

A cautionary tale	2
News	3
Conference 2004	4
ISO 18019 checklist	7
Translation matters	8
Events	9
Training courses	10
The back page	11

The ISTC (Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators) is the United Kingdom's professional association for technical authors, technical illustrators, and information designers.

ISTC Office: PO Box 522, Peterborough, PE2 5WX, United Kingdom. Tel: 01733 390141
Email: istc@istc.org.uk
Web: <http://www.istc.org.uk/>

This Newsletter is published monthly and is emailed to anyone who wishes to subscribe. As well as ISTC news, the Newsletter aims to cover anything of interest to the profession. Currently about 1500 people subscribe. To subscribe, contact the Office.

Advertising: [Felicity Davie](#) or phone 01344 466600
Editorial: [Newsletter Editor](#) Letters: [Letters Editor](#) If you're reading a printed copy of this newsletter, go to <http://www.istc.org.uk/pages/newsletters.php> and open it online to explore the links mentioned.

ISTC News

Amazon links

Earlier this year, the ISTC handbook and several other useful publications became available via the ISTC website thanks to links to amazon.co.uk.

The original idea was to improve the sales process, reduce overheads and costs and pass on the savings to members by improving our services in other areas. A few extra links to books were added for good measure, little did we realise how popular this feature would be.

The Amazon associates scheme is designed so that any website which refers its visitors on to the Amazon website will earn the owner a small commission on any sales from that link. Since March 2004, around £750 of purchases have been made on Amazon thanks to links from our website. That represents about £40 income to the ISTC over five months. In financial terms, not a big success. However, as it was only ever intended to be an easier way to buy and sell the ISTC handbook, not a profit making scheme, I think we can be more than pleased with the results and as they say "every little helps".

Salary and Benefits Survey

The preparation for the salary and benefits survey is almost complete. This year, the survey will be available on-line to speed up the process and make it easier for those of

you who prefer it that way. Paper copies will be available from the office on request.

The salary and benefits survey is a useful resource for ISTC members, but can only be considered accurate and useful if enough people contribute to it. The online and paper versions should be available from September, so keep an eye out for it. More information will follow in next month's *Newsletter* and the next "Communicator".

New Business Affiliate

The Information Services department of the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) has joined the ISTC as a grade 2 Business Affiliate. The [Business Affiliates](#) page has a link to their website and should link to a detailed Business Affiliate page soon.

Potential Irish Area Group

Can all those who had an e-mail or letter from Adrian Rush between 11 to 14 July please respond to it before 7 August as he would like to get the nominations to Council for the August Meeting. Your assistance is going to benefit you all in the long term.

Office contact

For the week beginning 23 August, there will be some refurbishment work being done in the ISTC Administrators office. This will mean an email only service for that week, but full service will resume the following week.

A cautionary tale

by **Mike Unwalla** of [TechScribe](#)

Warning: this article may upset your equanimity!

A while back, I asked a question on the ISTC Discussion list. It really upset some people. All I wanted was factual information, and in return, quite a few emails suggested that I was a heinous beast who should never see the light of day!

So, what was the question? I wanted to find an ISP that permitted, within the constraints of the law, the sending of unsolicited commercial email (UCE). As a freelancer, I need to contact potential clients to offer my services. One way of doing that is by using email. And yes, some of those emails are indeed unsolicited (gasp, shock, horror).

Why did the question arise? Because I'd found out the hard way that the contract with my ISP prohibited the sending of any UCE, as you can read in the remainder of this article.

What went wrong

A few months ago, I sent an email to someone whom I'd contacted previously by letter. The email conformed to the DTI guidelines for UCE.

Unfortunately, the recipient didn't appreciate the message and complained to [SpamCop](#). SpamCop forwarded (automatically) the complaint to [Global Crossing](#), which is the upstream provider to TechScribe's ISP.

TechScribe's ISP forwarded the complaint to me, along with instructions from Global

Crossing which asked us to desist from sending unsolicited email.

So, I contacted SpamCop to point out that the original email conformed to UK guidelines for commercial emails and that, therefore, the complaint was unjustified.

