

## Book Review — Type & Layout

by Emily Skarzenski (eskarzenski@dtus.com)

*Type & Layout*, by Colin Wheildon  
 ISBN 0-9624891-5-8. 1995, Strathmoor Press  
 (2550 9th Street, Ste. 1000, Berkeley, CA 94710).

This book describes results of a nine-year study on the effects of typography and design on readers' understanding of printed material. In the study, articles with varying typographic and design elements were presented to 224 participants. Participants read the pieces, then took short tests to reveal their understanding of the material contained in the articles. Participants were also asked other questions to determine preferences for particular typographic and design elements.

Wheildon's major conclusions follow.

**Reading Gravity** American typographer and teacher Edmund Arnold devised a model called the Gutenberg Diagram, which asserts that a reader's eyes naturally fall at the top left corner of a page (the Primary Optical Area), then move across and down the page. After each left-to-right sweep, the eyes return to the horizontal point at which the next line is expected (the Axis of Orientation, which is represented by the left margin of a column). These principles govern how a reader's eyes move over a page, referred to as "reading gravity." Arnold's model, however, was based on opinion and anecdotal observation.

Wheildon's study validates the principles of reading gravity. Specifically, his study showed that more than twice as many readers understand text presented in layouts geared to reading gravity.

**Serif Type vs. Sans Serif Type in Body Text** More than five times as many readers are likely to show good comprehension of text printed in serif type than sans serif type.

**Type Style in Headlines** There is little difference in legibility between headlines in serif and sans serif type, or between roman and italic. Headlines in capital letters are less legible than those in lowercase. Tightly tracking headline type (shorter letter and word spacing) undermines legibility.

Slightly condensing headline type makes it easier to read. Settings between 70% and 90% of natural width are optimal.

**Color and Type** Study participants showed an interesting dichotomy regarding type and color. Layouts with colored text were considered more attractive, but comprehension of colored text was lower (for some colors, much lower) than black text.

The darker the headline, the better the comprehension. Black headlines were well understood by nearly four times as many readers as headlines in bright, high-intensity colors (such as bright yellow, orange, red, and lime green).

Print body text in black. Even copy set in dark colors was harder to understand. Seven times as many participants showed good comprehension of black text compared to intense or muted colors.

Black text printed on a light tint is both attractive to readers and highly comprehensible. When text is printed on a screened background, readers have difficulty if the screen is more than 10%. *see* **5**

## Director's Chair

by Mary R. Wise

Here it is, 1996! I'd like to share some of my New Year's resolutions with you (even though it's February!). I won't bother you with my resolutions to lose weight, exercise, and read Foote's *Civil War* series, but I *will* talk about technical communication resolutions. Drumroll, please?

- 1. I resolve to plan my projects exhaustively.** I used a planning methodology in my last project. What a revelation! I resisted panicking at the short deadline and diving in and writing. Instead, I wrote a detailed plan, followed by a detailed outline. The project was a pleasure, not a pain.
- 2. I resolve to pick my grammatical battles carefully.** It's senseless to turn purple over split infinitives and whether data is singular (or even whether data are plural). Rather, I'll concentrate on whether text is concise, clear, and usable. (But I'll still fix spelling errors, tense problems, and subject/verb agreement!)

- 3. I resolve to be as accessible to my subject matter experts as I'd like them to be to me.** *see* **7**

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The Carolina Chapter publishes the *Carolina Communiqué* 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 Communiqué*. E-mail articles and letters to the editors or send snailmail to:

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# From the Editor by Michael Uhl

## Its time to for you to decide: improvement or stagnancy

by Michael Andrew Uhl

STC elections are coming soon. This year's elections provide a rare opportunity for the Carolina Chapter. At the international level, **Larry Kunz** is on the ballot for second vice president. This is a very big deal: the second vice president automatically proceeds through three other offices in the three subsequent years: first vice president, president, and immediate past president. If Larry wins the second vice president job, he'll have a lock on an STC leadership position for four years. Our chapter will instantly gain higher visibility and more immediate access to the top of the STC leadership.

Larry Kunz is a member of the Carolina Chapter. He has served in a variety of leadership positions, including chapter president and director-sponsor for our chapter's STC region. Larry is a senior staff member at IBM in Research Triangle Park.

