Awards Presented at IPCC 01

By Muriel Zimmerman

The annual PCS awards banquet in Santa Fe, New Mexico, 25 October 2001, was a splendid occasion. The *Alfred N. Goldsmith Award* for outstanding contributions to the field of technical communication was presented to **Janice C. Redish**; the *Emily K. Schlesinger Award* for outstanding service to the Professional Communication Society went to **William P. Kehoe**; the first *Ronald S. Blicq Award* for distinguished contributions to technical communication education was given to **Ann A. Laster**; and the newly named *Rudolph J. Joenk, Jr. Award* for outstanding paper published in the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* was presented to **Ann S. Jennings**. See the recipients' biographies in the November/December 2001 *Newsletter*.

Ron Blicq, for whom the new PCS education award is named, provided the assembled guests with a mini-history of technical communication textbooks, beginning in 1908 and ending in 1970. He displayed quotations from each book he mentioned, and the audience learned that some of the earlier books argued for now-common document features, such as executive summaries, while others stressed the importance of audience analysis for writers in the planning stages. He also noted that most of the earlier books were written in a long-sentence style that we no longer associate with skillful technical writing, and that all of them assumed that technical writers are men, never women.

Why end with 1970? That was the year that Blicq Awardee Ann A. Laster's book, *Technical English*, written with coauthor Nell Ann Pickett, *(continued on page 3)*

Jean-luc Doumont

Award winners Janice Redish, Ann Laster, Ann Jennings, Bill Kehoe

Rudy Joenk

Surprised? Perhaps it took a second look to recognize the *Newsletter* in its new garb. Aside from our accidental blue issue in March/April 2001, our previous look—the first with two colors—was implemented in mid-1995 by then-editor David Nadziejka, so we thought it was time for a fresh look. The *Newsletter* has now joined the graphic-identity family begun with our new PCS logo, reported in the November/December 2000 issue, and since applied to our membership brochure and stationery. Let us know what you think about it. The next few issues may see some refinements as we get used to the layout.

When this issue reaches our Web site as a PDF file (approximately one month after distribution of the print version), e-mail and Web links will be active.

With this issue I confer heaps of INSTANT FAME, with my thanks, to the volunteer reporters and photographers who provided the reflections and pictures of IPCC 01 in this issue: Joe Chew, Marj Davis, Jean-luc Doumont, George Hayhoe, Luke Maki, Terrance Malkinson, and Kirk St.Amant.

The IEEE and the IEEE Foundation recently announced the establishment of the *Goldsmith League*, named for Alfred N. Goldsmith and his wife Gertrude, as a special tribute for their legacy gift that seeded the Foundation's ability to award grants to worthy projects that impact the profession. Goldsmith is the PCS founder for whom we named our award for contributions to the field of technical communication.

AdCom

AdCom meetings in 2002 will be online in January and July; in Atlanta, Georgia, 12-13 April; and at IPCC 2002 in Portland, Oregon, on 21 September. Check the Web site (*http://www.ieeepcs.org/*) for dates.

Potpourri

Reader Bill Twaddell reported that the haiku error messages in Potpourri for November/December 2001 originally came from the *Salon Magazine* site, *http://www.salon.com/21st/chal/1998/02/10chal3.html*, rather than the site where I found them unattributed. My apologies to Joy Rothke, Suzie Wagner, and Howard Korder, the three authors.

Here's another good one by Jason Axley from the same site:

Login incorrect.
Only perfect spellers may
Enter this system.

For three years, until recently when someone finally noticed, the Web site of the Independence Institute in Golden, Colorado, displayed a picture of Vladimir Lenin, identifying him as the Institute's president. Gregg Moss and Emily Narvaes in *The Denver Post*.

Introducing the *pleonasty:* a sarcastic response to a pleonasm (redundancy):

An unexpected surprise.
How do you like your surprises?

Add on.
As opposed to subtract off?

A new innovation.
Enough of those old ones!

Past experience has shown….
That's the most enriching kind.

Cancel it out.
Anyway, don't include it in.

A short three-letter word.
The long kind will never do.

Outlook for 2002

This column was difficult to write since I wrote it before I officially took office. First of all, we need to thank George Hayhoe for his past two years of service. George was instrumental in the formation of the strategic plan (*http://www.ieeepcs. org/plan.htm*) we are currently operating under. With his help, and that of other AdCom members, membership in PCS is slowly rising again. We also have a new logo, a new Web site, and, as you can tell, a fresh look to our *Newsletter*. It doesn't end there.

PCS has been working very hard over the past few years to increase its visibility within the IEEE, among engineering educators, and among technical communicators. One goal, as always, is to continue to grow our membership base. We also have some exciting projects in the works.

Web-based Education

Nancy Coppola (*coppolan@ieee.org*) is leading a group exploring the development of Web-based education for engineering professionals. Our collective experience in engineering, education, and communication perfectly positions us to develop courses other organizations can model.

Member Services

Our members already receive the *Transactions* and the *Newsletter*, but we are also looking at electronic delivery methods and information repositories. One immediate possibility is the PCS Online Discussion Forum (*http://ieeepcs.org/www board/*) *[be careful where you put*

those w's]. Members can pose questions and share information with one another. In addition, we would like to broadcast e-mail to members with information that just cannot wait for the next *Newsletter*. This would be an opt-in list only. Finally, we are looking at partnering with another group to take over management of a technical communication information portal. As soon as the details are finalized, we'll get the information to you.

AdCom Elections

As a result of our society review, we have modified our constitution and bylaws so that one-half of the AdCom will be elected by the general membership. Each fall we elect six new AdCom members. In the past, only current AdCom members could vote for new AdCom members. Based on the bylaw change approved at our October AdCom meeting, three AdCom members will be elected by the general membership and the remaining three will be elected by the AdCom. This change will take effect with elections this coming fall, so watch the *Newsletter* and the Web site for

information on how you can participate. Any member of PCS, who is also a member in good standing of the IEEE, is eligible to run for election. *[Details of the bylaw change are on page 7 of this Newsletter and a call for AdCom nominations is on page 5. Ed.]*

Participation

While on the topic of participation, we have a volunteer coordinator: Bernadette Longo (*blongo@ieee.org*) maintains a list of volunteers and their interests and tasks available. Volunteering does not necessarily mean that you will be running a conference. We have a lot of smaller tasks that need to be done to help with the conferences and implement the strategic plan. You can help one time, with no obligation to help again, or you can assist with an ongoing project.

I was first elected to the AdCom five years ago. In that time I've participated in a number of activities that have helped me grow both professionally and personally. PCS is a great organization and one that I am looking forward to introducing to more people.

Awards Presented at IPCC 01

first appeared. The publisher had urged them to use initials rather than their full names to disguise the fact that they are women, and also urged them to disguise their two-year-college academic affiliations. Laster and Pickett refused to take this advice, and *Technical English*,

recently reissued in its eighth edition, is one of the most enduring texts around.

Muriel Zimmerman is awards chair for PCS and a senior lecturer in technical communication at the University of California, Santa Barbara; m.zimmerman@ieee.org.

Highlights of the October AdCom Meeting

By Eduardo H. Clark

The Professional Communication Society's administrative committee (AdCom) convened at La Fonda in Santa Fe, New Mexico, on 24 and 27 October 2001. The two-day session included elections the first day and strategic planning and discussions the second day.

Election of AdCom Members-at-Large

The AdCom held elections for six members-at-large to replace those whose terms expire at the end of 2001. In a highly contested election with 13 candidates, six of them incumbents, the AdCom elected the following members for the 2002–2004 term:

Michael Bridgwood, Ed Clark (incumbent), Jean-luc Doumont, Luke Maki (incumbent), Larry Strianese, and Steve Robinson.

In 2002, three of the six AdCom members will be elected by the

> The AdCom has four new members.

membership at large; see the bylaw change on page 7 in this *Newsletter*.