What the regulations say

Currently, UK law allows the sending of business-to-business emails, even if they are unsolicited, provided that the sender conforms to certain guidelines.

The [DTI guidelines, *Complying with the E-Commerce Regulations 2002*](#), page 11, state in part:

Commercial communications

Any form of electronic communication designed to promote your goods, services or image, such as an email advertising your goods or services, must:

- be clearly identifiable as a commercial communication
- clearly identify the person and/or organisation on whose behalf it is sent

If you send unsolicited commercial communications by email (for example, an email advertising your goods or services which is sent to a recipient who has not requested it) you must ensure that recipients are able to identify them as such as soon as they receive them.

SpamCop's reply showed that even though the legislation might allow UCE, the contract with the ISP prohibited sending it.

SpamCop's reply

"Whether or not a complaint about UCE is valid or not is up to your service provider to decide.

"Spam is not about laws as the Internet is global, and no one country's or region's laws can be forced upon another.

"Rather it is contract law that is in effect here.

"No doubt your service agreement with your service provider prohibits the sending of unsolicited mail. I know their provider, Global Crossing prohibits the sending of UCE, as does [RIPE](#)."

[Author's note: the FAQ page on the RIPE web site states that RIPE cannot prohibit the sending of UCE, because it is not an ISP.]

"Upstream agreements are in place and enforceable on downstream customers and their customers.

"We do not review mail that is sent through our service, just as your provider doesn't check your mail.

"The complaint received by your provider was an email sent by our user through our service.

"Our user was the one who determined what they received was unsolicited."

What it means to freelancers

Well, of course, within the constraints of UK and EU law, people in business want to send emails to potential clients. Even if your ISP agrees that there's no problem with the emails you send out, your ISP is still bound by the upstream agreements, and has to investigate every complaint.

Are there alternative suppliers that allow the sending of UCE? As far as I know, no. For example:

- [Easily](#). I asked about obtaining an account that allows the sending of UCE. Easily replied, "We don't, nor are we making any plans to allow this type of practice to be done via our email servers."
- Freeserve (now [Wanadoo](#)). It's not allowed "to spam or send or procure the sending of any unsolicited advertising or promotional material."
- [BT](#). For BT Business 500 and Business PLUS, you are not allowed "to spam or to send or provide unsolicited advertising or promotional material."

So, there you have it. Even though UCE is allowed in UK law, if you send it, you are probably breaking the terms of your contract with your ISP. That's not an issue... until someone complains.

This article originally appeared (in a slightly different form) as "A cautionary tale" in [City Business Magazine](#), June/July 2004 issue.

News

Plain English Campaign celebrates 25 years of fighting gobbledygook

Plain English Campaign is 25 years old this Monday (26 July). To mark the occasion, supporters around the world have voted a draft law from 1998 as their favourite example of gobbledygook from the Campaign's history. And they are thanking writers who make the effort to communicate clearly.

The draft National Minimum Wage Regulations, which supporters picked as their favourite example, defined "non-hours work" with the memorable phrase: "the hours of non-hours work worked by a worker in a pay reference period shall be the total of the number of hours spent by him during the pay reference period in carrying out the duties required of him under his contract to do non-hours work."

The extract was one of 10 chosen for a shortlist by Campaign supporter Kieran Lefort, who was born on 26 July 1979 — the day the Campaign was launched. Visitors to the Campaign's website (www.plainenglish.co.uk) then voted for the winner.

Campaign spokesman John Lister said the draft minimum wage law was a surprise choice. "It's not the type of jargon-riddled, overly-complicated sentence that we normally think of when we talk about gobbledygook. But it's certainly very memorable: it shows that even everyday words of one or two

syllables can cause confusion when they are poorly chosen."

As well as looking back at 25 years of gobbledygook, the Campaign is celebrating the improvements in communication since 1979. It has asked its 7000 supporters, in more than 80 countries, to mark the anniversary by sending thank-you notes to writers of clear documents.