We can use Larry's ascendancy as a catalyst to grow the chapter into one of STC's best and biggest. As I survey STC's other chapters, especially those in other high technology areas of the country, I see that we have a lot of potential for growth and improvement. Right now, we have one of the best groups of leaders the chapter has ever had. We can leap forward in the next few years, providing members with: better training and professional improvement opportunities; more and better recognition programs; increased *pro bono* work in the service of our communities; closer links with academia; cooperative activities with local industry; and, most importantly I think, an *esprit de corps* that makes STC membership genuinely enjoyable, not merely functional.

One of the keys to a successful chapter is matching the right people with the chapter leadership positions they enjoy most and are best able to do. We need your help in trying to do this. In this month's *Communique* you'll find a nomination form. Please take a few minutes to fill it out and mail or fax it to Donna Zimmer. As you read it, think about colleagues you know that would enjoy and benefit from a particular chapter job. Donna will compile the nominations and members will receive ballots probably in April or May.

Your chapter leaders need to know you're listening; or, if you can't hear, what changes we need to make so you *can* hear. Apathy on your part means the chapter receives no feedback from its members. A lack of feedback greatly reduces the chance for self-improvement on our part and steals much of the enjoyment from volunteering.

When your international STC ballot comes, read it; fill it out—vote for Larry Kunz; and mail it. When your chapter ballot arrives, read it; fill it out; and mail or fax it. If you're unhappy with the choices or with some other aspect of the chapter, express your feelings on the ballot. We need your feedback to make the chapter, and STC as a whole, better, to better serve you.

Please vote.

“The opposite of good is not evil; it's apathy.” — *Elie Wiesel (b. 1928), 1986 Nobel Peace Prize winner and Holocaust survivor*



# Meeting Announcement

Carolina Chapter

Society for Technical Communication

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## Annual Awards Presentation at SAS Institute

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**What:** Celebrate our chapter STC publications winners by attending a reception in their honor. Come join us as we enjoy lavish hors d'oeuvres, including cucumber rounds with smoked salmon mousse, broccoli-stuffed beignets, country ham strudel, chocolate fondue with assorted fruit, and much more. The always entertaining Dr. Robert Kelton will present the awards, which will be given for both hardcopy and online communication competition winners. You'll also see a demo of some of the winning online entries.

**Who:** Dr. Robert Kelton, president of The Kelton Group, will present the awards. Helen Weeks (sashxw@unx.sas.com) of SAS's Quality and Testing Support Department is the SAS contact for this meeting.

**When:** **Thursday, February 8, 1996.** 6:00 p.m. (social); 6:30 p.m. (program)

**Where:** **SAS Institute's Training Center (Building F), SAS Campus, Cary, NC.**

*Directions*—From I-40, take the Harrison Avenue exit into Cary. (Eastbound travelers should turn right and westbound travelers should turn left at the top of the exit ramp.) Turn left at the first stoplight (SAS Campus Drive). Follow SAS Campus Drive to Building F. The reception will be in the Training Center, which is located on the right side of the building. Plenty of parking is available behind Building F.

# Job Bank

# Nomination Form for 1996-1997 Officers and Committee Managers

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Please list the names of people you want to nominate for STC Board positions. You can specify a particular position for your nominee (optional).

The officer and committee manager positions are:

President*	Vice-President*	Secretary*	Treasurer*
Programs*	Membership*	Newsletter	Public Relations
Employment	Education	Hospitality	Nominations
Publications Competition	Online Publications Competition	Summer Conference	

*\*elected positions*

Fold Lower  
Flap to Here

Fold Lower  
Flap to Here

## Nominees

Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____
Name: _____	Position: _____

All nominees must be STC members. If you have questions regarding any of the STC Board positions, contact Donna Zimmer at (919) 481-4506.

Nominate your friend ... nominate yourself! Please send this form in by February 28.

(Return address is on the back). Thanks!

You can also fax nominations to Donna Zimmer at: (919) 481-1157.

**STC Carolina Chapter Nominations  
c/o Donna Zimmer  
523 S. Harrison Ave.  
Cary, NC 27511**



**Thank You for Helping Your STC Chapter!**

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Reversed text is nearly impossible for readers to understand.

Printing running text in bold undermines reading comprehension. Less than half of readers easily understand the message.

**Italic Type** Conventional wisdom says italic type is harder to read. This study, however, proves this idea false; italic type was no more difficult than roman type.

**Justification vs. Ragged Setting** Readers show better comprehension with justified text. Almost twice as many readers understand justified text than text set ragged right. Seven times as many show good comprehension of justified compared to ragged left.

