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This month's Newsletter is a bumper issue as we're catching up on a backlog of stories.

Arthur's arrival

Amanda Bates our Letters Editor writes:

Our son, Arthur Meryn Bates, was born at 04:32 a.m. on Saturday 13 March 2004, weighing 8lb 13oz (4.1 kg in new money). He has a shock of dark hair, blue eyes, large hands, and has the promises to be tall, if his length is anything to go by!

ISTC news

London Area Group meets

The next meeting is on 13 May. **Ellis Pratt** will be developing a number of themes:

- What does the future hold for technical authors?
- Can we look forward to a land of wine and roses as the economy takes off, or have the good times gone for ever?
- Are things getting better?
- The loneliness of the technical writer
- Should we worry about "offshoring"?
- Are we in "the new economy", and if we are, what does it mean for us all?
- What should the ISTC do?
- How has Cherryleaf changed?

This meeting is at **Stephen Helms'** house, 55 Chelverton Road, Putney, SW15 1RW. It's near Putney rail station (frequent trains from Waterloo) and East Putney Underground station. (Map links: [Multimap](#) and [Streetmap](#))

There is a collection of £3 each for the food and drink. The meeting starts at 7.00 p.m. If you want to come, please email the Secretary, [Alan Fisk](#) with a copy to [Stephen](#).

If you have no email, phone Alan on 020 8670 4290.

Standards order

Those members who took the opportunity to purchase BS ISO/IEC 18019:2004 at a discounted price should be receiving it in the next few weeks.

Letters please

We'd like to make this *Newsletter* a bit more interactive. If you have any comments on the stories in this *Newsletter* or observations on the profession in general, please write to the [Letters Editor](#).

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

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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.

Oxford Reference Online

Marian Newell writes: As you know, the ISTC has been working with Oxford University Press to introduce an exciting new benefit for members: access to Oxford reference material through the ISTC website. I'm delighted to announce that this service launched on 6 April 2004.

It provides access to a range of content from Oxford Reference Online: Core Collection (ORO), a facility launched last year and until now sold largely into libraries and educational institutions. Content is hosted by OUP, and updated when the source content changes, but delivered into an ISTC-branded template.

ORO is just one example of the way in which OUP is moving on from its traditional role as a publisher of print titles to delivering content through various channels. Premium and Scholarship collections have been launched and more products are in the pipeline.

Louise Rice, Project Director for Oxford Reference Online, says, "We are very pleased to be working with the ISTC and its community of professional communicators. We hope that the content on offer in our online service will benefit the ISTC and its members, and we look forward to developing a close working relationship in coming years."

Gavin Ireland, President of the ISTC, says, 'I see this as an important step toward providing bigger and better services for our members and it's only a starting point. Keep watching for more new benefits over the next year.'

Using the service

To use the service, log into the members' area of the ISTC website at www.istc.org.uk. Once you are logged in, click **Members' area** and then **Oxford Reference Online**. This displays a search page within the ISTC website. Enter your search term in the box and click **Go**. This takes you into the ISTC area of the Oxford website, giving you access to more facilities.

For example, entering 'XML' and clicking **Go** returns five hits, one from the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* and five from *A Dictionary of the Internet*. The last is 'XML Schema'. Clicking this displays an entry containing two terms in blue. These are cross-references to other entries. Clicking these takes you into the associated entries, which include cross-references to more terms. You can follow interesting lines of investigation until you find what you need. You can also highlight words that do not have an embedded link and click **CROSS-REFERENCE** to generate a secondary set of search results. You can move between adjacent entries in a book using the left and right arrow buttons above the entry.

For tips on searching more successfully, click **HELP** on the green bar near the top of the screen. To return to the ISTC website from the Oxford page, click **HOME**.

Please be sure to comply with Oxford's legal requirements when using the service. To view these, click **Privacy Policy and Legal Notices** at the bottom of the screen.

If you have any difficulty in logging in or using the service, please contact [Chris Pearson](mailto:Chris.Pearson@istc.org.uk).

Titles available

The agreement between the ISTC and OUP includes 30 titles, focused on language, science, and technology. These are:

- The Concise Oxford Dictionary
- The Oxford Paperback Thesaurus
- The Oxford Dictionary of Abbreviations
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology
- The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar
- Concise Oxford Companion to The English Language
- A New Dictionary of Eponyms
- The Oxford Essential Dictionary of Foreign Terms in English
- The Oxford Dictionary of Idioms
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Linguistics
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs
- Pocket Fowler's Modern English Usage
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations
- World Encyclopedia
- A Dictionary of Computing
- A Dictionary of the Internet
- A Dictionary of Astronomy
- A Dictionary of Biology
- A Dictionary of Chemistry
- A Dictionary of Earth Sciences
- A Dictionary of Ecology
- The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Mathematics
- Concise Medical Dictionary
- A Dictionary of Physics
- A Dictionary of Plant Sciences
- A Dictionary of Psychology
- A Dictionary of Statistics
- A Dictionary of Zoology
- A Dictionary of Accounting
- A Dictionary of Finance and Banking

We can adjust the list annually to provide the most useful titles. Contact the [Journal Editor](mailto:Journal.Editor@istc.org.uk).

Letters

BSI Standards and EC Directives

I can sympathise with **Eric Sutherland's** views on this complex subject [see Letters, [March Newsletter](#)]. With experience of "using" CE Marking directives, the following brief comments may be useful.

Directives are legal documents, intended for implementation into national legislation. A Directive will not contain practical information on how to comply with its requirements. A Directive must meet the "requirements" of every member state – soon to be 25. With national and industry bodies from each member state having inputs to the process, there **are** an enormous number of cooks to spoil the broth!

