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# Carolina Communique

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Vol. XXVIII, No. 2

The Monthly Newsletter of the Carolina Chapter, STC

August 1995

## Feature

### Results of Chapter employment survey

by Michael Harvey (harvey@m@rtp.dg.com)

In the September-October 1994 issue of the *Communique*, I posted a technical writing employment survey. Of the 310 *Communique* recipients, 67 responded by the November deadline. I continued to get responses as late as March, but didn't include their data.

The survey's purpose was to discover:

- 1) Who are the members of the Carolina STC? What is the age range of our membership? The gender breakdown? Highest educational degree earned? How much experience? Salary distribution? Job satisfaction?
- 2) What do we do? What is our breakdown of "permanent" versus contractor? Do we write for end-users, programmers, or system administrators? What type of work environment do we have? Do we work on new or revised material?
- 3) Where do we work? For how long? Where did we work last, and for how long? How many writers in our organization? Why did we leave our last job? Do we think we get adequate training?
- 4) Does a writer's education predict salary? Does experience predict salary? Do contractors make more than permanent employees? Do males make more than females? Do older writers make more than younger writers? Are there too many technical writers in the RTP market? Are we overworked? Are there fewer permanent positions opening up than before?

The Durham Tech program produces around ten graduates a year. When they get jobs, are they paid less than other tech writers? For that matter, how many tech writers studied tech writing in college or graduate school?

I used the SAS system to statistically test each of the questions posed in item 4. I performed a series of Chi-Square tests, which measure how well hypotheses fit observations and which apply to data where observations fall into discrete categories. I also ran analyses of variance, which test the effect of independent variables on dependent variables. Chi-Square tests showed that of all the variables tested, only experience and education significantly affected salary. An analysis of variance testing a model including years of education and experience, whether an employee was permanent or contractor, gender, and age showed a significant effect on salary.

Closer examination of the model revealed that only experience and salary contributed to the effect, experience more strongly than education. Put simply, the longer you're a technical writer, the more money you make.

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society for technical communication  
Carolina Chapter - Central North Carolina

## Membership profile

### Chris Benz: Best of Show

by Laura S. Johnston

Chris Benz, accomplished book writer and recipient of top honors in the STC International Publications Competition, is an avid cook and volleyball player. The Carrboro resident moved from Upstate New York last year with his wife



Kat because they had tired of the cold weather and yearned for a warmer climate. Outdoor activities like hiking, camping, and backpacking appeal to Chris. "I grew up living through 30 winters in New York," he said. "Before we moved to North Carolina I visited a friend who lives here. I helped him put up a fence, and for some reason, I realized that this is where I want to live." He went back to New York and convinced his wife they should move to the

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## Carolina Communique

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The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communique* monthly to provide reliable and timely information to Chapter and Society members. We encourage other STC chapters to reprint the material in this publication—provided they credit us and send a copy of the reprint.

We also invite our readers to submit material for consideration in the *Carolina Communique*. E-mail articles and letters to the editors or send snail-mail to

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## From the editors

### Thank you for your responses

We got off to a pretty good start with our first *CarCom*. And we're pleased to see that a few of you folks are paying attention. You caught a few boo boos and we shure do appreciate that. We've fixed them and created a whole new batch. Well, actually, we hope not.

We hope you enjoy and make good use of these fine sheets. We're working real hard to get you a newsletter every month, on time, come hell or high water—and we sure have had enough of that lately.

And again, we ask you, if you see any mistakes in this newsletter, please, call us or send us an e-mail.

Mike and John

## Programs

### 3rd annual summer conference is a great success!

The Carolina Chapter held its 3rd Annual Summer Conference July 22 at the Marriot Hotel in Research Triangle Park.



Excellent planning and preparation paid off with a great program and great attendance. We had people from as far away as Ohio. In next month's issue of the *Communique*, we'll tell you more about the Conference.

## Upcoming events

### September 13: *The Internet and How to Access It*

American Medical Writers Association (AMWA)/STC Joint Meeting at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center (RTP), 6:30 p.m.

Come meet medical writers and see the beautiful Biotechnology Center on Alexander Drive in RTP (right across the street from Glaxo's main campus). We'll send Chapter members a map in the next issue of the *Carolina Communique*, in about four weeks.