Election of President and Vice President

The AdCom also held elections for president and vice president for 2002. Beth Moeller was elected president and Ed Clark was elected vice president.

Officers' Reports

Outgoing president George Hayhoe will lead a professional communication delegation to the People's Republic of China in October 2002, sponsored by the People to People Ambassador program. PCS is one of the first societies to be invited.

Budget difficulties continue in IEEE with a projected deficit of about USD 25M, partly due to diminished return on investments in the stock market. The IEEE blue ribbon panel

has proposed major changes to the administrative structure in IEEE. Implementation would occur between 2003 and 2006

Vice president Beth Moeller proposed the venues and approximate dates for the 2002 AdCom meetings (see Future Meetings). She also proposed that the AdCom create a list of preferred vendors, and that committee chairs apply our tax exemption when paying for conference expenses. Both proposals can save PCS significant money.

Conferences

IPCC 01 was expected to be a success in spite of reduced attendance because of cancellations. It is fully reported elsewhere in the *Newsletter*. Planning for IPCC 2002 is on track with Laurel Grove as chair. A call for papers has been distributed and the Web site (*http://www.ieeepcs. org/2002/*) is ready and bringing inquiries. For IPCC 2003, a contract with Coronado Springs Resort (Walt Disney World) in Lake Buena Vista (Orlando), Florida, has been negotiated, with Sherry Steward as chair; Paul Dombrowski is program chair. For IPCC 2004, the AdCom selected Minneapolis, Minnesota, with Bernadette Longo as chair.

Awards

The AdCom voted to confer the 2002 Goldsmith Award on Dr. Edward Tufte, a professor at Yale University, and the 2002 Blicq Award on Dr. Mary Lay, a professor at the University of Minnesota.

New president Beth Moeller with former president Mark Haselkorn

Membership

For the second year in a row, PCS is finishing the year with positive numbers—more than two percent gain in total membership. The membership committee obtained a USD 5000 membership development grant from the IEEE, which will be used to defray mailing expenses and other membership initiatives. Senior Membership is being actively promoted; two AdCom members were recently elevated to this grade. Visit *http://www.ieee.org/membership/ upgrade.html* for information on how to upgrade your IEEE membership.

Ed Clark (right) and Luke Maki (far right) were reelected to the AdCom.

Future Meetings

The next AdCom meeting will be held electronically in January or February. The second meeting of 2002 will be in April or May in Atlanta, Georgia, at Mercer University, hosted by AdCom member and membership chair, Marj Davis. The last meeting of 2002 will be at IPCC 2002, in Portland, Oregon, on 21 September. PCS members are welcome at AdCom meetings.

Ed Clark was PCS secretary for 2000-2001 and is now vice president.

Note added in proof: Gene Hoffnagle resigned the final year of his second AdCom term and Julia Williams was appointed to finish his term through 2002.

Call for AdCom Nominations

By Kim Sydow Campbell

The Professional Communication Society is managed by an administrative committee (AdCom) comprising 18 volunteers who work to assure that our society serves its members, the IEEE, and the field of technical and professional communication. If you are interested in a higher level of involvement in PCS and IEEE, I urge you to consider being a candidate for the AdCom. Elections are held each year to fill six at-large positions with three-year terms. AdCom members-at-large must be both PCS and IEEE members (i.e., a higher level of membership than affiliate). Beginning with our election in fall 2002, three members-at-large will be selected by vote of the members of PCS and three by vote of the current AdCom. (See the notice of constitution and bylaw changes on page 7.)

Typically, AdCom members attend three business meetings each year. Last year (and this year), however, one of those meetings was held online using Microsoft NetMeeting. AdCom members also engage in e-mail discussions between meetings. Each member-at-large has an opportunity to provide leadership in the society by, for example, chairing a standing or ad hoc committee, serving as a society officer, or playing a lead role in an upcoming International Professional Communication Conference (IPCC). Although AdCom members are volunteers and are expected to seek travel support from their employers, PCS currently provides up to $1200 yearly for attending the three meetings.

You need not be a member of the AdCom, however, to play a role in these and other PCS activities. There's plenty of rewarding work for anyone who wants to volunteer by contacting Bernadette Longo, our volunteer coordinator, at *blongo @ieee.org*. Nevertheless, for those of you with a special desire and exciting ideas, working with the AdCom can be both significant and rewarding.

If you're interested, or know someone who might be, please contact Kim Sydow Campbell, chair of the nominating committee, at *k.s.campbell@ieee.org* by 1 April (no foolin'!). You can learn more about our society by visiting *http://www.ieeepcs.org/*.

Kim Campbell is a member of the AdCom and editor of the IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication.
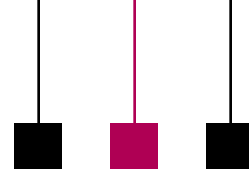
Peter Reimold and Cheryl Reimold

Being Part of the Solution

Part 2: Guidance vs. Criticism

One of the most common complaints we've heard from managers is the enormous amount of time they spend editing subordinates' writing. They all would like to do much less of that. But the harder they fight the problem, the worse it seems to get, sometimes driving them to desperate measures such as firing irredeemable writers.

Here we'll look at a rarely used approach that gets results: a real solution, rather than a mad jumping into the middle of the problem and becoming part of it.

Symptoms…and Questionable Cures

What kind of writing drives managers to distraction, and then to lengthy labor with the red pen? Four categories stand out:

Useless or incomplete: Written in a vacuum: wrong message for readers, important information omitted in favor of a flood of irrelevant detail

Indigestible: Main message buried, organization nonexistent or inconsistent, style convoluted

Embarrassing: Glaring grammar and spelling errors, grade-school style, inappropriate word choice

Offensive: Politically naive, arrogant, or aggressive

When the next reports are no better, despite all the red ink (and perhaps some verbal constructive criticism), the manager reaches for heavier ammunition: Step up the volume, threaten career damage, threaten to send the sinner to a writing course, then actually send him or her to a one-day course. If the course is generic and not geared to the writer's situation and problems, there will almost certainly be no change, so the drama continues.

All throughout, the red-ink editing escalates, consuming much of the manager's time and energy and enraging the writer-sinners. When self-preservation becomes an issue, the manager may get drastic. For instance, we met some who simply refused to publish bad reports of sinners who would not be reformed. Countless others fired the offenders. Both actions do relieve the editing load at least temporarily—but look at the price paid!

**A Better Solution:
Low-Pressure Coaching**

We ran into one group leader whose subordinates consistently turned out useful, well written memos and reports without much editorial input. How did he achieve this, year after year? His secret was simple: He spent time *initially* coaching every new employee in writing. This simply took the form of writing a report on the first project together. In the process, the manager explained the political realities: who the clients were, what they cared about most and what would rub them the wrong way, what they understood and what had to be explained to them in nontechnical ways or by analogy.

PCS Members Elevated to Senior Status

Congratulations to these Professional Communication Society members who achieved IEEE Senior Member status in 2001:

REGIONS 1-6 (U.S.)

Kim Sydow Campbell
Eduardo H. Clark
Nancy W. Coppola
Daniel J. Dailey
Elizabeth W. Moeller
Tina L. Ogden
William D. Palmer
Gyan P. Saxena
Mohammed O. Zaatari

REGION 8

François le Chevalier (France)
James Irvine (U.K.)

REGION 9
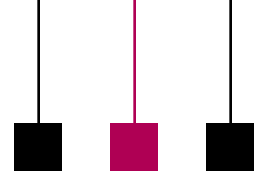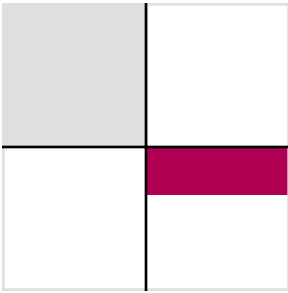
Ricardo A. Viega (Argentina)

REGION 10

Roger Holt (Western Australia)
S. S. Narayanan (India)

If you have 10 years or more of professional communication experience you can apply for IEEE Senior Member status. The forms are available on the Web: *http://www.ieee.org /organizations/rab/md/smforms.htm.*

For more information or help in completing the forms contact (PCS) *marj.davis@ieee.org*.