With CE Marking Directives, a product must meet the "essential requirements" detailed in the Directive. To show a product meets the essential requirements of a Directive, perhaps the easiest (but not the only) route is to show that the product conforms with a European standard providing "presumption of conformity" to that Directive. The EU publishes these standards in the "Official Journal". The Directive may also detail other requirements, such as implementing a Quality Management System. Finally, more than one Directive may apply to a product – a mains-powered PC must comply with two Directives before it can carry the CE Marking.

CE Marking Directives cover safety of a product and its user. As technology progresses, the standards will inevitably get more complex. A minimalist approach is very unlikely.

CE Marking Directives do have a structure and once it is appreciated, a lot of "excess" can be removed to come up with the essential requirements that a product and its manufacturer must meet before applying the CE Marking.

CE Marking Directives have changed enormously over the last 30 years. The Low Voltage directive (LVD) was first published in 1973; it became mandatory in the UK in 1997. The LVD is quite different from more recent CE Marking directives, but no less complex. The LVD is now undergoing a review, with (probably) years before the review is completed - and then a few more years before it is mandatory!

Comments on draft Directives are possible. During their draft stages, comments on the WEEE and RoHS environmental Directives could be made via the DTI website (for UK residents). The UK government cannot make independent changes to a draft Directive, no matter how valid. Changes to a draft Directive are proposed to, and must be agreed by, every member state.

I hope this throws some light on a complex area.

Stuart Miller

In defence of BSI

In response to Eric Sutherland's letter in the March *Newsletter*, I would like to point out that, if it is BS ISO/IEC 18019 he is talking about, this is not a "pure" British Standard produced by BSI, our own national standards body, but a British implementation of an international standard produced by ISO, which BSI is obliged to implement without alteration. "Pure" British Standards – that is, those of national origin – are drafted to much higher standards, by committees made up of interested trade bodies and assisted by trained technical editors.

I entirely agree with Eric that EC Directives and indeed international standards tend to be somewhat lacking in quality; but I don't like to see BSI tarred with the same brush.

Regards,

Sophie Watson

—
If you have any comments on issues raised in the *Newsletter* or about technical communication in general, please send you emails to [letters AT istc.org.uk](mailto:letters@istc.org.uk).

Like most email addresses in the *Newsletter*, clicking on the link above produces an address with a **bonus amphibian**, which you should remove before sending the email.

ISTC in Europe

ISTC–tekcom meeting

Alan Fisk writes: The latest in the regular meetings between the German technical communication society [tekcom](#) and the ISTC took place in London on 15 March.

The ISTC was represented by **Gavin Ireland** and **Alan Fisk**, and tekcom by its President, **Claus Noack**, and its Managing Director, **Michael Fritz**.

Each society gave a report on its activities. The ISTC representatives gave our latest news, and tekcom told us that their new certification programme has just produced its first three graduates.

Other issues of common interest that were discussed included help to new societies in other European countries.

TCeurope AGM

[TCeurope](#), the European umbrella organisation for technical communicators, held its AGM in Brussels on 28 March.

New President

TCeurope's new President is [Dr. Hanna Risku](#). Finnish-born Hanna is the Head of the [Centre for Knowledge and Information Management](#) at [Donau-Universität Krems](#) (Danube University [Krems](#)) in Austria. She is also active in the Austrian branch of tekcom.

Member organisations

[STD](#) from Finland reported a good year, gaining more members and activists. They will be building links with translation organisations.

The chief concern of [CRT](#) (France) was that one of the few French organisations providing technical writing education will be withdrawing from the field. CRT is hoping to find a replacement.

[STIC](#) (Netherlands) is gaining members and is developing a programme of activities for the year, including a week of 10 activities planned for November.

Germany's [tekcom](#) held a highly successful conference in the Autumn, which included an English-language stream branded as the European Information Development Conference. They have also developed a certification programme, which has had its first graduates. Benchmarking groups in five industrial fields are another innovation. Tekcom will be relaunching its website so that it becomes comprehensive in both German and English.

New members

Ottavio Ricci of [COM&TEC](#), the fledgling Italian organisation, said the job profile of a technical communicator is little known in the country. COM&TEC have been holding information days to promote the profession.

If your Italian is good, read a bit more about COM&TEC [here](#).

Åke Rullgård formally introduced Sweden's [FTI](#), which is celebrating its 40th anniversary. FTI has a strong membership base but, like all organisations, needs more volunteers.

Both FTI and COM&TEC have affiliated to TCeurope. TCeurope is actively looking to help new organisations that are being set up in other European countries.

Activities

The SecureDoc project will finish in May. The *Guidelines* have been published in 11 languages, including Czech, Hungarian, and Polish.

ISTC members will have free access to the English version of the *Guidelines* in the members' area of the website. Next month's *Newsletter* will have more information on this project.

The TecDocNet project will continue until April 2005. (See "Events" on page 14 for some forthcoming TecDocNet events and the [TCeurope page](#) for a full list.)

The AGM discussed possible future EU projects under the Leonardo da Vinci programme and another scheme. It is unlikely that any such projects would start in earnest before November 2005.

TCeurope hopes to sponsor Forum 2007, which will be organised by STIC and held in Amsterdam.

See also the TCeurope website for a [PDF summary](#) of parts of the AGM.

Document Design Conference

Noel Reid writes: The small city of Tilburg in the South-West Netherlands saw a wave of researchers and practitioners converge on its University in January this year, to present papers to the [Document Design Conference](#).

The conference focused on “organizational communication from the cognitive-psychological, institutional and intercultural perspective”.

