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IEEE Professional Communication Society NEWSLETTER

IPCC 94 in Banff– This is Your "Help File"

So, in September you're planning to head north to Banff, and you'd like some travel suggestions?

Except for Albertans and maybe some British Columbians (who know how to get there anyway), I'm assuming you are most likely to fly in. Your destination city will be Calgary, Alberta, which is on Mountain Daylight Saving Time. You can fly directly to Calgary from eight U.S. cities:

- Chicago (Air Canada)
- Cincinnati (Delta)
- Dallas (American)
- Denver (Delta)
- Los Angeles (Delta, Air Canada)
- Salt Lake City (Delta)
- San Francisco (United, Air Canada)
- Spokane (United)

If you do not have easy access to any of these cities, you may prefer to connect in one of five Canadian cities that have direct flights to Calgary. All these cities have direct flights from the United States and numerous flights daily to Calgary:

Don't forget to bring your camera!

- Montreal, Quebec (6 flights to Calgary every day; 2 are nonstop)
- Ottawa, Ontario (5 flights a day, 3 nonstop)
- Toronto, Ontario (13 flights a day, 7 nonstop)
- Winnipeg, Manitoba (13 flights a day, 7 nonstop; direct flights from Minneapolis)
- Vancouver, British Columbia (20 flights a day, 14 nonstop)

One of these cities may be the most convenient connecting point if you live in the eastern or southeastern United States. For example, you can fly direct to Toronto from Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, Hartford, Indianapolis, Miami, Nashville, New York, Orlando, Philadelphia, Raleigh/Durham, Syracuse, Tampa, and Washington, D.C.

You pass through Canadian customs and immigration at your first city of entry into Canada. You don't need a passport (though it's useful), but you will need positive identification, both for when you arrive and when you re-enter the United States. Your travel agent can give you more definitive information.

From Calgary airport you can either rent an automobile—all major car rental companies are represented—or take a coach to Banff (the Banff Centre will inform you about coach times when you register). In either case, the journey will take about 90 minutes: you'll travel six miles south from the airport, then due west on the TransCanada Highway (Highway 1) right into Banff.

At the moment of writing (early April), the Canadian dollar is substantially lower than the U.S. dollar, and it's likely to remain so. Currently, a U.S. dollar realizes between $1.30 and $1.35 in Canadian funds. You can travel with just

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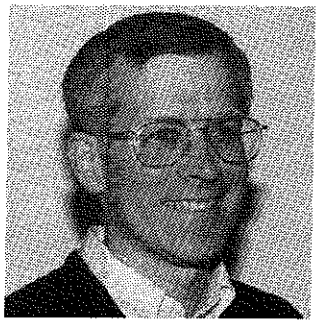
INSIDE

From the Editor



I'm starting to prepare a technical writing course that I'll be teaching this fall; I've been teaching technical editing, not writing, for a number of years. As I went through some of my old class materials, I recalled how difficult it was to be the one to tell graduate students, many of whom had come through their education with A's and B's in their English courses, that they really didn't write very well.

It wasn't as difficult emotionally—like when you cut someone from an athletic team, wounding their pride and denying their desire—as it was in terms of just trying to get them to believe what I was telling them. I had several students in each class who did not recognize why they should be with me talking about the need to improve their writing. One engineering student asked me why I was telling him that he didn't write well. I explained, with frequent reference to the parts of his prose that were confusing, ambiguous, or simply dense. He soon interrupted with, "I don't think I have a writing problem." When I asked him why he thought that, he replied, "No one else has ever told me that I don't write well."

This student had a writing problem, all right, but he also had a thinking problem. His technical background should have told him that you can't have confidence in a positive conclusion (i.e., I write well) based solely on a lack of negative evidence (no one has ever told me that I don't).

And it's the thinking, in fact, that I've usually seen as the major culprit in cases of technically educated students who wrote poorly. Very few scientists or engineers are poor writers because they are not intelligent; only a handful more are poor writers because they can't write decent sentences. On a basic level, the grammar and syntax of most technical authors is adequate. Their real problem is that they haven't developed the sophistication of their writing beyond a high school level; yet the sophistication of the topics they have to write about is immensely greater, having developed through years of study of electrical engineering, or biochemistry, or materials science, or whatever.