**Headlines and Periods** Periods at the end of headlines can hinder comprehension.

**Other Typographical Elements** Readers are annoyed by elements often considered "good" design: articles in which body type jumps over an illustration, screening effects on illustrations, and headlines of more than four lines. They also complained about jumps (articles that begin on one page and continue on another). Four out of five readers disobey jumps.

Captions are better than descriptions in accompanying text.

Most readers find subheads useful, especially in long articles.

Running text set in either long lines (>60 characters) or short lines (<20 characters) is hard to read.

Text set in capitals is difficult to read.

**Type Size for Body Text** In a separate study of 4,000 participants, about 75% found it easy to read type set in 10-point type on 11-point leading (10/11) and 12-point type on 14-point leading (12/14).

**Some comments:** Wheildon discusses his research methods in an appendix to the book, and they seem valid. I'd like to see a larger sample, however. (The sample size was 224.) With the exception of a few high school students, all participants were at least high school graduates; many were more educated. Therefore, his sample is better educated than the general population. (This would seem to make his results more polarized along current lines.)

Regarding tracking and condensing headline type: this study didn't outline

other design criteria that accompany the decision to manipulate type, such as the headline length, type size, type quality, and the ability of the word processor or DTP program to adjust type. For example, high-quality headline type may already be optically adjusted for spacing and width.

Regarding justification: this study didn't specify line length for justified type samples, and this is a major consideration (the shorter the lines, the harder it is to set justified type). Also not mentioned were the limitations of DTP tools; some programs do such a poor job of spacing justified type that ragged right might actually increase readability. Finally, the study didn't address the affect of hyphenation on comprehension, which is a major variable in setting justified type.

[Ms. Skarzenski, who works at Deloitte & Touche/ICS in Chadds Ford, PA, posted this report to the TECHWR-L listserver, January 17, 1996.]

## Billions and Billions!

by Stan Brown, Cleveland, OH  
stbrown@nacs.net <http://www.nacs.net/~stbrown>

I recently asked in TECHWR-L about the U.S. vs. British usage of "billion," whether they still mean different things, and how TECHWR-Lers write around the difference. The consensus is that although the U.S. billion ( $10^9$ , a thousand million) is crowding out the British billion ( $10^{12}$ , a million million) the traditional British usage is not yet dead. Some details:

- *The Economist* uses the U.S. billion on both sides of the Atlantic.
- The BBC World Service began using the U.S. billion a year or so ago.
- An Australian survey (1995) by the Dictionary Research Centre of Macquarie University found that 65% of respondents understood "billion" as  $10^9$  and 33% as  $10^{12}$ . *Modern Australian Usage* (1993) says the "old British and German usage [ $10^{12}$ ] is obsolescent in those countries and incorrect elsewhere."

Some work-arounds:

- Use metric (SI) prefixes.
- Use powers of 10 explicitly.
- Document your convention somewhere readers will find it, and refer to "large numbers" several ways in the index.

## Web Page Competition, Lone Star Chapter

by Chuck Banks, Co-Manager, Internet PIC,  
lscwww@stc.org, <http://stc.org/region5/lsc/>

The results are in for the 1995-1996 Lone Star chapter of the STC Web Page Competition. To see the results and view the entry Web sites, browse this URL:

<http://stc.org/region5/lsc/www/ipic/wwwenter.html>

(Warning: This page uses HTML 3.0 code. To view, use Mosaic 2.x, Netscape 1.1 or later, or a compatible browser.)

The Lone Star Chapter and the Internet PIC wish to congratulate all contestants in this first Web competition. These Web sites are outstanding expressions of technical communication principles in a new medium. Happy browsing!

Look for our forthcoming announcement of the 1996-1997 STC, Lone Star Chapter Web Page Competition.

## Books in Print

by Beverly Parks, in response to a query  
bparks@huachuca-emh2.army.mil

Dennis Johnson docwrite@ihgp.ih.att.com asked:

... I meant the book (forgot the publisher) that bookstores use ... to back order a book. It tells the publisher and the ordering information. You still have to go through a vendor to get the book, but at least you know it still is in stock.

