



## In this Issue

*Message from the Boston Chapter President*.....1

*Expand Your Writing Through Awareness of Learning Styles*.....1

*Resources for Members During Tough Times*.....3

*Single Sourcing Made "Simple"?*.....4

*Winter/Spring 2009 at MCC: Authoring and Distributing Technical Documents*.....5

*Moderating a Usability Test*.....5

*Marian Norby and Student Scholarship Applications Extended to May 15*.....7

*Upcoming STC-Boston Chapter Competitions*.....7

*Technical Editing SIG is Introduced to Taxonomies* .....8

*STC Offers Free Web Seminar on Job Search Topic*.....8

## Message from the Boston Chapter President

By Pamela Sarantos  
STC-Boston Chapter President



### Happy New Year!

Council members and program volunteers will be very busy during the next few months developing the activities for Chapter members:

- **Competitions:** Our annual STACIES event is soon approaching (February 25). Our committee members are busy contacting the winners, arranging entertainment, making special arrangements with the Hilton, finding sponsors, and creating the brochures.

*President, continued on page 2*

## Expand Your Writing Through Awareness of Learning Styles

By William Pacino

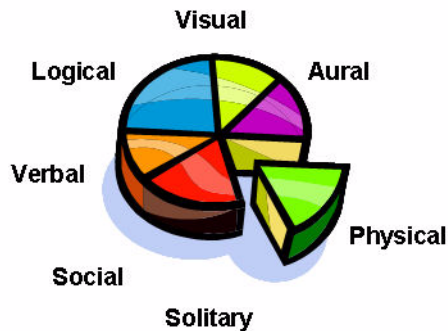
Paying attention to the different ways people learn helps meet the needs of your audience. Each person has his or her own mix of learning styles. Some people may find that they have a dominant style of learning and use fewer of the other styles. Others may find that they use different styles in different circumstances. There is no right mix; nor are the ways people learn fixed over time.

Acknowledging the many ways people bring their intelligence into a learning situation is a powerful way to get the appropriate information to the audience of your technical documentation.

Traditional schooling uses—and continues to use—mainly verbal (linguistic) and logical teaching methods. Many schools still rely on classroom and book-based teaching, repetition, and exams for reinforcement and review. But the delivery of technical information does not have to be restricted to linguistic and logical methods.

By recognizing and understanding the learning styles of your audience, you can improve the speed at which your information is absorbed and increase the quality (more information in a smaller package) of information delivery.

Seven learning styles are featured in this article. These learning styles are discussed from the point of view of the writer and suggest ways and techniques that the writer can use to meet the needs of the audience.



The seven learning styles featured here are:

- Visual uses pictures, images, and spatial understanding.
- Aural includes sound and music.
- Physical is missing.
- Solitary is working alone and using self-study and analysis methods.
- Social involves learning in groups or with another person.
- Verbal means words, both in speech and writing.
- Logical includes logic and reasoning. (Rearrange the subtopics below like the bullets.)

*Learning Styles, continued on page 2*

- **Programs:** Ongoing is the development of the monthly program and SIG activities, which involves determining program topics, finding presenters, and managing other various logistics that are involved in presenting a program.
  - Regarding SIG meetings, we are in search of a venue. An ideal venue is one within the Burlington-Waltham area that provides presentation equipment. The equipment is not a requirement, but it is helpful to have it available, rather than arranging to bring equipment.
  - SIGs are also looking for speakers. We have a list of proposed topics based on member survey responses, and we need speakers to present these topics.
- **Workshops:** Back by popular demand is Joel Sklar's XML workshop and Ed Marshall's API workshop. Both are being held on January 24. Committee members are working with The Mathworks to secure the venue, coordinate the logistics for registrations, and arrange food and beverages.
- **End-of-Year Celebration:** Plans have begun for this last program of the season in June. We try to make this an extra special occasion, since the agenda includes an award session which recognizes the year's Chapter program committee members and other volunteers.
- **Sponsorship:** We are looking for someone to run our sponsorship program. If you have sales or marketing skills and want to meet recruiters and other industry professionals, please contact me for more information about this Chapter job.
- **Elections:** By early April, Chapter elections will be underway. Due to end of service terms and natural attrition, the following *Council Seats* are open:  
Secretary
  - Treasurer
  - First Vice President
  - Second Vice President
  - At-large Members

## 1. Visual (Spatial) Learning Style

If your audience favors the visual style, focus on providing images, pictures, colors, and maps to organize and communicate the information. Your audience can easily visualize objects, plans, and outcomes. In this learning style, your audience also has a good spatial sense, which leads to a good sense of direction and the ability to navigate easily using your visual directions.



