

Memo to Members

The newsletter of the Orlando Central Florida Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication



[HOME](#) [ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL](#)

January 2010

01
2010

Memo to Members

Inside this issue:

- ➔ [President's Corner](#)
- ➔ [The view from number two](#)
- ➔ [This month's program](#)
- ➔ [Tell your story!](#)
- ➔ [January/February STC web seminars](#)
- ➔ [Tools or Talent? What to Look for in a Technical Writer](#)
- ➔ [2010 society elections begin in March](#)
- ➔ [Meet the candidates: Nathaniel Lim](#)
- ➔ [Meet the candidates: W.C. Wiese](#)
- ➔ [Meet the candidates: Nicky Bलिएil](#)
- ➔ [From the editor's desk](#)



Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

VIEW A SELECTED MONTH

Select Month

SEARCH THIS SITE

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

To view details about a particular event, hover your mouse over the highlighted date. To RSVP, click on the highlighted date.

Regular Meeting		ADCO Meeting		Special Event		
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
April 2012						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	26	27	28
29	30					
May 2012						
				1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31

STC LINKS

[STC Headquarters](#)
[STC Orlando chapter](#)
[STC Palm Beaches chapter](#)
[STC SpaceTech chapter](#)
[STC Suncoast chapter](#)

EMPLOYMENT

[Follow](#)

Memo to Members

by Kelli Pharo
Orlando Chapter President

01
2010



Welcome to the Future

Happy New Year and welcome to 2010! Weren't we supposed to be traveling around via rocket-packs and spaceships by now? And what about George Jetson's push-one-button job? How do I get that gig?

Alas, life is not as plush as any of us had hoped. But the world still needs us. After all, when those space-age vehicles finally do come around, who but technical communicators could market them to the military, write the user guides, and provide the online help? Well, while we're waiting let's learn something new.

Orlando STC will be offering several opportunities to learn in this New Year, beginning with our annual STC-at-UCF January meeting. For this event we'll once again be teaming up with the UCF Future Technical Communicators (FTC), and bringing in a crowd-drawing speaker to present on a cutting-edge topic. This year Scott Abel, aka The Content Wrangler, will be presenting on social media. You won't want to miss this free January 26th event.

We have some other fabulous programs planned for the rest of the year, including a month of employment topics in March, culminating in a half-day workshop on March 27th. So be sure to save the date. You'll be hearing lots more on this one.

Let me end by sending congratulations to two of our long-time, and special members. First, former Orlando STC president and STC director, Mike Murray, has just retired from a 31-year career at Lockheed Martin. Congratulations Mike on a job well done!



Madame President, her husband, Chris, and their horse, "A.J."

Second, this past week Gail Lippincott was the recipient of our first-ever Award of Eggcellence! Way to go Gail! We are so grateful for all your tireless work on behalf of the Chapter. You are an inspiration to us all, and very much appreciated.

Here's to a great New Year. May times of fun and festivity, moments of sweet solitude, and delicious discoveries present themselves abundantly to each of you this year.

Kelli

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

The view from number two

by Dalton Hooper
Orlando Chapter Vice President

1

NOT A MEMBER?

Want more information on being an STC Orlando Chapter member? You can contact our Membership Manager, David Coverston, by clicking here. Your first meeting is free!

ACTIVE MEMBER SHIRTS

Want to be in the running for an Active Member polo shirt? You can contact our Active Members Manager, W.C. Wiese, by clicking here.

RISING STARS



Want to help our Chapter in support of our educational outreach initiative? You can make a tax-free donation. Just click on the above image for more information.

STC ORLANDO LOGO ITEMS

Our Chapter web store is now open!
[Click here for great STC-Orlando logo items](#)



Show your STC Orlando pride by purchasing an item imprinted with the STC Orlando logo! Click on the above image to see the catalogue and/or to place an order.

AMAZON.COM



Well, now that we've got that horrid 2009 out of the way, I can't help but feel optimistic about 2010. As far as our Orlando Chapter goes, we have lots of good things in store for this new year.