There were in the region of 70 papers presented, with attendees coming from as far away as Hong Kong and North America.

While topics covered at the Document Design Conference will be revealed and explored to a greater degree in the Summer and Autumn editions of *Communicator*, I have selected several papers that may be of interest to readers of this *Newsletter*. Each of the researchers has given their permission for abstracts/summaries of their papers to be reprinted here.

A Focused View On Procedures

[Hans van der Meij](#), Faculty of Educational Design, Management and Media, University of Twente, Netherlands

Background

As they form the heart of most types of user support, one should expect to find a good deal

of theory and empirical research on procedures. Yet this is not the case. This research departs from the theoretical notions about systems theory and rhetoric proposed by Farkas (1999) to build a Componential model on procedures. The model supports the analysis and (re)design of procedures.

Aim

The study addresses the following research questions:

- (1) What are procedures made of?
- (2) What advice in the form of design guidelines, if any, can be given for the design of the constituent components of procedures?
- (3) How well do practices agree with these guidelines?

Method

The Componential model distinguishes four key parts in procedures: goals, prerequisite states, unwanted states (warnings and problem-solving information), and actions and reactions. For each component, theoretical notions are advanced along with research finding from empirical research. These findings are then summarised as design guidelines (see Van der Meij *et al*, 2003). 104 procedures in software and hardware manuals were analysed to see how well these fitted the guidelines.

Results

The inventory study of existing practices yielded numerous instances in which theory

and practice did not converge. For example, designers often did not signal prerequisites for procedures and thereby foiled modularity.

Likewise, actions and reactions of the system frequently were presented together rather than as two clearly distinguishable entities that facilitate scanning. Just as in earlier research, most designs failed to offer support for handling mistakes.

Conclusion

The Componential model offers a manageable and expandable framework for document design by distinguishing four key parts in procedures.

The findings for software and hardware manuals attest to its qualities as a fruitful approach for analysing and (re)designing procedures. In addition, it affords effective quick fixes by inexperienced designers. Recent work also shows that the framework works well for online help systems.

Farkas, David. K. (1999). The logical and rhetorical construction of procedural discourse. *Technical Communication*, 46(1), 42-54.

Van der Meij, H., Blijleven, P. & Jansen, L. (2003). What makes up a procedure? In M.J. Albers & B. Mazur (Eds.), *Content & Complexity. Information design in software development and documentation* (pp. 129-186). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Van der Meij, H., & Gellevis, M.R.M. (2004). The four components of procedures. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*, 47(1), 5-14.

Coherence in persuasive and informative texts: The effect of linguistic marking on text comprehension and evaluation

[Judith Kamalski](#), Utrecht Institute of Linguistics, Utrecht University.

Coherence is what makes a whole text of a string of sentences. People read the individual sentences in a text but form in their heads a *coherent* representation of its meaning.

Readers link the segments of the text using markers such as *because* and *therefore*. This research focused on the effects these markers can have on readers. Does it make them understand the text better? Are they more convinced by what the writer has to say?

Results showed that effects are different for expert readers than for novice readers, because beginning readers often lack the necessary knowledge to connect up the sentences and bring about comprehension.

Experts understand the text better if markers aren't present, making them work harder and having a positive effect on their understanding.

Both the experts and novices disliked the version of text without markers, because it demands more cognitive effort and they feel it's more chaotic and 'unstructured'.

Surprisingly, the markers like *because* influenced the persuasive power of the informative texts: novices were convinced by

the marked version, experts by the unmarked version. No effects were found in the persuasive texts.

This means that even texts that are supposed to be neutral and objective, influence people's meanings, but almost without their awareness. When texts are overly persuasive, trying to 'manipulate', people's resistance grows. Markers like *because* also signal argumentation, which adds to this resistance. When trying to persuade the reader, it seems a good idea to hide this from them and disguise the text into a more informative one!

Information about medicines for patients

Karel van der Waarde, University of Delft, Netherlands

We spend a lot of money on medicine. Medicine will become more expensive, more types of medicine are available, we use more medicine per person, and we live longer. In fact, there are 2.9 billion prescriptions issued every year throughout Europe with a requirement for 180,000 different leaflets to support the thousands of different medicines, and in the 11 different languages.

On a more serious note, research shows that about 50% of medicine is not used optimally: the medicines are used incorrectly or the full course of medicine is not followed, indeed, not at all in some cases.

On the basis that clear and appropriate information is beneficial, I asked 300 patients about the medicines they took.

Brief overview of the study

People who are unwell usually separate the process of seeking help into five consecutive steps: deciding that a visit to a doctor is necessary, the consultation, the pharmacy, taking medicines at home, and a second health decision. In each of these steps, the correct information is essential.

In the presentation in Tilburg, I focused on the fourth step: taking medicines at home. I showed which information patients currently receive.

The interviews showed that there are at least eleven different actions that patients need to undertake when a medicine needs to be used successfully. Information should support all of these actions.

For example, a patient wants to find an inhaler for asthma in a medicine cupboard. The box only states "salbutamol 100", but this does not help patients to find their 'inhaler'. Or, a patient needs to make a risk-benefit decision. Again, this is made very difficult because the benefits ('What this medicine does') are mentioned separately from the risks ('What are the side-effects?') in the package leaflet.

Conclusions

- 1) Information for patients is not perceived as a single experience.
- 2) Testing results reveal not only points that need to be improved, but also fundamental flaws in whole concepts.

Congratulations to Masters' graduates

After much hard work, a fresh crop of graduates of Sheffield Hallam University's [MA in Technical Communication](#) received their awards at a grand ceremony in Sheffield City Hall at the end of last year.

