the developers and have been involved with changing poor messages. Using technical communicators for consultation, one technical communicator said, was helped because users were complaining and pointing out problems to the developers. Another technical communicator said that where there are space restrictions on the error message text, then it is even more important to involve the technical communicator to ensure the best minimal messages are constructed.

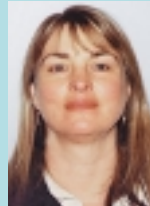
**How Do You Get Developers to Listen?** This question was asked by many participants. One suggestion was to explain to the developers why a particular part of the interface does not work for users. For example, why flashy graphics and scrolling text do not work on a Web site. Explaining to developers, in a positive way, saying "this is better" rather than "this is bad", often is a more effective way to capture the developer's attention and interest.

A number of participants raised the issue of web site design and how technical communicators have a role to play. The point was made that often businesses get caught up with wanting to go online but pay little attention to who their audience is and why they want a web site. In some cases it may not be appropriate. A technical communicator pays attention to these things and will stress to those developing web sites that it is the information that is important, not the flashy graphics.

Technical communicators are skilled in audience analysis. This is a useful skill in Web site design because many sites are developed without an understanding of who the audience is. For example, if the Web page is to describe a shopping site, then there is a need to understand shopping behaviour. If the site looks inviting, then the user is more likely to "stay".

Idea markets are a great way for participants to share their experiences with each other and with the activator. I learnt, from those who stopped to talk with me, more about how technical communicators are contributing to interface design than I knew before the session. It is not necessarily a new area that technical communicators are moving into, but it is one that developers are starting to notice and appreciate the contribution you, as a technical communicator, can make.

Idea markets  
are a great  
way for  
sharing  
experiences!



**Julie Fisher**

Senior Lecturer  
Dept of Information Systems  
Victoria University of Technology  
Australia  
+61 3365 2592 (fax)  
JulieFisher@vut.edu.au  
68 Holmes Road  
Moonee Ponds Victoria  
Australia 3039

## Making Research Usable (HL 3)

### *Notes from the Idea Market at IPCC 98 in Quebec by Kim Campbell*

On Friday 25 September 1998, Laurel K. Grove and Kim Sydow Campbell conducted a session regarding ways that both practitioners and academics could gain better access to the results of technical communication research.

They led into the discussion with the following questions:

- How can research results be disseminated?
- Would an abstracting service be beneficial?
- How would you prefer to access results?
- What should be included?
- How should it be paid for?
- How much would you be willing to pay?

Responses came from both academics and practitioners, from both sides of the Atlantic. All find it difficult to make adequate use of research results, for various reasons. One particular disincentive to using research results is the current scattering of information. For instance, Sage publishes Communication Abstracts (on paper) but that publication neglects many technical communication journals. Some practitioners mentioned that they rely on publications by the Society for Technical Communication, although they realise that those publications represent only a fraction of all that might be relevant.

**Above all:  
access to  
research  
results must  
be FAST!**

Most researchers rely on electronic services, such as Web search engines, Uncover (a research database), and First Search (another research database). Altogether, the participants reported, there are a dozen or so relevant databases. To be thorough, a researcher must use several, because although there is some overlap among them, there are also gaps between them. However, many people use only one database (often the one they learned first) and never go beyond it. Even then they find that many of the sources that their searches identify are irrelevant or inapplicable.

Grove and Campbell asked what would better meet technical communicators' needs. One model suggestion was a reference librarian service. With the trend in libraries toward electronic communication and away from staffing, an alternative suggestion was a database. If they are to use a database, technical communicators would like to be able to select on dates or years of interest, language, and keywords, then obtain every abstract meeting all the selected criteria. They could settle for that set of abstracts, or if necessary fine-tune the search further.

Several payment options were suggested. For instance, the service could be set up as a subscription, with password protection. For an annual fee, subscribers would be allowed as many searches as they want. Alternatively, payment could be by the number of abstracts or articles downloaded. A price of US\$ 5-10 per usable abstract was suggested as reasonable. Accepting advertising on the database could subsidise costs, as could support from professional societies. (In another session, Tom van Loon suggested that journal publishers would be responsible for collecting payment per downloaded article and then would pay a royalty to the database according to the number downloaded.)