This month, we have our annual FTC/STC joint event at UCF (see Dana Hratko's article in this issue for details.) It's always a crowd-pleaser.

In February, we will be having a representative from Quark as our keynote speaker at our regular meeting on the 16th. Quark has some amazing tools to help technical communicators get the job done more efficiently. I'll have more about that in next month's issue.

Traditionally, March is our employment themed month, and this year will be no exception. Our regular monthly meeting in March will be employment themed, as well as other employment related happenings throughout the month, culminating in a half-day workshop on Saturday, March 27, entitled "An Unexpected Detour: How to (Re-)enter Today's Job Market to Win!"

By the way, when you renew your STC membership, you will need to specifically designate Orlando as your community in order to be a member of the Orlando Chapter. This is different than in years past. If you did not designate Orlando as your chapter of choice when you renewed, you can still go back to the renewal site at <http://www.stc.org> and add the Orlando chapter to your membership profile.

See you at UCF on January 26!

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

This month's program

by Dana Hratko
FTC President



Future Technical Communicators (FTC) at UCF and the Society for Technical Communication (STC) are pleased to announce that Scott Abel, CEO of *The Content Wrangler* will speak about the Future of Technical Communication this month. His presentation is scheduled for Tuesday January 26, 2010 and will be held at the University of Central Florida in the Student Union, Pegasus Ballroom GHI. Light refreshments begin at 6:30 p.m. and the meeting commences at 7:00 p.m. Admission is free, but donations are greatly appreciated. The proceeds collected at this event go toward the Melissa Pellegrin scholarship for students who show promise in the field of

technical communication.

Please join us and welcome the content management strategist and social media choreographer, Scott Abel, to the Central Florida area. His presentation will focus on the ways that technical communication is evolving, especially in the realm of social media. Scott will offer insight about marketing yourself successfully in the online arena.

If you have an interest in content management, social media



Click on the above image to go to Amazon.com. A percentage of your purchase is rebated to the Orlando Chapter.

VISIT US ON FACEBOOK...

... OR ON TWITTER!

SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL
COMMUNICATION (STC)



Mission: STC advances the theory and practice of technical communication across all user abilities and media so that both businesses and customers benefit from safe, appropriate, and effective use of products, information, and services.

VISITS TO THIS SITE

10,644 views

trends, and the rapidly changing industry of technical communication, then this meeting is for you. Check out Scott Abel's popular website, TheContentWrangler.com, for more information about his credentials



Scott Abel

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

Tell your story!

by Michele Damron
Chapter Achievements Chair

01
2010



Every March, our chapter submits information to STC that lets them know what we have achieved over the past year, in hopes of winning a Community Achievement Award. This award recognizes a SIG, professional, or student chapter's outstanding accomplishments in achieving the Society's goals through a wide range of programs and activities. We've won Chapter of Distinction four times, and Chapter of Excellence multiple times as well.

While regular Orlando Chapter meetings provide a great venue for networking with you—our members and prospective members—it's quite possible that we are unaware of specific endeavors you may have undertaken this year to advance Technical Communication. We need your input to help us paint a complete picture of our chapter!

With that in mind, since March 1, 2009, have you:

- submitted an entry in a Technical Writing/Communication contest, such as FTCC Suncoast Competition?
- judged entries in a TC contest?
- won an award for a contest submission?
- published an article about an aspect of TC?
- presented at the STC Annual Conference or a local/regional conference?
- participated in Leadership Day at the STC Annual Conference?
- presented or volunteered in a classroom?
- volunteered at the STC Annual Conference or a local/regional conference?
- reviewed session proposals for the STC Annual Conference?
- reviewed books for the Technical Communication quarterly journal?
- performed any other TC-related activity that you feel is worthy of mention?

Our deadline is February 28, 2010, so there's still time for you to accomplish that career-enhancing, community-building activity you've been contemplating!