Although most of my students could write sentences and paragraphs, they had trouble trying to think through and organize large-scale writing projects like dissertations or project reports. They also had difficulty on a smaller scale, in trying to keep facts and concepts in order in a way that would lead the reader easily and logically through their argument. Teaching writing to these technical graduate students made me realize the essential truth of the aphorism, "Writing is crystallized thinking."

A large part of the problem for most of the students was their lack of any concept of a writing process. Too few had any concept of revision as an essential part of writing, and even fewer ever thought in terms of more than one revision. One student, whose written ideas were always scattered, sometimes incoherent, never seemed to improve despite conferences before each revision. I eventually found that he threw away each draft and started fresh after each conference. Not a great concept of writing process there.

The most important allies I had in convincing a student that her writing needed improvement were other students who had worked in industry for a while. They too had once thought that they only needed to learn the tech stuff, that they'd be in the plant or the lab most of their time once they were working. But returning to school for a graduate degree, they now knew how much writing engineers and scientists had to do. It didn't take long for those industry veterans to correct the misconcep-

IEEE Professional Communication Society

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tions of the grad students who hadn't yet held a technical job.

In the seven years or so since I taught technical writing, I haven't seen much change in the writing skills of newly graduated scientists and engineers. For all the popular emphasis in universities on writing across the curriculum and technical writing courses for technical students, any gains haven't been apparent to me yet. Maybe we could use some serious help from future employers in emphasizing to technical students how important good writing and speaking are as tools for an engineer. We certainly need better ways to develop those tools in the students being educated today.

And, we need to get that development started EARLY. I'm not looking forward to again being the first to tell a student he doesn't write adequately after 16+ years of education.

—*D.E.N.* ◄

Say Again?

From a student's paper explaining the choices that went into revising a text passage:

"Essential" and "required" are both defined by Webster's as necessary, so "essential" was omitted as unnecessary. ◄

From a student's paper explaining the revision of a text passage:

> The discussion of the physics of paper and its similarities with wood is obvious to a reader who would be interested in the topic and has been eliminated in the revisions.

If you can eliminate the reader in revision, it's going to make audience analysis a lot simpler. ◄

From the President

by Deborah Flaherty Kizer

I don't know about you, but I am thrilled to see the first signs of spring after what has been a seemingly endless winter. I am certainly a proponent of organization and structure in one's life, but once-a-week snowstorms is a regularity I can live without.

The blooming of the first crocus triggers my planning of the annual family vacation. This year, I plan on taking a few extra days after IPCC 94 to enjoy the beauty and tranquillity of Banff. I urge you to do the same. Why not combine a few days of R&R with what promises to be an excellent learning and sharing experience?

Having been involved with planning all kinds of activities, I am particularly impressed by the efforts of Conference Chair Pamela Kostur and her team. They have put together what promises to be an excellent program in a most beautiful setting. Of course, the informal gatherings and social opportunities provide a valuable opportunity to network and further explore ideas and concepts presented in the formal sessions.

So, I urge you to attend IPCC 94 and include a few days' vacation while you are there. You will find it a worthwhile experience, both professionally and personally.

On another note, our first AdCom meeting in 1994, held in Piscataway, was a success. In spite of rain, sleet, and snow, we had excellent representation. I am excited about our plans to develop and implement a formal long-range plan into our organization. This plan will not only incorporate the management of our products and services over time to ensure they meet your needs, but it will include some rigorous financial planning and measurement systems to maintain the financial integrity of our society. I'll be sure to keep you apprised of the AdCom's work in these areas.

As usual, I welcome your comments, thoughts, and suggestions. ◄

Past President Richie Robinson receives a certificate of appreciation for his work from President Deborah Flaherty Kizer. The presentation was made at the March meeting of the Administrative Committee in Piscataway, New Jersey. (See p. 7 for related photo.)

IPCC 94 Program Set

There will be 97 presentations during this year's IEEE International Professional Communication Conference, which will be held in Banff, Alberta, from Wednesday, 28 September to Saturday, 1 October 1994. Topics will range from teamwork in collaborative writing, through preparing for ISO 9000, to using multimedia in technical communication. In addition to speakers from the United States and Canada, there will be speakers from Australia, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Russia.