They would construct the piece conversationally, with the subordinate writing down what he or she was led to formulate. If there were style problems, such as long sentences or convoluted constructions, the manager would let them go but make a mental note to work on the major ones another time. Any blatant errors in grammar, such as run-on sentences, he would fix quietly, making light of them.

After that initial session, the manager knew whether there were writing problems that required extra coaching sessions; if not, the first session was still useful because it gave him

> Intensive guidance ultimately saves you time and effort.

a chance to explain all-important political details. And where extra coaching was needed, the time invested was still shorter than that consumed by constant editing. More important, his cooperative coaching allowed poorer writers to learn by doing, a much more effective method than trying to figure out the positive principles behind obnoxious or cryptic red marks.

Interestingly, this manager was not a star writer—something he admitted cheerfully to anybody. But he did know (1) what his readers wanted and (2) how to get to a short, focused draft in a very short time

by keeping everything simple. That, together with his cooperative attitude, was enough to make him an effective writing coach. It would be enough to turn you, too, from an eternal red-ink editor into a happy coach with lots of free time!

Cheryl and Peter Reimold have been teaching communication skills to engineers, scientists, and business people for 20 years. Their firm, PERC Communications (+1 914 725 1024, perccom@aol.com), offers businesses consulting and writing services, as well as customized in-house courses on writing, presentation skills, and on-the-job communication skills. Visit their web site at http://www.allaboutcommunication.com.

Notice of Amendment to PCS Constitution

By George Hayhoe

At its October meeting, the PCS administrative committee approved amendments to the society's constitution and bylaws that will allow PCS members to directly elect members of the AdCom. This governance change was recommended by the IEEE society review committee in its recent review of PCS.

Both amendments have been reviewed by the IEEE Technical Activities Board (TAB). The amendment to the Constitution becomes effective on 31 March 2002 unless five percent of PCS members of IEEE member grade or higher object in writing to the TAB secretary. The bylaws amendment became effective upon TAB approval.

The amendment to article 4, section 2 of the PCS constitution replaces "New AdCom members-at-large are elected by the current year's AdCom" with "New AdCom members-at-large are elected in the manner prescribed in the bylaws of the society."

The amendment to sections 10C and 10D of the PCS bylaws provides for election of three AdCom members-at-large each year by the PCS membership and of three other members-at-large by the members of the current year's AdCom. All candidates are elected from a slate of candidates submitted by the nominating committee from names submitted by interested PCS members.

Look for information about the 2002 AdCom election in future issues of the *Newsletter*. See page 5 for an article by Kim Campbell soliciting potential candidates for the September election.

Any PCS member of IEEE member grade or higher who objects to the change in the PCS constitution described here should send that objection in writing to:

Mary Ward-Callan, Director
IEEE Technical Activities
P.O. Box 1331
Piscataway, NJ 08855-1331, USA

Letters of objection must be postmarked no later than 28 February 2002.

Usability—It's Not That Difficult

Elizabeth Weise Moeller

In the November/December 2001 issue I told you that *accessibility* and *usability* are not necessarily the same thing. A usable Web site may not be accessible if it does not follow the Web Accessibility Initiative guidelines. An accessible Web site, on the other hand, is almost always a usable Web site. Therefore, it's time to talk about a usable Web site.

Background

Tim Berners-Lee, the acknowledged inventor of the World Wide Web, stated during his talk at the 35th anniversary celebration of the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science:

"The basic idea of the Web is that [it is] an information space through which people can communicate, but communicate in a special way: communicate by sharing their knowledge in a pool.…This is not supposed to be a glorified television channel."

Designers seem to be forgetting this. The Web as we know it today is no longer a communication medium usable by all, harkening back to the ideals of Vannevar Bush and Ted Nelson. It has become primarily an advertising medium, driving the U.S. economy, and leaving in the dust those who do not (or cannot) keep up with the latest technological improvements.

But is this good practice? What can designers, programmers, and users do to make sure sites are usable to many?

Areas for Concern

When a new client asks me to evaluate his or her Web site, there are four areas I concentrate on: navigation structure, information content, ease of finding information, and overall graphical look and feel. While many sites fare just fine using one or two of those criteria, most sites prove problematic when all four are considered; sometimes you can't find the information you need on a great looking site, while an ugly site has some of the best information.

> The Web has become primarily an advertising medium.

Navigation Structure

If you were to draw a flow chart of your Web site, what would it look like? This is essentially your navigation structure. We check to see that headings are logical and that, when clicked, people find the information they expect to find. For example, if a visitor clicks on About Us, she or he would expect to find information describing the site owner. We also check to see how pages link to the home page, how users get from one section to another within the site, and how difficult it is to find a specific piece of information that is buried deep in the site.

Poor navigation structure significantly hinders usability because site visitors cannot easily find the information they need.

Information Content

"It's the content, stupid." So many site developers seem to forget that the greatest looking site on the planet is useless without the content to back it up. Usable sites contain well organized content—content that is written for the Web. Writing for the Web is different from writing for print publications. People do not read Web sites the way they read a publication. Therefore, information needs to be chunked appropriately to make it easier for site visitors to read.

Ease of Finding Information

Visitors use different methods for finding information online. Some click through the navigation structure to get there; some look for a button to lead them to a site map; and others want to use a search box. A well done navigation structure serves the first group well. Whether a designer chooses to use either of the other options is up to him or her. Large sites (over 50 pages) absolutely should contain some form of site map or search function. The search function could cover just one area of the site (e.g., the PCS Web site permits searching of *Transactions* abstracts only) or it could cover the entire site.

Usable Web sites are ones on which visitors can find the information they need quickly—no matter what method they use.

Overall Graphical Look and Feel

This is the area that often causes the most problems in terms of usability. Sites created by designers often have a wonderful flair to them but take a long time to download and sometimes exclude users by incorporating state-of-the-art technology. There are
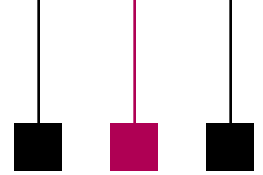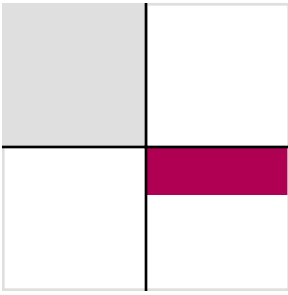
many in the world of Web design who feel that people who cannot keep up with the technology should be left in the dust. Unfortunately, those designers are not looking at the reality that many people are comfortable with their current software and are not interested enough (or permitted by their IT departments) to upgrade to the latest Web browsers and plugins.

On the other end of the scale are people with no design experience at all who insist that blinking text

Site evaluation factors: navigability, content, ease of use, look and feel

really will draw the attention of site visitors. Those sites are bad, too, because they are often very hard to read. There is a fairly wide range in the middle of the design spectrum that allows for nice graphics without sacrificing usability.

Summary

With just a little effort, it is easy to make a Web site be both aesthetically pleasing and usable. It all comes back to "Know thy audience." If you know your audience has the latest and greatest tools and knows your company inside out, feel free to create the latest and greatest Web site using all your jargon. If you cannot guarantee the audience's tools and knowledge, it is much better to design a site that many can use to find the information they need.

Elizabeth Weise Moeller is president of PCS. She owns Interactive Media Consulting, LLC (+1 518 587 5107, beth@imediaconsult.com), a World Wide Web and Internet training firm in Saratoga Springs, New York, which provides Web-site design and Internet training for businesses in the northeast.

From the Editor
(continued from page 2)

From an essay by Harold J. Ellner, originally in *Verbatim Magazine*, now in *Verbatim*, an anthology edited by Eric McKean.