The specific content to be included is a matter for debate. Some technical communicators would be satisfied with abstracts rather than full articles; some said an annual annotated bibliography or review articles would meet their needs. A number of other questions were also not resolved, such as those concerning form of delivery (electronic versus paper), coverage (annual versus archival), and language (original language only or translated to major languages).

In discussing ways to disseminate research results, the discussion inevitably shifted to the value of research. One problem is that practitioners need quick turnaround from project inception to usable results. They argue that research conducted in academia is generally outdated by the time it is published. Practitioners contend that research lags practice, and then publication lags research. For this reason, they often look to the work of their colleague practitioners rather than to academia for answers.

With that and the question of timeliness in mind, they suggested that any database should include the white papers being published on company white pages, because such work tends to be on the cutting edge of practice. Although such papers would not have been through the quality control implied by the peer review process, practitioners believe that the peer review process within technical communication has been so weak as to be meaningless; academics are generally not hard enough on each other to really eliminate poor quality. On the whole, practitioners said that they were simply concerned about finding out what works, without regard to the underlying reasons sought by academia. They thought that a specific trade journal could inform them without the common problem of being overly academic (Campbell referred them to the "Interface" section of the IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication, which supports this purpose).

Researchers expressed other dissatisfactions. They noted that technical communicators, both practitioners and academics, tend to look within their own field to the exclusion of others. Thus much relevant work that may be going on in associated fields beyond technical communication is likely to be missed entirely. They were hopeful that a more inclusive database could help solve that problem.

Grove and Campbell conclude from their presentation that there is sufficient reason to explore the feasibility of establishing some form of abstracting service for the technical communication field. At this stage, two questions must be answered:

- What is the demand for an abstracting service among technical communicators?
- What will it cost to satisfy that demand?

Grove and Campbell plan to survey technical communicators to assess the demand for an abstracting service and to interview information systems providers to estimate the cost of satisfying that demand. In this way, more authoritative information can be used in developing a proposal that can then be presented to potential supporters within the IEEE and its Professional Communication Society, at the Society for Technical Communication, and elsewhere.

#### Kim Sydow Campbell, PhD

Editor IEEE Transactions on  
Professional Communication  
k.s.campbell@ieee.org  
(205) 348-8921 (voice)  
(205) 348-6695 (fax)  
Department of Management & Marketing  
Box 870225 University of Alabama  
Tuscaloosa, AL 35487-0225

# Building Usability into Your Development Process

By Marie-Louise Flacke

*A Summary of Ginny Redish's Workshop at the "When East meets West" Conference on Technical Communications and Usability, Ljubljana (Slovenia), October 1998*

Ginny Redish focused her seminar on these four points:

1. Introducing usability (i.e. what is usability?)
2. Understanding users and their work before design
3. Interviewing users
4. Finding out if an organization's prototypes and drafts work for users (i.e. usability evaluation)

## 1. What is Usability?

Usability means making sure that the people who will use the product can (1) use it immediately to do their work productively, and (2) easily reach their goals within their own physical and social environments.

In other words, Technical Communicators (TCs) put the users in the centre of their documenting job, because products have no reason to exist without users!

Consequently, TCs should always ask : "What do the users want? What do they expect?" Redish then provided some key word definitions:

- usability (I can find what I need and understand what I find)
- reliability (it works the same way every time)
- accuracy (I can trust what it says)
- functionality (it works the way the specs say it will)
- sufficiency (everything I'm looking for is there).

## 2. Understanding Users

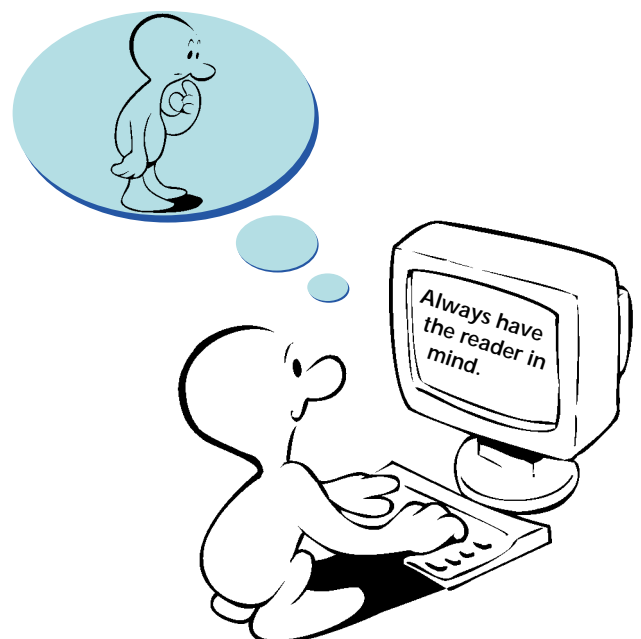
If TCs are to understand their users, they should also ask: "Who decides what is usable?" In fact, it's the users who decide

- whether to use the product,
- when to use it,
- how to use it, and
- how much to use it.

