



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

Monthly Publication of the Mid-South Chapter

Volume 20, Number 3

March 2002

Freelance Writing

by Scott Thompson

“With the prolific downsizing of the past decade, Corporate America is outsourcing more writing projects than ever before, and that spells big opportunities for freelancers!” according to Peter Bowerman — author of the best seller *The Well-Fed Writer: Financial Self-Sufficiency as a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less*.



Join the Mid-South chapter as we welcome Betty Larkey on Monday, March 4th, at the Pig-N-Whistle Barbecue Restaurant on Winchester Road. Based on her personal experience and case history, Ms. Larkey will discuss the pros and cons of freelancing, some of the differences between freelancing and contracting, and ways to get started in freelancing. Ms. Larkey will also give pointers about being in business for yourself, and aims to help answer the question, “Do you really want to freelance?”

Betty Larkey's freelance experience began when she declined a transfer to St. Louis in 1989 — “just when there were lots of writers looking for jobs,” she says, “due to the Holiday Inn corporate move and 1990 downsizing.” Since that time, she has done freelance work for a number of Memphis companies in addition to writing for magazines and trade journals. Ms. Larkey holds an M.A. from the University of Memphis, and B.S. from a small liberal arts college in Texas, where she was a member of the newspaper staff and yearbook editor. She is currently working on a book project, and continues to write magazine assignments and marketing copy for several of her long-time clients.

Reference

Bowerman, Peter. *The Well-Fed Writer: Financial Self-Sufficiency as a Freelance Writer in Six Months or Less*. Atlanta, GA: Fanove Publishing, 2000.

Meeting Notes

by Alison Joyner Masilak

Dr. David Armbruster, head of scientific publications at the University of Tennessee Health Science Center, encouraged the 29 in attendance at

the February meeting to step back from the world of micro-content for a moment and think about the “macro” — about how digitizing information and the World Wide Web have changed the way we archive and access larger pieces of information, specifically scientific and technical information. Using his field of scientific publications as an example, Armbruster illustrated the current accessing/archiving situation.

While an Internet search offers quick, convenient access to a wealth of information, it's by no means complete. Armbruster illustrated this point with a scenario that occurred recently at Johns Hopkins University where a researcher who was conducting a drug study using human subjects did his background research online. The online search did not turn up a critical article about a potential fatal drug interaction, and a research participant died as a result. This example shows how the Internet can offer a false sense of security and completeness. As Armbruster pointed out, the entire 400-plus years of scientific and technical information will never be completely available online.

The fact that online searches are not exhaustive is only one of several problems with accessing scientific and technical information. One of the chief means for obtaining scientific information is through journals. In recent years, research libraries have had to drop subscriptions to some of these journals because of rising costs. Armbruster cited a subscription cost increase of 10 percent per year since 1989 for biomedical journals. Some journal subscriptions are now cost-prohibitive for library budgets.

Another major journal access issue is with online subscriptions. Many journals offer online subscriptions — for an extra fee — in addition to print subscriptions. But there is no standard for accessing these journals. Armbruster noted that every consortial agreement between libraries and journal publishers is different. Some online journals limit access to campus-only, some to library-only, and some are only accessible from one terminal in the library. These types of access pose problems to students and researchers who are working off-campus, among others. And, of course, the library is not open 24/7 [Editor's note: *twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week*].

Archiving poses its own problems, the first of which is the issue of space. Armbruster reminded us that it takes a lot of physical to store

Inside

Chapter Helps Reach Out to Aspiring Writers	2
50th Anniversary Committee Seeks Your Memories.....	3
Meeting Reminder	4

paper copies — shelves, floors, and buildings. But the information is there, readily available for all — until it disintegrates. And, paper archive searches can be tedious — do you remember the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*?

Electronic archiving offers searching ease and convenience, not to mention taking up significantly less space than shelves and shelves of back issues. But these archives pose their own problems.

Take, for example, those expensive journals — when a library discontinues its subscription to a journal, it gets to keep all of the paper copies it has received over the years. But with Internet subscriptions, access to back issues vanishes along with access to new issues.

And who would pay to archive all of this scientific information? Government? Universities? Professional societies? Armbruster pointed out that, while the Web may be free to us, there is costly manpower and IT infrastructure behind the information.