IPCC 94 Program Co-chairs David Farkas and Laurel Grove reviewed 140 submissions before selecting the 93 papers and 4 workshops. Typical topics include sessions on

- Teamwork in technical communication
- Usability testing
- Technical communication in the engineering curriculum
- Creating interactive on-line instruction
- Communication from a global viewpoint
- Creating effective documents and graphics
- Achieving clarity and correctness in writing
- The future of technical communication

There are four workshops—on usability testing, writing and editing, technical translation, and oral communication. They are being held on Saturday, 1 October, to accommodate delegates who will be attending the annual ACM SIGDOC conference, which will be held from 2 to 5 October, also at Banff.

In recognition of the event, the Town of Banff has announced that it will declare the week of 26 September to 1 October to be "International Professional Communication Week".

For more information or to receive a registration form, contact Pamela Kostur, General Chair, IPCC 94, SaskTel, 7-2121 Saskatchewan Drive, Regina, SK, Canada, S4P 3Y2; telephone, (306) 777-2894; facs, (306) 522-3718. ◄

IPCC 94 Preliminary Program

Wednesday, 28 September

Time	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C
8:45 – 9:15 a.m.	Welcome to IPCC 94		
9:25 – 10:15 a.m.	Tools for collaborative writing	Technology transfer: The transition from lab to market	The technical communicator's role in continuing education
10:35 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	Teamwork, part 1: Teamwork within corporations	Graphics, part 1: Guidelines and models.	Oral communication: Connecting with people
1:45 – 3:15 p.m.	Technical editing: Tools and methods	Technical communication in the engineering curriculum, part 1	Communication from a global perspective
3:35 – 5:05 p.m.	Usability testing: From implementation to success	Scanning the future of technical communication	Diverse roles and new identities

Thursday, 29 September

Time	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C
8:45 – 10:15 a.m.	Assessing the value added by technical communication	Documentation, part 1: Design	Understanding and using the Internet
10:35 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	Teamwork, part 2: Teams are people	Research: Scaling the heights	Graphics, part 2: The problem of graphics literacy
1:45 – 3:15 p.m.	Achieving clarity and correctness in writing	Product development, part 1: Technical writer's early involvement	Multimedia applications
3:35 – 5:05 p.m.	Teamwork, part 3: Planning and leadership	Teaching technical communication in a diverse changing world	Documentation consulting for fun and profit

And Following IPCC 94 . . .

SIGDOC '94 comes right after IPCC 94 at the Banff Centre and will run from 2 to 5 October. The theme of SIGDOC '94 is "Technical Communicators at the Great Divide: From Computing to Information Technology".

SIGDOC, a part of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), is an organization of senior professionals and academics who study or create computer documentation and who use computers to create many styles and media of documentation. Like PCS members, SIGDOC participants are interested in all aspects of information design and content selection, including the analysis of tasks, audiences, and situations; the uses of new technologies to create, present, and deliver communications; textual effectiveness; visual communication; international perspectives; and project management and collaboration.

The SIGDOC conference begins on Sunday, 2 October, with a full day of tutorials. The next two and a half days offer panels and poster sessions conducted by national and international specialists. The topics will include

- Interoperability and the power of using networks
- On-line documentation and help
- Emerging technologies
- Usability testing and document design
- Changes in roles and boundaries.

John Carroll, winner of this year's SIGDOC Rigo Award, will be a featured speaker. In addition, SIGDOC '94 and IPCC 94 will jointly host a reception for everyone at the conferences.

Scheduling SIGDOC '94 and IPCC 94 back to back makes it possible to travel once for two outstanding conferences. SIGDOC will discount the registration of anyone attending both conferences. Participating in both conferences offers a unique opportunity to share ideas and experience across organizations in order to broaden, deepen, and enrich our understanding of the work we do and its significance.

To receive a preliminary program and registration form, send an e-mail message to "sigdoc94@mit.edu" or contact SIGDOC '94, c/o Nina Wishbow, Ph.D., 5508 Bartlett St., Pittsburgh, PA 15217. ◄

IPCC 94 Preliminary Program *(continued)*

Friday, 30 September

Time	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C
8:45 – 10:15 a.m.	Putting the collaboration into collaborative writing	Documentation, part 2: Centering on the user	Emerging standards: ISO 9000 and SGMBL
10:35 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	Product development, part 2: The communicator as catalyst	Documentation, part 3: The process	Technical communication in the engineering curriculum, part 2
1:45 – 3:15 p.m.	Converting a conference paper into a *Transactions* article	*Mens sana in corpore sano* (Ergonomics and burnout)	Creating interactive on-line instruction
3:35 – 5:05 p.m.	Information methodology in the future	Planning for future IPCCs: We need your feedback.	

