



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

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TALKING IN CIRCLES

A roundtable progression on Writing, Editing, Document Design, and Project Management for April 7.

by Leanne Logan

Come prepared to both listen and share your ideas with a small group of others in the upcoming interactive progression. Be sure to attend this first-time progression in the Mid-South Chapter.



As always, attendees are welcome to enjoy dinner and networking time from 6:00–6:30 p.m. This will also be the time for members to cast their ballots for the Mid-South Chapter election.

The progression will kick off promptly at 6:30. Each participant will choose three out of the four table topics to join throughout the evening: Writing, Editing, Document Design, or Project Management for 20-minute discussions with a small group of others (5-7). A moderator will introduce the topic and pose several topics for discussion. All participants are invited to contribute to the discussion. At the end of each 20 minutes, the moderator will invite you to select another topic for discussion, for a total of three tables each participant will join.

As always, the meeting will be wrapped up before 8:00 p.m. Come on out to enjoy this unique interactive meeting night.

See the last page of this newsletter for more details about the meeting.

Remember the Phones

We continue to collect used cell phones at our program meetings to benefit victims of domestic violence. Working phones, batteries, and chargers will be collected and distributed to family violence shelters, to be given to individuals who are victims of family violence and in risky domestic situations.



ELECTIONS TO BE HELD ON APRIL 7

by Nell Johnson

The Mid-South election of officers will be held at the regularly scheduled program meeting on April 7 at the Pig-n-Whistle. To vote, check in at the membership table when you come in the door and receive a ballot. We will check your name off a list of members of the Mid-South Chapter. The votes will be collected before the roundtable progression begins (see “Talking in Circles”).



You will be able to vote for the following candidates:

- Vice President: Glenn Sanders or Donald Richie
- Secretary: Elizabeth Boone
- Treasurer: Alison Masilak

You will also be able vote FOR or AGAINST adoption of the bylaws. To read the proposed bylaws, go to <http://www.stc-midsouth.org/> and click on the Bylaws link. Exercise your rights as a member and come vote with us. Absentee ballots or e-mail ballots will not be accepted in this election. You must be present to vote.

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MEETING NOTES

by Elizabeth Boone

Mary Sue MacNealy, Mid-South Chapter vice president and English professor at the University of Memphis, brought her name tag collection to the March meeting to give the 19 members and guests in attendance a lesson in document design.



According to MacNealy, a name tag is a tiny document whose

purpose is simple: to help people identify themselves in order to get acquainted with others. At conferences, the source of most of MacNealy's collection, name tags may also act as an admission ticket, in which case the tag contains an organization's logo to indicate the wearer is eligible to enter a location or activity. Despite its small size, the name tag may be a complex and/or illegible document, and like other documents with design problems, the name tag can have too much or too little.

In this document, the primary design issue is legibility, which can be affected by style, clutter, and contrast (e.g., font, background). Most of the name tags MacNealy used as examples had the



name in all capital letters; using all uppercase, she pointed out, has been known for over 40 years to impede legibility. Mixed case letters provide contrast and are therefore easier to read. Oftentimes, names compete with an organization for recognition on the tag, with the organization, say the one sponsoring the conference, logo appearing above the wearer's name. English is read from the top down, so putting an organization at the top of the tag distracts from the name. This design may aid the secondary purpose of the name tag as an admission ticket but may hinder its primary purpose.

In many situations, as is the case in our Chapter meetings, people write their names on "Hello my name is" tags, leaving design up to the user. Having premade name tags does allow for effective design. However, such tags may cause visitors, i.e., those without premade tags, to feel self-conscious and could lead to an us-and-them mentality among a group, which would defeat the name tag's get-acquainted intention.

MacNealy ended by reiterating that a name tag, although small, is a document and, like other documents, must be user friendly and achieve its purpose.



Designing the future of technical communication

Society PresidentEdward J. See
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Mid-South Chapter