Grammar, *n*. A system of pitfalls thoughtfully prepared for the feet of the self-made man, along the path by which he advances to distinction. From *The Devil's Dictionary* by Ambrose Bierce.

Message on a leaflet: If you cannot read, this leaflet will tell you how to get lessons. From the *Saturday Evening Post*.

Information for Authors
One thousand words makes a nice page-and-a-half article, though longer and shorter articles may be appropriate. Proposals for periodic columns are also welcome.

If you use a wp program, **keep your formatting simple;** multiple fonts and sizes, customized paragraphing and line spacing, personalized styles, etc. have to be filtered out before being recoded in *Newsletter* style. Headers, footers, and tables lead the casualty list. **Embed only enough specialized formatting and highlighting (boldface, italics, bullets) to show me your preferences.**

If you borrow text—more than a fair-use sentence or two—from previously published material, you are responsible for obtaining written permission for its use. Ditto for graphics. Always give credit to the author or artist.

The *Newsletter* issues on our Web site can be used as examples (*http://www.ieeepcs.org/pub.html*).

I prefer to receive articles by e-mail; most WordPerfect, Word, RTF (rich text format), and ASCII files are acceptable. My addresses are in the boilerplate at the bottom of page 2.

Deadlines
The 15th day of each odd-numbered month is the deadline for publication in the succeeding odd-numbered month. For example, the deadline is 15 March for the May/June issue, 15 May for the July/August issue, etc. You won't be far off (and never late) if you observe the Ides of March, May, July, and so on.

Jean-luc Doumont

Unchained

Discourse is by essence sequential: Words follow words, sentences follow sentences. In oral discourse, the sequence is clearly imposed by the speaker. In written discourse, it is proposed by the writer, but ultimately chosen by the reader, who elects what to read and what not. Still, the sequence remains, at some level: Readers are, for example, unlikely to read words out of order within a sentence.

Discourse, at the same time, is remarkably structured. The sequenced words are not undifferentiated; rather, they each find their place in some sort of hierarchical pattern that linguists draw as a tree. At higher levels, sequenced sentences can similarly embody a tree-like structure, consisting, for example, of sections and paragraphs.

Readability, then, stems largely from the ease with which we can recognize and process the underlying tree-like structure of discourse in the apparently linear sequence of words and sentences. As argued previously ("Lest We All Go to Hell" in the May/June 2001 *Newsletter*), the readability of sentences is not a matter of length, but of structure: Short sentences can be hard to read if their structure is heavily nested and long sentences can be easy to read if their structure is readily apparent. At higher levels, the ease with which we perceive the structure of sections and paragraphs can be regarded as a matter of *accessibility*, a quality to strive for in any document, including online ones such as Web sites.

Trouble begins when the structure embodied in the sequence of words or sentences is a chain, not a tree. Chains (long series) rapidly tax our short-term memory, making it difficult for us to process the text. Interestingly, they also affect our long-term memory, making it difficult for us to recall items randomly, out of sequence.

> Trouble begins when the structure is a chain, not a tree.

Chains, unfortunately, are frequent constructs in professional communication often resulting from a good intent on the part of the author. Here are three examples.

• An obsession with sentence length as a guarantee of readability often results in long chains of short sentences within paragraphs; each sentence may well be easy to read, but the paragraph as a whole might not. The same applies to a long series of short paragraphs, an instance of what a friend of mine mockingly calls Information Slicing™.

• Writing down and committing to memory the text of an oral presentation places the speaker at the mercy of the slightest memory lapse: If a link is missing, the chain is broken—the remainder of the text somehow cannot be recalled past the blank.

• A wish for conciseness (or perhaps for idiomatic English) leads many writers to piling up premodifiers, as in Santa Fe's Café Pasqual's "Grilled Applewood Smoked Bacon Wrapped Mission Figs."

It took me a while to figure out what in there was grilled, what was smoked, and what was wrapped.

"Unchaining" these constructs is a balancing act. It requires that we balance the tree-like structure of our discourse at all levels. Often, it requires that we add or suppress levels, so as to avoid both too many levels and too many items per level. For the examples, it suggests combining closely related sentences or paragraphs, outlining an oral presentation as a tree so points can be recalled in any order, and "unfolding," at least partly, the doubly nested items on Café Pasqual's menu.

As I also argued previously ("Simplify, Simplify?" in the July/August 2000 *Newsletter*), piles of premodifiers are not only taxing for our short-term memory, but also rapidly ambiguous. At Café Pasqual again, the naive patron that I am thought for a second that the "free range chicken mole enchiladas" were on the house. Not so, of course. These reasonably expensive enchiladas were simply made with free-range chicken.

Fortunately, Café Pasqual's heavily chained menu items did not prevent AdCom members from enjoying a great dinner as a way of celebrating another successful IPCC.

Dr. Jean-luc Doumont teaches and provides advice on professional speaking, writing, and graphing. For over 15 years, he has helped audiences of all ages, backgrounds, and nationalities structure their thoughts and construct their communication (http://www.JLConsulting.be).

Censorship

By Michael Brady

Censorship may be the biggest bug-bear in communication. So much so that it has become a denigrating term: The enemies of freedom practice censorship; we espouse it only in fighting them. Perhaps. Indeed, censorship is as much a hallmark of totalitarian regimes as the military forces they support. But every country, however liberal, has its film and video censors; the job of the censor is one of the oldest in governmental bureaucracy, dating from ancient Rome, where a censor was one of two magistrates appointed to oversee public morals. And it's commonplace: Clerics decry blasphemy, lawyers file libel suits, politicians bend facts, and companies practice confidentiality. Yet censorship eludes concise definition. Pilate asked, "What is truth?" "What is censorship?" is as valid a question.

British dramatist Harold Pinter has put forth a sweeping answer: "Censorship comes in many shapes and sizes: It can be trivial, silly and even pathetic, but it can also be arbitrary, brutal, elaborate, complex, far-reaching and very dangerous." Pinter wrote in the *Index on Censorship**, the London-based, bimonthly journal and continually updated Web site dedicated to revealing censorship, wherever it may occur, in whatever guise.

The scope of that goal boggles. Censorship is a palimpsest, as beneath any surface there may lurk another factuality. Stands on censorship are accordingly slippery, so the *Index* states in its strapline that it is "for free expression." That mandates an objectivity that doubtless is unique in communication. In articles and reports, there is an impartiality that can be seen as praiseworthy or annoying, depending on your stand on the matter at hand. The bottom line is that the facts are there; let the reader decide.

> A Web site dedicated to revealing censorship, wherever it may occur, in whatever guise

Now in its 31st year of publication, the *Index* has a makeup that addresses all facets of censorship. A news section brings reports of happenings that constrain free expression. Trends are highlighted in feature articles, often by noted writers; last year's features included Czech president Václav Havel writing on European identity and Nobel Laureate novelist Günter Grass writing on memory. The regular *Index* Index is a chronicle of brief notices gleaned from the A-Z of concerned organizations worldwide, from the American Association for the Advancement of Science to the World Organisation Against Torture. Topical sections assemble the com-ments of several authors on a single issue. No country is spared; last year's issue 3 had a 51-page section entitled "American Gulag," devoted to the prisons of the U.S. The 11 contributing authors raised questions sufficiently thorny to bother any contemplative American. Arguably that slant is the *Index* raison d'être: Dig and dig, but always call a spade a spade.

Last February, the *Index* held the first of what is to become an annual awards ceremony. Understandably, it is dedicated to those who take personal risks in the defense of free speech. Moreover, there are awards—in the spirit of the *Index*—both for and against censorship. Last year, the award for the best circumvention of censorship went to the Publius Censorship Resistant Publishing System, an online encryption service used to evade censors. And the award for services to censorship went to the Ministry of Defence of the U.K., for measures enacted to stop whistleblowing in the military and intelligence services.

The *Index on Censorship* is recommended reading, not least as a multi-faceted reminder of the vulnerability of human communication.