Chrissie Maher, the Campaign's founder-director, said at least one thing had changed in the past 25 years. "In 1979 we stood outside Parliament shredding gobbledygook to protest at the state of official documents. This summer we were inside Parliament giving evidence to a committee of MPs trying to improve communication with the public. So at least we've got through the front door!

"We've changed thousands of documents, but more importantly we've changed attitudes. Unclear writing is now far more likely to be caused by bad habits rather than bad intentions.

"In a way, it's depressing that we still need a Plain English Campaign after 25 years. Some of the campaigners who work at our offices weren't even born when the Campaign began. But a letter I received from a nurse a couple of years ago explains exactly why Plain English Campaign will keep on fighting. She said that gobbledygook 'makes us feel hoodwinked, inferior, definitely frustrated and angry, and it causes a divide between us and the writer'."

Conference 2004

Documentation awards

The deadline of 1 August has, of course, passed. However, I'm reliably informed that late entries received before 14 August will be accepted.

So if you thought you'd missed out and still want some recognition for all of your hard work, get that entry in!

You can enter the following classes.

Class 1: Paper Documentation

1a Printed documentation about specified items of equipment, systems or software

1b Printed documents of any other sort

Class 2: Electronic Documentation

2a Handbooks about specified items of equipment, systems or software designed to be read on screen

2b Documents of any other sort designed to be read on screen

An entry is £25 for members and £40 for non-members. Entries must have been produced between April 2003 and July 2004 and be written in English.

You can download the [Information Sheet](#) and the Entry Form, which are also linked from the [Documentation Awards page](#).



Expanding Your Horizons

The 13th annual ISTC conference
8th - 10th October 2004, Oxford

Presentation summaries

The following two pages give some more detailed information about some of the presentations and will be continued over the next few issues to build up a full collection.

tekomp's certificate for Technical Writers

Nearly 80% of all technical writers in Germany are only trained on the job, and therefore they have not got any formal qualification like a diploma or a certificate.

With the slow economy, competition has risen in our trade and some proof of their professional skills has become a "selling point" if technical writers want to promote themselves in their company or if they want to find a new job outside.

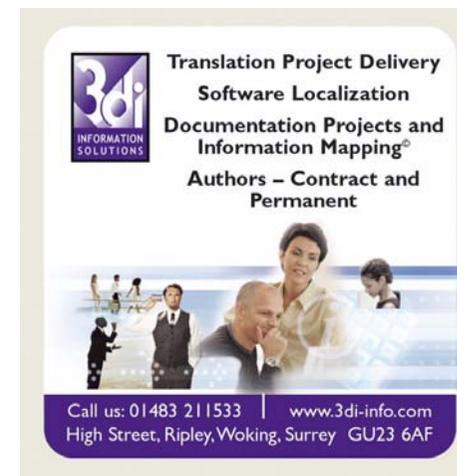
To help people out of this situation, tekomp has developed a certification system for technical writers in Germany. People who have been working in the field for longer than three years can take part in an assessment which is conducted by tekomp. If they are successful, they are allowed to use the job title "Technischer Redakteur (tekomp)".

The presentation describes the certification system and tekomp's initial experiences with it.

Michael Fritz has a degree in business management with a specialisation in marketing. Before working for tekomp, he was director of an educational institution and worked for several associations. Since 1996,

he is managing director of tekomp Gesellschaft für technische Kommunikation e.V.

Since 2001, he is also managing director of TC and more GmbH, the society which is realising the commercial activities of tekomp.



10 Tips to save money in localisation

The localisation business is subject to a strong cost increase. Still, providing properly localised documentation is a way to keep the localisation project within budget. Preparing the information to be localised avoids localisation pitfalls and therefore maintains the budget within limits.

Marie-Louise Flacke is a graduate from the American University of Paris (1993) with a Technical Writing Diploma. Since then, she has been contracting in various European countries with major IT companies performing localisation QAs for the French market. She is a Tekomp and a CRT - Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques member and was appointed INTECOM Vice President in July 2003.