Apply this style by adding elements of visual art, photography, video or film, and navigation to your writing.

### How the Audience Learns in This Style

If your audience consists of visual learners, use images, pictures, color, and other visual media to help them learn.

You may find that creating pictures out of written descriptions, especially with vivid language, comes easily to this audience. This also means that you, as the writer, have to make your descriptions stand out even more to make new material obvious to the audience.

Use color, layout, and spatial organization in your descriptions, and use many "visual words" in your writing, such as "see," "picture," "perspective," "visual," and "map."

Use "mind maps." A mind map is a diagram used to represent words, ideas, tasks, or other items linked to and arranged radially around a central key word or idea. A mind map is used to generate, visualize, structure, and classify ideas, and as an aid in study, organization, problem solving, and decision making.

Use color and pictures in place of text, wherever possible.

Diagrams of the hierarchy of systems and subsystems can help the audience visualize the links between parts of a system. Replace words with pictures, and use color to highlight major and minor links.

## 2. Aural (Auditory-Musical-Rhythmic) Learning Style



If your audience favors the aural style, focus on providing information through sound and music. Your audience will respond positively to information delivered in a way that asks them to take advantage of their listening abilities and rhythm.

### How the Audience learns in this style

If your audience consists of aural learners, use sound, rhyme, and music in your presentation. Focus on using aural content in your examples and descriptions.

Use sound recordings to provide a background and help the audience get into what is being described. For example, use a recording of the sound of wind and water when describing sailing maneuvers.

## 3. Verbal (Linguistic) Learning Style

The verbal style involves both the written and spoken word. If your audience favors this style, focus on full descriptions via written and verbal expression. This style is most often featured in public speaking and debating.



### How the Audience Learns in This Style

If your audience has verbal learners, find ways to incorporate more speaking and writing by the audience. For example, have the audience talk itself

Detailed information about these openings and the elections will be available shortly.

Seats are also open for *Council members*:

- Manage the various program committees and Chapter finances.
- Meet on the first Wednesday evening of each month to discuss adding new activities and to improve current activities and processes.
- Host a new member reception at least twice a year.
- Publish Chapter announcements.
- Contact vendors and network with other industry professionals.
- Assist Chapter members with various tasks

The goal of the Council is to ensure that the Chapter provides the appropriate support to our members. The mix of experiences from Council members is a major contribution to our continued success.

Please consider joining Council and bringing your experiences and ideas. Being a Council member is a win-win situation. You win by broadening your networking pool and strengthening skills. The members win by receiving your support and input.

You may contact any Council member for information about Chapter activities. Our contact information is listed at <http://www.stcboston.org/chapter-info/contacts.shtml>.

Thank you.

## Resources for Members During Tough Times

During a downward cycle in the economy, your STC membership becomes even more valuable. You have instant access to thousands of colleagues worldwide. Use the time now to expand your network so you can meet the added challenges thrust on you by a market downturn. Connect with colleagues in your [chapter](#) and [SIGs](#) via our many listserves and blogs. You can increase your number of contacts by participating in these listserves so that you can keep your finger on the pulse of the market. This is not the time to be incognito. Raise your professional profile!

through procedures, or use recordings of dictation or discussions with others as a way of prewriting.

Use rhyme and rhythm wherever you can and suggest that the audience read important points aloud.

Suggest that your audience work with others and use role-playing to learn verbal exchanges such as negotiations or sales calls.

## 4. Physical (Bodily-Kinesthetic) Learning Style



If the physical style is more suited for your audience, focus on ways to use the body and a sense of touch.

In this learning style, your audience is much more in tune with the physical world. They will notice and appreciate textures; for example in clothes or furniture. They also favor hands-on work; “getting their hands dirty,” making models, or working out puzzles.