Refer to the *Other Professional Groups* article on page 3 for more information about AMWA.

### September 14: *Annual Chapter Picnic*

Lake Crabtree Park (Cary), 6:00 p.m.  
Enjoy the year's only outdoor meeting. Networking and eating, what could be better?

There's a \$7 charge for non-members to cover the cost of food.

## Other professional groups

### American Medical Writers Association

The American Medical Writers Association (AMWA) is an international, nonprofit professional organization that promotes excellence in biomedical communication. AMWA brings together medical, allied-health and science communicators and educators interested in improving the quality and effectiveness of biomedical communication in all media. Through networking, interactive meetings, the quarterly AMWA Journal, and chapter activities and newsletters, AMWA provides a forum for extending professional expertise.

At its annual conference and at some chapter events, members can earn credits toward AMWA's Core Curriculum (CC) and Advanced (ADV) certificates. CC credits can be earned through required (R) and elective courses in six specialty areas representing the six sections of AMWA: audiovisual (AV), editing/writing (EW), educators (ED), freelance (FL), pharmaceutical (PH), and public relations/advertising/marketing (PRAM).

To earn AMWA credits in either curriculum, one must be a member of AMWA, pay a one-time enrollment fee (within 2 weeks of taking your first workshop for credit), which is good for 6 (Core) or 8 (Advanced) years, complete on time a precourse assignment for each workshop and attend the entire workshop.

AMWA workshops and conferences are open to nonmembers.

For more information about AMWA, contact AMWA Headquarters at 9650 Rockville Pike, Bethesda, MD 20814-3998, USA; 301 493-0003 (tel.), 301 493-6384 (fax) or [amwa@amwa.org](mailto:amwa@amwa.org) (e-mail)

#### Workshops to be held in September

The Canada Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association (AMWA), jointly with the Annals of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, is pleased to present again this year a day of intensive workshops designed to enhance your skills as a biomedical communicator. The workshops will be held at the Montreal Convention Centre on Thursday, September 14, 1995, at the start of the Royal College's annual meeting, and are open to both physicians and non-physicians.

Please address your inquiries about, or application for, the workshops to Ann Bolster: Telephone (613) 731-8610 or (800) 663-7336, ext. 2117; Fax: 613 523-0937; e-mail: [abolster@hpb.hwc.ca](mailto:abolster@hpb.hwc.ca)

**Note:** Our Chapter is having a joint meeting with the local chapter of AMWA at the North Carolina Biotechnology Center (NCBC) on Wednesday, September 13, 6:30 p.m. The program topic is using the Internet.

## Employment news

### Your portfolio

*[This tip for enhancing the quality of your portfolio comes courtesy of the TECHWR-L listserv on the Internet. We regret that we do not have the name of the author. -Eds.]*

One thing you might consider is writing a colophon (an inscription) for each piece in your portfolio.

Depending on what kind of box or binder you keep your samples in, you



could have a clear overlay for each piece, with a little piece of paper listing the date of authorship, the purpose and intended audience for the document, your total responsibilities for it (original writing/revision/editing/original design/revised design/proof and publication/etc.), and the tool(s) used for the major document elements.

### N&O classifieds on the Web

The Raleigh News & Observer posts its classified ads on the World Wide Web. This is especially useful on Sunday when the volume is high.

Advantages of using the Web site include electronic search capabilities, if you're using Mosaic, Netscape, or another browser with a search capability, and you can scan a linear, text-only list by scrolling down the Web page.

Point your Web browser to <http://www.nando.net/classads/today>

### NC ESC

And, just a reminder, the North Carolina Employment Security Commission's WWW URL is <http://www.esc.state.nc.us/>

## Administrative Council meeting highlights

### Administrative Council kicks off new year at Jodi Pollock's house

[This article highlights the minutes recorded by Kim Andrews, the Chapter Secretary, at the Carolina Chapter Administrative Council meeting, June 28, 1995.]