INTECOM - Providing professional service to technical communicators around the globe

This is a joint presentation by representatives of the Board of the International Council for Technical Communication of which the ISTC, your organisation, is a founding member. We are also being assisted by Alan Fisk, your representative on INTECOM.

In this presentation we aim to “de-mystify” our organisation by explaining who we are, what we do, and how we operate. Ron Blicq will look at our history and how we have developed to become an active part of the world of technical communication.

We will then take you on a guided tour around the world, looking at the activities of our members in the Southern and Northern Hemispheres. Margery Watson will focus on “down under”, and Marie-Louise Flacke will look at recent activity in Europe. Ron Blicq will bring us news of what is happening in North America, and Alan Fisk will tell us about what is happening in Scandinavia and closer to home in the UK and Ireland. We will also be looking at what is happening in the “New Europe”, countries recently accepted into the EU.

With the recent rapid changes in approaches to software development, Asia has become important when considering establishing international links with members of the profession working in this region. There are exciting changes taking place for India and we

are pleased to have been approached to assist with providing professional support for technical communicators in that part of the world.

Of particular importance to you is understanding the advantages of membership of INTECOM, from a personal and organisational perspective. We will examine ways in which individual technical communicators gain support and assistance. You may be surprised at the resources available to you through INTECOM. We also have resources to share with existing and potential member organisations. As new groups of technical communicators form INTECOM can provide valuable support to assist them set up their own national group. We will look at the international issues that need to be considered by all member organisations, such as standards, education and training, certification, and recognition of the profession as a whole.

What of the future? We will take this opportunity to describe some exciting new ventures being considered and underway, and the continuing activity of current projects.

The activities of INTECOM are largely carried out by volunteers freely giving their time and resources to support the organisation. There are also financial costs to be met by membership fees, and support through member funding of delegates. We feel it is important to understand just what is involved in INTECOM activities and the contribution made by individuals and member organisations.

In the final analysis, INTECOM is the people,

like you, who support us. Some of that support is in making use of the resources we provide, but we also welcome your input. We will conclude with suggestions on what you can do to assist in maintaining INTECOM as a live, active organisation providing benefit to technical communicators around the world. Today we can all be world travellers, in reality or virtually through the Web. As part of an international organisation it is great to have friends and colleagues wherever you decide to go.

Margery Watson is the current President of INTECOM. She is a founding member and President of the Technical Communicators Association of New Zealand and is their representative on INTECOM. She recently represented New Zealand on WG2 (software and systems documentation) at the ISO/IEC SC7/JTC2 Plenary in Brisbane on Software and Systems Engineering. Margery has been a technical communicator since 1986, working mainly in software documentation, and is the Director of Documentation Online Consultancy Services Ltd.

Ron Blicq has been a technical communicator since 1953. He is the Immediate Past President of INTECOM, a Fellow of both the STC and the ATTW, a Senior Life Member of the IEEE, a member of ISTC, and author of several award-winning textbooks. Ron is Senior Consultant with RGI Learning Inc. in Winnipeg, Canada.

Marie-Louise Flacke is the Vice President of INTECOM, representing CRT - Conseil des Rédacteurs Techniques. She is a graduate of American University of Paris (Technical Writing Program). She works in the international

environment and her experience in technical communication includes IT, Telecoms, ASP, Network security, and aeronautics. She is also proficient in localization QA, providing content and testing usability of e-documentation (GUIs, Web pages, and on-line help).

Alan Fisk is the ISTC representative on INTECOM. He became a technical writer in Canada in 1983 through misreading a job advertisement, and has since worked at several companies in both Canada and England. He is also a member of the Board of TCEurope. He is at present working for a company carrying out a technical authoring contract at BT, Martlesham Heath, in Suffolk.

Implementing an information architecture using OASIS DITA

DITA (Darwinian Information Typing Architecture) is an architecture for creating topic-oriented, information-typed content that can be reused and single-sourced in a variety of ways. It is also an architecture for creating new information types and describing new information domains based on existing types and domains. This allows groups to create very specific, targeted document type definitions using a process called specialization, while still sharing common output transforms and design rules developed for more general types and domains. The DITA technical committee at OASIS (Organisation for the Advancement of Structured Information Standards) is currently developing the proposal for the standardisation of the architecture.

