

Ragged Left

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Editor's Notes

More authors, more perspectives!

We have the good fortune this issue to have not one but *two* articles on Nancy Katz Ph.D.'s talk on writing in the medical field! They are about the same presentation, but especially if you weren't there to hear the talk, I encourage you to read both, as each write-up touches on some different concepts and details. Thank you to our industrious writers who provide the content for the newsletter.

Submission Deadlines

The regular schedule is to post the PDF the first week of every even-numbered month (it's a bi-monthly newsletter), so I need content the last week of January, March, May, July, September, and November to publish the first week of February, April, June, August, October, and December.

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President's Notes

by Richard Mateosian

I have just looked at the latest membership information that STC headquarters makes available to the leaders of this chapter. It lists all STC members in Berkeley and nearby zipcodes. It lists those who are not members of our chapter as "unaffiliated." These are either members of other chapters or not members of any chapter. The report doesn't distinguish between those cases. Up until March 31 the report listed everyone who had paid through the end of 2009. As of April 1, the report lists only those members who have paid their 2010 dues.

At this time last year our chapter had 94 paid up members. This number grew to 107 by the end of 2009. As of April 10, 2010, we have 56 paid up members, down 40% from last April. Of the 107 members we had at the end of 2009, two are paid up STC members but are now listed as unaffiliated. STC has dropped the remaining 49 members from this report. Some of those members have left the area or have given up on STC. Some mean to renew but just haven't gotten around to it. Others, I suspect, would like to continue but can't afford or can't justify the dues.

STC's existence depends on renewals. Without STC we would not have a chapter, so renewal is important to us. Nonetheless, our emphasis at the local level is less on renewals and more on maintaining and serving our community. Trying financial times have led to substantially higher STC dues at the same time as many of us have seen drastic cuts in income. We don't want that situation to drive anyone away.

Our chapter meetings provide networking opportunities and information to help us all succeed as technical communicators. Our prices remain low --

with a good crowd we barely break even. If you haven't yet gotten around to renewing and you sign up at the member price, we'll take that as a sign that you're still with us, and we'll be happy to see you.

February 2010 Meeting Notes

Beyond the Practitioners' Lore: Reading the Research

Presentation by Susan Becker

Notes by Romy Sinha

In the February chapter meeting, Susan Becker gave an interesting presentation on the role of research in Technical Communication. She explained how research strengthens our argument and why we should use research to support our thinking and writing.

As technical communicators, all of us are making constant decisions about how to write a particular document, which style to adopt, and so on, in our

Technical communication is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) has members worldwide. Its members include writers and editors, artists and illustrators, photographers and audiovisual specialists, managers and supervisors, educators and students, employees and consultants.

STC strives to:

Advance the theory and practice of technical communication

Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication

Aid the educational and professional development of its members

Membership

Membership is open to everyone. Classic membership is \$215/year with an additional \$15 enrollment fee. STC also offers Limited, E-Membership, and Student Membership options. To receive additional information and an application form, email membership@stc-berkeley.org

everyday work. Most of the time we base our decisions to adopt a particular style on corporate guidelines, departmental policies and our own education. But sometimes we base our decision on what seems right to us, and it serves us fine. However, at times, we are challenged to base our decisions on evidence. That is when research becomes important. The decisions we make based on our research strengthens our argument.

To many of us, research may bring memories of late nights and delving into myriad books, papers and endless surfing of websites. That may be true, but Susan explained how we can streamline research and make it fun and interesting.

Susan told us how she learned a lot about research while working on the NIST (National Institute of Standards and Technology) Style Guide for Voting Systems. She, along with Dana Chisnell, did extensive research while working on developing the Voting Systems Style Guide. Basing their work on research, Susan and Dana turned the confusing reference manual that the poll workers used into a user-friendly one, with clear and easy to follow instructions.

In her presentation, Susan explained how to:

Use sources to explore a question.

First, narrow your search by refining your question. Use the internet intelligently without getting lost in the mountain of information. Use reliable websites for online research. You can also use books, professional magazines, papers on previous and current research to hunt down a question.

Read a research article.

Assess while reading the research article and note down whatever is applicable to your work.

Apply what you learn from doing the research to the job you do.

Susan mentioned a number of sources that address the evidence basis for guidelines, including:

Problems and Joys of Reading Research Papers for Practitioner Purposes by Carolyn Jarrett

http://www.upassoc.org/upa_publications/jus/2007november/jarrett.html

Certain research-based Guidelines from Usability.gov

<http://usability.gov/guidelines/index.html>

Articles by Jan Spyridakis

<http://www.hcde.washington.edu/navpeople/faculty/jansp>

Articles by David Farkas

<http://faculty.washington.edu/farkas>

Official guidelines for federal government communications

<http://www.plainlanguage.gov/>

John M. Carroll - *Minimalism Beyond the Nurnberg Funnel*

<http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/author/default.asp?aid=1163>