**Present:** Bill Albing, Pat Silva, Diane Feldman, Chris Tilley, Barbara Retzlaff, Michael Uhl, Ronnie Duncan, Nacia Avera, Paul Kaufman, Larry Kunz, Jodi Pollock

**Absent:** Donna Zimmer, Kathy Underwood

Date: June 28, 1995



**Bill's Opening Remarks** - The Carolina chapter can recruit members from much of the state. Membership discounts to unemployed members and officers is a national issue. Sites for the Annual Conference have been chosen up through the year 2003. Selecting sites seems related more to a city's ability to host such a large conference rather than to the chapter's size or abilities.

**1995 Ballots** - Because of problems with the ballots, new officers have automatically assumed their roles and no election was held.

**First Business Meeting** - To ensure that board members can attend the Summer Conference, the Administrative Council's first business meeting is August 3, 1995. Council meetings operate under Robert's Rules of Order.

**Be Aware of Your Society-Wide Counterpart** - Bill wants all Council members and committee chairs to know their Society-wide counterpart. He will let everyone know the individual to contact.

**Our Director-Sponsor** - Larry Kunz mentioned that Mary Wise, Director-Sponsor for our Chapter's STC Region 2 may attend one of our meetings in the fall and that we should e-mail her if we have questions, comments or concerns.

**New SGML PIC?** - Nacia Avera represents the SGML User's Group, which is interested in merging with the local STC group

to become a mutually beneficial Professional Interest Committee (PIC). The SGML User's Group is willing to provide programs or workshops to our members. The Council offered Nacia several possible contacts.

**Computer Purchase** - Bill wants the Chapter to purchase a laptop computer to store and make readily available the membership database and other Chapter and STC information. Pat Silva recommended that Bill present a proposal for a vote at the August 3 meeting.

**Kickoff Meeting** - The Chapter kicks off the new season with its annual September picnic.

**The Newsletter** - The third week of the month is the deadline for submitting material for the next

## Ergonomics

[In a recent discussion of Repetitive Stress Injuries on the TECHWR-L (Technical Writers) listserv on the Internet, Marilynne Smith posted a practical tip for exercising joints and muscles, thus avoiding repetitive stress injuries. We reprint it below, with Marilynne's permission. -Eds.]

### Elastic bands help ease tension

by Marilynne Smith  
(m.smith182@genie.geis.com)

I use elastic bands for avoiding repetitive stress injuries. You can buy elastic bands made specifically for exercising. These bands provide a means for handy isometric exercises that relieve tension. They come in different sizes to meet your individual need.

I try to use them *before* the pain begins. They're great for relaxing the neck and upper shoulders. The idea is to hold a band with both hands and pull it apart. It's not difficult. You don't have to be an athlete. They fit easily into a desk drawer or briefcase. They work.

## This just in...

### Our chapter now has a home page!

Robert Berry, Michelle Corbin Nichols, and Michael Uhl teamed up to establish a Web presentation for the Carolina Chapter. Michelle and Robert oversee the maintenance of the Chapter's Web pages. If you have any questions, comments, or ideas about how the Carolina Chapter can best use its Web site, contact Michelle:

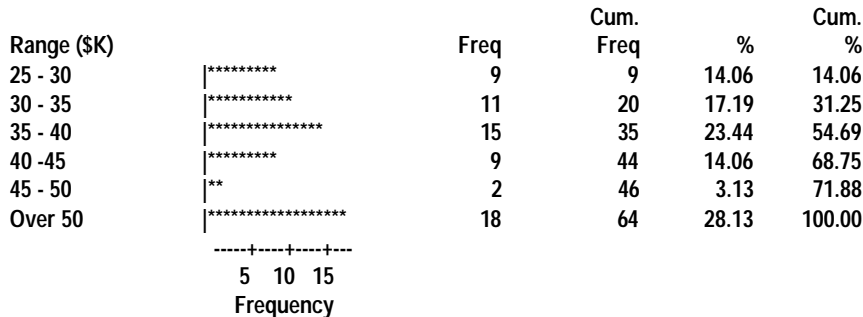
michelle@carvm3.vnet.ibm.com

To see the Chapter's new home page, point your browser at

[http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/carolina\\_homepage.html](http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/carolina_homepage.html)

You're likely to earn more the more educated you are, but only if experienced. Salary differences between males and females, permanent employees and contractors, and older and younger writers are not significant.