Saturday, 1 October

Time	Stream A	Stream B
8:45 a.m. – 12:05 p.m.	Workshop 1: The usability test process, part 1	Workshop 2: Writing and editing to meet the reader's expectations
1:45 – 3:15 p.m.	Workshop 1: The usability test process, part 2	Workshop 3: Preparing technical text for translation
3:35 – 5:05 p.m.	Workshop 1: The usability test process, part 3	Workshop 4: Technically speaking

PCS Co-Sponsors European Conference

PCS will be co-sponsoring Forum 95, an international technical communication conference to be held in Dortmund, Germany, on 13–15 November 1995. The conference title is "Disappearing Borders: The Interacting Communication Conference". The conference will be of particular interest to IEEE and PCS members in Europe, although representation is also expected from PCS members in the United States and Canada.

The conference is being organized by four societies: the Institute for Scientific and Technical Communication (ISTC), U.K.; Studiekring voor Technische Informatie en Communicatie/Quality of Technical Communication (STIC/QTD), The Netherlands; tekom, Germany (tekom is Germany's equivalent of the U.S. Society for Technical Communication); and the IEEE Professional Communication Society.

The "Forum" series of conferences is held once every five years (previous sites were Malmo, Sweden; Lillehammer, Norway; Helseinger, Denmark; and Stockholm, Sweden). Of particular interest to North American and UK/Northern Ireland PCS members is that the conference language will be English, for both written papers and oral presentations. For a brochure and additional information (including costs), those in the United States should write to

Lisa Moretto
RGI International
6001 South Kings Highway
Unit 767
Myrtle Beach, SC 29575

Those in Canada should write to

Ron Blicq
RGI International
569 Oxford St.
Winnipeg, MB
Canada R3M 3J2

facs (for both): (204) 488-7294;
e-mail: r.blicq@ieee.org ◄

IPCC 94 "Help File"

(continued from page 1)

U.S. dollars, or you can buy Canadian-dollar traveller's checks from your bank. Merchants in Calgary and Banff are accustomed to accepting U.S. dollars and will give you a fair rate of exchange.

All the major forms of plastic are accepted, both at the Banff Centre for Conferences and by merchants: Visa, MasterCard, American Express, and, in many places, Diners Club.

What will the weather be like? It can be glorious in late September: 65 degrees (Fahrenheit) during the day and about 35 degrees at night. That time of year can also bring snow flurries, but the snow won't last more than a day or so.

A reminder: be sure to register early. There is always a demand for accommodations at Banff, and the Conference Centre can guarantee rooms only until 26 July. After that date they may release rooms to other applicants.

If you are looking for accommodations in Banff either immediately before or after the conference, remember that we have made arrangements for a special rate at The Banff Park Lodge Hotel. Until the end of September, the nightly corporate rate will be $105.00, single or double occupancy; from 1 October it will be $89.00 (plus local taxes of $7–10 per night). In U.S. dollars, that's about $80 or $70 a night!

Call toll free to the Banff Park Lodge to make your pre- or post-conference hotel reservations: (800) 661-9266; facs, (403) 762-3553. Mention you are part of the IEEE Professional Communication Conference to ensure you get the rates I have quoted. The mail address is 222 Lynx Street, P.O. Box 2200, Banff, Alberta, Canada, T0L 0C0.

For more information about registration or arrangements at the Conference Centre itself, call the Centre at (403) 762-6204; facs (403) 762-6388. Their mail address is The Banff Centre for Conferences, P.O. Box 1020, Banff, Alberta, Canada T0L 0C0.

For a brochure or information about the conference, write or call

Pamela Kostur
IPCC 94 General Chair
SaskTel
7-2121 Saskatchewan Drive
Regina, SK
Canada S4P 3Y2
telephone: (306) 777-2894
facs: (306) 522-3718

And a last-minute reminder: DON'T FORGET TO BRING YOUR CAMERA!

—Ron Blicq
Publicity Co-chair
IPCC 94 ◄

AdCom Meetings

3 June 1994	IEEE, New York
30 September 1994	The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada
2 December 1994	IEEE, Washington, DC

CURMUDGEON'S CORNER

by Joan G. Nagle

Professional Research

"Hey, Rocco . . . How many R's in *arrividerci?*"

We've all heard it, the call across the cubicle wall or over the coffee machine. This is research?

