



M A N U S C R I P T

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Fourth Annual STC/RRC Technical Communication Conference

Thursday, April 12 to Friday, April
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Red River College
Princess Street Campus



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Getting your novel published

by Lydia Klassen, edited by Nirdosh Ganske

It was the first Tuesday in March—time for another STC meeting! Eager STC members and guests flowed into the room and found their places around the tables. Everyone was excited about the topic for the evening, most of all Michael Hartley, who talked about how to write and sell novels. Michael Hartley, an experienced novel writer himself, clearly described how to write for the reader, develop the story, find a publisher, and finally market the product.

Write for the reader

After writing a novel, you want people to read and enjoy the story. But before you start writing, you have to ask yourself the following question, "What do the readers want from me?" Once you've answered this question, you'll find it easier to decide on a plot and characters that readers can identify with. When writing the story, try to put pictures into the readers' minds so they can visualize the scene you are writing about. Since the story is made up of characters, choosing the right ones is important. Michael gave the following good tips about characters:

- Give individuals interesting traits (to make them memorable)
- Have heroic characters
- Let characters grow/change
- Do not use too many characters
- Be careful when writing about people you know

Develop the story

Every novel should have a good beginning, interesting middle, and successful ending that transport readers into a different world. Before you start writing your story, you should make an outline to help you stay focused. To make the story as real as possible, research the geographical area and have a good feel for the setting.

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Manuscript

Manuscript and its shorter sibling *Micro Manuscript* are the official newsletters of STC-Manitoba Chapter. Together, they are published 10 times annually between September and June. The opinions expressed are those of the authors. Submissions, news, reviews, and other items of interest are welcome. Contributions may be edited for length. Deadline is the fifteenth of every month. For example, the deadline for the November issue is October 15.

Submissions and ideas are welcome. Please make arrangements in advance with the editor. By submitting an article, you agree to its publication in *Manuscript* and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. The writer holds copyright. When submitting an article, please let the editor know if it has been published or submitted elsewhere.

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Mission: Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

For more information about STC-Manitoba, please visit our Web site at <http://www.stc-manitoba.org/>.

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Members of Manitoba's STC chapter gather at the Annual General Meeting in May and elect members to the STC Executive. Each member on the executive is elected for a term of one year.

Getting your novel published continued from page 1...

Your writing should also appeal to the readers' senses like taste, smell, touch, sound, and sight. The use of dialogue is also a great way to catch the readers' attention and makes for an interesting read. "Create a world that the reader wants to explore—arouse the reader's curiosity," says Michael.

Find a publisher

Getting a book published without an agent is very difficult. Publishers do not want to spend money and time on editing your story, but rather want to see a perfect version of the manuscript. Michael suggested finding an agent who is willing to work with you and edit your work. Your novel will go through many revisions, and listening to the agent's suggestions and making the changes is important. Try to stay in a good relationship with your agent. Be sure your manuscript is perfect before you submit it.

Market your product

Once your book has been published, you should market it as best as you can. Great opportunities to market the book are readings and signings at libraries and independent bookstores. If you can manage to get a table in front of a bookstore in a mall during Christmas or another high traffic season, you will find opportunities to talk about your book, promote it, and make sales. Budding authors may want to note that Chapters sells 87 percent of books sold through retail bookstores in Canada.

Start writing your novel

Michael Hartley provided such a good insight into how to write for the reader, develop a story, find a publisher, and market the product that people, while enjoying their dinner, started talking about stories that they could work into novels. Although publishing a novel is not easy, Michael's success in publishing several novels gave people hope and sparked their interest in trying it.

President's message

by Nirdosh Ganske

It's April 1; I have only two months left in my term, and I still haven't crafted that inspiring and uplifting message that I thought I'd write. I've had a long spell of writer's block, or some other writing malady.