When teaching this audience a new skill or topic, emphasize “hands-on” actions and permit the audience to play with the physical parts. For example, this type of audience would prefer to pull a physical system apart and put it back together, rather than reading or looking at diagrams about how it works.

### How the Audience Learns in This Style

If your audience uses a physical learning style, suggest touch, action, movement, and hands-on work in your writing. For descriptions, focus on the sensations to be expected in each instance being described.

Focus on the physical reactions that come out of your writing. For example, a physical learning style would prompt a pilot to write about an experience (“learning a skill”) as follows: “I feel the resistance as I push the throttle forward to start my takeoff run. The controls start to move around more actively as I check the airspeed, oil pressure, and temperature. At takeoff speed, I pull back slightly, and I feel the vibrations of the wheels stop as the plane leaves the ground.”

Promote your audience to use physical objects as much as possible. Suggest that your audience physically touch objects as they learn about what these objects do.

Keep in mind as well that writing and drawing diagrams are physical activities, so do not neglect these techniques. Suggest that your audience use big sheets of paper and large color markers for reproducing the diagrams in your writing.

## 5. Logical (Mathematical) Learning Style

If your audience favors the logical style, present the information via rationality and mathematical reasoning. Your audience will recognize patterns easily, as well as connections between seemingly meaningless content. Classify and group information to help your audience learn or understand it. Present your information so that your audience can systematically work through problems and issues, set numerical targets and budgets, and, create agendas, itineraries, and to-do lists. This scientific approach to thinking means supporting the points of the presentation with logical examples or statistics.



### How the Audience Learns in This Style

If your audience is a logical learner, aim to demonstrate the reasons behind your writing and presentation. Promote the exploration of the links between various systems and have your audience note them. In your writing, highlight logical thoughts and behav-

*Resources, continued from page 3*

[My Recession Strategy](#) – Advice from STC Fellow Michael Hughes on how to protect yourself from inclusion in a layoff.

[Feast or Famine: US Technical Writer Employment, 2007](#) – STC Economist Richard O'Sullivan gives an in-depth overview of the latest Bureau of Labor Statistics information regarding salary data for technical communicators.

[Job Hunting in a Recession](#) – STC Associate Fellow Jack Molisani addresses how being unemployed can be very stressful and difficult, but being unemployed during a recession can be even worse. Molisani gives his tips and advice on how to weather the storm, and what steps you can take to find a job.

### Take Action to Increase Your Value to Your Company

Make yourself a more valuable asset to your company and clients by increasing your knowledge and technical communication skills.

Take advantage of the affordable Web seminars and other continuing education offered by STC.

Make plans to attend the 2009 Tech Comm Summit, May 3–6, in Atlanta, GA, where you can increase your professional knowledge, expand your technical expertise, and learn best practices that can be cost-saving for your company.

### Exclusive Access to Job Postings

STC members see new job postings on STC's online [Career Center](#) 14 DAYS BEFORE nonmembers. That can be a huge advantage! The listings also include projects that can be covered remotely and temporary assignments.

STC's expanded [Salary Database](#) is an exclusive membership benefit. The current version on our Web site documents an overall growth of 3.1 percent in technical communication jobs with 60 percent of states indicating an increase in the number of jobs. The 2007 data, provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, also identified which states had the largest increase and those with the sharpest decrease in technical communication jobs.

Our Salary Database can help identify the jobs geographically by specific industry and area of growth.

**Editor's Note:** Source: <http://www.stc.org/stcmembers/member-resources.asp>

*Learning Styles, continued from page 3*

iors. Make use of diagrams of systems and subsystems to help your audience understand the links between various parts of a system.



## 6. Social (Interpersonal) Learning Style

If your audience favors social learning, focus on providing information both verbally and nonverbally. Provide group exercises, discussion topics, and other ways in which your audience can interact among themselves and with others outside of the group.

Present the overall concepts and let the group teach itself the subprinciples and procedures.

### How the Audience Learns in This style

If your audience favors social learning, aim to have your audience work with others as much as possible. Role-playing is a technique that works well with others, whether it is one-on-one or with a group of people. Have your audience review checklists and planning goals with others. By listening to how others solve their issues, your audience may get more ideas on how to solve their own issues.