All graduates of the three-year Masters complete a dissertation on a relevant topic and we have included the abstracts from two of them for your interest.

Controlled languages: an alternative to translation?

Kathryn O'Donoghue

The idea that controlled languages could provide an alternative to traditional approaches to international documentation has been discussed in several technical journals and papers.

In theory, controlled languages can offer a solution to the common problems associated with translation but does this approach work in practice?

This dissertation looks at the options currently available to companies and organisations who provide product documentation to a non-English-speaking audience.

The investigation took the form of a survey that targeted technical communicators in different industries.

The aim was to discover how different companies provide documentation to an international audience, and investigate whether controlled languages could be an alternative.

It appears that controlled languages are rarely used: international documentation is either translated, or left in the original language.

Yet controlled languages was perceived as a possible alternative, particularly in contexts where technical communicators must use a controlled terminology in their documents.

Using Minimalism for a complex task

Helen Clarke

This study examines the use of minimalist principles to design a sample chapter for a proposed manual for novices in Conspectus-based collection assessment.

The sample chapter was structured around a software-based task that would allow immediate action and co-ordinate learning in the larger task domain.

Extended narrative examples were included as a means of envisioning action and the consequences of different choices.

However, while advanced learning was supported through the software task, examples did not appear to have an effect on subjects' mental models.

The results of user testing are discussed in light of three issues: support for novices, focus on task, and support for advanced learning.

Awards

Note that the name of the course changed from "Authorship" to "Communication" in 2001.

MA Technical Authorship

Damien Braniff, Helen Clarke (distinction), Kathryn O'Donoghue, and Hilary Stephenson.

Post-graduate Diploma in Technical Authorship

Neil Clifford, Nigel Doughton, Lesley Head, Ian Hubble, Keith Posner, and David Rowley.

Post-graduate Certificate in Technical Authorship

Patrick Killeen

Post-graduate Certificate in Technical Communication

Abdullah Al-Sauty, Carol Archbold, Colin Birkinshaw, Stuart Elliott, Shirley Hall, and Alison Haxton.

—
The course's next intake is in September.

Book review

Developing Quality Technical Information: A Handbook for Writers and Editors

By Gretchen Hargis *et al*

Prentice Hall

\$39.99 USD

ISBN 0-13-147749-8

432pp

This book is an updated and extended version of the successful book *Producing Quality Technical Information*, which was written by a panel of experienced editors from IBM's Silicon Valley laboratory.

Like its predecessor, the new edition is about writing technical information that is easy to use, easy to understand, and easy to find. Consequently, the first three parts of the book each contain chapters dealing with one of nine quality characteristics:

- Task orientation, accuracy, completeness (easy to use)
- Clarity, concreteness, style (easy to understand)
- Organisation, retrievability, visual effectiveness (easy to find)

The book promotes a topic-based approach to documentation in which:

- Task topics provide the instructions and rationale for performing a task.
- Concept tasks provide the information that users need to perform the task.

- Reference topics provide supporting information for the task.

However, most of the book is applicable to other types of documentation structure, and there is guidance on restructuring legacy information to topic-based documentation.

The quality characteristics

Each of the chapters on quality characteristics begins with an overview that is followed by a set of guidelines for achieving the characteristic. At the end of each chapter is a checklist of items to look for to ensure compliance with the guidelines in the chapter.

The "Task orientation" chapter discusses how to write information in terms of the tasks that a user must perform rather than in terms of product functions. Guidelines include:

- understanding your reading audience and presenting information from the user's perspective
- dividing task information into appropriate tasks and subtasks
- providing clear, step-by-step instructions

The "Accuracy" chapter discusses how to write information that is as far as possible free of technical errors and that is both current and consistent. Guidelines include:

- avoiding writing information that will become outdated
- exploiting single-sourcing and reuse as means of maintaining consistent information

- using automated tools for checking accuracy

Quite rightly, the chapter emphasises the importance of reviews, and there is sound advice about writing information only when you understand it.

The "Completeness" chapter discusses how to provide just the correct amount of detail that users need. Guidelines include:

- compiling the list of topics that users need to perform their tasks
- including the right amount of detail in topics
- using patterns – an organisational device that ensures consistency and that allows you to check for proper coverage
- recognising when repeating information will benefit users

The "Clarity" chapter discusses how to avoid ambiguity or obscurity in your writing and how to present information in such a way that users understand it the first time. Guidelines include:

- avoiding ambiguity, for example, by avoiding words that might confuse translators (for example, *once* and *since*)
- presenting similar information in a similar way, for example, by using consistent notation for programming language syntax, or by using parallelism in lists
- handling technical terms – deciding when to use terms, and using terms consistently

The “Concreteness” chapter discusses how to choose appropriate examples and scenarios to illustrate tasks and to provide overviews. Guidelines include:

- choosing examples that are appropriate for the audience and subject
- setting the proper context for examples and scenarios
- relating unfamiliar information to familiar information by using similes and analogies

The “Style” chapter discusses how to ensure a stylistic consistency that will ultimately help users to understand information. Guidelines include:

- using correct grammar and consistent spelling
- using appropriate tone, voice, and mood
- following template designs and using boilerplate text
- creating and following style guidelines

Some of the grammar suggestions will not please everyone; for example, the splitting of infinitives and the ending of sentences with prepositions.