Beverly responds:

Don't know about "Books in Print" per se, but I use a site called *Amazon.com Books* to research availability and to get ISBNs and prices. They claim one million titles. When you get there, access the search feature by selecting either "One Million Titles," or "Browse the Shelves." The URL is:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/subst/index2.html>

# President's Message

by Bill Albing

Despite the Blizzard of '96, Mary Wise, our regional Director-Sponsor, spoke to us about setting and achieving goals. This is a big part of our work as a chapter. I hope each of you has individually set career goals. Remember, our Job Bank is alive and well, and you don't have to be out of work before submitting a resume.

In February, we can pat ourselves on the back as we recognize fellow technical communicators at our Awards Banquet. We'll honor those who won awards for the Pubs and Online Competitions. Perhaps in the future, the Online Competition will be part of the Pubs Competition. We work in many media these days, and online documents are just as important and valid as hard copy publications.

Then in March, it's back to work with George, a software product from Unipress that automatically creates software documentation from source code. Is technical writing dead? Last month I said our profession is changing and writing is only one component of it. But did technical writing ever really exist? To write effectively, you must experience a subject and make it a part of you. How many of us have had the time to live with our subject matter? Yes, we are better at interviewing subject matter experts, but with shorter time-to-market, we have less chance to work with the technology. If writing is only about interviewing, researching, and reformatting, then where is the challenge? How many of us can really understand an entire telephone system or complex drug delivery system?

STC provides a forum for us to organize and articulate these issues. You can write about these and publish them in our newsletter; you can meet in small groups called Professional Interest Committees (PICs); you can get some programs discussing these issues:

- intellectual property rights
- growing connectivity of digital info
- MS Windows as *de facto* user interface
- our educational system and its failures
- literacy
- the Information Superhighway

- virtual learning and virtual corporations
  - professional accreditation (certification)
  - standards for graphics, indexing, etc.
- I'd like to see our Chapter start addressing these issues.

How many of you can arrange to participate in a teleconference at your company? STC is broadcasting a panel discussion, *Publishing on the Internet*, on February 28, but how many will get involved? I'm sure that BNR, NorTel, Fujitsu, IBM, and SAS have the capability, but how many of you writers would be willing to ask to use those facilities? Why not all of you? ☸

## Web Reference Resources

One of the best uses for the Web is employing it as a giant reference resource. Here are some examples.

For copyright law, try <http://lcweb.loc.gov/copyright/>

For Web publishing guidelines, check out [http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/StyleManual\\_Top.HTML](http://info.med.yale.edu/caim/StyleManual_Top.HTML)

The U.S. Code (federal laws) are available at <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/>

Need a computing dictionary? Check out <http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/>

And, the best treat of all, Strunk and White's *Elements of Style*: <http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/>

## Getting Where You Want to Go

by Chris Tilley

For those who chose not to brave the ice storm (which didn't happen until later) or who just assumed we would cancel because of the weather, you missed quite a meeting on January 11 at the EPA in RTP. Mary Wise, Director-Sponsor of our region, presented a fantastic program on *Getting Where You Want to Go: From Goals to Plans to Accomplishments*.

Mary began by answering a question we all had: What does a director-sponsor do? She told us about her involvement with a regional conference, her experience with the STC Board of Directors, and her responsibility for keeping up with all the chapters in her region, including Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, D.C., West Virginia, Virginia, North Carolina, and even Israel! (Yes, the Israeli chapter is back and publishing newsletters again!) She told us how she ended up being a director-sponsor by summarizing her 15-year involvement in the STC, the responsibilities she volunteered for, and her journey toward her election as Region 2 Director-Sponsor. But that was just the introduction.

As the plug for the program promised, there were no magic answers. I certainly expected none. I'm sure that we have all seen the material, quotes, examples, and

practical advice she gave us. But since discipline, goals, fear, determination, and discouragement are things I struggle with, it was good to be reminded and encouraged. It was refreshing to hear that I needn't give up when I feel stuck. Instead, I should just reevaluate my goals to see if they were realistic. I left the program feeling very hopeful.

But I walked away with just as much from Mary as I did from her program. Her relaxed, conversational style set me at ease with the intimidating issue of setting goals. (Maybe that's why some of you *really* didn't come.) The relaxed atmosphere encouraged much discussion.

It was heartening to meet the devoted, involved, informed, and very engaging Director-Sponsor. I felt a great deal of confidence in the woman who leads our Chapter on the national level. I feel better about the organization itself knowing what goes on outside our Chapter.