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* *Index on Censorship*, Writers & Scholars International Ltd., Lancaster House, 33 Islington High Street, London N1 9LH, UK; individual U.S. subscriptions (6 issues per year) 708 Third Avenue, 8th floor, New York, NY 10017; online at *http://www.indexoncensorship.org*.

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Woe Is the Dangling Phrase

The Professor is not without apprehension as she submits to you a lesson from her somewhat strange and estranged sister who is a pseudo-expatriate living it up in Paris. Her name is Doctor Grammatica (the ninny changed her name because of an argument with your esteemed Professor over commas); she rides a motorcycle with a sidecar, owns a parrot named Mrs. Wiggins (the parrot often rides in the sidecar), prefers to watch rugby rather than American football, never smokes because it upsets the parrot, and makes many trips each year to London to visit her favorite pub, The Coughing Pig. She has a Ph.D. degree in linguistics from Oxford, but for some reason prefers not to speak of it. To some extent, she shuns what she considers the haughtiness of the English (she's been tainted by the French point of view), and she is especially contemptuous of her highly regarded sister, your own Professor Grammar.

However, it's clear that the Doctor secretly admires her sister's admirable command of language rules and writing styles. With begrudging respect, I submit to you Doctor Grammatica's essay on dangling and misplaced modifiers, a topic near and dear to the Professor's heart.

Woe Is the Dangling Phrase

"Woe is the dangling phrase that hangeth in the airy paragraphical firmament, Describing nothing, confusing all who suffer to read, and leading to fervent frustration."

—*The lesser known poet, playwright, and taxidermist Josephine Grammatica, 1616, from the scandalous play* Death of the Grammar Queen

Yes, even one of my nearly famous ancestors knew the pain of the dangling or misplaced modifier.

Undoubtedly, we have all succumbed to the allure of writing badly (except perhaps the haughty Professor G, who is insufferably perfect). If we wish to do more than keep the meaning of our ideas to ourselves, we should endeavor to destroy dangling and misplaced modifiers, wherever they are mis…placed.

...the mystery of the tattooed cow

Dangling Modifiers

You can create dangling modifiers when you do not pay close attention to syntax (word order). Always place modifying words, phrases, and clauses next to the words they are supposed to modify.

The dangling modifier is sometimes caused by a participial phrase followed by a passive independent clause.

Example

Applying algorithms to large volumes of data, interesting values are discovered.

This sentence tells us that values can apply algorithms to large volumes of data, as if the values were scratching mathematical formulae on the white board, trying to solve the mysteries of the universe.

Rewrite

By applying algorithms to large volumes of data, we can discover interesting values.

We repair the offending error by adding someone or something that can perform the action. The pronoun *we* solves the problem.

Here is an example of a dangling modifier without the passive construction:

Soaring effortlessly through the air, people have always envied birds.

Of course, people can soar through the air. However, most would need some sort of mechanical help. The author of this sentence was probably referring to birds that soar, not people who soar. If you place the word *people* directly after the participial phrase, then that phrase must modify people. However, the participial phrase should modify birds.

Rewrite

People have always envied birds that soar effortlessly through the air.

We move the dangling phrase next to birds. Also, notice that for easier translation, we should use a relative pronoun clause instead of a participial phrase.

Misplaced Modifiers

"Misplace my phrase, and I'll show you a tattoo on my favorite cow."
                    —*Anonymous*

Though most scholars have no idea what this proverb means, we might take heed of the virtually implicit pseudo-warning about misplacing modifying words, phrases, and

clauses. Again, proper syntax is important: Place a modifier next to the word it is supposed to modify.

Example

We sent the computers to our customers with Intel chips.

I suppose this writer could have meant that the customers had Intel chips, but most likely the computers have the Intel chips. (I think everyone should have a chip, except perhaps Professor G who thinks, no doubt, that she does not need one.) The prepositional phrase *with Intel chips* should be placed next to computers, not customers.

Rewrite

We sent the computers with Intel chips to our customers.

For the next example, we must decide whether the authorities should arrest Uncle Bob:

Uncle Bob gave the pie to the twins that he had dropped in the trash compactor.

Ouch! Death by trash compactor. Perhaps if Uncle Bob's author had not misplaced the modifying phrase *that he had dropped in the trash compactor,* those children would be here to enjoy the pie.

Rewrite

Uncle Bob gave the pie that he had dropped in the trash compactor to the twins.

Or

Uncle Bob gave the twins the pie

that he had dropped in the trash compactor.

As someone quite famous once said, "Without proper syntax, the tattooed cow lives precariously." Place your modifiers where they belong.

As for me, it's off to The Coughing Pig for a pint with my companion parrot, Mrs. Wiggins.

> ...the pain of the dangling or misplaced modifier

Copyright 2001 by IBM Corporation. Used with permission. Professor Grammar is an advisor to the IBM Santa Teresa Laboratory Editing Council. Each month she sends a lesson to the technical writers at the Laboratory. Many of the Professor's lessons are based on tenets described in the Prentice-Hall book Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors, *recently authored by the Council.*

RAB Award to Henrich Lantsberg

Dr. Henrich S. Lantsberg, who has been very active on behalf of the Professional Communication Society in Russia, was selected for the IEEE Regional Activities Board Achievement Award "In recognition of dedicated and long-standing service to the work of IEEE Region 8 and the Russia Section."

The award was annnounced by Maurice Papo, IEEE vice president of Regional Activities, following the board meeting in Mexico City in November.

How-to Guide for Course Design

Free from the IEEE Educational Activities Board (EAB): the Telcordia Technologies Reference Guide for Instructional Design and Development. This online-only guide teaches efficient and effective course and tutorial design. Based on the *Systematic Design of Instruction* by Walter Dick, Lou Carey, and James Carey, the guide outlines six steps to acquiring sound principles of design:

• Assess the needs of the instructional situation

• Analyze the learners

• Write learning objectives

• Select an instructional strategy that fits your assessment

• Develop materials that enhance your strategy

• Evaluate your work

With each step there is a concise concept outline, tools to aid in the application of the step, and online references that can add to the material in the outline. You can access this guide at *http://www.ieee.org/organizations/ eab/tutorials/refguide/mms01.htm*.

"All the problems of the world could be settled easily if men were only willing to think. The trouble is that men very often resort to all sorts of devices in order not to think, because thinking is such hard work."

— *Thomas J. Watson*

What's Special about Portland, Oregon?

By Laurel Grove

Some people say that Portland is what Seattle used to be. The climate is mild: IPCC 2002 is scheduled for 17-20 September, at the end of the dry season and before the rains start. The latitude is about the same as that of the wine-growing regions of France, and many excellent wineries can be found less than an hour's drive from downtown.

Majestic Mountains, Fertile Fields

If you fly into the airport (PDX), you'll pass over the Cascade Mountains. You may see nearby Mt. Hood framed in the wall of windows at the end of your concourse. From the airport, you can take the light rail to downtown for USD 1.55. Amtrak trains also come right to downtown; the state of Oregon has been investing in improved rail service south to California and, to an even greater degree, north to Seattle. The tracks roughly parallel Interstate 5, running along the valleys between the Cascade Mountains to the east and the Coast Range to the west, passing through the fertile Willamette Valley. The Willamette River flows north into Portland, where it meets the estuary of the Columbia River in a maze of islands. One of Portland's nicknames is Bridgetown, and the many beautiful bridges over the Willamette and Columbia Rivers are honored in sculptures over the baggage carousels at the airport.

Views from Downtown

Downtown Portland lies west of the Willamette River. Tom McCall Park,

which runs along the river, offers good views of bridges and is a popular location for such events as the Rose Festival, blues concerts, and the Brewers Festival. From various downtown locations, you can see Mt. Hood, so pervasive it might be thought of as Portland's mascot, and Mt. St. Helens, whose 1980 eruption attracted much attention. On a very clear day you might even see other high peaks in the Cascades. The peaks are snow covered, even in September; the U.S. ski team has long practiced through the summer on Mt. Hood.