The “Organization” chapter discusses how to arrange information coherently so that it makes sense to the user. Guidelines include:

- organising information into discrete topics by type
- organising topics for quick retrieval

- separating contextual information from other types of information
- organising information consistently

The “Retrievability” chapter discusses how to present information in a way that enables users to find specific items quickly and easily. Guidelines include:

- providing a complete and consistent index
- using an appropriate level of detail in the table of contents
- providing helpful entry points by using suitable headings and by breaking up text appropriately
- using hyperlinks appropriately and making linked-to information easy to find in the target topic

The “Visual effectiveness” chapter discusses how to improve the attractiveness and enhance the meaning of information through the use of layout, colour, illustrations, typography, and icons. Guidelines include:

- using graphics that are meaningful and appropriate and that complement text
- using visual elements for emphasis
- using visual elements logically and consistently, while ensuring that their number and placement is balanced
- using visual cues to help users find what they need
- using colour and shading discreetly and appropriately

- ensuring that information is accessible

The fourth part of the book is titled “Putting it all together” and consists of chapters about the interplay of the quality characteristics, and how to apply the characteristics to different types of information. There is also material about testing and reviewing documentation.

The fifth part of the book contains a number of checklists that allow you to assess the quality of your technical documentation according to the quality characteristics covered in the book.

The glossary is adequate but it would benefit from the inclusion of definitions for some of the terms used in the book, for example, *dangling modifier*, *referent*, and *topic-based information*.

Finally, there is a good bibliography and an index that does indeed follow the advice on indexing presented in the book.

In summary, this is a very useful book that is well written and structured. A particularly good feature is the use throughout of “before and after” examples and screen shots to drive home the points. *Developing Quality Technical Information* should readily find a place in the libraries of writers, editors, designers, and reviewers of technical information.

-

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.

Developing international English guidelines

Ron Blicq, MISTC, FSTC introduces the *Guidelines for Writing English-Language Technical Documentation for an International Audience*.

Summary

In 2000, The International Council for Technical Communication (INTECOM) embarked on a special project to identify English-language words and expressions that are used differently in various countries, and present them to INTECOM member societies as a set of *Guidelines* for technical writers who have to prepare English-language technical documentation that will have worldwide use. The results were published in 2003 and are now available on the Web. This article summarises the Project Group's efforts.

Background

At the Annual General Meeting of INTECOM in Melbourne, Australia, November 1999, the delegates from the member societies recognised there is a need to help technical writers in non-English-speaking countries who have to write English-language technical documentation, and have to choose between British and US usage and spelling styles.

If they are writing for an audience solely 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. However, if they are writing a single set of documentation for use in all countries, then the choice is difficult.

From June 1999 to June 2000, 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 INTECOM Annual General Meeting held in London in June 2000, the delegates decided that INTECOM should set up a Study Group to determine preferences, identify words and expressions that pose problems, research which is the most suitable writing style to adopt, and make recommendations.

The study was to examine differences in spelling, usage, and punctuation; it also was to consider cultural differences that influence how one should write.

Developing the *Guidelines*

I was appointed co-ordinator of the Study Group, with 12 members in countries such as Australia, South Africa, Canada, the UK, the USA, France, the Netherlands, and Sweden.

In the UK, ISTC's *Communicator* editor **Marian Newell** led a team assembling spelling variants from the British point of view, and worked with **Coralyn McGregor** in the US who led the team assembling American spelling variants.

Sally Gross, also in the UK, worked with **Alain Roy** in France to determine cultural differences and identify variants in usage, such as 'lift' versus 'elevator' and the name of the first level of a building above the floor level (in Britain it's called the first floor and in the US and Canada it's called the second floor).

The Study Group set July 1, 2003 as the target date for releasing the *Guidelines*. The venue was to be the Forum 2003 conference in Milan, Italy. They scheduled two years to identify language variances worldwide, share them with other team members, determine even further local variants, and then discuss which should be the preferred usage for international English-language technical documentation. (If two years seems a long time, remember that every person contributing to the project was doing it on a voluntary basis.) The final six months were for assembling the *Guidelines* into a form that would be easily accessible to users.

As the Project Group's studies progressed, it became clear that, because of the widespread preferences around the world, it was going to be extremely difficult to establish definitive guidelines that would be acceptable to everyone. Consequently, the Group members decided to prepare guidelines for three different situations:

1. For English-language documentation that would be read primarily in countries where British-based spelling, terminology and usage are currently prevalent or were part of the country's history.

These would be principally the UK, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Canada*, many Caribbean countries, India, Pakistan, the Scandinavian countries, and some European countries. For them, we would encourage using British-based spelling and usage.

2. For English-language documentation that would be read primarily in countries where US-based spelling, terminology and usage are prevalent.

These would be principally North and South America, Canada*, the Philippines, and many Asian countries such as Japan, China, and North and South Korea. For them, we would encourage using US-based spelling and usage.

*Canada appears in both groups because it is a special case. Historically, Canada has been closer to British (and French) spelling and usage but, because of its proximity to the US and the influence of US media, opinion is divided within Canada as to which is the preferred usage. Either is acceptable.

3. For English-language documentation that would be read by users in a much broader range of countries, with some accustomed to British usage and some accustomed to US usage.

For such documentation we would identify what the Project Group felt, based on their research, would be the preferred usage.

This last resulted in intense discussion! Eventually the Project Group decided on a compromise, which is described as follows in the Introduction to the published document.

"The Project Group mostly suggests using US spelling and usage for English-language documentation that will have worldwide use. Our rationale was that people who are accustomed to US spelling practices find British spelling to be strange or quaint, or may even think the writer cannot spell correctly. On the other hand, most people who use British spelling and usage have also been exposed to US spelling and usage, so that even though they do not use it themselves (as, for example, in Great Britain), they recognize it and more readily adapt to it."