What do you do when you encounter writer's block? Solutions I've collected over the years (and sometimes implemented) include the following:

- Take a long walk, about two hours, at a brisk pace. (If you still can't write when you return, at least you'll feel better physically, and you can feel self-righteous that you've gotten your exercise).
- Do something creative for a few hours—work on a scrap-booking or woodworking project, paint, draw, create a topiary—the type of project matters less than your ability to become totally absorbed in it. The distraction will help break your obsession over not being able to write and may encourage the flow of new ideas for your writing project.
- Draw a mind map, concept map, or similar framework for the ideas you already have. Work quickly, without judgment, and see if the act of connecting all your thoughts jogs some more ideas!
- Start writing anything that comes into your head. Capitalize on the natural human

tendency to associative thinking (stream of consciousness) to continue writing until something coherent starts to emerge.

- Read ten or more articles written in a style you admire and would like to emulate, on the topic you want or need to write about. Doing so can establish a pattern or rhythm of language that can jump-start your own writing effort.
- Promise yourself a reward that you rarely indulge in, if you accomplish a certain amount of writing within a specified timeframe. (This approach works best if you have a history of being able to bribe yourself).

As I watch the snow flying by the window and realize I have only two months left to “unblock” and dazzle you with technical writing insightfulness, I contemplate with some smugness that I've just written the April president's message.

Do write to Steve, our editor, and tell us how you overcome writer's block! What works for you? What have you tried that you can vouch does not work?

Meanwhile, I hope to see you at the fourth annual technical communication conference at Princess Street Campus, April 12 and 13. Do check out the conference Web site, accessible through the Manitoba STC Web site. (Please note the change in URL to <http://www.stcmanitoba.org>).

From the Editor

Although I thanked them in March's *Manuscript*, I have to thank Neil and Lydia once more for their work on the newsletter. Now, onto other matters, namely the fourth annual STC/RRC technical communication conference. Just from reading the write-ups of the presenters, I can tell this year's conference will be fun and informative. Alas, I will not be able to attend; some of us actually have work to do.

This reality also explains the shortened issue for *Manuscript* this month—it's down to six pages from the normally bulging eight. Looking forward, I'm hoping that some of you conference attendees/presenters will provide accounts of the conference. I'm interested to learn as much as I can.

Vansco—creating an intranet site for the global workplace

by Cheri Frazer

Last summer, Vansco was persuaded that it was time to redesign their intranet site. The existing site was Winnipeg-based, which no longer suited the needs of the now-global company, and it still had its original design, which was quite spiffy in 1996 but a little outdated in 2006.



The intranet redesign team consisted of one information architect (me), and a programmer (we were later joined by a designer). We thought we could do a good job given

ten months, a decent budget, and some dedicated resources to help with the planning and user testing. Instead, we were given zero budget and three months—from concept to completion—to complete the programming, and another three months to move the entire old site into the new design. It was quite a challenge, to say the least. When a project's scope is reduced so drastically you are forced to change your definition of success. So, instead of a high-tech, context-sensitive, user-oriented design, we went with a simpler, scaled-down, traditional design that had some modest bells and whistles.

The interesting part of the project was the user testing that took place in the Winnipeg office. We decided to (1) research industry best practices; (2) poll employees to find out what resources they needed or valued most; (3) do an open card-sort, which consisted of writing topics on cards and asking employees to sort them into categories, and then (4) do a closed card-sort, in which we provided category names and then asked employees to sort the cards into them. Because the Winnipeg employees were so accustomed to the design they had seen for the past ten years, it was extremely difficult to get past that bias. For example, the original home page looked like an index, with department names and their major sub-pages listed in alphabetical order. As a

result, when asked what they thought should go on the new home page, employees would re-create the old index. Even after we created a paper prototype of the new home page showing the News module, Quick Links, Weather module, People Finder, and world clock, employees still asked where their department's list of links would go. (Answer: in the Departments menu, which was shown in the prototype).

The new intranet features a home page that is customizable for each employee who has a log-in address. (If you've used the customized Google page you'll know what I mean; you need a Gmail address to explore this feature). Employees can add, delete, or move modules, which are bits of programmed information contained in a discrete box. They can add their own list of Quick Links, post news stories, participate in discussion forums, create project blogs, and even display their Outlook meetings and appointments on their home page (and more).