Not surprisingly, an experienced technical writer is more likely to have a title such as "Senior Technical Writer" or "Technical Documentation Specialist" than someone less experienced. But job title by itself doesn't predict salary. Here's one of the most interesting facts to emerge from the data; it's a graphical representation of the distribution of salary across survey respondents:



Not responding = 3

As you can see, this graph peaks at \$35-40K, dips, and peaks again at salaries over \$50K. The distribution strongly suggests distinct groups within the pool of respondents. Considering the results of my statistical tests, I conclude that there's one less experienced group making between \$25K and \$45K and another more experienced group making \$40K and up. For a future employment survey, we will need to extend the upper salary bound. With the currently available data, there's no telling where the salary curve peaks above \$50K.

The descriptive statistics that emerged from examining job satisfaction, professional growth, tools used, and so on, proved fascinating. I discovered, consistent with common sense, that someone who reported a high level of professional growth also reported high job satisfaction. The correlation between the two was significant. The correlation between working overtime and reported job satisfaction, which I thought would be significantly negative, was insignificant. Someone making a high salary reported that technical writing met their salary expectations and reported higher job satisfaction, but the correlation between the variables was insignificant. All other correlations were insignificant. That is, reported opportunities for training, availability of resources, how often someone had to work overtime, and how much new writing a writer got to do, all had no effect on salary or job satisfaction. This was touted as an employment survey, but it only shows what employees think about employment opportunities.

It's important to understand how workers perceive their market, but in the future, we should survey employers as well as employees to truly identify what kinds of jobs will be offered.

[You can read the complete results of Michael's employment survey analysis at [http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/Salary\\_Survey.html](http://stc.org/region2/ncc/www/Salary_Survey.html).]

## Technology information

### Roadmap: a free online Internet tutorial

[In the fall of 1994, Patrick Crispen, at the University of Alabama, offered an online tutorial for using the Internet. Well over 60,000 people, in three subscription periods, took Patrick's course. You can download his tutorial using the instructions Patrick himself recently provided on the TECHWR-L listserver. - Eds.]

To find out how to retrieve the Roadmap workshop lessons, all you have to do is send an e-mail letter to

`listserv@ualvm.ua.edu`

with the command

```
GET MAP PACKAGE F=MAIL
```

in the *body* of your e-mail letter.

After you send your letter off, a computer at the University of Alabama processes it, and e-mails—usually within 24 hours—you two letters: one telling you a little more about the Roadmap workshop, and the other telling you how you can retrieve the workshop lessons with a few, simple e-mail commands.

Cool, huh?

You can also find the Roadmap workshop archives on the University of Alabama's CMS Gopher server (UA1VM.UA.EDU) in the "Network Resources, Services and Information" menu, or on my World Wide Web homepage at

<http://ualvm.ua.edu/~crispen/crispen.html>

(My site's web server is a little flaky, though.) Thank you again for your interest in the Roadmap workshop, and I hope that you will enjoy the lessons. (Please feel free to redistribute this letter to others)

Patrick Douglas Crispen  
pccrispe1@ualvm.ua.edu  
The University of Alabama

## Michelle reports from Washington, D.C.

This is the second in a series of reports Michelle Corbin Nichols filed on her experience at the 1995 STC Annual Conference.

**Presenters:** Tracey Chiricosta and Alice Jones

Tracey Chiricosta (of KBM Group) and Alice Jones (of Micro Dynamics Ltd) presented a workshop on designing effective user interfaces.



Thinking I could use the information

to review my own software product's user interfaces, I found that much of the information could apply to the *online help* systems I create for that product. The following is a quick summary of the key points from this technical session:

1. While task analysis is a standard part of a documentation project, it should

also be a standard part of a user interface design project. However, it is not enough to list the tasks. You must analyze tasks and determine which are critical, that is, the ones users do most often. Frequently performed tasks must be more carefully designed and documented.