However, there were exceptions. For example, we decided that *litre* and *metre* should be spelled with the British/French '-re' ending, which is the spelling in the *Système International d'Unités (SI)* defined in 1960 by the 11th Conférence Générale des Poids et Mesures (the international authority on metrication).

The Study Group was aware that this might be anathema to Americans, but decided that, when the metric system eventually becomes more widely used in the US, the spelling would not seem strange.

Publishing the *Guidelines*

The Study Group decided to publish its findings dictionary-style, to provide easy reference by technical writers in all countries. We were particularly aware that the *Guidelines* were for two sets of users:

- Technical writers for whom English is their first language, who have ready access to a broad range of English-language dictionaries and can make decisions based on their experience; and
- Users in countries who are working in English as a second language, who would have much less access to English-language dictionaries and would be seeking guidance and clear-cut decisions.

Because people in Canada (where I live) are particularly aware of the variances between British and US versions of the English language, and are continually having to make spelling and word-choice decisions, we decided that I should assemble the final *Guidelines* because I had access to many sources.

The nearly 1500 entries were typed in two columns using Microsoft Word (I had to be vigilant, because the software frequently changed the spelling without my noticing that it had happened!), and 500 copies were printed for the Forum 2003 conference. Since then, the *Guidelines* have been placed as .PDF files on the INTECOM web site (www.intecom.org), where they are available for anyone to download.

Presenting the *Guidelines*

We used the following approach to present our information.

- Where words have different US and British spellings, or are understood to have different meanings, all three versions are shown with the letters US, Br, and Intl (for International) beside them. For example:

harbor (US); **harbour** (Br); **harbor** (Intl)

Consequently, users can quickly identify the spelling or usage which will be appropriate for the document they are writing.

- Where a word or expression can be spelled in alternative ways, but we recommend it should be spelled the same way in all documentation, the word is shown as a single entry:

antagonize

- If additional comments apply, such as how the word is expressed as a plural (pl), it appears like this:

addendum pl: **addenda**

If there is a choice of plurals, we recommend (rec) which we consider is preferable:

memorandum pl: **memorandums** (rec) or **memoranda**

- If a word or expression has different meanings in the UK and US, the *Guidelines* draw attention to it and recommend that it not be used. For example:

presently def: in the US *presently* means immediately; in the UK it means after a while, when it's convenient; avoid using; replace with **immediately** or **shortly**

- If a word has an unusual application in a specific country, attention is drawn to it:

robot def: a mechanical or electronic mechanism that performs human tasks; in South Africa, a traffic light also is called a *robot*, so the term may need to be defined in international documentation

- If a word can offer a problem to both native-born English-language writers and those who write English as their second language, it is defined:

personal/personnel *personal* means concerning one person; *personnel* refers to all the members of a group, often employees all in one organization

At the end of the *Guidelines* are nine pages that provide a rationale for some of the decisions, and additional information likely to be useful to technical writers regardless of where they live. The topic headings are:

- Diphthongs: Should You Insert Them?
- Metre and Litre: How Should You Spell Them?
- Using Shorter Words
- Brackets and Parentheses: Which Are Which?
- Using Punctuation Correctly
- Abbreviating Technical and Nontechnical Terms
- Writing Numbers in Narrative
- Dates and Times
- Shall, Will, Should: When to Use Them

Initial results from the Forum 2003 release

Three of the original Project Group members presented the *Guidelines* during a special Idea Market presentation at Forum 2003. They were **Johan Nasstrom** (Sweden); **Bruce Maylath** (USA); and **Ron Blicq** (Canada). We were particularly pleased that the session was well attended, especially since it was the last session. Some of the observations are described next.

1. Attendees felt the *Guidelines* were of considerable value, and had a practical application they could use. They also said they needed more time to study the decisions we had made for the 'International' listings, before starting to apply them.
2. We should encourage INTECOM's constituent members (STC, tekcom, ISTC, etc), other organisations (IEEE, ATTW, etc.), and industry leaders (for example, Microsoft, with its manuals of style built into its software programs) to adopt the *Guidelines*.
3. In future editions, the *Guidelines* should include more words used with different meanings in different territories (such as American 'escalator' vs. British 'moving stairs'). Furthermore, additional guidelines should be inserted for native English-speaking territories beyond the UK and US (for example, Australia, Canada, India, Ireland, New Zealand, and South Africa).
4. In future editions, when new words and expressions are coined, INTECOM should be identifying them and inserting them into the *Guidelines* as quickly as possible.
5. The *Guidelines* need to be marketed among technical communicators at conferences, in publications, and perhaps in direct mailings.

The next step

The *Guidelines* are intended to be a living document; that is, they will be updated as time progresses to keep abreast with changes in how the English language is used. This means I will need people from different societies, countries and cultures to send me news of words and expressions they have encountered that need to be included. I encourage ISTC members, particularly, to be proactive in bringing information to my attention. Write to [ronblicq AT cs DOT com](mailto:ronblicq@cs DOT com).

Editor's note: Some words in Ron's article were amended to conform to the British spellings in the ISTC's house style rather than those advocated in the *Guidelines*.

Sheffield meeting

Technical communicators in and around Yorkshire are invited to an informal meeting on Saturday 24 April. The meeting starts at 1.30pm and will continue until around 5.00pm.

Everyone is welcome.

Programme

The driving force behind the meeting is **Nancy Halverson**, "a transplant from Waterloo, Ontario (just west of Toronto)".

The programme for the afternoon aims to be less formal than a seminar day, and more formal than a simple networking meeting.

Nancy will be giving a bit of a briefing on the benefits to the profession that can be gained by meeting together occasionally – based on her experience in her native Canada.