Come and hear how the Nokia mobile phone

organisation is using DITA as a common content architecture for different user groups. Demonstrations of the benefits of the architecture and examples of the Nokia implementation will be shown.

Indi Liepa is Senior Information Architect for the Content Solutions organisation of Nokia. She is currently responsible for defining and implementing a modular XML content architecture for information created during the product creation process of a mobile phone - from internal research and development specifications and service information to phone user guides and help.

Indi is building the common content architecture based on the DITA. She is a member of the DITA Technical Committee of OASIS.

For over a decade, Indi has worked as an information designer, instructional designer, author, trainer and project manager in single-sourcing projects for Nokia, Lucent Technologies and 3di Information Solutions.

Conference news

As Conference goes from strength to strength every year, we are always surprised with the amount of interest. This year we have been so overwhelmed with proposals for presentations and they all appear to be very high quality, that we will be running a third stream of presentations along side the usual two.

As well as the new Indexing workshop, there promises to be a wide choice of top quality presentations to choose from.

So don't be late and miss your chance to get an early booking discount. Contact the ISTC event organiser, [Ann Little](#) on 020 8422 4689 to book your place.

Sponsorship and exhibitions

This year as usual we have plenty of opportunities for you to promote your business directly to our delegates at Conference. There are still a few opportunities left to sponsor various aspects of Conference, such as the documentation awards, Conference programme and receptions. We also still have a few spaces left in the exhibition room which is conveniently located near the presentation rooms.

This year there will be longer and more frequent breaks between presentations. This will allow delegates plenty of time to get their refreshments and visit the exhibition stands.

Contact the ISTC event organiser, [Ann Little](#) on 020 8422 4689 for more information or to book a place.

Coming soon...

More summaries/abstracts will be presented over the coming months. Next month will be a full programme of events and more Conference news.



ISO 18019 checklists

By **David Cooper**

Following the discount offer in the [February 2004 Newsletter](#), several members purchased the new standard BS ISO/IEC 18019:2004, *Software and system engineering. Guidelines for the design and preparation of user documentation and application software*. (Henceforth, this is referred to as ISO 18019.)

You can read more about ISO 18019 on our [ISO 18019 page](#).

As a follow-up, a team of ISTC members has reproduced the checklists in ISO 18019, on which ISO has waived copyright. Overall the checklists come to about 19 pages and should be useful to anyone planning a documentation project or reviewing a document.

What's in them?

Although ISO 18019 is a standard for application software, non-IT authors will find there is much in the checklists they can use.

The Annex A Process checklists comprise five lists: objectives, planning, analysis, design, and development and review. Although there are occasional IT-specific items, these lists are pretty much applicable to any documentation project.

The Annex B Design checklists – content, navigation, style, presentation, and overall – are slightly more IT-oriented but non-IT authors could readily adapt them to suit their company's documentation and products.

Do I need to buy the standard?

Many items in the checklists are self-explanatory. For others, it is beneficial to have a copy of ISO 18019 to refer to. There are cross-references in the checklists to sections in ISO 18019 itself, where the underlying rationale of each check can be found.

The team augmented the Annex B lists with cross-references, which are not present in ISO 18019 itself.

Where do I get the checklists?

Members can download the checklists from the ISTC members' area. They are available in Word and RTF formats.

What next?

The checklists as published are work in progress, so please send in your suggestions for their improvement.

And finally...

I'd like to thank the following for their help in producing the checklists.

- **Jane Dards** of [Dards Computing & Communication Ltd](#)
- **Mike Unwala** of [TechScribe](#) (Mike was also involved in the development of ISO 18019 itself.)