Mind maps and diagrams of systems are great to work on in a group. Have one person draw the ideas, while the rest of the group works through material and suggests ideas. Working in groups to practice behaviors or procedures will help your audience understand how to deal with variations. Seeing the mistakes or errors that others make can help your audience avoid the same types of mistakes or errors later.

## 7. Solitary (Personal) Learning Style

If your audience favors a solitary style, focus on ways to present your information in ways that are more private, introspective, and independent. Your audience may prefer to work on problems by retreating to somewhere quiet and working through possible solutions. Give this audience the facts and challenge them to find a solution.



### How the Audience Learns in This style

It is necessary to have your audience follow a few fixed steps in working successfully with the information they are presented:

- Specify that your audience set goals, objectives, and plans.
- Suggest that your audience keep a log or journal so that they have a written record of their progress.
- Promote modeling as a technique to understand the new information learned in terms of information they already know. Use patterns, behaviors and appearances in order to understand the new in terms of the old.

*William Pacino currently works as a technical writer at Guardium, Inc. in Waltham, MA. He is a senior member of the Boston and Northern New England STC chapters and lives in Chelmsford, MA. He can be reached at [william.pacino@verizon.net](mailto:william.pacino@verizon.net).*

## Single Sourcing Made “Simple”?

*By Neil Perlin*

### What is Single Sourcing?

“Single sourcing” means having one master set of source content from which to extract subsets of content in order to create custom outputs. For example, we might have one

*Single Sourcing, continued on page 5*

## Winter/Spring 2009 at MCC: Authoring and Distributing Technical Documents

Are you responsible for writing technical documents? Do you want to learn how to effectively author and distribute usable information using the industry's standard tools? Join us for this 15-week course and learn the introductory skills needed to make information usable, create books and PDF files using Adobe FrameMaker, design a web page, create an online help system, and convert HTML to XML.

Well-developed writing skills and familiarity with technical documentation and Microsoft Office are recommended for this course. This course is not eligible for waivers or vouchers.

Winter/Spring 2009  
February 26 - June 4, 2009  
5:45-9:45pm  
\$1,499

*About the instructor: Andrew Harrington is a seasoned instructor and technical writer. As a Principal Technical Writer at Avid Technology, Inc., he develops print, on-line, and multimedia documentation for industry-standard film and video editing software. He has won numerous awards for his technical manuals and on-line documentation.*

For more information, contact:

Sheila Morin, Program Manager  
Community Education & Training  
Middlesex Community College  
33 Kearney Square  
Lowell, MA 01852  
Voice: (978) 656-3416  
Fax: (978) 656-3442  
Email: [morins@middlesex.mass.edu](mailto:morins@middlesex.mass.edu)



## Moderating a Usability Test

by Marcia Shanbaum

On November 20, 2008, the Usability SIG of STC Boston met at the Design and Usability Center at Bentley University in Waltham,

*Usability, continued on page 6*

*Single Sourcing, continued from page 4*

project that contains service information for all a company's products from which we could extract and publish the subsets of information that apply to specific products. More broadly, we can extract subsets of the content in order to create custom outputs for a broad range of items, such as:

- Products
- Markets
- Audiences
- Formats, such as HTML Help, WebHelp, PDF, etc.
- Devices, such as PCs and mobile devices
- Modalities, such as mouse interfaces, touch screens, and digital ink
- Other subsets that you might define



Conceptually, it's that simple. Now, for the messy parts...

First, multi-channel publishing:

Several years ago, a large consulting company arbitrarily split single sourcing into two definitions: single sourcing and "multi-channel publishing." It defined them as follows:

- Single sourcing is the master source content in one format and creating custom outputs in the same format, such as creating the master source content as a FrameMaker file, then generating your custom outputs in the form of FrameMaker files.
- Multi-channel publishing as all the other options that make up traditional single sourcing, such as creating the master source content in a help authoring tool, then generating your custom outputs in WebHelp, PDF, and hard copy form.

Very few authors ever seem to encounter the term "multi-channel publishing," but it's good to be familiar with it. For the rest of this article, I'll use the term "single sourcing."