Topics will include:

- usability – **Andrew Swartz**
- expanding markets – **Mike Unwalla**
- education – **Florence Dujardin**

Venue

People will meet at Sheffield Hallam University (Harmer building, Room 2216). The building is a short walk from the railway and bus stations, and has good parking. See [map](#).

If you arrive early enough for some lunch, Nancy invites you to meet her at the café in the Millennium Gallery opposite the University. She'll be at the cafe from noon until 1.15pm.

Contact [Nancy Halverson](#) for more information.

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.

April

- 22–23 [tekom Spring Conference](#). Aachen, Germany. (Held entirely in German)
- 22–23 [FUGS](#) (FrameMaker User Group Sweden) FrameMaker Användarkonferens. Södertälje.
- 28–30 [AODC](#) (Australasian Online Documentation and Content Conference) 2004. Manly, near Sydney, New South Wales.
- 29 [La documentación técnica en el mercado europeo](#). Barcelona

May

- TBA First week? TecDoc-Net Information Day. Paris. Contact [Françoise Jouan](#).
- 9–12 [Navigating the Future of Technical Communication](#). STC 51st Annual Conference. Baltimore. USA
- 10 [SfEP One-day Conference](#). The essential editor: bridging the in-house/freelance divide. London.
- 13 [ISTC London Area Group](#). See page 1 for details.**
- 13 TecDoc-Net Information Day. Nijmegen. Netherlands. Contact [Leo Adank](#).
- 17–24 [WWW2004](#). Thirteenth Annual World Wide Web Conference. New York.
- 18 TecDoc-Net Information Day. Warsaw. Contact [Lomac](#).
- 26–27 [Adobe Live](#) event. London. See synopsis on right.

TecDoc-Net events

The Europe-wide TecDoc-Net project is running many events over the next year. For a full listing, see the project's events page: <http://www.tceurope.org/tecdocnet/events.htm>.

Adobe Live

Cheerily and tastelessly promoted with slogans such as "Adobe Live or P45?" and "Expert user or total loser?" this event takes place at Olympia on Wednesday 26 to Thursday 27 May. It includes 90- and 60-minute sessions about Adobe products, and an exhibition. Best of all, it's free. For more information, see <http://www.adobe.co.uk/live/>. You can register to receive regular updates of event details and participants.

SfEP Annual Conference

The SfEP (Society for Editors and Proofreaders) has released details of its [annual conference](#) *A Meeting of Minds*. It's being held at the [Royal Holloway College](#), Egham, Surrey on 12–14 September. They have already published a provisional [programme](#).

It's worth having a look at their site soon because they offer good rates for early bookers. The standard price for an SfEP member is £299 but you can get £50 off by booking before 30 April. They also offer a further £50 off for first-time delegates. For non-members, the standard price is £395, so it's cheaper to join the SfEP for £67.50 + £25 joining fee and get the members' rate.

Localization World Bonn

The [Localization World Bonn](#) conference aims to help professionals learn about new tools, methods and business practices in the areas of localisation and internationalisation.

It runs from 29 June to 1 July and promises to be "strong on content and short on sales pitches". The cost is €650 + VAT and the cost of your accommodation.

Training news

Cherryleaf courses

Cherryleaf has announced its training schedule for the year. Go to its [Training Courses](#) page and explore from there.

Courses coming fairly soon include:

- [Designing and Writing for the Screen](#) (20 April)
- [Effective Report and Proposal Writing Skills](#) (12 May)
- [Essential Copywriting Skills](#) (11 May)

Microtype courses

The [Microtype](#) courses in London described in the [February Newsletter](#) were scheduled for May but will now take place in August.

Interactive multimedia

[Bath School of Art and Design](#) is offering an [MA Interactive Multimedia](#) course.

Modules include web design, screen design, interactive design, cultural theory, usability, and video for multimedia

Translation matters

Translation tools

A brief survey of what's new.

Alchemy

Irish firm [Alchemy Software Development](#) has released [Catalyst](#) 5.01, which is a free enhancement pack to 5.0. See the [news release](#) for more.

The firm is also bundling an evaluation edition of workflow tool [SAM ezBatch](#) 1.0 with Catalyst. See another [news release](#) for more.

Language Weaver

[Language Weaver](#) now offers new translation modules for [Simplified Chinese](#) and [Arabic](#).

Machinese

[Connexor](#) has released [Machinese Syntax for German](#).

Mutilizer 6.0

[Mutilizer](#) has released [Mutilizer 6.0](#). See the [news release](#) for more.

PROMT

[PROMT](#) has released its @prompt 2004 translation software family. See the [news release](#) for more. It has also released [@prompt VER-Dict](#), an English–German electronic dictionary for PalmOS computers.

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Common Sense

[Common Sense Advisory](#) has produced a [Translation Budget Calculator](#), which aims to give your organisation a broad idea of how much it should be spending on translation.

Maori dictionary

New Zealand educational publisher [Learning Media ~ Te Pou Taki Kōrero](#) hosts the [Ngata Maori–English Dictionary](#). Initially compiled in his spare time by Hori M. Ngata and later backed by the NZ Department of Education, the dictionary aims to illustrate the usage of Maori rather than simply supplying definitions or equivalents. (Note that the links to the other parts of the dictionary are at the foot of each page and you often have to scroll down to see them.)

NEMLAR

[NEMLAR](#) (Network for Euro-Mediterranean LAnguage Resources) aims to create a network to specify and support the development of language resources for Arabic and other local languages.

The NEMLAR site has links to events, publications, and scientific papers. You can keep up-to-date with its work by subscribing to its quarterly newsletter.

NEMLAR will be holding a Conference on [Arabic Language Resources and Tools](#) on 22–23 September in Cairo.

