

ISTC Conference presentations

Conference 2003 will be held on Friday 3 to Sunday 5 October. The venue is the Palace Hotel in Buxton, Derbyshire (more on page 5). You'll find the [booking form](#) online and also in the [July Newsletter](#). For other conference matters, email [conference AT istc.org.uk](mailto:conference@istc.org.uk). Here are some planned presentations.

Abstracts of the following presentations are in this Newsletter

Lucid Law – Martin Cutts. See page 2.

TCeuropa – a joint venture for Technical Communication in Europe – Michael Fritz. See page 2.

The Skills Gap between Technical Communication and Usability Testing – Florence Dujardin of Sheffield Hallam University. See page 3

XML – An Approachable Implementation – John Mobbs. See page 3.

Developing Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience – Ron Blicq. See page 4.

E-commerce for self-employed professionals – some practical legal issues – See page 5.

Abstracts of the following presentations were published in the [July Newsletter](#).

Understanding Your Customer's Needs through Customer Site Visits – Francisco Abedrabbo and Lypp-Tek Khoo-Ellis, both from Oracle.

Increasing User Acceptance of Technical Information in Cross-Cultural Communication – Prof. Thomas L. Warren ([Horace Hockley Award](#) winner, 1996).

Developing an In-house Document Management System – David Smith.

Perspectives – Kenneth G Rowen and Peter Perkin.

Putting a Student in His Place – Alan Fisk.

Estimating and Planning for Technical Documentation – Peter Meherne.

CorelDRAW (from first switch-on) – John Hooley.

Abstracts of the following presentations should be ready for the September Newsletter

Single-sourcing: An Introduction – Justin Darley of Cherryleaf

Interactive help and training with RoboDemo – Greg Daffern

Online Design: Beyond the Basics – Justin Darley of Cherryleaf

Word Workshop – Adrian Young

Freelancers' Workshop: Rising to Meet Client Demands – Richard Raper.

Plus presentations on EasyHelp, Trisoft products, and LinKit!

Programme change

Total Quality Management: Getting it Right First Time will no longer go ahead. Andrew Slack is recovering from illness and, although he hopes to come to Conference, will not be able to present.

Whilst the ISTC will make every effort to run the Conference programme as previewed, the programme is subject to change. Please check the [Conference web page](#) for the latest information.

Conference presentation previews

Lucid Law

Martin Cutts, Research director, Plain Language Commission

Faced with the tortuous syntax and strange vocabulary of legal language, many lay people feel they should bow down and worship. But does this specialised form of technical writing have to be so obscure, as lawyers often claim?

Using modern examples from the UK, India, and the European Commission, this paper shows:

- why traditional forms of legal language are hard for the public (and even lawyers) to understand
- how they can be reworked into more everyday English without losing any (or significant) legal effect.

Technical words and phrases will always be needed in legal texts, as in documents prepared by most specialists, but the paper shows that in law, consumer contracts and deeds, few of them are really essential. In fact, much of the obscurity in legal texts is caused by their authors' poor grasp of punctuation, syntax, and organisation. The paper argues that legalese is one of the few social evils that can be eradicated by careful thought and disciplined use of a biro.

The speaker, who is not a lawyer, will give all those attending a copy of *Clarifying EC Regulations*, which shows a 'before' and 'after' version of a recent European Commission regulation. The booklet provides a full commentary on how and why the original version was reworked. The 'after' version was produced as a demonstration project to complement a Fight the Fog campaign mounted by translators in the EC.

TCeurope – a joint venture for Technical Communication in Europe

Michael Fritz, Managing Director of [tekomp](#), our German sister organisation.

The umbrella organisation TCeurope builds a common platform for the national societies for technical communication such as the ISTC and others. It provides a basis that enables the national organisations to co-operate more closely, to lobby more effectively in Brussels, to promote their vision of user-friendly technical documentation throughout Europe, and to work more efficiently.

The most important fields of activities are currently education and training for technical communicators, consumer protection, the promotion of the interests of consumers in the European standardisation processes, and the foundation of societies for technical communicators in European countries where none exist yet.

Currently, there are two projects being realised with the financial support of the EU: TecDoc-Net and SecureDoc. ISTC is involved in both projects.

In his presentation, Michael Fritz, of tekomp, will talk about the foundation process and the aims of TCeurope and about the current state of the projects.

Spam

To try to thwart address harvester programs, the newsletter now slightly disguises explicit email addresses. Embedded email addresses now come with a **bonus amphibian**, which you should remove before sending the email.