Redish stressed the importance of user-centred design, asserting that the users' needs drive design, not the technology.

Implementing user-centred design means doing user, task, and environmental analyses, creating usability specifications, and performing usability tests. Within this process, TCs have to watch and listen to users and avoid assumptions, i.e. stick to reality. Watching the user means observing the user's goal, the user's task, the characteristics of the user, and the characteristics of the environment:

- Capturing characteristics of the user means analysing the user's prior experience, expectations and mental models, style, and ways of working.



(HL 4)



- Capturing characteristics of the environment includes observing the physical surroundings (space, lighting, noise, placement of devices, etc.) and the social and cultural milieu (interactions with others, speed, interruptions, clients, etc.).
- Stressing how to capture the starting point (by defining what kind of information the user has at the beginning) and the end point (by identifying how the user decides when the task is done and what happens next), and whether the user accomplishes the expected goal.

TCs have to be good observers and treat the user as a partner. They should write down their observations and separate observations and interferences (assumptions).

### 3. Interviewing Users

In addition to observing users, TCs must also interview them, focusing on

- determining what the user does when the product does not work,
- giving open questions and listening, and
- asking neutral questions.

Remember: a good interviewer listens more than he speaks !

For such interviews, it is important to talk to users one at a time and to create a scenario. A scenario is a short story with a real setting and a real situation that identifies people's goals, and the task and attributes that are relevant to doing the task.

### 4. What is Usability Evaluation?

Usability evaluation means finding out if the prototype document works. TCs should conduct controlled try-outs with one user at a time, and observe the user, recording what the user says and does, analysing the data, and figuring out what is causing problems.

### When should a usability evaluation be done?

Usability evaluations should be performed throughout the product development, not just at the end. It is not necessary to have a complete manual, help system or Web site to conduct an evaluation. Usability evaluations are possible for prototypes, navigation, outlines of manuals or help systems, and specific screens or modules. Finally, when evaluating usability, Redish recommends considering the following three steps to finding the problems:

- Group related instances together.
- Consider how global (widespread) the problem is.
- Categorize the problems by their severity.

#### Additional sources

Usability Professionals' Association:  
[www.upassoc.org](http://www.upassoc.org)  
 +1 630 655 1647 (voice)  
 +1 630 655 0391 (fax)

Ginny Redish, Ph. D.  
 President, Redish & Associates, Inc.  
 6820 Winterberry Lane  
 Bethesda, MD 20817 (USA)  
 1 + 301 - 229 - 3029 (voice)  
 1 + 301 - 299 - 2971 (fax)  
[redish@ari.net](mailto:redish@ari.net)  
[www2.ari.net/redish](http://www2.ari.net/redish)



**Marie-Louise Flacke**  
 Technical writer  
 Lannion, France  
 +33 296 14 11 33 (voice)  
 +33 296 14 11 34 (fax)  
 Videoconferencing : +33 296 14 11 35  
 CompuServe: 100615,2175  
[flacke@editions.net](mailto:flacke@editions.net)  
<http://www.hr/marie>

## Last Minute News



### TC-Forum Mailing list TCF-GEN

We installed this list in December, but we had to stop using it soon after because we had problems with some addresses.

By the end of February or early in March we will re-start the list. However, it will be a reduced membership list sent only to addresses which did not create problems.

It may happen that TC-FORUM subscribers who previously gave us their email addresses will not automatically be subscribed to the list. So, if you have not received an email from the list by the end of March, and you want to participate, please send an email to [majordome@listserver.tc-forum.org](mailto:majordome@listserver.tc-forum.org) with the text (in the body) containing just one line: "subscribe tcf-gen".

To send a message to all list members address it to [tcf-gen@listserver.tc-forum.org](mailto:tcf-gen@listserver.tc-forum.org)

If you have problems participating on the list, email your message to [editor@tc-forum.org](mailto:editor@tc-forum.org).