And not forgetting our webmaster, **Iain Wright**, for setting up the web pages.



dcs Design & Creative Services

Technical Authors & Trainees

- Electro/Mechanical & Electronics
- Full staff positions & contractors
- Commercial & Military specifications
- Good DTP skills
- SGML/XML an advantage
- Engineering background
- Enthusiastic & self motivated

Technical DTP

- Detailed DTP knowledge
- SGML/XML an advantage
- Framemaker experience
- Enthusiastic & self motivated

To assist in a variety of projects across a wide range of industries.

dcs are a progressive and rapidly expanding company and have been established for over 17 years. We pride ourselves in our relationship with our employees. We currently have vacancies for a number of positions.

Please forward your CV to: Mrs Pat Ward,
dcs, 1 Avenue One, Business Centre East,
Letchworth Garden City, Herts SG6 2HB.
Email: pward@dcs-ltd.co.uk
Web: www.dcs-ltd.co.uk

Translation matters

News from the field of translation and localisation.

Idiom Worldserver SDK

[Idiom](#) has produced new Software Development Kit (SDK) to accompany its family of [WorldServer](#) globalisation solutions. The SDK provides a variety of APIs, and an expanded set of libraries and “how to” examples that make it easier for organisations to extend WorldServer, and integrate it into their existing environments. [News release](#).

LUCAS 3.0

[CPSL Technologies](#) has apparently released the English version of their workflow management system, LUCAS 3.0.

Passolo 5.0

[Pass Engineering](#) has released version 5.0 of its specialised software localisation tool, [Passolo](#). See their [features](#) page to find out what’s new in version 5.0. More information can be found on their [news page](#).

RapidTranslation 4.0

[Rapid Solution Software AG](#) has released [RapidTranslation 4.0](#).

TRADOS roadshow

TRADOS has started a [23-nation roadshow](#) that goes on until December. The next UK date is in October, but you can register now.

SDLreleases

[SDL International](#) has released some new products.

[SDLX 2004](#) is now available in a German version.

[SDLTermBase Online](#) provides secure, web-based access to a centralised terminology repository (TermBase) so that organisations can easily capture, manage, and maintain corporate terminology information. See the [news release](#) for more.

[Trados 2 TMX](#) is a free conversion tool that allows users of rival [TRADOS](#) software to convert their translation memory into a [TMX](#) Certified format. See also the [news release](#).

STAR Transit XV

[STAR Technology Solutions](#) has released [Transit XV](#) Service Pack 11. This includes reference-based spell-checking and dynamic linking. [News release](#).

Unicode CDLR 1.1

The [Unicode Consortium](#) has announced the release of new versions of the [Common Locale Data Repository](#) (CLDR 1.1) and the [Locale Data Markup Language](#) specification (LDML 1.1), providing key building blocks for software to support the world’s languages. This new release contains data for 247 locales, covering 78 languages and 118 countries. There are also 36 draft locales in the process of being developed, covering an additional 17 languages and 7 countries. See their [news release](#) for more.

Turning Over a New Leaf

Cross-language communication is becoming a necessity as well as a challenge for an increasing number of people. For some years now, automatic translation software has proven to be an indispensable help in coping with the increasingly extensive translation tasks at hand. The Heidelberg-based company [Lingenio](#) is one of the leading manufacturers of such programs and has recently launched the new product series “[Translate](#)” in cooperation with language specialist digital publishing AG.

The result is their latest product “Translate”, put on the market in June by the new partner digital publishing. An innovative feature is the improved handling of idioms: for the idiomatic phrase “to turn over a new leaf” e.g., the program – apart from the “literal” translation “ein neues Blatt umdrehen” – also offers the German idiom “einen neuen Anfang machen”, using the extensive integrated dictionary of idioms.

Lime Language Translation Specialists
translations

- 120 plus languages
- Qualified native in-country linguists
- Text/website/software translation
- In-house PC/Mac D.T.P. Services
- Professional Project Management
- Glossaries/Translation Memories
- Document Management Consultancy

Francis or John
01954 -212902
info@limetranslations.com
www.limetranslations.com

Events

As we're coming across many more events than can easily fit into the *Newsletter*, they are now listed in full on the ISTC website at <http://www.istc.org.uk/pages/conferencetoc.php>.