Now that the new intranet site is live in three countries, we've moved into the Content phase of the project. This phase is intended to determine how we can make the most of this interface to save employees time and to streamline our processes. Another major bonus of having a global tool is that it sparks discussions among team members who live in different countries; for example, the IT employees in our Finnish facility are working with the IT employees in other facilities to build a list of help files for common office equipment. Also, our discussion forums are creating communities of practice that share valuable information on a given topic.

It has been a fascinating and challenging project so far, and the redesign team already has more suggestions than we can handle. The next phase will likely include a portal that customers and suppliers can log into to get information relevant to their business. The challenge, as always, will be to find the time and resources necessary to get the job done right.

Resources for technical communicators

by Nirdosh Ganske

After a brief respite, we're back again! Thanks to Rachel Ines, who passed along a list of blogs she located on Techwr-l, posted by Tracy Taylor on March 21, 2007. Thanks to Rick Ray for providing a list of resources for technical communicators, from which I've selected five to include in the list below. Feel free to contribute your favourite online resources for inclusion in this listing.

Site name/description	URL
Usable Help (blog)—some humorous, some informational entries; most entries include links	http://www.g2meyer.com/usablehelp/index.html
The Content Wrangler (blog)—an invitation to submit papers to the Extreme Markup Language conference; an article on design research; the impact of drive-by pharming on wireless networks; and more	http://www.thecontentwrangler.com/
I'd Rather be Writing (blog)—Steve Job's Stanford commencement speech found here; Jobs launched Apple, Next and Pixar (see second link)	http://www.idratherbewriting.com/ http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D1R-jKKp3NA
DMN Communications (blog)—podcasts on technical writing	http://www.dmncommunications.com/weblog/
UX Matters (blog)—“user experience; sometimes has user assistance issues”: – <i>Taylor</i>	http://www.uxmatters.com/MT/archives/000170.php
Adobe FrameMaker Resources	http://www.klariti.com/Framemaker/index.shtml
Designing FrameMaker Documentation: FrameMaker Tutorials	http://www.io.com/~tcm/etwr2372/frame_index.html

Resources to Master the Information Design Process	http://saulcarliner.home.att.net/id/processresources.htm
Tech-Writer.net: Developing Documents and Content—a good primer	http://www.tech-writer.net/developingdocuments.html
Informational Interviewing Tutorial	http://www.quintcareers.com/informational_interviewing.html

Blogging is definitely something one is either wild about or not. Depending on how the blog is managed, it can be a good resource for dependable information, or it can be a dumping ground for unbridled rants. We hope that you find the blogs listed here to be interesting and informative.

The FrameMaker sites were a welcome find for me. The first site listed, Adobe FrameMaker Resources, is a reference site organized by broad topics, which I find particularly useful. The second, Designing FrameMaker Documentation: FrameMaker Tutorials, uses an instructional format to take you step-by-step through the learning process.

Resources to Master the Information Design Process—a Saul Carliner site—is exquisitely detailed, accessible, and relevant.

If you hate job hunting and feel like a wallflower at networking functions, the Informational Interviewing Tutorial may be just the resource you need. According to this site, “One out of every 200 resumes (some studies put the number as high as 1,500 resumes) results in a job offer. One out of every 12 informational interviews, however, results in a job offer.”

Send the URLs of your favourite resources to nganske@rrc.mb.ca

Professional development courses

The following are links for continuing education courses at these institutions:

- University of Winnipeg Continuing Education—<http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/index/dce-index>
- University of Manitoba Extended Education—<http://www.umanitoba.ca/extended/division/>
- Red River College Continuing Education—
<http://me.rrc.mb.ca/Catalogue/Default.aspx?Link=Courses.asp?DeliveryCode=E>

Course name	Dates	Location	Link
Technical Communications—an introduction	April 3–June 5, 2007	Red River College Continuing Education	http://me.rrc.mb.ca/Catalogue/Default.aspx?Link=
Values, Ethics and Issues in Technology & Society	April 4–Jun 6, 2007	Red River College Continuing Education	http://me.rrc.mb.ca/Catalogue/Default.aspx?Link=Courses.asp?DeliveryCode=E