Newsletter URL

If you're reading a printed copy of this newsletter and want to explore the links mentioned, go to the URL shown in the odd page footers and open up or download the PDF file of this newsletter.

Please note that links with %, # and some other characters can give Acrobat problems. Although the URL is shown correctly in the pointer text, when you click the link, the URL may be truncated.

Documentation Awards 2003

Les Best writes: It's too late now. The closing date for entries was 1 August. There are about 15 entries with the online documents being in the majority. Not as many as I had hoped but the number compares well with previous years.

Two sections are being sponsored by [AST](#), Gerry Gentle's firm, and the other two by the [Plain Language Commission](#), founded by Martin Cutts in 1994. We're very pleased to be associated with Martin for the first time.

The judges are being briefed and the winners will be informed soon after the 19 September. The sponsors will award their prizes at the Conference on Saturday 4 October, just before the Gala Dinner.

I should like to thank all those people who have entered their work and encourage more of you to have a go next year.

The Skills Gap between Technical Communication and Usability Testing

Florence Dujardin, Senior Lecturer in Technical communication, [Sheffield Hallam University](#)

Abstract

Technical writers usually find it hard to make a convincing case for contributing to usability testing. This presentation suggests a ‘skills map’ to support that case.

The starting point is to use skills in user-task analysis. To help **design** usability tests, writers could make better use their knowledge of users by:

- giving advice about what product features to test, how they should be tested, and by whom
- offering their knowledge of the corporate context to generate test scenarios
- providing document design expertise to design questionnaires.

However, to **conduct** tests, technical writers need specialist skills:

<u>To</u>	<u>Writers need to learn about</u>
Design tests	researching experiments
Gather information	focus groups, ‘talk-aloud’ protocols, and contextual enquiry
Collate user responses	organising and commenting on findings
Analyse user responses	cognitive psychology, ergonomics, and learning theory

User-task analysis is not enough: knowledge of research practices and relevant theory must complement it.

XML – An Approachable Implementation

John Mobbs, BA MMS MISTC is an XML Documentation Consultant

Do you need to get your documentation into XML? Are you bewildered by the tech-speak associated with many of the products on the market? Do you need a credible starting point?

John Mobbs, having climbed the learning curve on this question, offers a low-cost approach that will appeal to the person who wants to know what is going on in the XML engine room and to control it.

The aim of this approach is to equip the documentation professional with the resources both to meet future requirements without external intervention and to make informed judgements about selection of further XML tools.

John will describe a matching suite of Document Type Definition (DTD), the XML instance itself and XSL Transformation to HTML. He will explain how a bespoke system can be built on this uncomplicated foundation.

Finally, John will describe a simple, predictable and controllable means of legacy conversion to produce an XML instance that validates to a pre-existing DTD.

Exhibitors and sponsors

Exhibitors at Conference include [Lloyd International](#) and [Plain Words](#).

[eHelp](#) is sponsoring two prize draws. [ITR](#) is sponsoring the Horace Hockley Reception.

Translation survey

[MultiLingual Computing & Technology](#) is conducting an online survey: “[Writers Who Write Documentation That Is Translated](#)”. After filling in the survey form, you’ll get the opportunity to receive a free one-year subscription to the magazine. But be quick, as the survey closes soon.

The survey results will be published online and in a special magazine supplement *Writing for Translation* that will be distributed in late September.

MultiLingual Computing & Technology is an industry magazine for Web site globalisation, translation, international software development, and language technology.

Recovering waste

EU directives on Waste Electrical Equipment were “brought into force” in the UK on 13 August.

The EU Directive on [Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment](#) (WEEE) (2002/96/EC) and the complementary EU Directive on the [Restriction of the use of Certain Hazardous Substances in Electrical and Electronic Equipment](#) (ROHS) are designed to prevent electrical and electronic equipment from becoming waste and to increase the level of recycling and recovery of WEEE.

All product/equipment designers must learn about these directives. The DTI is leading the UK initiative; see the DTI [WEEE and ROHS page](#).

Developing Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience

Ron Blicq, MISTC. Coordinator, Language Study Project

How the Guidelines came into being

In 1999, the member societies of INTECOM recognised there was a need to help technical writers who have to write English-language technical documentation for products that will be sold worldwide. If they are writing for an audience in the UK, the Scandinavian countries, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, then British style is appropriate. Similarly, if they are writing for an audience solely in North and South America, the Philippines, and many Asian countries, then US style is appropriate. But if they have to write a single set of documentation for use in all countries, then a difficult decision has to be made.