Come early to IPCC 2002 and stay late.

Near the river, in fact almost under one of the soaring bridges, is Portland's Saturday Market. The Saturday Market is more like an arts and crafts fair than an old-fashioned farmer's market. There's food, yes, but also there are people selling kaleidoscopes, flowerpots, and painted dresses, as well as the unforgettable Spoon Man, who crafts wind chimes and masks out of kitchen implements. There is music, too, and street performers, and balloon artists—in short, a festival every Saturday (and Sunday).

Sources of Serenity

Slightly north of the Saturday Market is Portland's Chinatown, with a newly opened Chinese Garden. In this area you can find
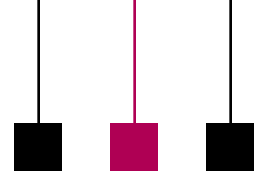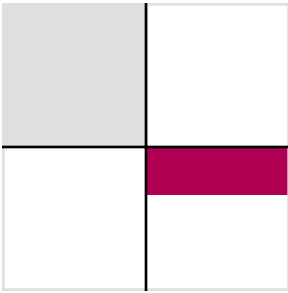

numerous sources of Asian food, groceries, and art. Turning away from the river and toward the hills, you find Powell's Technical Bookstore and, just a couple of blocks farther, the main store. Powell's is the world's largest independent bookstore: The main store takes up a full city block. You can pick up a map to mark the way to your preferred genre, where you'll find new and used books with shelf lives longer than the now-standard six months (or less).

Powell's Technical Books sits on what are called the North Park Blocks. The North and South Park Blocks provide a wide swath of green space through downtown. Eventually they may connect, but today the swath is discontinuous. The conference hotel (Marriott on Broadway) is roughly midway along the discontinuous stretch, so it's not far to a peaceful tree-lined boulevard in either direction.

Along the South Park Blocks you will find the Portland Art Museum and the Oregon History Center. You will also find sculpture—Oregon is justly proud of its One Percent for Art Program (one percent of the budget of every publicly funded con-

struction project pays for artwork). Works range from the mammoth statue of Portlandia on the Portland Building to the Story-Telling Tree in the children's room of the main branch of the public library and brightly happy fish on a parking structure.

After the Sessions

All these downtown sights are within just a few blocks of the conference hotel, the Marriott City Center on Broadway. Walking is easy, but most of the downtown area surrounding the hotel is a free-fare zone on the light-rail and bus lines. You can get to such famous eateries as Huber's, the city's oldest restaurant, or Jake's or McCormick and Schmick for seafood, or you can enjoy local Asian or other cuisines. The bookstores (Powell's is far from being the only one) stay open late, and you'll find a variety of music at venues from Kell's Irish Pub to the Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall. Almost half of the downtown movie theaters are dedicated to showing foreign, independent, and revival films that never reach the suburban megaplexes.

Brief Escapes

If you go east from downtown, you soon reach the Cascade Mountains and the Columbia River Gorge that cuts through them. The Gorge is known both for its beauty and for its hydroelectric dams. In recent years, the Gorge has become known as a premier windsurfing location, as air is funneled through this narrow break between the mountains.

Also in the Gorge is one of Oregon's most visited spots: Multnomah Falls.

These 189-meter (620-foot) falls are just 30 minutes by car from downtown, and you can hike all the way to the top or admire them from the base. Multnomah Falls are the most famous in the area because they are so tall and are visible from Interstate 84 (in fact, most visitors come from the I-84 rest area). But there are many more waterfalls in the Gorge. A loop of back roads takes you to eight other waterfalls, some close to the road and some on shorter or longer hikes. The Visitors Center at Multnomah Falls has both a snack bar and an excellent, rustic restaurant.

Staying a Little Longer, Going Farther Afield

Mt. Hood is integral to life in Portland. You can drive there through the Mt. Hood National Forest in about an hour and go hiking or even skiing year-round. And each year in late August, there is the "Hood to the Coast" relay, in which teams run a total of 312 kilometers (195 miles) from Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood to Seaside, Oregon.

One of Portland's nicknames is Bridgetown (for good reason).

Oregon's coast is wonderful. One important reason is that it is public: You could walk along the Pacific shoreline from the Columbia River and Washington State as far south as the California border without entering private land. A popular sport along the coast is kite flying, and sand castle contests trace a circuit of beaches from June through September. Swimming is less common than whale watching: The

waters are rough and chilly but the cliffs give broad vistas. You can also see campsites of the Lewis and Clark expedition, where they waited in vain hope of meeting a ship that would spare them the trek east.

If you're interested in more modern transportation, Howard Hughes' famous Spruce Goose, the wooden airplane from the 1940s, is the centerpiece of the Evergreen Aviation Museum in McMinnville, less than an hour from downtown. And you can move even farther into the future with a visit to the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry (OMSI), east of the Willamette River in Portland.

Come to Portland for IPCC 2002

Members of the conference committee visited a lot of great sites (and sights) in Oregon before selecting the conference hotel in downtown Portland. We finally settled on the Marriott City Center on Broadway because of its convenient downtown location, its high quality meeting space, and its many amenities. As a newcomer in an area famous for beautiful but aging boutique hotels, it blends the glamour of the past with the features of the new. It offers both gorgeous woodwork and wheelchair accessibility, conversation parlors and DSL lines. The IPCC 2002 committee is pleased to invite you to join us in Portland, to share your Reflections on Communication.

Laurel Grove is chair of IPCC 2002; l.grove@ieee.org.

Santa Fe, New Mexico

The famous La Fonda on the Plaza in Santa Fe was the site for IPCC 01. It's always a pleasure to visit this artist community and enjoy the scenery, the shops, and the food.

Special thanks to Jean-luc Doumont, Terrance Malkinson, and Luke Maki for their photographic contributions on these pages.

Phil Rubens

Laurie Lamar

Janice Redish

Teresa Lau

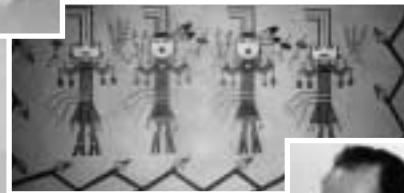Heather McNay

John Russell

Jim Ramsay

Robert Krull

Andrew Malcolm

Painted pony for charity auction in the lobby of LaFonda.

Kinei Yoshida

Steven Poltrock

Terrance Malkinson

De Anna Steiner

Rosiland Rogoff

Diane Phelan

Ann Laster's "class"

Dana Tesone

Jonathan Price

Beth Moeller, Marj Davis, Luke Maki

Don Zimmerman

Stephanie Rosenbaum, Janice Redish

Charlene Strickland, Ricka Rak, Anchi Miller

Keynote Lunch

Ann Jennings

Rives Hassell-Corbiell

Lynn Deming

Charles Blackwell

Andrea Ames

Helen Grady

Ann Jennings

Jane Aronovitch
Pamela Kostur

Patricia Carlson

Charlene Strickland

Jennifer Heins

Muriel Zimmerman, Jean-luc Doumont

Thomas Orr

Nancy Coppola

Carol Isakson

St. Francis Cathedral

Rebecca Jay

Bill Hart-Davidson

Moira Gunn

Bill Kehoe, Susan Dressel

Jean-luc Doumont

Moira Gunn
Joe Chew

George Hayhoe
Bill Kehoe

Carol Isakson,
Robert Krull, John Russell

Marj Davis

Ron Blicq

Laurel Grove

Back: Luke Maki, Muriel Zimmerman (hidden), Sherry Steward, George Hayhoe, Bill Kehoe, Gene Hoffnagle
Front: Ron Blicq, Beth Moeller, Nancy Coppola, Marj Davis

Izabella Gieras

From Santa Fe to Portland

By Joe Chew

If you couldn't go to IPCC 01 in Santa Fe, you missed many things, and one of the best was the Goldsmith Award lecture by **Janice Redish** on the relative merits of various ways of gathering user information. I won't even try to tell the whole story, for I could not tell it as well. Instead I summarize and paraphrase it with a thought that I believe comes from Jacques Cousteau: *You have to go and see for yourself.* Thinking about users, asking about users, obtaining other people's data about users are useful techniques but all are inferior to actually immersing oneself in their milieu and experience.