Hans Springer

### ELRA 1999 Call for Proposals Commissioning Production of Language Resources

The European Language Resources Association (ELRA) invites proposals for the first of a series of calls for the (co-)production and packaging of Language Resources (LRs), open to companies and academic organisations that comply with eligibility conditions provided below.

ELRA is planning to commission the production, packaging and/or customisation of speech and written LR's needed by the Language Engineering (LE) community, and is inviting applications for production and/or packaging/repackaging projects, which could be eligible for funding from ELRA. The purpose of the call is to ensure that necessary resources are developed in an acceptable framework (in terms of time and legal conditions) by the LE players. This call is targeted towards projects with short time scales (projects lasting up to one year but preferably shorter) and the size of the funding will be fairly small.

To qualify for funding eligibility under the European Commission 4th Programme, the institution(s) making the proposal must belong to one of the European Union Member States, or be in Liechtenstein, Iceland or Norway.

### Timetable of deadlines:

- Announcement of the Call: 8 February 1999
- Submission deadline for proposals: 19 March 1999
- Notification of reception of proposals: 26 March 1999
- Acceptance notifications and negotiations to start: 5 April 1999

Only complete proposals will be reviewed.

Should you have further questions, or if you want to receive a full version of the call for proposals, please contact Jeff Allen preferably before 1 March 1999.

Jeff Allen c/o ELRA/ELDA  
55 rue Brillat-Savarin  
75013 Paris FRANCE  
(+33) 1 43 13 33 33 (voice)  
(+33) 1 43 13 33 30 (fax)  
<http://www.icp.grenet.fr/ELRA/home.html>  
[jeff@elda.fr](mailto:jeff@elda.fr)

## National Contact Persons (NCPs) Professional Events

**Austria:** Victoria Koster-Lenhardt  
vkosterlenhardt@eur.co.com

**Australia:** Julie Fisher  
+61 3365 2592 (fax)  
strype@onaustralia.com.au

**Belgium:** Patrick Goyvaerts  
+32 3 240 3759 (fax)  
goyvaerp@bec.bel.alcatel.be

**Canada:** Ron Blicq  
+1 204 488 7294 (fax)  
rgi\_ron@compuserve.com

**Denmark:** Thomas O'Connor  
+45 4226 9322 (fax)  
toc@foss-electric.dk

**England:** Gerry D. Gentle  
+44 1462 483 480 (fax)  
ns68@dial.pipex.com

**France:** Jean-Paul Bardez  
+33 1487 56566 (fax)  
Bardez@club-internet.fr

Jeff Allen  
+33 1 483 133330 (fax)  
jeff@elda.fr

**Germany:** Brigitte Beuttenmueller  
+49 711 657 40 13 (fax)  
Beuttenmueller.B@t-online.de

**India:** Guru Kamath  
guru@bom5.vsnl.net.in

**Israel:** Julian Zelenko  
+972 9771 8189 (fax)  
techstyl@netvision.net.il

**Netherlands:** Rob Punselie  
+31 4027 57710 (fax)  
pres@stic.nl

**Norway:** Tove Østberg  
+47 2202 6050 (fax)  
tove.ostberg@comtext.no

**Spain:** J. Antonio Bardera Pinuela  
+34 45 185 099 (fax)

Dr. Rodolfo Beceiro Mangold  
+34 925 22 89 18 (fax)  
rrbbm@intercom.es

**South Africa:** Jan Roodbol  
+27 1283 1553 (fax)

**Sweden:** Johan Naesstroem  
+46 08 648 00 37 (voice/fax)  
johan.nasstrom@odata.se

**Switzerland:** Reto Schilliger  
+41 1 767 18 66 (voice/fax)  
r.schilliger@access.ch

**USA:** Jeffrey L. Hibbard  
+1 9149 452 018 (fax)  
hibbard@watson.ibm.com

Thomas L. Warren  
+1 4057 446 326 (fax)  
twarren@okway.okstate.edu

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

**06 - 7 May, Innsbruck, Austria:**

### tekem-Conference

Producing Documentation for Europe

Legal requirements, standards, translation, terminology questions, consumers' rights. (Language German; international delegates welcome)  
For information contact  
www.tekem.de

**16 - 19 May Cincinnati, Ohio**

### STC's 46 Annual Conference

For details contact  
stc@stc-va.org or  
www.stc-va.org

**22 - 27 Aug 1999, Munich, Germany**

### HCI International '99 - Creating New Relationships

8th International Conference on Human-Computer Interaction jointly with 15th Symposium on Human Interface, Japan  
The conference will provide an international forum for exchanging and discussing ideas, research results and experiences related to analysing, designing, developing, applying, and evaluating information and communication technologies for work, leisure, and personal growth.