Perhaps most importantly, what happens if our current storage and retrieval devices go the way of the 5-inch floppy? We don't want to lose years of data because our archives are in PDF files and Adobe decides to discontinue its Acrobat product.

Armbruster raised these and many other questions regarding accessing and archiving information, encouraging us to think about these macro issues within our organizations and on a worldwide scale.

Chapter Helps Reach Out to Aspiring Writers

by Teresa Johnson

According to the STC Statement of Ethical Principles for Communicators, one of our goals as professionals is to “assist other persons in our profession through mentoring, networking, and instruction.” Since several of our chapter members are affiliated with the University of Memphis, we have many excellent opportunities for outreach to promising young writers.

WordSmith

In February, several of our chapter members judged the technical description category of the WordSmith Writing Olympics, a contest for seventh through twelfth graders at local high schools. For this category, which has been a feature of WordSmith since 1998, students write a description of a mechanism or process and must include relevant graphics. The top three winners in each grade advance to an hour-long event on Tournament Day, during which they write a description of a mechanism or process and must include relevant graphics. The top three winners in each grade advance to an hour-long event on Tournament Day, during which they write a 400-word essay on a topic they have never seen before. It is always amazing to see how well these young people write under such tremendous pressure.

I want to thank Elizabeth Boone, Sue Easley, Becky Marsh, Gene Plunka, Susan Popham, and Glenn Sanders for serving with me as judges.



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Designing the future of technical communication

Society President Judith Glick-Smith
Region 3 Director-Sponsor..... Rob Houser

Mid-South Chapter

A sharing community creating opportunity

Officers

President Nell Johnson
(901) 434-8426
nwjohanson@fedex.com
Vice President..... Amy Hollister
(662) 349-8967
abhollister@bellsouth.net
Secretary Alison Joyner Masilak
(901) 678-1756
ajoyner@memphis.edu
Treasurer Mary Sue MacNealy
(901) 678-4431
macnealy@memphis.edu
Past President..... Jackie Walters
(901) 434-7489
jhwalters@fedex.com

Managers

Academic Liaison..... Loel Kim
(901) 678-3646
loelkim@memphis.edu
Employment..... Steve Gillespie
(901) 874-2225
stephen.gillespie@persnet.navy.mil
Fund Raising..... Margaret Carbaugh
(901) 372-7962
mcarbaugh@ensafe.com
Historian David Armbruster
(901) 448-5051
darmbruster@utmem.edu
Hospitality Open
Newsletter Editor..... Scott Thompson
(901) 757-5974
thompsonscott@cs.com
Publicity Teresa Johnson
(901) 821-9443
trj@midssouth.rr.com
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/>

Write Night

If you're sad because you missed the chance to further our profession by judging in WordSmith, take heart because another opportunity is still available. You are cordially invited to attend Write Night on March 26 at 7:00 p.m. in the University of Memphis Alumni Center. The Write Night series introduces undergraduate and graduate students to several local writers, who discuss their work and offer practical advice to complement the writing instruction that students receive in the classroom. This year, we are delighted to have three STC members as our guest speakers: Becky Brown Derych from Physicians Postgraduate Press, and Rebecca Mabry and Nell Johnson from Federal Express.

Although the speakers' presentations will be the main focus of the evening, there will be time both before and after the program to mingle with students and discuss your work with them. We will also have an information table if you want to provide business cards or literature about your company. For more information, call me at 821-9443 or e-mail me at trjohnsn@memphis.edu.

50th Anniversary Committee Seeks Your Memories

When STC members from across the world gather, a favorite activity is sharing stories about the memorable times we've had — the great session at the Annual Conference that changed our lives, perhaps a mentor in the Society who helped with our careers, or the technical communication "firsts" and transitions we shared.

During such a story fest, we also laugh about the fun times and the difficult times that turned out to be fun — the Publications Competition conducted during a hurricane in Tampa, for example.

In preparation for our May 2003 celebration of STC's 50th Anniversary, the 50th Anniversary Committee wants such stories from you. We need humorous and inspirational anecdotes that we can collect in an STC archive, and we want to publish

some of your most sparkling or inspirational stories in a brochure to be distributed to all members.

Whether you're a Society leader or a chapter member, a member of many years' duration or one who recently joined, a technical communication specialist or a novice, a U.S. member or one located in another country, we hope you will participate.