A sharing community creating opportunity

Officers

President.....Amy Hollister
901.395.7764 abhollister@bellsouth.net

Vice PresidentMary Sue MacNealy
901.678.4431 macnealy@memphis.edu

SecretaryElizabeth Boone
901.274.5801 eboone@psychiatrist.com

TreasurerAlison Joyner Masilak
901.274.0215 ajoyner@memphis.edu

Past PresidentNell Johnson
901.434.8426 nwjohnson@fedex.com

Managers

ProgramLeanne Logan
901.274.0080 llogan@quarry.com

Academic LiaisonLoel Kim
901.678.3646 loelkim@memphis.edu

EducationJackie Walters
901.434.7489 jlwalters@fedex.com

Employment.....Dennis Plafcan
870.659.0683 djp0305@netscape.net

Historian.....David Armbruster
901.448.5051 darmbruster@utm.edu

Hospitality and
MembershipSue Easley
901.323.5965 seasley@midsouth.rr.com

Newsletter EditorNell Johnson
901.434.8426 nwjohnson@fedex.com

PublicityGreg M. Jordan
901.495.5075 greg.jordan@stjude.org

Scholarship.....Mike Albers
901.678.4776 malbers@memphis.edu

Webmaster.....Joe Lakey
901.434.8427 jhlakey@fedex.com

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) is an individual membership organization dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. It is the largest organization of its type in the world. The Society's 25,000 members include technical writers, editors, graphic designers, videographers, multimedia artists, Web and Intranet page information designers, translators, and others whose work involves making technical information available to those who need it.

Membership in STC offers opportunities to learn new job skills, network with other technical communicators, and broaden your professional horizons.

To learn more about what the STC has to offer, visit:

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

50TH ANNIVERSARY WEB SITE

Bill Leavitt, STC 50th Anniversary Committee



The much-awaited STC 50th Anniversary Web site is finally up and running. Take a look at it when you get the chance. It contains anecdotes and memories from STC members, a history of STC, a timeline for STC and technical communication, pictures, information about chapter planning of 50th anniversary celebrations and a contact list for the 50th Anniversary Committee.

To get to the new website, go to www.stc.org, and look for a historical logo with "Anniversary Web Site" below it; click on "Anniversary Web Site." Also, you can search for "STC@50."

Don't forget that STC will be celebrating its 50th anniversary at the Dallas Conference in May. There are two presentations that deal with the anniversary on the program. On Tuesday (May 20) the 50th Anniversary Committee will present "STC@50: The Golden Opportunity Continues," from 8:30 to 10:00 a.m. (Chambers Lecture Hall). Then, on Wednesday (May 21), the closing session will feature STC leaders discussing "STC@50: Past, Present and Future" (4:00 to 5:30 p.m.). Additionally, there will be two historical exhibits in the industrial exhibits area. One is a "Timeline," showing the history of STC and technical communication in a linear display.

In the same area, STC chapter histories and displayed in a combination exhibit.



WE'RE PLANNING A PARTY

Want to be part of the fun?
by David Armbruster



Next fall, we're going to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the Society for Technical Communication (and more than 20 years of the Mid-South Chapter).

In addition to your participation at the gala (details are still being worked out), a few minutes here and a bit of searching the Web there will help us have a fabulous party.

At the April meeting (and beyond), we'll ask for volunteers to help

- Add to the database of former members by searching a few years' worth of newsletters (I have most newsletters).
- Search STC's Intercom for articles by and about Mid-South Chapter members and make a copy for the archives (I have a notebook full from Dr. Pat Connors).
- Search the Web and phone book (and whatever else you can come up with) for addresses of former members so they can be invited to the party.
- Address a few invitations when the time comes.
- Take RSVPs.

If we all contribute an hour or two over the next six months, our anniversary party will allow us to greet old friends and meet new ones; learn more about the profession of technical communication, the Society, and our Chapter; network; reminisce; and have a jolly good time.

In the meantime, if you want to have a good laugh, learn more about STC, find out what others are doing to celebrate this important event in the history of our profession, check out the anniversary Web site that has just gone live.

Newsbrief

<http://www.stc-midsouth.org/>

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Twelve issues of Newsbrief are published each year. We create the publication to:

- Involve members and visitors more fully in professional development and service.
- Foster a sense of community among Chapter members and visitors.
- Provide a link between professors and students at local universities.
- Promote the benefits of Chapter membership to attract new members.

Submissions

If you would like to contribute an article to Newsbrief, submit:

- The text portion of the article as a text (TXT) or Microsoft Word (DOC) file, or as text incorporated within the body of an e-mail.
- Photos as JPG or TIFF.

If you choose to use a TIFF, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

To ensure that we publish articles within a timely fashion, we ask that you submit your articles by the tenth of each month for the coming month's issue. Send all submissions to the editor of Newsbrief.

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Editor

Nell Johnson 901.434.8426
nwjohanson@fedex.com

MAY 5 MEETING: LEARN MORE ABOUT LEARNING STYLES

by Leanne Logan

Who do you know whose areas of specialties include tutoring, conversations, artificial intelligence, and psychology? If you come up empty handed, you'll want to be sure to come out Monday, May 5 to meet Dr. Art Graesser from the University of Memphis and hear his talk on learning styles.