Keynote speaker Moira Gunn

That talk, combined with **Moira Gunn**'s opening keynote address about the human and social context of what we do, catalyzed some thinking about how we perform our work. There are more questions than answers; if you have answers, let me point you to IPCC 2002 in Portland, Oregon (*http://www.ieeepcs.org/2002/*).

Fuzzy and Messy Logic

Are technical communicators' processes and products art or engineering? And how would you distinguish between the two? I like to think of engineering as doing things in a certain way, amid all the other ways you could have chosen, for a functional reason. What we do and how we do it are sometimes disparaged as the "fuzzy studies," but they're really better described as (to use a term I learned at the conference) the *messy* studies.

In our job of uniting humans with knowledge and technology, the answers are not always simple, nor are they stable; sometimes they can even be multiple and contradictory. One thing I feel more confident about after these two talks: The more I am among users rather than merely aware of them, the better I can serve their needs.

Of course, that doesn't mean I'll get it right the first time, nor that I can expect others to do so. Few great designs are born perfect; most are iterated on the basis of various kinds of information: user experience, new ideas, demands to add features or cut costs. Also, not all changes are improvements from all perspectives. To paraphrase Stewart Brand (who was thinking of architecture), how do your documents *learn*?

Information Wants To Be $6.95

In a cable-TV commercial, someone is selling CD-ROMs that supposedly teach everything the typical user needs to know about the Windows operating system and the more popular applications running under it… for $6.95.

An apparently large set of possibly good computer-based training (or

Conference chair Joe Chew

even just a substantial first installment on it) for the price of a paperback novel… marketed through what I would guess to be the first mass-media advertising of a technical communication product? There's at least one interesting business model in there somewhere.

Thinking about business models makes me think of the role played by technical-information development and production in the overall business of the organization. (I still think "Ten Things I Wish I'd Known When I Took That First Management Job" might make a great conference paper.) Why are we—professionals in the communication field—chosen to do this instead of all the other kinds of people who might do it? How does the quality of our products demonstrably assist the company? What should be offered, and how do we know that?

> Topic for IPCC 2002: How our work contributes to business and society

Most of our day-to-day concerns, and therefore most of the papers at technical-communication conferences, have to do with the nature and construction of communication products. But it's always good to have a well argued, fact-based explanation of how our work contributes to the business. A perception of our ends and means as being primarily aesthetic, rather than as pleasingly rendered function, is a constant enemy, especially when times are hard. Explaining our place in the business model may be more difficult here in the messy end of the engineering professions, but it's all the more important.

On the same theme but at a higher level, What is the macroeconomic importance of technical communication? What does our work mean to society as well as to individual companies? Being intrigued by that subject doesn't mean I have any idea how to approach it, so I leave you with that thought and with a URL: *http://www.ieeepcs.org/2002/call4 pap.htm*.

On behalf of the Santa Fe committee, I look forward to seeing you and perhaps hearing your answers to those questions in Portland!

Joe Chew was chair of IPCC 01; jtchew@lbl.gov.

Information and Communication Technology (IV-3)

By Luke Maki

The CEO of a Fortune 500 company steps up to the podium, and says: "I am proud to announce that our new CIO is [*your name!*]. A graduate of the technical communication department of [*your favorite university!*], [*your name!*] has demonstrated the technical, communication, facilitation, and management skills our company needs to achieve even higher levels of productivity and performance…."

L. Maki

Mark Haselkorn

Far-fetched? Not according to **Mark Haselkorn,** professor of technical communication at the University of Washington in Seattle. Dr. Haselkorn studied Y2K lessons learned, and one outcome was the realization that technical communicators can have the right mix of talents to fill the role of CIO. His hypothesis: When the role of chief information officer (CIO) is properly understood, the training and experience of technical communicators, augmented by training and experience in management, best suit the demands of this position.

Initially, a CIO was viewed as owner of the technology enabling information and knowledge management. CIO activities centered on standardizing and keeping up with new information and communication technology. What the problems of Y2K demonstrated, however, is that the CIO should focus less on functionally organized groupings of technology, and more on the spaces between them. The CIO must focus on the conversation and interactions that link the functional parts into a strategic whole. The CIO must delegate responsibility to a functional group when it is clearly within that group, but must take ownership of issues identified to be enterprise-wide.

Ownership for the CIO means being a single point of contact to provide consistent guidance at the appropriate level of the enterprise. In particular, ownership means the CIO must identify the relevant organization representatives who are best suited to resolve a problem, and ensure they are communicating and empowered to manage it. The CIO's perspective, then, is that of technical communication: the recognition of multiple audiences and goals, and the need to be a communicator, facilitator, and at times a politician to achieve the common good.

Questions without answers:

If lawyers are disbarred and clergymen defrocked, doesn't it follow that electricians can be delighted, musicians denoted, cowboys deranged, models deposed, tree surgeons debarked, and dry cleaners depressed?

Utilizing Scenarios (V-1)

By George Hayhoe

For me, the highlight of this year's conference was **Janice Redish**'s presentation on using scenarios to guide the design of products and information. Redish's talk was a compelling demonstration of why she was the recipient of the 2001 Alfred N. Goldsmith Award for distinguished contributions to engineering communication. She first defined what a scenario is (a brief story that presents one or more users and the problems they confront in trying to perform a task) and then explained a series of ways that scenarios can be used to help programmers, engineers, and writers gain a greater appreciation of the users' perspective.

Janice Redish

I've heard it said that the best teachers don't present new information but rather help you see the connections that exist among formerly discrete bits of information that you have acquired in the past. The many examples of scenarios that Redish wove into her presentation brought many such bits of information into focus for me. If you have an opportunity to attend this presentation at another conference, I recommend it enthusiastically.

Producing PDFs (VII-1)

By George Hayhoe

Many of us produce documents these days in Adobe's Portable Document Format (PDF), whether intended to be printed by end users and read as traditional paper manuals or viewed on screen. PDF files allow us to keep our document sets up to date and available for downloading from the Web any time a user needs them. Unfortunately, producing PDFs often causes problems, especially when the document in question is long or complex, uses lots of graphics, or has been created with some of the software we technical communicators love to hate.

Sharon Burton-Hardin's "Getting Good PDF" provided an energetic and amusing introduction to the basics of good PDF output by ensuring that you have the needed disk space and printer drivers, knowing the optimal settings for the Acrobat Distiller, using the best graphics formats, and avoiding the PDFWriter. Sharon's presentation is not available in the conference proceedings but her handouts can be found at *http://www.anthrobytes.com/acrobat_ talk_PDF.pdf*.

Award Winners Session (VII-2)

By Terrance Malkinson

Innovative technical-communication teaching techniques was the theme of engaging presentations by Ron Blicq, Ann Jennings, and Ann Laster. Audience participation provided the opportunity to experience the teaching techniques first hand.

In "Designing an Interactive, Independent Study, Self-evaluated, Online Technical Communication Course," **Ron Blicq** shared with the audience his and Lisa Moretto's experiences designing three foundation and five advanced online courses that teach how to write e-mail messages, letters, reports, and proposals. The uniqueness of his approach lies in the interactivity between the course participants and the program algorithms. This approach provides a valuable learning experience with no need for an instructor to evaluate the work—the users evaluate their own work. This reduces course delivery cost and learning takes place at whatever time is convenient. Different learning loops accommodate the learners' capabilities. The eight courses are

now online (http://www.rgilearning. com).