### Benefits and Problems of Single Sourcing

Single sourcing offers three major benefits:

- It's faster and cheaper to update one master set of source content than multiple sets. And because we only have to make changes in one place, fewer inconsistencies creep into the material.
- A master set of source content designed deliberately for single sourcing can more easily accommodate additional custom outputs as your needs change.
- Every item in a master set of source content can be assigned to an author who's an expert in that topic, raising the reliability of the content. This ownership eliminates winding up with two or more descriptions of the same topic and having to spend time reconciling the differences.

So, the benefits are easier and more cost-effective maintenance, flexibility to handle new outputs, and more reliable information. What could possibly be wrong with this picture?

The problems aren't in single sourcing per se, but in what's required to do it. They include:

- The need to switch from writing lengthy documents to writing shorter, more manipulable topics, potentially using different tools. For example, rather than writing one chapter that explains every task related to using Product 1, another chapter on Product 2, and so on, we want small, individual chunks of content that explain how to perform specific tasks on each product. This lets us extract and use only those chunks related to the specific output that we want to create.

*Single Sourcing, continued on page 6*

MA. There, Usability Consultant Kris Engdahl gave a presentation on the challenges of moderating usability tests.

The Bentley Design and Usability Center is a consultancy that performs many tasks for clients, including user research, focus groups, and usability testing. Profits from the consulting work go back into the program, which offers a Masters of Science in Human Factors in Information Design. See the Bentley University website ([www.bentley.edu](http://www.bentley.edu)) for more information.

Kris opened her talk with comments on the Design and Usability Center and her own background as a technical writer for several years at Oracle before she became a usability professional. She pointed out that usability is good for technical writers to know about, as industry trends move toward including the information on how to use the product within the product design.

Technical writers and usability professionals have much in common. Both are committed to supporting users. Both work with development and comprise separate disciplines. The work of both involves research and communication.

However, technical writers learn how to use the product from development and teach this to users. Usability professionals learn from users, finding out what they know about the product, what they expect from it, what they want to do with it, how they want to work with it, and teach this to developers.

In a typical usability test, the participants work in the usability lab, a place fitted with workstations and audio/visual equipment to record the entire testing process on video. The Moderator has a goal for the test, which typically involves asking users to perform a task with limited information, such as "Using this data, create a table in a Word document, and make it look like this."

The Moderator has to keep people on task, and this job requires top notch interpersonal skills. The Moderator must make the participants feel safe while they work, being sensitive to their emotional state as they experience frustration or request assistance. "Users want to do it right," Kris says, "and often blame themselves for problems they encounter." The Moderator has to be there with them, offering encouragement and support without guiding them in their work.

We can define the chunks in various ways, like the concept, task, and reference definition at the heart of DITA. Whatever chunks we define, we have to write them so that they can stand on their own, without referring to other chunks that may not get used in a particular output. For example, we can no longer write "as explained above" because "above" may be in a topic that's omitted from a particular output.

What I'm discussing here is "topic-based authoring" as opposed to the "document-based authoring" we're accustomed to with Word or FrameMaker. Word and FrameMaker can certainly do topic-based authoring, but aren't designed for it like the help authoring tools, XML/DITA, authoring tools like XMetal, and MadCap's new Blaze.

- The need for greater development rigor, such as using specific templates or CSSs. In my experience, this is the hardest part of single sourcing for experienced writers who think it that using it reduces their creative flexibility. It does. But despite the cliché about thinking outside the box, real creativity often lies in having to think inside the box formed by the various constraints in our work.
- The need for greater management rigor, such as requiring the use of specific templates or CSSs, requiring that projects be documented, or instituting a change procedure. Again, in my experience, this is one of the hardest parts of single sourcing because it changes how we work. However, as disruptive as change can be, we can get used to it. (If you've been in the tech comm for a while, you'll recall the disruption when word processors appeared in the early 1980s. Would you give up Word or FrameMaker now?)
- The need for greater technical awareness, such as understanding what a CSS is and how it fits into the development process, even if you don't know how to code a CSS. Without understanding the overall technical architecture of the work, it's easy to make mistakes.
- The need a greater knowledge of the tool, such as understanding what single sourcing features are in your authoring tool and how to use them efficiently and effectively. People are often told to learn a new tool on their own, but today's tools are so feature-rich that it wastes their time, causing a lot of flailing to learn on your own. Self-interest aside (I do a lot of training), one of the best paths to development efficiency is to get formally trained.
- And one of the big problems is cultural fit: Can your group adapt to these requirements? A group whose culture doesn't support standards and the need for tool and technology skills can certainly do single sourcing, but they won't necessarily enjoy it.