2. Typically, the amount of control a user interface gives a user is directly proportional to the knowledge required to use that interface. For example, a command-line interface, such as DOS, provides detailed control of the system but requires the user to remember any needed commands. On the other hand, a higher level, graphical interface, such as Microsoft Windows, shields the user from having to know as much of the inner workings, but provides less direct, detailed system control.
3. When designing a screen (dialog or window), the designer must reduce the visual load (demands on the user), direct the user's attention appropriately, and reduce clutter as

much as possible. The visual load includes where the eyes must move to gather the necessary information. By using standard layouts and directing the eyes to a certain location on the screen, the designer creates a more effective user interface. Good screen design also helps reduce memory load.

Included in their process for designing an effective user interface, Tracey and Alice discussed the use of color and graphics, the design of error messages and feedback to the user, as well as iterative testing of the user interface. We must remember that as we create our online help systems, we are creating user interfaces, and vice versa. We must work together with user interface designers to create a online help systems that compliment the user interfaces.

## Training tips from our director-sponsor, Mary Wise

[In a recent discussion of training techniques on the TECHWR-L (Technical Writers) listserver on the Internet, Mary Wise posted these tips. We reprint it below, with Mary's permission. -Eds.]

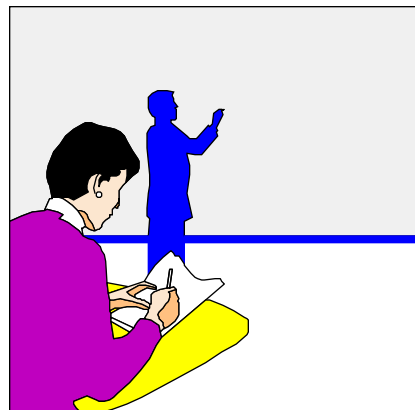
Consider your audience (duh!). Analyze what they already know and what they need to know. The difference is the *knowledge gap*, and that's what your material must address.

Then, analyze the knowledge gap from a task perspective. In a training environment, adults want to know what they have to do and how they have to do it. Moreover, they want to know what's in it for them! Organize the task information sequentially. Our training manuals use a process approach: we cover the big picture first and provide a diagram (in our software, it follows a Setup/Cycle format). Then, each section covers a segment of the diagram.

Determine how your material will be used: instructor-led training in a classroom environment? Self-paced

instruction where users are on their own? Interactive? (I can't be much help there.)

If it's instructor-led training, you should (I would like to say *must*)



develop an *Instructor's Guide* in addition to the user training manual. The Instructor's Guide contains all the information that the instructor needs to be successful: when to use overheads, ideas for exercises, script for the lesson...

Develop sound instructional objectives that contain:

- an action (what the user is able to do):  
Type a letter.
- a condition (what are the circumstances?): Using MS Word, Version 6.0, type a one-page letter.
- a standard (how well will the user be able to perform?): Using MS Word, Version 6.0, type a one-page letter with fewer than three errors.

Use active, concrete verbs in your objectives: *Describe, List, Explain, Calculate, Assemble*. You have to be able to observe the behavior. Not: *Understand, Realize, Comprehend, Know*.

Resist the urge to write everything there is to know. Write succinctly, clearly, and actively (sound familiar?). Be sure to test for knowledge retention and transfer: test items, controlled note-taking (strategic

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## Membership

by Barbara Retzlaff (barb@isscad.com)

### Pump up your career...get involved!

Do you like meeting new people, bragging about STC, and making new STC members feel at home? If so, you'd be an excellent addition to the STC Chapter Membership Committee!

The Membership Committee is currently seeking volunteers to help out with this fun, dynamic, and vital aspect of STC. We work to recruit new members, inform prospective members, and serve current members. The Membership Committee registers members and guests at STC functions, and produces the Chapter Directory, while keeping our membership mailing list up-to-date. If you enjoy people and want to enrich your career, this is a great way to meet members, new and old, and interact with the STC Membership Committee at the national level.

If you'd like to join us, contact:

Barbara Retzlaff  
Membership Manager  
(919) 941-6614 (w)  
(919) 834-3942 (h)  
barb@isscad.com

...from p. 4...Admin Council Highlights

*Communique* issue. Programs will be announced in the newsletter well in advance. Mike has the Council's approval to offset the newsletter's cost with advertising.