The *Newsletter* will introduce new events, list the ones most relevant to our profession, and, of course, list ISTC-related events, which are in bold.

August

- 2 [Adobe Photography Training Day](#). Rapid Group PLC, London.
- 3 [Adobe Design and Print Training Day](#). Rapid Group PLC, London.
- 5 [Adobe Photography Training Day](#). Rapid Group PLC, Birmingham.
- 6 [Adobe Design and Print Training Day](#). Rapid Group PLC, Birmingham.
- 11-13 [Electronic Resources and Electronic Publishing](#). Tilburg University, Netherlands.
- 16-27 [New Writing Workshops for British Asian Writers](#). The British Library, London.
- 14-30 [International Book Festival](#), Edinburgh.
- 29-31 [The Second International Conference on the Future of the Book](#). Beijing, China.

September

- 5-8 [Digital Resources for the Humanities Conference 2004](#). University of Newcastle upon Tyne.
- 6-10 [HCI2004](#). (Human-Computer Interaction), Leeds.
- 7 TecdocNet information day. Warsaw, Poland. Contact [Lomac](#).
- 12-14 [SfEP Conference](#). Egham, Surrey.
- 12-17 [European Digital Library Conference 2004](#). University of Bath, Bath.
- 14 [Copyright Circle Seminar](#). Glasgow.
- 14 [Beauty in Science and Literature](#). The Royal Society, London.
- 14-16 [ALT-C 2004: Blue skies and pragmatism](#) - learning technologies for the next decade. University of Exeter, Devon.
- 16 [ALPSP AGM and Awards Dinner](#). British Library, London.
- 16 [What's New in XML and Related Standards](#). BSG House, London.
- 20-21 [Scenario planning](#). Novartis Foundation, London.
- 22 [Communication BONANZA 2004](#), Rembrandt Hotel, South Kensington, London.
- 24 TecdocNet information day. Rome, Italy. Contact [Athena Congressi](#).
- 26-30 [LavaCon 2004](#). New Orleans, USA.

October

- 5-7 [Preservation of scientific data conference](#). European Space Agency, Frascati, Italy.
- 8-10 [ISTC Annual Conference 2004: Expanding Your Horizons](#). Oxford.
- 14 Moving to On-line Submission and Peer Review. [ALPSP](#).
- 15-16 [Technical Communication: Changing perspectives of quality](#). STD, Finland.

Technical Authors
Permanent, Contract and
Interim vacancies



www.cliffordsells.co.uk
Information Design & New Media Recruitment

Contact Mark Clifford
call: +44 (0)1234 35522 or
email mark@cliffordsells.co.uk

Training courses

Listings are restricted to scheduled courses that are low cost or are in some way unusual. For training in, say, Adobe products, or for organisations that provide bespoke training, you'll one day be pointed to a new edition of the ISTC's guide, [Technical Communications: A Guide To Courses](#).

Course providers

Plain English Campaign. PO Box 3, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4QP, phone 01663 744409 or take a look at their [website](#).

SfEP (Society for Editors and Proofreaders). Contact details vary from course to course. See the [programme](#) on 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 ISTC endorsement.

General courses

12-13 August: Introduction to Quark XPress 6. [Tidalfire](#), Edinburgh.

19-20 August: *Adobe Indesign: Creating basic publications*. [Tidalfire](#), Edinburgh.

26 August: *Web writing. editing and usability*. [British Association of Communicators in Business](#), Milton Keynes.

21-22 September: *Copywriting workshop*. [popcomm training](#), London.

21-22 September: *Unleash your writing power*. [popcomm training](#), London.

23-24 September: *MAA Anatomy Drawing Course*. [Institute of Medical Illustrators](#), University of Cambridge.