Your involvement is easy. Whenever you think of a story you'd like to include, send an e-mail or snail mail to Liz Babcock (lizbab@iwvisp.com or 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555). Liz is the committee member who has volunteered to serve as the initial collection point for your stories.

Those stories will be most useful to us if they are succinct (250 words or less on any given topic) and entertaining. We would love to receive several stories from you, with each story to the point and on a single topic.

Here are some questions we hope will inspire you:

- What amusing or inspirational story can you tell us about how you joined the profession? How did you overcome obstacles that our members will find educational or amusing?
- What career and/or Society highlight can you share with us? (We will construct a technical communication timeline, so your stories in this area could be especially helpful.)
- What's your favorite STC memory?
- What mentor or role model inspired you in your career or in the Society? What makes that person memorable? What did he/she do to help you?
- What experiences, humorous or inspiring, have you had with our changing technology — typewriters to computers, red pencils to redlining?
- What can you tell us about a chapter or regional event or accomplishment that changed you, your chapter, or the Society?

This list of questions is intended to rekindle your memories, not to restrict your flow of ideas.

Please communicate with Liz Babcock, 401 N. Warner, Ridgecrest, CA 93555 or lizbab@iwvisp.com, or with other members of the committee: Georgina Cantoni, committee chair, gcantoni@techcomm-solutions.com; Ken Cook, kenc@kenccook.com; Marguerite Krupp, mkrupp@cisco.com; Bill Leavitt, skibill@aol.com; Ernie Mazzatenta, jande@a-o.com; and Bill Stolgitis, bill@stc.org. We look forward to your messages!

Newsbrief

Newsbrief is the monthly publication of the Mid-South chapter of the Society for Technical Communication, a nonprofit organization. Nine issues of *Newsbrief* are published each year (September through May). 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 and professionals within local industry.
- 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 Joint Photographer's Interest Group (JPG) files; and
- Line art as Graphics Interchange Format (GIF) or Windows Meta-File (WMF) files.

Of course, we are more than willing to accept images (photos and line art alike) as Tagged Image File Format (TIFF) files, since these files are ideal for print. If you choose to submit a TIFF, however, please set the file resolution to 150 dots per inch (dpi) or higher.

To ensure that we publish articles in 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*.

Copyright

Newsbrief invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Please note, however, that, by submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to *Newsbrief* to run your article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. You as the writer nonetheless hold the copyright. When you submit an article, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.

Reprints

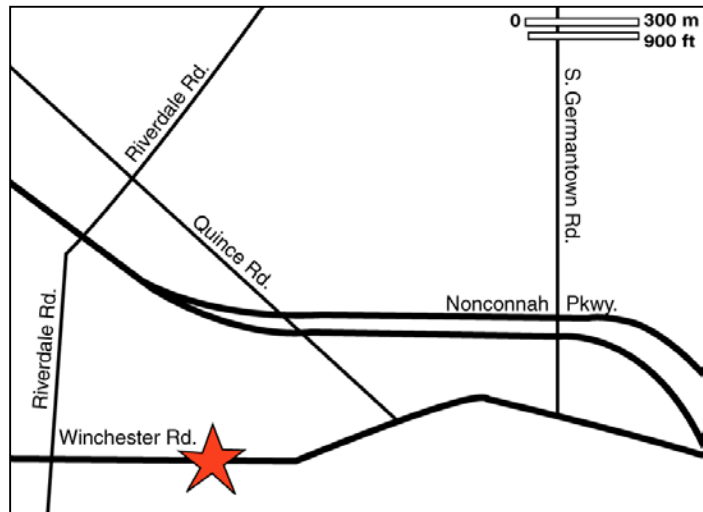
Articles published by *Newsbrief* may be reprinted in other STC publications if (1) credit is given to the author as well as the Mid-South chapter, and (2) a copy of the reprint is sent to the *Newsbrief* editor.

Editor

Scott Thompson
(901) 757-5974
thompsonscott@cs.com

Meeting Reminder

What: March (dinner) meeting
When: Monday, March 4th, 6:00 p.m.
Program: Betty Larkey, "Freelancing"
Where: Pig-N-Whistle
7144 Winchester Road
(901) 754-4400
Menu: Barbecue buffet (not just
barbecue!), dessert, and drink
(tea and water)
Cost: \$10.00, including tax and
gratuity



SOCIETY FOR
TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION

Newsbrief

Scott Thompson
35 Oslo Cove
Cordova, TN 38018