### What Features of Authoring Tools Enable Single Sourcing?

There are many features that we can discuss, but for the purposes of this article, I'll put them into three categories:

- Features that are familiar from other tools, particularly conditions and variables, but also the ability to change the default topic, such as the home page for a help system for different outputs, or the ability to define and select from multiple tables of contents and indexes.
- Features that are variations on familiar ones, like snippets (similar to variables but can support graphics, links, and formatting in addition to text), or the ability to conditionalize table of contents and index entries.
- New features, like Flare's mediums feature that lets you define multiple style attributes for different outputs in one CSS, instead of defining a different CSS for each output. It's one of those seemingly small features that can really boost productivity.



The Moderator balances many responsibilities -- to the users, preserving their anonymity, making sure their boss doesn't see the video of their tests, and to the client company, making sure the data being gathered is pure, that the error rate, success rate, and average time spent per task is uninfluenced by any inadvertent teaching.

Some participants will try briefly, and then ask "What should I do now?" When a participant gets stuck, Kris said, "The most useful response the Moderator can give is 'I'd like you to keep trying... What are you looking for now? As you are trying to accomplish the task, what do you expect to happen?' " Human beings are natural teachers, Kris pointed out, and the Moderator must make sure not to offer participants any clues on how to proceed.

## Marian Norby and Student Scholarship Applications Extended to 15 May

The deadline for receipt of applications for the Marian Norby and student scholarship has been extended to 15 May 2009.

### STC Student Scholarships

STC scholarships benefit students enrolled in technical communication programs at universities, colleges, junior colleges, and technical schools. Since the program's inception in 1971, the Society has awarded more than \$465,000 to deserving students.

Four scholarships of \$1,500 each will be awarded, two to graduate students and two to undergraduates. Application forms and additional information can be found on the STC website at [www.stc.org/edu/scholarship/Info01\\_national.asp](http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarship/Info01_national.asp).

### Marian Norby Scholarship

In 2003, the STC Board of Directors resolved to create a scholarship fund in the name of longtime member Marian O. Norby, who passed away in 2002 at age 85. In her will, Norby left almost \$200,000 to fund a scholarship program.

The Marian Norby Scholarship benefits female US federal government employees who are interested in obtaining training in technical communication to improve their

*Scholarship, continued on page 8*

### Single Source Authoring Tools

What authoring tools do you need? The fact is that almost any of our tools, except for Word, will do. More specifically, we can look at three categories of tools:

- Hard copy tool - FrameMaker
- XML/DITA authoring tools: XMetal, In.Vision, Epic. These tools can be configured to resemble Word to help ease the transition, but offer far greater technical depth and single sourcing capabilities.
- Help authoring tools: Flare, RoboHelp, etc. These tools have offered single sourcing for years. For example, RoboHelp has offered conditionality since the RoboHelp Classic (RoboHelp for Word) days in the mid-90s.

### How Difficult Is Single Sourcing?

Mechanically, it's a snap. Creating and applying condition tags is easy. Creating and applying a variable is easy, as is changing the variable's value.

The difficulty lies in keeping track of what you're doing. It's easy to get tangled up in the options or confused about what results to expect from what single sourcing features. For example, I did a project this year for a company in Connecticut that hired me to modify a single-output RoboHelp project to support single sourcing to four different outputs. A low-key project, it might be in limbo for a month at a time, and I had to carefully document what I'd done with the conditional tags, or I would quickly lose track the project's status. And this was a small project, about a hundred topics and four build tags. Larger or more complex projects will be harder to track; the reason for the greater development and management rigor that I mentioned earlier.

### Summary

Single sourcing offers more output options than what most companies need today. But we've learned, often painfully, that things change quickly. Any tool or methodology that helps us respond to changing business requirements, as single sourcing does, is worth careful investigation.