Please send your responses to achievements@stc-orlando.org . Thanks for letting us hear from you!

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

January/February STC web seminars



STC has released the full schedule of webinars for January and February 2010. To view the entire listing, as well as the collection of archived webinars available for viewing 24/7, check out the [STC website](#). From there you can click on "View Description and Speaker Biography" to learn more details about each webinar and the presenter, and click on the name of the webinar to register.

Special note for Gold Members! Your Gold Membership includes access to seven STC webinars. You can simply register online, and your account will be updated with your attendance. To find out more about what Gold

Membership brings you, see [STC's dues information chart](#).

Cost for all webinars: Members \$79; Nonmembers \$149

[Register Now](#)

Strategic Planning for Your Life

Presented by Judy Glick-Smith

Wednesday, 6 January 2010

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

The New Face of Documentation

Presented by Rahel Bailie

Wednesday, 13 January 2010

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

What Technical Documentation Can Learn from the Comics

Presented by Alan Porter

Wednesday, 20 January 2010

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

Useful Shareware for Technical Communicators

Presented by Ed Marshall

Wednesday, 27 January 2010

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

Coming in February!

[Ten Things You Thought You Knew about Writing](#)

Presented by Leah Guren

Wednesday, 3 February

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

[Quick Reference Guides: Short and Sweet Technical Documentation](#)

Presented by Ben Minson

Wednesday, 10 February

1:00-2:00 PM EST (GMT-5)

To Be Announced
Wednesday, 17 February
1:00–2:00 PM EST (GMT–5)

Managing Conflict on a Global Team
Presented by Judy Glick-Smith
Wednesday, 24 February
1:00–2:00 PM EST (GMT–5)

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

Tools or Talent? What to Look for in a Technical Writer

by Jack Molisani
<http://www.twitter.com/JackMolisani>



I was speaking with a tech support manager recently who acknowledged that using good technical writers reduces their support costs, but then he asked me how you can tell if a writer is *good*? While I normally keep my opinions to myself (OK, those of you who know me can stop laughing now), here was my reply:

Is it possible to tell who is a “good” writer and who isn’t? You bet!

But before we jump into how to tell the good apples from the bad, we have to examine what a technical writer should be able

to do.

Core Competencies

So what skills does someone need to be a technical writer?

First and most importantly, the person must be able to communicate using the written word.

Next, the person must have “people skills.” Contrary to popular myth, technical writers do not just sit in a dark cubicle writing their fingers to the bone—they have to interview people to learn about the product they’re writing about. And pulling information out of engineers (and support professionals) is often not an easy task to accomplish!

A tech writer must be a “quick study.” The very nature of the job requires that tech writers understand what they are writing about, without the advantage of a Ph.D. in mathematics, astrophysics, software engineering, or whatever subject the tech writing is writing about.

A technical writer must also be a good investigator. It is not uncommon to have to dig up information not clearly listed in a design document.

Finally, a tech writer must be able to quickly learn new authoring tools. The media on which writers deliver documents has changed dramatically with the growth of the Internet, and a writer must be able to keep up with the latest in authoring tools and technology. (While this is really just another example of being a “quick study”, it’s sufficiently important to qualify as a separate skill.)

Evaluation of Importances

Now that we’ve discussed the core competencies, let me point out something that may have escaped your notice: whether a writer knows the latest online authoring tools was *last* on the list of core competencies. I bring this up now because it is the most common mistake hiring managers make: confusing *knowing a tool* with *ability to*

01
2010

communicate.

To illustrate my point, read a typical job posting: “Technical Writer. Must know FrameMaker and RoboHELP. Mail resume and salary history to resumes@BlackHoleNeverToBeHeardFromAgain.com”

Most tech writers can master new software publishing tools relatively quickly. On the other hand, learning to effectively use the English language so that your audience will receive and understand your communication takes much longer to learn and master. So focus on a writer’s ability, and not the latest buzz words. That is, if you find a *good* writer who does not know a particular tool (let alone a specific version of that tool), then hire that writer and let him learn the tool at the first opportunity.