For a year, I questioned technical writers in many countries to determine which style they felt would be appropriate, and whether they felt standards should be established. Their response was clear: (1) they need help in making decisions; and (2) they want guidelines, not standards.

At the June 2000 INTECOM Annual General Meeting, a Study Group was set up to determine preferences, identify words and expressions that pose problems, research which is the most suitable writing style to adopt, and make recommendations. I was appointed chair of the Study Group, with members in Australia, South Africa, Canada, the UK, the US, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden. An immense amount of work was invested into the project over the following three years, during which it became clear that drawing clear-cut decisions would be very difficult.

The Study Group's findings were assembled into a set of Guidelines for release on 2 July 2003 at Forum 2003 in Milano, Italy. However, this was to be only the first step, because the Guidelines are to become a 'living' document which will be amended and updated as styles change and new words and expressions are drawn to our attention.

At the ISTC conference, I plan to describe:

- the different writing styles the Study Group members investigated and reported;
- how the members' findings were assembled and circulated for evaluation;
- the different opinions on the preferred usage that evolved;
- how the different opinions affected the Study Group's ability to reach a consensus on usage (at times it seemed that we would never be able to reach a consensus!);
- how we reached decisions;
- how we designed the Guidelines; and
- Forum 2003 delegates' reactions to the Guidelines – their opinions were very clear, and differed markedly between English-language speakers who prefer US usage, English-language speakers who prefer British usage, and (particularly) delegates for whom English is a second language.

I will then ask for feedback from ISTC members attending the presentation.

W3C Patent Policy

The [World Wide Web Consortium](#) has approved the "W3C Patent Policy". It aims to solve a specific problem – the threat of 'blocking patents' on key components of Web infrastructure. By adopting this Patent Policy with its commitment to royalty-free standards for the future, W3C hopes to lay the foundation for another decade of the Web's technical innovation, economic growth, and social advancement. See their [Patent Policy](#) page.

WSIS declaration

Access to information is a fundamental right in information society says the [World Summit on the Information Society](#) (WSIS). It has released drafts of its [declaration of principles and action plan](#) with the goal that the benefits and rights of the information society are extended to all humanity. For more information, see also its [news release](#).

US school grades

You may well have done a readability check on your work only to find that the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level left you none the wiser. To learn about grades in the American education system, try the Wikipedia [School Grades \(US\)](#) page, which offers an authoritative looking list comparing grades with ages. There are also similar pages for England and Wales, Scotland, and Canada.

[Wikipedia](#) is an open content encyclopaedia project and you can copy its text under the terms of the GNU Free Documentation License.

Indian writers

For a view of technical writing from an Indian perspective, see this [ZDNet India](#) article.

E-commerce for self-employed professionals – some practical legal issues

Andrew Rhodes Taylor of Net LawMan and The Mediator

Topic headings are as follows.

Pros and cons of self employment

- Allowances against tax
- Freedom – work from home
- Freedom – flexible work style
- Loneliness
- Lack of back-up/
- Taken less seriously by the World at large
- Time lost in admin
- Lack of secondary skills
- Cash management – debt collection
- Staff management – avoid if possible
- Partnership – solves some problems, creates others
- Limited company – as for partnership
- Are you self-employed or in consultancy when you work for someone else.

Issues and documents for self employment

- Necessity to keep accounts
- Customs and Excise and Inland Revenue
- Data Protection
- Terms and conditions or client contracts

- Your consultancy agreement
- Contracts of employment for your staff
- Extras to contracts of employment

Issues in e-commerce

- Size of market – and of competition!
- Anonymity useful when you are small
- Purpose of web site?
- Practicalities of web site design
- Is e-commerce the Wild West over again?
- Distance Selling Regulations and Electronic Commerce Regulations
- Intellectual property – who owns what, from when?
- When are the terms accepted?
- When is the contract concluded?
- The international element

Documentation in e-commerce

- Terms and conditions – take it or leave it?
- E-commerce

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Disclaimer: *As mentioned on page 1, the Conference programme might change, so please treat the programme as provisional.*

Palace Hotel, Buxton

This year's Conference venue is the four-star [Palace Hotel, Buxton](#). Opened in 1868, it was built in the Grand Victorian style. The hotel is now a Grade 2 listed building and is set in five acres of landscaped grounds. The hotel is an established conference venue with three bars and all the usual facilities.