For those of you who missed the program and Mary, she has promised to return in the Fall for an encore, hopefully under better weather conditions. When you see it announced in the newsletter, take the opportunity to meet our Director-Sponsor and find out what a great job she does. ☸



# So, You Want to Write a Book — Nichols Report by Michelle Corbin Nichols

With a panel consisting of Bill Horton (writer), Terri Hudson (John Wiley & Sons editor and publisher), Carol Barnum (writer and STC publications), and JoAnn Hackos (writer), we were treated to quite a mountain-full of information about writing, publishing, and (a little) money making off of a book.

While focused on technical, nonfiction books, many of the writers' ideas and experiences could apply equally as well to fiction books. Bill Horton moderated, summarizing the process of writing a book as follows: propose, write, publish, market, revise, republish. He also organized the discussion around a set of pre-determined questions.

*1. Why do you want to publish a book? Fame? Fortune? Ego?*

Simple answer: Yes. There is always some ego involved, but when you have something to say and you are willing to work hard, then it is something you have to do. The money won't come right away, but can accumulate over the years.

"Writing a book will open the door for you as a consultant," says Bill Horton. Imagine that. One surprise was that you have to market your own book if you want it to sell well (publishers typically won't).

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from **1**

I've realized that it's easier to get information if you give it. So, instead of looking out of my ivory tower, issuing pleas for information, and muttering under my breath, I'm going to get down and get what I need — nicely, of course.

**4. I resolve to keep my eye on my audience.** I will make information accessible, attractive, and meaningful; in other words, I will communicate what my audience needs to know.

**5. I resolve to keep informed on technical communication trends and techniques, especially regarding electronic communication.** (I wanna write a Web page!)

Pretty ambitious resolutions! I expect I'll do better on some than on others, but achieving these is like eating a bag of potato chips. If I start with one small chip, eventually I'll eat the whole bag!

Happy New Year to all of you. 🌸

*2. Is there a market for my books?*

To write a proposal that will be accepted, you **must** do market research. Go to the bookstores and see what books have (or have not) been published. You can be first, or you can do it differently or better. Carol Barnum suggested that STC publications are a nice first step. Writers also need to be realistic with their market size predictions and focus on the real market.

*3. How do authors drive publishers crazy?*

The number one pet peeve of all publishers is...late manuscripts. Publishers sell books six months in advance of when it will be in bookstores; when a manuscript is late, it hurts publishers and authors alike. Writers must communicate the progress they are making. The number two pet peeve of all publishers is...a poorly organized manuscript. If the manuscript is not neat, clean, and carefully bound, then it wastes time and paints a very bad impression.

*4. How do publishers drive authors crazy?*

One of the ways publishers drive authors crazy is in the writing and keeping of a contract. When the contract is not clearly and completely articulated (who owns what, and when will what be delivered and how), the author usually gets the short end of the stick. Also, writers should remember **THEY** are 100% responsible for the quality of their book.

Publishing is a long and tedious process. One time estimate quoted is a 3-year cycle, others, a year or less. STC publications are usually completed in the shortest cycle and the author has more control. As for royalties, one estimate was 10-15% of the domestic rates (about \$2.00 per book sold). Finally, some recommended books were: *How to Be Your Own Literary Agent*, *How to Negotiate a Book Contract*, and *The Writer's Market*. 🌸

# AD

## Chapter Leadership

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## Other Announcements

### **Event: SGML User's Group Meeting: Java Demo**

**What:** Maureen Chew, a representative of Sun Microsystems, will give a demo of Sun's new Web-oriented programming language, *Java*.

**Where:** To be announced

**Date:** Monday, February 19, 1996; 6:00 p.m.

For more information refer contact Pete Gegen (peteg@raleigh.ibm.com) at (919) 254-6658.

### **Event: Information Exchange Day 1996**

**Sponsor:** ECU Student Chapter of STC and ECU English Dept.

**Date:** Wednesday, April 3, 1996

Communicators from all specialties, come share your expertise with students at the third annual Information Exchange Day! We would like anyone who produces manuals (hard copy and online), newsletters, brochures, multimedia presentations, sales and marketing literature, proposals, technical reports, white papers, mission statements, annual reports to come and participate.

*For more information, contact:*

Sherry Southard, Advisor for ECU Student Chapter of STC and Co-Director of ECU Professional Communication Programs, at  
(w) 919-328-6374, (h) 919-355-0796, or [enssouth@ecuvms.cis.ecu.edu](mailto:enssouth@ecuvms.cis.ecu.edu).



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