*Neil Perlin is president of Hyper/Word Services ([www.hyperword.com](http://www.hyperword.com)) of Tewksbury, MA. He has 30 years' experience in technical communication, with 24 in training, consulting, and development for online formats and tools like WinHelp, HTML Help, JavaHelp, CE Help, RoboHelp, Flare, Mimic, Captivate, and others now known only in legend. Neil is a member of IEEE and STC, an associate fellow of the STC, and the founder and manager of the Beyond the Bleeding Edge stem that ran at the STC annual conference from 1999 to 2006. You can reach him at [nperlin@concentric.net](mailto:nperlin@concentric.net) or [www.hyperword.com](http://www.hyperword.com).*



## Upcoming STC-Boston Chapter Competitions

[http://www.stcboston.org/competitions/calendar\\_index.shtml](http://www.stcboston.org/competitions/calendar_index.shtml)

### February 2009

25th STACIES Awards Banquet at the Hilton Garden Inn (Burlington, MA)

### April 2009

STC International Competitions results via mail from International contacts

### May 2009

TBD Online Awards Showcase

*Scholarship, continued from page 7*

employment opportunities. One scholarship of \$2,500 will be awarded. Application forms and additional information can be found on the STC website at [www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01\\_norby.asp](http://www.stc.org/edu/scholarshipInfo01_norby.asp).

### Additional Information

For more information about STC's scholarship programs, please contact Scott DeLoach, Manager, Scholarship Selection Committee, at [scott@clickstart.net](mailto:scott@clickstart.net).

Completed applications for both scholarships should be sent to the following address:

Scott DeLoach  
834 C Dekalb Avenue NE  
Atlanta, GA 30307

**Editor's Note:** *Source: Intercom, January 2009*

## STC Offers Free Web Seminar on Job Search Topic

### The Top 10 Mistakes Writers Make When Looking for Work

February 4, 1:00–2:30 PM (Eastern)

Have you ever interviewed for a position you wanted but didn't get? Or worse, have you submitted a résumé and didn't even get an interview? Chances are you made one or more mistakes that scuttled your chance at landing the job. In this session, Jack Molisani will present the top 10 mistakes writers make when looking for work (contract, perm, or outsource), with proactive tips on how to avoid these pitfalls and increase your chances of landing that next job or contract. Register here: <http://www.stc.org/edu/seminars01.asp>



## Technical Editing SIG is Introduced to Taxonomies

*By Virginia O'Donnell*

At the November meeting of the Technical Editing SIG, attendees were introduced to the concept of taxonomies, controlled vocabularies used for the indexing, retrieval, and organization of information.

Heather Hedden, principal of Hedden Information Management and a design and information architect, presented "An Introduction to Taxonomies" at Middlesex Community College in Bedford.

### About Taxonomies and Thesauri

As Hedden explained, taxonomy is a kind of controlled vocabulary (CV), an authoritative, restricted list of terms used mainly for indexing or tagging content so that it can be retrieved. Such vocabularies are "controlled," in the sense that there are restrictions on who can add terms and when the terms can be added.

A taxonomy is a hierarchy with broader and narrower terms, but not necessarily the related-term relationships and other requirements of a standard thesaurus. Taxonomies may or may not have the hierarchical structure associated with traditional taxonomies and can be in electronic or printed form.

Unlike a thesaurus, in which a given term may or may not have broader or narrower terms, all terms in a taxonomy belong to a single, large hierarchy that encompasses all concepts of a certain class, category, or aspect. The structure is sometimes referred to as a "tree" and the terms as "nodes" in the tree.

Taxonomy has also come to be a term for any kind of controlled vocabulary, whether a structured thesaurus, a simple synonym ring, or anything in between, especially in the corporate world which uses "enterprise taxonomies." Those involved in creating taxonomies are commonly referred to as taxonomists.

### Applications of Taxonomies

Today, taxonomies are used for indexing support; retrieval support; retrieval support with facets, which are multiple term lists of different types, such as people, places, events, products, etc.; and for organizational and navigational support.

For indexing support, taxonomists agree on a list of terms for indexing multiple documents or indexing by multiple indexers to ensure the consistency of periodical articles, database records, multi-volume works, encyclopedias, and web pages.