Four major areas are in the focus of the program:

- Ergonomics and health aspects of work with computers
- Human-computer interfaces

- Organisational aspects of information and communication technologies
- Communication and interaction in information networks

For questions and further information contact:<sup>1)</sup>

**24 - 28 August 1999 Innsbruck, Austria**

### 5th International Congress on Terminology and Knowledge Engineering

### TKE '99, Multimedia and Content for a New Millennium

organised by  
Association for Terminology and Knowledge Transfer (GTW)  
International Information Centre for Terminology (Info-term)  
International Network for Terminology (TermNet)  
(Details have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.19)  
Further information available at:<sup>2)</sup>

## Professional Events

30th August - 3rd September 1999,  
Bozen/Bolzano, Italy

### 12th European Symposium on Language for Special Purposes LSP '99 "Perspectives for the new millennium"

(Details have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.20)  
Further Information:<sup>3)</sup>

30 - 31 October 1999, Nagaoka  
Institute of Design, Japan

### 4th ASIAN DESIGN CONFERENCE

International Symposium on  
Design Science

The Japanese Society for the Science of Design, the Korean Society for Design Studies, the Chinese Institute of Design, and the Design Research Society, announce the 4th Asian Design Conference - International Symposium on Design Science. The conference aims to promote international exchange of research findings in the field of design science.

The conference will comprise oral presentation sessions and a poster session. Papers are invited on any researched topic within the widest definition of industrial design, including, but not limited to, product design, graphic design, environment design, design history, design methods, CAD, human factors, and design management.

All papers and presentations are to be in English.

Deadline for abstracts:  
28th of February 1999

For further information contact:  
4thadc@syst1.ti.chiba-u.ac.jp  
(In English or Japanese)

12 - 14 June 2000 London, England:

### Forum 2000

Technical Communication  
Leading the Way

INTECOM is pleased to announce FORUM 2000, which will be held from June 12 to 14, 2000 at the Commonwealth Centre in London. This unique conference invites technical communicators worldwide to participate in a multifaceted discussion of our profession. If you have ideas to share, or if you are interested in what other professionals will be doing and thinking, FORUM 2000 is for you.

Details on Forum 2000 have already been printed in TC-Forum 3-98 p.16 - 17

The Program Committee requests urgently to ask the following contact persons for details before submitting proposals.

Peter Greenfield,  
pegre1@abbeynational.co.uk;  
+44 1908 343388 (fax from Europe) or  
Ellen Fenwick,  
fenwick@cyberhighway.net,  
+1 208 853 0335 (fax from outside Europe)

**Deadline for proposals:  
1 July 1999**

For up-to-date information contact [istc@istc.org.uk](mailto:istc@istc.org.uk) or [fenwick@cyberhighway.net](mailto:fenwick@cyberhighway.net)

1) HCI International '99 -  
Conference Secretary  
Fraunhofer IAO  
Nobelstr. 12  
D-70569 Stuttgart, Germany  
+49 711 970 2331 (voice)  
+49 711 970 2300 (fax)  
[HCI99@iao.fhg.de](mailto:HCI99@iao.fhg.de)  
<http://hci99.iao.fhg.de>

2) Gesellschaft für Terminologie  
und Wissenstransfer (GTW)  
Universität Innsbruck  
Fischnalerstr. 4  
A-6020 Innsbruck (Austria)  
+43 512 507 2966 (fax)  
<http://gtw-org.uibk.ac.at>

3) Accademia Europea Bolzano  
Via Weggenstein 12/a  
I-39100 Bolzano, Italia

Europäische Akademie Bozen  
Weggensteinstraße 12/a  
I-39100 Bozen Italy  
+39 471 306 111 (voice)  
+39 471 306 199 (fax)  
[LSP99@eurac.edu](mailto:LSP99@eurac.edu)  
<http://www.eurac.edu/LSP99>