Amazing facts about the Palace Hotel!

- The hotel has the longest wrought iron staircase in England!
- It has its own ghost!
- Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford used the hotel as their secret rendezvous when having their much-publicised affair!
- Margaret Thatcher and Keith Chegwin are numbered amongst its prestigious clientele!
- Every room has a trouser press!



The Dovedale Restaurant in the Palace Hotel shows off the hotel's fine plasterwork.

XML Internationalization and Globalization

by Yves Savourel, SAMS, 2001 ISBN 0-672-32096-7 £36.50

As more and more software products are being localised, the advantages that Extensible Markup Language (XML) offers for internationalisation are being exploited. If you're involved in globalising documentation in any way, this book will help you understand what is required for internationalising XML documents and for localising XML data efficiently.

Part 1

The first part of the book is titled "Enabling XML Material", but it's really an introduction to the facilities that XML provides to overcome the problems of internationalisation (developing a product so that it works with data in different languages) and localisation (translating and adapting a product to different cultural conventions). For example, the internationalisation process must cope with different rules for sorting in various alphabets, and different representation of times and dates across the world.

Chapters in part 1 discuss how XML represents characters in different natural languages, how XML identifies the language of document content, and how well the various rendering technologies such as Cascading Style Sheets (CSS), and Extensible Style Language Transformation (XSLT) cope with language issues such as writing direction and sorting rules.

Part 2

Part 2 deals with the techniques for ensuring that XML documents are optimised for localisation. The first couple of chapters describe cost-saving techniques for creating XML documents that are more easily localised and that allow better reusability.

The part ends with a chapter about the use of XML with databases. It's interesting if you need to know about how to extract text from a database for translation, or how to publish XML content to a database.

Part 3

Part 3 deals with the techniques and tools for localising XML documents. Some of the tools discussed are not specific to XML, so much of the material is applicable to localisation in general. There are chapters that discuss online translation systems and tools particularly in terms of how well they support XML. There is also material about the OpenTag and XML Localization Interchange File Format (XLIFF) formats for extracting localisable text from non-XML file formats into a common format for translation. Also covered is Translation Memory eXchange (TMX), an XML format for exchanging translation memory-exported files between translation tools.

There is a useful glossary and a number of appendixes listing language codes, and OpenTag and TMX tags.

Summary

To sum up, the book is well written and ideas are communicated clearly. The author is very experienced in his field and has covered the relevant subject matter very comprehensively. However, a book covering a fast-changing subject area such as XML is bound to get a little out-of-date. An example of this is the fact that there is no coverage of XML Schema, which is set to replace Document Type Definitions (DTD) as the means of defining XML vocabularies.

The book concentrates on XML-related matters but it also covers general problems of internationalisation. As such, the book will be useful to technical communicators who produce XML content to be localised, as well as to localisation professionals. It will also be popular with XML enthusiasts!

Editor's note

More information on this book, including its table of contents, downloads, and a sample chapter is available from [SAMS](#).

Charles Cowan, FISTC is an Information Developer in the User Technologies department at IBM UK, Hursley Park, Winchester, Hampshire. You can contact him at c8cowan AT uk.ibm.com.

Training Courses

Courses listed are starting to be limited to those that are low cost or are in some way unusual. For training in, say, Adobe products, you'll soon be pointed to a new edition of the ISTC's courses guide.

This section of the newsletter lists forthcoming scheduled courses. Many other organisations also provide bespoke training. For some of these, download the ISTC's booklet [Technical Communications: A Guide To Courses](#).

Course providers

Cherryleaf. Tel: 01784 258672 Email: info AT cherryleaf-com

Ideal. Tel: 01295 201240 Email: enquiries AT its-ideal-co-uk

Pacific Blue. Tel: 01483 212612 Email: sherryl AT pacificblue-co-uk

Sfep (Society for Editors and Proofreaders). Contact details vary from course to course. See their website.

Sol (Society of Indexers). Workshops Administrator: [Julie Miller](#),
Tel: 01229 464878 (preferably early evenings on weekdays)

Weekend and evening courses, when identified, are in bold. Listings are a service to members. A listing does not imply endorsement by the ISTC.