Dr. Art Graesser will speak to us on "AutoTutor: Learning by Collaborative Question Answering and Mixed-Initiative Dialog." The first part of the talk will describe psychological and computational models of question answering. The second part will describe the objectives, architecture, and empirical tests of AutoTutor.

AutoTutor is a computer tutor that simulates the discourse patterns and pedagogical strategies of a typical human tutor or of an ideal tutor. AutoTutor asks questions that require paragraph-length explanations and deep reasoning (e.g., answers to why, how, what-if questions). There is a continuous multi-turn tutorial dialog between AutoTutor and the learner during the course of answering such questions. Learners type in their contributions during the exchange by keyboard, whereas AutoTutor generates a variety of dialog moves with an animated conversational agent that speaks, points, and displays facial emotions. Latent Semantic Analysis is the primary representation of world knowledge.

Dr. Graesser brings with him extensive research experience garnered from a variety of world-renowned institutions. In 1977 Dr. Graesser received his Ph.D. in psychology from the University of California at San Diego. He was a visiting researcher at Yale University in 1983, Stanford University in 1984, and Carnegie Mellon University in 1991. Today, Dr. Graesser is employed as a full professor in the Department of Psychology and an adjunct professor in

Mathematical Sciences at The University of Memphis. He is currently a co-director of the Institute for Intelligent Systems and director of the Center for Applied Psychological Research.

Dr. Graesser's primary research interests are in cognitive science and discourse processing. More specific interests include knowledge representation, question asking and answering, tutoring, text comprehension, inference generation, conversation, reading, education, memory, expert systems, artificial intelligence, and human-computer interaction. He is currently editor of the journal *Discourse Processes*. In addition to publishing nearly 300 articles in journals, books, and conference proceedings, he has written two books and has edited eight books (the most recent one being the *Handbook of Discourse Processes*).

We're pleased to welcome back Dr. Graesser as a speaker to a Mid-South Chapter STC meeting, after a number of years absence. We're confident this session will be as informing and exciting as the last.

THE VALUE OF STC MEMBERSHIP

Adapted from March 2003 Tieline

In the first week of April, chapter presidents and student chapter advisors will receive a list of chapter members who did not renew their dues for the 2003 year. These members might renew if they understood the value of STC membership to both the individual and the employer.

For Members

Beyond networking and educational opportunities, STC allows its members to advance their careers in many ways. Volunteering on chapter committees and projects provides members with management and project experience they may not receive on the job.

For Employers

STC's 2003 regular membership dues are \$125—at the lower end of the scale in comparison to many similar associations. Over the course of a year, the cost of one employee's STC membership is about \$10 per month. Consider the result if the employee learns one good idea or skill from any of the following resources:

- a chapter meeting
- a workshop program
- an article in *Intercom* or *Technical Communication*
- a networking session

Could that idea or skill save the company the cost of membership? Management tips picked up at a chapter meeting may help a department run more efficiently. *Intercom* articles on various software packages can increase an employee's value to the company. Usability methods can help fine-tune a company's product. Even self-employed technical communicators benefit by learning more efficient and creative ways to do business.

Invest in STC

Remember, STC is not just a bullet on a résumé; it's an active resource for technical communicators. While the profession continues to grow, its practitioners often remain isolated without access to information sharing, support, or education and training. STC provides that access.

In today's economy, many people are tightening purse strings. Now is an excellent time to reap the rewards of a long-term investment in STC.



APRIL MEETING REMINDER

What: April program meeting and election

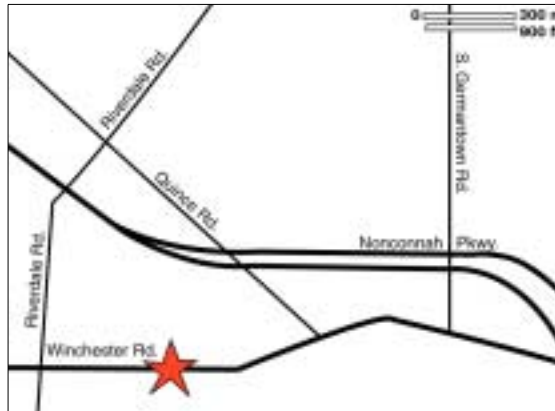
When: Monday, April 7, 6:00 p.m.
Networking dinner starts at 6:00,
program starts at 6:30.

Program: Talking in Circles
(see article on page 1)

Where: Pig'n'Whistle Restaurant
7144 Winchester Road
901.754.4400

Menu: Barbeque buffet with all the
trimmings

Cost: \$10, includes tax and gratuity



Newsbrief

Nell Johnson
668 North Idlewild Street
Memphis, TN 38107