This is what passes for research in the communication biz, by non-professional communicators. And occasionally by professional communicators too, I'm afraid. If we have a question, we ask the guy in the next cube, or whomever we chance to encounter at that particular moment.

Didn't these people ever hear of dictionaries? (Yes, I know, if you can't spell it, how are you gonna look it up.) More important, whatever gives them the idea that Rocco knows any better than they do? Well, maybe, in the case of *Rocco* and *arrividerci,* but it's by no means a sure thing.

And this is what makes my curmudgeonly gorge rise. Scientists and engineers, who would not accept the time of day from any source short of the Naval Observatory, will take the word of anyone, anyone at all, on questions of spelling, punctuation, all areas of communication mechanics.

In an earlier one of these columns, I reported some observations about the large segment of the population who are not "printy". That is, they do not in general learn from the printed word; they learn from and are engaged by the oral tradition. They learn by apprenticeship. To acquire a skill, they watch what is being done, over and over, and—most important in this context—listen to experts tell them how to proceed.

After moving from Pennsylvania to South Carolina a few years ago, we informed all our friends and family of our new address. Later we got a note from a former neighbor, saying, "I would have called you, but you didn't tell us your phone number."

Didn't these people ever hear of directory assistance?

And there are those who will ask all over the office about how to get from here to Orlando, rather than look at a map. And those who haven't an idea in the world how to find out the population of San Diego or the formula for the volume of a cylinder, *except to ask someone.*

The mark of a professional is knowing what to do in those situations when experience does not inform us.

Don't they still teach basic library skills in grade school, or junior high at the latest? Certainly a college graduate should be expected to know how to use a dictionary . . . in fact, a wide variety of reference works.

In a discussion of whether a certain clerical person should be upgraded to professional (exempt) status, the argument was advanced that "she knows how to do everything the other system analysts do." My argument was that that wasn't good enough. The mark of a professional is knowing what to do in those situations when experience does not inform us.

Knowing how to do is not the point. Knowing how to find out what to do, using previously untapped resources and using them in new, untried ways, is what makes a professional.

As my checkered career drew to its formal end, I realized that of five professional-level jobs I had held, three of them were newly created positions—jobs no one had ever held before. In the first of these, I remember wishing every morning that I'd find someone at the office who would tell me what to do that day. But it never happened. I had to figure it out for myself, and boy, did I do a lot of figuring. It was painful, but that was what I was being paid all those nice bucks for.

If you want to be told what to do by the person in the next cube, get a technician job. If you want to be a professional, learn to find your own answers. Consult authoritative sources (first learning who/what the really authoritative sources are). Look it up, for goodness' sake.

One of these days you'll find that you're an authoritative source yourself. Or a curmudgeon. ◄

Past President Richie Robinson as he probably looked on New Year's Eve 1993, contemplating that it was his last few hours as IEEE PCS President after two years of service in that post. *(See p. 3 for related photo.)*

Worth Reading

Mitchell, W.J. When is seeing believing? *Scientific American* 270(2): 68–73 (February 1994). Another in the recent spate of articles on the ease of manipulating photographic images with today's computer technologies. A lot of folks must really think the ramifications of this development are serious! This article explains how such manipulation is carried out using "before" and "after" photos.

Moore, R. Writing to learn biology: let's stop neglecting the tool that works best. *Journal of College Science Teaching* 23(5): 289–295 (March/April 1994). Although this article focuses on writing in biology courses, the advice is applicable to any technical field. Moore's recommendations include making writing assignments that require more than a single draft, but grading only the final product; having students critique each other's drafts; and resisting the temptation to separate form from content in a student's work. ◄

1994 Calendar

7–10 June

42nd Technical Writers' Institute, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY. Contact the Office of Continuing Education, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY 12180-3590. Tel: (518) 276-8351

15–17 June

Communicating Technical Information (37th edition: Writing and Editing), James Paradis, director. Contact MIT Summer Session Office, E19-356, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139. Tel: (617) 253-2101; facs: (617) 253-8042; e-mail: summer-professional-program@mit.edu

28–30 September

IPCC 94, Banff, Alberta, Canada. Contact Ron S. Blicq, RGI International, 569 Oxford St., Winnipeg, MB, Canada R3M 3J2. Tel: (204) 488-7060; facs: (204) 488-7294; e-mail: r.blicq@ieee.org ◄

IEEE Professional Communication Society NEWSLETTER

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