In "Murder, Mystery, Game: A Novel Approach to Science Writing," **Ann Jennings** (2001 Joenk Award winner) shared with the audience her experiences using interactive multimedia games to teach science writing. This approach requires students to think out a scenario and the many resulting permutations requiring logic, linking, and analysis. This results in a fun learning experience that appeals to students of all ages and has a credible basis in learning theory. Accurate and coherent writing describing scientific facts and principles is the result. The uniqueness of this approach is that it stimulates students' powers of invention regarding causes, effects, conclusions, and solutions. A side benefit is that it requires teamwork, a practical understanding of which is important to be employable and effective in today's workplace.

In "Using Props as Assignment Starters," **Ann Laster** (2001 Blicq

Ann Jennings, Rudy Joenk

Ann Laster, Ron Blicq

Award winner) describes her experience using props to initiate responses that lead students to an effective writing experience. Improved student performance results because of the discussion, questioning, analysis, teamwork, problem solving, planning, and strategy building skills developed. Ann described the many advantages of this approach, the most important of which is that it builds self-confidence and communication skills required in the world of work.

These three presentations provided the audience with "food for thought" on novel and effective instructional techniques that reach "outside the cubical," providing both young and old with a creative, interesting, fun, and motivating way to learn how to communicate well. In particular, they stimulate creativity and promote teamwork in the writing process—important and essential skills for employment success.

Interface Between Practitioners and Academics (VIII-3)

By Marj Davis

This session on the Interface feature in the *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, led by **Alan Manning**,

Alan Manning

was a delightful exchange designed to draw attention to this unique column in the journal. **Kim Campbell**, *Transactions* editor, explained it this way: Those who pay for our services expect us to be grounded in theory and research. A review of 20 years of proceedings from another society's

Kim Campbell

conferences revealed, however, that only about 10 percent of practitioners were driven by research. As a result of this awareness, Kim decided to add the new column to provide a way for researchers and practitioners to connect.

It is important for technical communicators to know where the important foundational research is being done, by whom, and how it can be applied. This column is designed to bring

good research from a wide variety of fields into a usable framework for

Jonathan Price

practice. In the panel discussion, Interface editor Alan Manning, **Jonathan Price**, and **Kirk St.Aman**t talked about how to develop appropriate topics. In brief, one finds some insight in research or practice that is applicable to technical communication, describes it and gives references, and then applies it in technical

Kirk St.Amant

communication contexts. Articles are typically about 3000 words. (See Manning's article in the September/October 2000 *Newsletter*.)

Interface articles are peer reviewed and provide wonderful opportunities for publishing useful research. The articles are helpful to readers who have no time to go to all the primary texts themselves but can benefit from another's work. The Interface feature is just one of the reasons that the *Transactions* is a useful journal grounded in legitimate research that can be applied. Alan encouraged people with potential topics to send him an e-mail describing the idea in brief terms (*alan_manning@byu.edu*).

Communication Within Organizations (IX-3)

By Kirk St.Amant

Technical communicators do more than generate user documents; through their efforts, they also document the history of institutions. For this reason, technical communicators should be viewed as archivers as well as creators and disseminators of information. This idea of the technical communicator as historian was the intended focus of this panel presentation.

Hugh Marsh

Unfortunately, two of the three scheduled presenters were unable to attend the conference. However, the one presenter who was there, **C. Hugh Marsh** of the University of California at Santa Barbara, did a masterful job both of presenting and of getting the audience involved in a discussion of how technical communicators often serve as institutional archivists.

Marsh's presentation (assembled with the help of Eric C. Morris of UCSB) revealed just how much institutional memory organizations lose whenever they perform clean-up operations. As Marsh explained, in many cases, organizations often sacrifice vital information without realizing the actual value of such information until it is too late. To

exemplify this point, Marsh explained how one company had to spend USD 50 000 to regenerate a key document to complete an important contract. He concluded by encouraging technical communicators to help their institutions realize the importance of documentation to avoid costly or disastrous mishaps.

After Mr. Marsh completed his formal presentation, he opened the floor to questions and discussion, and this post-presentation dialogue proved to be extremely valuable. Many of the attendees presented their own stories of how lack of institutional memory—or failure to appreciate the importance of such memory—led to problems. Many also emphasized the problem of corporate buyouts and reorganizations that, inevitably, affect documentation and archiving systems.

This dialogue helped attendees achieve two ends: First, individuals realized that they were not alone in addressing this problem; rather, that it affected individuals from a wide range of industries and at a variety of levels from managers to new hires. Second, participants exchanged strategies for how to best deal with such situations, especially in relation to buyouts and reorganizations. As a result, attendees gained the benefit of two types of insight: the academic approach presented by Marsh and suggestions provided by peers who had encountered similar problems.

Call for Papers

Reflections…

Think about it.

We work in a profession where there's much to reflect on. But reflection is more than looking inward, more than looking backward, more than staring glassy-eyed at a computer screen, pondering the wonders of the internet. Reflections are our experience, our knowledge, what we've learned, what we draw on—what we apply so that each effort is better.

We invite you to join us in Portland, Oregon, from 17 to 20 September to explore our theme: Reflections on Communication. We are looking for papers in the following categories, which represent the cyclical nature of reflections.

IPCC 2002
reflections on communication

17-20 September 2002

Abstract Conceptualization

Ideas drive us to do what we do. They drive our research. They drive us to find new and better ways of reaching our users, of managing content, of pooling our knowledge. They drive us to improve our processes, reduce our costs; sometimes, they even drive us crazy.

Possible topics include:
• Technologies as solutions
• Knowledge management strategies
• Enterprise content management
• Adaptive information

Concrete Experience

Concrete experience leads us to discover what works and what doesn't. We plan, we write, we structure, we deliver, we test.

We provide products and information to our users and then watch to see how and whether they use them the way we thought they would.

Possible topics include:
• Modeling information for reuse and adaptation
• Putting it all together
• Writing the pieces
• Testing for usability and human factors
• Applying research results

Active Experimentation

Ideas drive us, but experimentation moves us from concept to reality. Experimentation helps us discover where and how to implement our ideas and where to apply our research.

Possible topics include:
• Identifying information needs
• Sharing and disseminating knowledge
• Prototyping a concept
• Structuring information to support different needs and uses
• Tracking information use

Reflective Observation

What have we learned? Do we need new ideas? Which old ones work? What are the implications? Reflective observation is making sense of our active experimentation and concrete experiences. We ponder, explain our ideas and results, teach them to others. Reflective observation leads us back to abstract conceptualization—back to the start of the iterative reflective cycle.

Possible topics include:
• Addressing future education needs
• Reporting our findings
• Teaching our findings

Share Your Reflections…

Come to IPCC 2002 and share your reflections. Write a 300-word description of your idea. Include:

• The session type: individual talk based on a paper, panel discussion of related ideas, or in-conference workshop (90-minute session)
• Your intended audience   • A brief description of your topic   • Your goals and how you plan to achieve them

Tell Us About Yourself

Include a brief (150 words) bio of each author, plus contact information (your e-mail address, preferably). If there are multiple authors, at least one must show up to present the paper.

Send Submissions To:

Pamela Kostur, program chair, at *pamela.kostur@sym patico.ca.* We prefer electronic submissions. Phone +1 416 413 4892 if you need to send your proposal by postal mail.

Proposals Are Due By:

8 March 2002. We'll send acceptance notifications and author instructions by 12 April. If your proposal is accepted, we expect you to write a paper about your idea and present it at the conference. Your paper will be due by 12 July 2002.

Stay Tuned

For further updates visit our Web site (*http://www.ieee pcs.org/2002/*) for the most current information on IPCC 2002.

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The administrative committee (AdCom) invites comment from PCS members about any of the society's activities. All the AdCom members have an electronic alias at the IEEE that automatically forwards e-mail to the member's actual electronic address.

You can address the whole AdCom at *adcom-pcs@ieee.org*, or any of the members individually at the addresses listed in the table. The year in parentheses marks the end of the member's term.

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Members are always welcome at AdCom meetings. See the meeting notices in the editor's column.

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