General courses

Designing and Writing for the Screen. Cherryleaf. 15/9, 17/9

Effective Business Communications. Pacific Blue. 27–28/8 (Antrim)

Adobe Acrobat, Illustrator, Indesign, and Photoshop

Indesign. Ideal. 27–28/8

Editing, indexing and proofreading

On-screen Editing. SfEP. (Part 1) 20/9, 27/9

Proofreading, Introduction to. SfEP. 2/9

Working for a Client. SfEP. 23/9

Indexing courses

Freelance Work in Publishing. Business aspects of working from home as a freelancer. Sol. 18/9 (Leeds) £100

Framemaker 7.0 and related

Advanced. Ideal. 21–22/8

Basic/Intermediate. Ideal. 18–20/8

ISTC London Area Group

Alan Fisk writes: The London Area Group visited the [St. Bride Printing Library](#) on the evening of 15 July. The ebullient Librarian, Nigel Roche, treated us to a fascinating combination of education and entertainment on the history of printing, culminating in a guided tour of the Library's museum of antique printing equipment.

Exploring the old working methods was enough to make you kiss your word processor when you got back to the office.

The next Group event will probably be a social evening. Details to follow.

Distance learning MA

There are still a few places for the September intake for the [MA in Technical Communication](#) at Sheffield Hallam University. Now in its thirteenth year, the course is the only UK distance learning course in technical communication above City and Guilds level. If you're interested, send them your application and CV by 29 August.

Street-cred (i)

Technical authors taking up employment in Sunnydale, California may well want to buy [Slayer Slang – A Buffy the Vampire Slayer Lexicon](#). Written by Michael Adams, Professor of English, Albright College, and published by Oxford University Press, it analyses the show's language to find "new formative tendencies", "clipped phrasal forms," and "redundant suffixation". Slayer slang has entered popular culture especially amongst teenagers so the book may also have some practical use.

Street-cred (ii)

If like Justice Lewison in the recent [court case](#), you're baffled by rap lyrics, such as "shizzle my nizzle", then look no further than [The Urban Dictionary](#). It's a slang dictionary with words contributed by its readers. Its definitions are "not appropriate for all audiences" and often unreliable. But being squares, we wouldn't know the difference, would we? [The Official Hip Hop Dictionary](#) has a similar mission to explain.

Physician heal thyself

From the web page of the [MAXit Checker](#).

"This technique is more sophisticated than other grammar checker because MAXit uses dictionaries and rules customized to a product."

Nonetheless, the [Smart Communications](#) site may be worth a look, particularly if you're interested in Controlled and Simplified English.

Events

August

25–7 Sep [Information Design Summer Academy 2: Interfaces and Interactions](#). Gifu, Japan

September

4–5 [TCANZ Conference 2003](#). Auckland, New Zealand

18–20 [Vision Plus 10: Touristic Information de Luxe – for All](#). Lech/Arlberg, Austria

21–22 [SfEP Annual Conference](#). Birmingham. Programme details now available.

24–25 Localization seminars. [Workflow and Tools](#) (24) [Project Management](#) (25). Bonn (Probably in German.)

Looking ahead

October

3–5 [ISTC Conference](#). Buxton. See page 1 for details.

12–15 [ACM SIGDOC Conference](#). San Francisco, USA

13–17 [LavaCon](#). (Technical Communication Management) Hawaii.

14–16 [Localization World](#). Seattle, USA

20–21 [Hidden Typography](#). London.

27–29 [FrameUsers Conference](#) (FrameMaker). Palm Beach, Florida

November

19–20 [European Information Development Conference](#). Wiesbaden. Mainly in English. See article below.

19–21 [tekomp Autumn Conference](#). Wiesbaden. Mainly in German.

24–26 [Structured Technical Information in the Defence Community](#). Wyboston, Cambridgeshire.

December

2–4 [Online Information](#) and [Content Management Europe](#). London

European Information Development Conference

TCEurope is the European umbrella organisation for technical communicators, the ISTC being one of its members. This is the first Conference under the auspices of TCEurope and is linked to the tekomp Autumn conference.

Dates: Wednesday 19 – Thursday 20 November 2003

Place: [Rhein-Main-Hallen](#), [Wiesbaden](#), Germany

19 November: Expert forums on online-help, localisation, and XML

20 November: Expert forums on usability and content management

Forum presentations, workshops and tool presentations will be held in English by experts from different European countries and the US, representing the industry, service providers, and universities. There will be additional presentations in German.

The programme will be available from September on the [TCEurope](#) web site. For further information, please contact TCEurope as follows.

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