*Programs* - Bill would like us to forge relationships with other organizations including joint meetings.

*Membership* - We can increase Chapter recognition by including individuals from other organizations in our mailings.

*Budget* - Pat will present a complete report at the August 3 meeting. The Chapter earned \$8,407.47 in income, most of which came from members' dues. The Chapter currently receives about 30% of each member's dues. The group paid out about \$5,500 in expenses, leaving about \$10,300 cash assets.

*Archives* - Larry Kunz currently has possession of the Carolina Chapter archives. He is contacting a representative at NCSU to determine their interest in securing them.

The next Administrative Council meeting is scheduled for August 3, 1995, at The Kelton Group.

...from p. 1...Chris Benz

RTP area. "We were looking for a warmer, friendlier place to live, like North Carolina, Austin, or Flagstaff."

The adventurous couple describe themselves as the "original environmentalists" and met while attending St. John Fisher College in Rochester. The college sweethearts met in glee club and started dating six months later. They were married in 1987 and currently have a dog and a cat.

Kat is the assistant innkeeper of the Hillsborough House Inn. "She really likes this job," Chris said. "Her background is in psychology and gerontology. She has worked as a crisis intervention counselor with severely handicapped children."

Chris graduated in 1986 with a BA degree in communications/management. "I spent a semester in London while in school. It was interesting and provided a good cultural and political influence," he said. "I came to appreciate art and architecture while there."

Currently working as an instructional developer on a software development project for Glaxo Wellcome Inc., Chris has authored six retail books and co-authored two. "All of the books had to do with applications," he said. "I wrote the first in 1992 and the most recent in 1995." While a trainer and curriculum developer at Logical Operations in New York, Chris took the curriculum information and turned it into retail market books.

After leaving Logical Operations, the Benz family traveled for three-and-a-half months across the country. "Traveling cross-country has been a lifelong dream," he said. "We wanted a chance to travel and live on the road for a while."

As for the STC, Chris said that he would like to get more involved with the STC in the areas of the job bank and promotions.

## Best of the best !

### Distinguished Chapter Service Award

Diane Feldman, our Chapter president last year, announced at the Summer Conference that the Society has bestowed the Distinguished Chapter Service Award on Mary Cantando and Patricia Tierney. Patricia received her award at the conference. Diane will present Mary with her plaque at a later Chapter event.

Mary and Patricia have served the Carolina Chapter, and the Society as a whole, in a variety of ways over the last few years. We enthusiastically salute their efforts and hope they inspire others to follow.

### Associate Fellow

The STC Board of Directors approved the nomination of Morris Dean, a long-time STC member and IBMer, for *Associate Fellow*. We will feature Mr. Dean in a membership profile later this year.

## Chapter leadership

President:	BillAlbing balbing@vnet.net (919) 851-4064
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Treasurer:	Pat P. Silva patsilva@aol.com (919) 851-2281
Im. Past President:	Diane Feldman feldmand@smtp.wg.com
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Hospitality Manager:	Paul Kaufman (919) 309-0118 (h)
Public Relations:	Christopher Benz 6229438@mcimail.com (919) 248-8659
Nominating Comm.:	Donna Zimmer (919) 481-4506

## From the president

### Feel free to contact me

As Chapter president, I'm working to serve the needs of the membership. If you have suggestions about benefits or programs we should provide contact me at 685-1676 or balbing@vnet.net.

The Summer Conference was a success, drawing just under 100 people and some from as far away as Georgia and Ohio.

I have been in contact with the leadership of the Student chapters within our boundaries and there will be more cooperation between us.

See you at the Annual Picnic, September 14 at Lake Crabtree Park.

Bill

...from p. 6...Training tips

blanks to fill in), online exercises, review sections, summaries.

*Format:* One that works for us is to use a two-page spread, with a graphic on the left page and text on the right page. Be careful not to become a slave to this format, however.

*Books, etc.:* Anything by Robert Mager, for example, the *New Mager Six-Pack* contains six valuable books on training and objectives. *Developing Technical Training*, by Ruth Colvin Clark.

Good luck!

Mary Wise



society for technical communication  
Carolina Chapter - Central North Carolina

c/o Michael Andrew Uhl  
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