24 September: *Getting into grammar*. [popcomm training](#), London.

28 September: *High impact business writing*. [Emphasis](#), London.

21 October: *Writing for impact*. [Business Link The West](#), Bristol.

Courses from the Plain English Campaign

11 August: *Plain English*. London.

17 August: *Plain English*. Manchester.

9 September: *Plain English*. London.

15 September: *Grammar Check*, Birmingham.

16 September: *Plain English*. Birmingham.

22 September: *Writing for websites in plain English*. London.

Courses from SfEP

11 September: *Production for copy-editors*. SfEP Conference, Egham, Surrey.

15 September: *Negotiating effectively*. SfEP Conference, Egham, Surrey.

22 September: *Proofreading problems*. Booksellers Association, London.

23 September. *Web editing and proof reading*. Booksellers Association, London.

28 September: *On-screen editing 1*. Happy Computers, London.

Indexing courses

28 September: Workshop. *Beginners Workshop*. For those considering a career in indexing or starting the Society's training course. £95. Edinburgh.

21 October: Workshop. *Periodicals Indexing*. For indexers wishing to take up periodicals indexing or refresh their knowledge in this field. Not suitable for beginners. £60. London.

27 October: Workshop. *The User-friendly Index*. Focusing on the index from the user's point of view. Not suitable for beginners. £60. London.

The back page

Why we're needed

Part 11 of an infinite series...

More from **Sophie Watson's** collection of unintentionally humorous or just plain bad writing.

contained_by	The equipment id of the equipment that contains this piece of equipment. —
Annually	Used to indicates whether the specified maintenance function is to be performed on a annually basis. —
Beep	The sounding of the terminal bell. —
ICL	Intentional Computers —
Auto off	Without any signal for 5 minues, the power will auto turn off, in this case, all the value will be kepted. —
invigilator	person responsible for invigilation —
system	something of interest as a whole or as comprised of parts

The Moving Finger

Sticks and Stones

Seen a piece of truly awful writing recently? The [Bulwer-Lytton Fiction Contest](#) are giving us the opportunity to "*locate, isolate, and otherwise identify samples of bad published writing (that is, writing by those who are paid to write)*".

Unsurprisingly, the page is already quite full and makes entertaining reading (as long as you aren't the subject!).

JUST A QUESTION OF STANDARDS

The US Standard railroad gauge (distance between the rails) is 4 feet, 8.5 inches. That's an exceedingly odd number. Why was that gauge used? Because that's the way they built them in England, and the US railroads were built by English expatriates. Why did the English people build them like that?

Because the first rail lines were built by the same people who built the pre-railroad tramways, and that's the gauge they used. Why did "they" use that gauge then?

Because the people who built the tramways used the same jigs and tools that they used for building wagons, which used that wheel spacing. Okay! Why did the wagons use that odd wheel spacing? Well, if they tried to use any other spacing the wagons would break on some of the old, long distance roads, because that's the spacing of the old wheel ruts. So who built these old rutted roads?

The first long distance roads in Europe were built by Imperial Rome for the benefit of their legions. The roads have been used ever since. And the ruts? The initial ruts, which everyone else had to match for fear of destroying their wagons, were first made by Roman war chariots. Since the chariots were made for or by Imperial Rome they were all alike in the matter of wheel spacing.

Thus, we have the answer to the original questions. The United States standard railroad gauge of 4 feet, 8.5 inches derives from the original specification for an Imperial Roman army war chariot. Specs and Bureaucracies live forever.

So, the next time you are handed a specification and wonder what horse's ass came up with it, you may be exactly right. Because the Imperial Roman chariots were made to be just wide enough to accommodate the back-ends of two war horses.

When we see a Space Shuttle sitting on the launch pad, there are two big booster rockets attached to the sides of the main fuel tank. These are the solid rocket boosters, or SRBs. The SRBs are made by Thiokol at a factory in Utah. The engineers who designed the SRBs might have preferred to make them a bit fatter, but the SRBs had to be shipped by train from the factory to the launch site. The railroad line to the factory runs through a tunnel in the mountains. The SRBs had to fit through that tunnel. The tunnel is slightly wider than a railroad track, and the railroad track is about as wide as two horses' behinds.

So a major design feature of what is arguably the world's most advanced transportation system was determined by the width of a horse's backside.