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Software news

An end to Frame on the Mac

On 21 April 2004, Adobe will discontinue Adobe FrameMaker software for the Apple Macintosh operating system. Adobe FrameMaker 7.1 will continue to be available on Windows and Sun Solaris platforms. Complimentary and fee-based technical support for FrameMaker for Macintosh will be available for approximately one year running until 21 April 2005.

For full information, see Adobe's posting [Adobe FrameMaker End-of-Life for Macintosh Platform](#). (Should that direct link not work, go to Adobe's [User to User Forums](#) page, choose the FrameMaker forum, and log in as a guest.)

Illustration software

AcroXchange

[Tailor Made Software](#) has released [AcroXchange](#), which converts PDF and Illustrator (AI V9+) files into in JPEG, TIFF, PNG and other popular raster formats. See the [news release](#) for more.

TurboCAD Version 10

IMSI has released [TurboCAD Version 10](#), which seems to have a wide range of new features, described in its [news release](#).

Corel DESIGNER Professional SG

Corel has integrated [Spatial](#)'s 3D technology into the recently released [Corel DESIGNER Professional SG](#). Its new technical illustration tool includes Spatial's 3D ACIS Modeler, 3D Precise Hidden Line and 3D InterOp translators, as well as HOOPS/3D Application Framework.

See the [Corel](#) and [Spatial](#) news releases for more.

Mozilla releases

Mozilla have released three new open-source products that are available for download: see the [news release](#) for details. Versions numbered 0.x are preview releases.

Mozilla 1.6

[Mozilla 1.6](#) is a web-browser, bundled with an advanced email and newsgroup client, IRC chat client, and HTML editor.

Firefox 0.8

Mozilla's Firebird browser is now called Firefox. [Firefox 0.8](#) includes tab browsing, popup blocking, integrated search, keyboard search, and other innovations.

Thunderbird 0.5

[Thunderbird 0.5](#), its new email program, with junk mail detection, security features, and more.

PDF programs

Further to the "PDFs on the cheap" article in the [January Newsletter](#), here are some more utilities.

Iceni tools

Norwich-based [Iceni Technology](#) supplies two tools.

[Gemini 5](#) exports PDF documents into a wide range of formats. It is available for Mac and Windows and costs \$159 USD.

[Argus 5](#) is an "industrial strength" product for bulk conversion of PDF documents. It is available for Mac, Windows, Linux, and Solaris platforms. It costs \$2995 USD.

There are demo downloads of both products.

Solid Converter PDF

[Solid Converter PDF](#) runs on Windows and costs \$49.95 USD. It converts PDF files to Word format.

Technical illustrators may be interested in another product in the family; [Solid Converter DWG](#) converts AutoCAD DWG and DXF files to PDF format. It costs \$69.95 USD.

LinKit! (reprise)

The [March Newsletter](#) carried a short review of [LinKit!](#), the fairly new help tool.

Australian Tony Self of [HyperWrite](#) has now done a lengthier [review](#).

The Back Page

Très bizarre

A technical author is “is the strange, silent person who sits in the corner ... they’re so weird. I’ve never met a normal TA”. And they might just hit you over the head with a tray.

Well, this [Contractor UK](#) article **was** posted on April Fool’s Day. Much of the rest of article purports to be a survey of the job market. According to the author, searching for FrameMaker or Acrobat jobs will reduce your rate to £15 an hour or less. So now you know.

Nigerian scammer jailed

[BlackSpider Technologies](#) reckons that 63,250,000 spam emails are sent each day to UK addresses and that 10% of these are Nigerian 419 scams. The ISTC gets a fair few of these, so imagine the Editor’s great joy at the news that one perpetrator, Peter Okoeguale, has been jailed for 20 months.

Okoeguale defrauded at least 11 victims. One in Scotland lost up to £20,000, and a 72-year-old American lost \$46,500. When he finishes his sentence, he faces deportation. See the [BBC News](#) for more.

This explains why most visible email addresses in this *Newsletter* are slightly disguised and embedded addresses come with a **bonus amphibian**, which you should remove before sending.

Parrot fiction

The story of N’kisi, the parrot with the wide vocabulary, reported by [BBC News](#) and mentioned in the [February Newsletter](#) has been cast into doubt. Research into N’kisi was conducted by one Rupert Sheldrake, whose work has been met with scepticism. See the *Guardian’s* [Ben Goldacre](#) for more.

Presenting Numbers, Tables and Charts

Last month’s *Newsletter* included a draw for a copy of *Presenting Numbers, Tables and Charts* by Sally Bigwood and Melissa Spore.

The following names were picked out of the hat by our independent adjudicator, **Kevin Thompson**.

- **Derek Cooper** of East Hunsbury
- **John Francis** of Cuckfield
- **William Waddilove** of Wolston

Your editor read a large chunk of one of the prize copies, and can echo the recommendation that **Graeme Horton** gave in his review last month.

One thing that struck home was how little most style guides say about tables and graphs. While reading this book, you start to realise that there’s a yawning chasm to be filled. *Presenting Numbers, Tables and Charts* can help plug this gap, and won’t break the bank either.

Why we’re needed

Part 8 of an infinite series...

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

The monitor acts as a controller the purpose of which is explained elsewhere in this document.

—

A ‘How to do it’ needs to be done.

—

By means of the Service Terminal, also the tests and loopbacks possibly required in fault location can be made.

—

Use ENTER to exit...

—

Calls from any agent extended within the attendants on same node may be recalled.

—

If at some point in the ARS the call is blocked...

—

There are many other commands that can be used to control the ARAB.

—

Move the mouse pointer to the required country...