Mapping tables of terms and their synonyms or equivalents assist in online retrieval of information for on-site search engines, online databases, online yellow pages, and enterprise searches. These tables are in electronic format and are used for "automatic" indexing.

In a faceted taxonomy or faceted "browse" the user can search using a single term or combination of terms. These taxonomies are in electronic format and are used for online databases and e-commerce sites.

### Types of Controlled Vocabularies

A synonym ring is a controlled vocabulary with synonyms or near-synonyms for each concept. There are no designated preferred terms; all are equal and point to each other in a "ring."

A thesaurus is a controlled vocabulary with standard, structured relationships between terms. Thesauri are hierarchical, with broad terms/narrower terms; associative relationships; and equivalence, with preferred terms vs. non preferred terms. Thesauri are usually used in indexing periodical literature.

Taxonomies are controlled vocabularies with broader terms/narrower term relationships that include all terms to create hierarchical structures and emphasize categories

*Taxonomies, continued on page 9*

## The Broadside Staff

The *Boston Broadside* is published six times throughout the calendar year and would not be possible without the hard work of dedicated volunteers. Many thanks to the following people for their contributions:

### Broadside Staff

Sharon Popovsky  
*Managing Editor*

Karen Giventer  
*Copy Editor*

Karlyne Hutchings  
*Copy Editor*

.....

This Issue's Contributors:

Virginia O'Donnell

William Pacino

Neil Perlin

Pamela Sarantos

Marcia Shanbaum

### Thank you, everyone!

.....

### Write for the Broadside

The *Boston Broadside* encourages Chapter members to share their skills, thoughts, and ideas with other professionals in the Chapter.

If you would like to write for an upcoming issue of the *Boston Broadside*, send email to:

[boston.broadside@gmail.com](mailto:boston.broadside@gmail.com)

*By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications.*

*Taxonomies, continued from page 8*

and classifications. Taxonomies are most often used in corporate or enterprise applications.

An ontology is a complex thesaurus type of controlled vocabulary, in which terms have specified attributes and relationships in a sort of "knowledge representation."

### Creating and Wording of Terms

In creating a taxonomy, one of the first tasks the taxonomist faces is deciding whether a concept should be a "term" in the taxonomy. The taxonomist must decide whether the term falls within the subject area scope of the taxonomy; is important and likely to be looked up by the user of the taxonomy; and whether there is and will be enough information on the topic.

The next task is selecting the "preferred" term, usually choosing between two synonyms, such as "physician" or "doctor." The taxonomist must determine the term that the audience for the taxonomy is likely to search for and use that term consistently, conforming to the academic or educational standards, and enforcing organizational/enterprise controlled vocabulary.

Equally as important as choosing preferred terms is choosing non-preferred terms, terms for which a designated preferred term should be used instead.

### Implementation and Maintenance

Hedden pointed out that taxonomy creation tools are usually separate from the indexing program, and that because it is likely that the taxonomy will need to be ported for indexing and/or end-user searching, the taxonomy creator must consider the export format.

When creating a taxonomy, the taxonomist must also consider a method for nominating new vocabulary terms and for announcing those terms. Changes are made as terminology changes as new content and concepts are used; as outdated content is removed; and as new requirements, needs, trends, and markets arise. Users also suggest improvements, and indexers will need to review new content sources, periodicals, click-trail reports and search logs to determine whether further differentiation is needed on high-use terms, and whether no-use or low-use terms should be merged.

### Software for Creating Taxonomies

Software for creating and taxonomies can run the gamut from the simple, such as Microsoft Excel spreadsheet software; to single user Windows desktop software; to "home-grown" programs developed in large organizations; to large-scale multi-user client-server systems on Windows or the Web), such as Data Harmony, Synaptica, or Wordmap.

For more information, see [www.hedden-information.com](http://www.hedden-information.com), Heather Hedden's Web site.



**REMEMBER TO RESERVE FEBRUARY 25 FOR THE STACIES.**

**IT IS THE TIME OF YEAR WE COME TOGETHER TO CELEBRATE  
THOSE WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN OUR COMPETITIONS.  
IT IS A FUN OCCASION AND REMINDS US OF THE REWARDING WORK WE DO!**