Note: I’m assuming that you are looking to hire writers as permanent members of your technical team. If you’re only looking for contract writers to help for a few months, then obviously you would want them to have the skills you need *before* you hire them.

Panning for Gold

So now that you know what a technical writer should be able to do, and which skills are more important than others, how do you determine if a writer is *good*? Let’s look at each of the core competencies:

Writes Well: Wouldn’t you know that the most important quality is also the hardest to qualify? There is no magic formula to see if a writer writes well, other than, of course, *reading* something he or she has written. Do you understand it? Is it clear? Logically thought out? Are there any misspelled words or grammar errors?

While the proof of whether a writer writes well is in the writing, I have a rule of thumb that I use when testing new writers: Do they do any creative writing outside of business writing? Art is about *communication*, and if someone has a desire or passion to communicate as an artist, then it’s likely that his technical writing has a quality that will ensure it communicates as well.

People Skills: This is an easy one to evaluate. How does the candidate interview? Does he confront you and look you in the eye, or does he constantly look about the room in fear? Is he friendly? (And I don’t mean social-veneer friendly, but truly personable.)

Quick Study: While it is generally accepted that a technical writer should have some higher education, there are two schools of thought on what is better: a degree in English, or a degree or certificate in a technical subject. Personally, I think the public education system has ruined more writers than it’s made, so given the choice of two writers who communicate well (which you’ve established by looking at samples of their writing, right?), I’d choose the writer with the technical background. After all, it’s pretty safe to assume that if a candidate has learned one technical subject, he can learn another.

Good Investigator: I am a firm believer that you can learn more about people from the questions they ask than the answers they give. Pay attention to the questions the *candidate* asks *you*.

Authoring Tools: If the candidate has passed the first four criteria, then I almost don’t care how many authoring tools he or she knows. *Almost*. I think writers should always be aware of the latest developments in the field of electronic publishing, even if they have not yet had a chance to use the tools in a production environment. If you are on a tight deadline or are bring on a temporary employee, then by all means look for the exact skills you need. But if you find someone who *writes well*, then spend a few extra dollars and send the person to a class if the person needs to get current on the latest publishing tools.

Look for an Expert

I advise clients who are hiring writers to look for an expert. Or more exactly worded, an expert *to the level to which the candidate has been trained*. Are you looking for a junior writer? Well look for an *expert* junior writer. I wouldn’t expect a junior writer to be adept in writing project plans, but I would expect him/her to be expert at writing conceptual and procedural text, numbered and bulleted lists, etc. Look for an expert. The best people are. (The same advice goes to candidates: Be an expert in your field to whatever level you have been trained!)

Listen to your Gut

My final bit of advice is to follow your intuition. If there is something about the candidate that just doesn't... quite... seem... right..., it probably isn't. There are many people on the market (especially now) who talk a good game but can't really produce what they say they can. Ask them *how* they produced such-and-such. They'll hesitate or give a very glib answer. They'll Trust your instincts. You'll know one of these candidate when you meet one.

That said, let me end on a positive note. Most writers on the market are very good people and very professional at what they do. Look for enthusiasm, passion and the ability to communicate.

That's who you want on your team.

Tools can be learned.

= = = =

About the Writer

Jack Molisani has been a project officer in the Space Division of the USAF, the manager of training and documentation of a multi-million dollar software firm, and currently is the founder and president of ProSpring., a staffing agency specializing in contract technical writers: <http://www.ProSpringStaffing.com>.

Jack also produces The LavaCon Conference on Professional Development: <http://www.lavacon.org>

He can be reached by phone at 866-302-5774 x201, by email at jack@prospringstaffing.com

You can follow Jack on Twitter: <http://www.twitter.com/JackMolisani>

Comments : [Leave a Comment »](#)

Categories : [January 2010](#)

