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Storytelling for User Experience: Crafting Stories for Better Design

Rare is the colleague who will admit that her world turned upside down after she browsed Harvard Business Review. But after reading “Strategic Stories: How 3M Is Rewriting Business Planning” (May–June 1998), my hair stood on end after I discovered how 3M execs, much to the initial chagrin of meeting-table audiences, had literally turned off their slide projectors and presented their business plans using narratives, not bullets. In Storytelling for User Experience, Quesenbery and Brooks understand that the path to an audience’s memory occurs not while “tak[ing] notes on the bullet points” but while digesting “the illustrations, examples, and anecdotes that help you remember the key points or grasp a new concept on an emotional level” (p. 28).

Of course, you cannot just craft a campfire tale in order to communicate better in business: Stories are not a Band-Aid slapped on a random communication wound for faster recovery from (and for) disgruntled users. And, clearly, telling just any story to add spice to your user experience (UX) problem or success for your audience is unethical because it detracts from the ultimate goal: to inform your audience. As the authors point out, effective and ethical storytelling for UX design also requires keeping the story accurate and authentic. Moreover, ethical and effective storytelling for UX design depends upon truly listening to and observing users. Unfortunately, we observe what is convenient and do not know how to really listen to our users. Brooks’s story about a woman breaking down during a workshop on listening sticks out in my mind as proof that, whether we like it or not, there is an emotional component to learning, and we are user-design fools if we believe that a cognitive-only approach to writing documentation, for example, can give us the best product and the happiest users.

Storytelling for User Experience describes the types of stories suitable for UX design (the “point-of-pain” story is my favorite) before moving into the ethics of storytelling, where to get stories, and how best to use particular story types to connect to your audience. Although most chapters are how-to, you find many connected stories with related visuals: illustrations explaining interactive storytelling, for example, or cartoon sketches of the authors next to anecdotes that illustrate principles of storytelling for UX design, and with (surprise!) color, from rich forest-green backgrounds for chapter starts to blue bubbles for better clarity.

If you’re the analytical type who favors “hard” data over “soft” anecdotes, this book is definitely for you. Quesenbery and Brooks understand, for example, the preference for numbers and eye tracking in usability testing over the messy, seemingly unreliable stories of just one or two users. Yet, they show you not only how those one or two users represent a pattern of problems evident in all of the users’ experiences but also the importance of asking (and listening to the answers to) more why questions as opposed to what questions. What the user did during usability testing is crucial, but the why is often much more important, even though the user’s story might seem completely unrelated to the testing.

This insightful book looks into how storytelling is not only sometimes oral and often written, but also sometimes visual. There are several visual representations of UX, such as flowcharts (complete with UX photos), cartoons, design layouts, screenshots, and so on. The authors even offer a photo as an acceptable image to support a written story. Nevertheless, it is clear that “the image gives fewer explicit” (p. 260) details than do the words, and although the authors find this photo a viable accompaniment to the story, it is clear that a sketch (even a stick figure) would better portray the information presented in the written text.

Regardless of how you feel about the value of stories as effective user data and as evidence used in presentations, Storytelling for User Experience delivers on its promise to not only help you want to use stories in UX design but also show how these stories can be crafted and recrafted. Quesenbery and Brooks tell it best:
We’re not talking about “Once upon a time” here. User experience stories aren’t made up. They are based on data from listening and observing in formal and informal settings. They are just as valid as scientific research papers or business reports. (p. 27)

Nicole Amare
Nicole Amare is a senior member of STC and an associate professor of technical communication at the University of South Alabama. Her research interests include ethics, editing, and visual rhetoric. She is associate editor of Teaching Cases and Tutorials for IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication.

Web Anatomy: Interaction Design Frameworks that Work

Design is about synthesizing often conflicting requirements and giving form to that synthesis. As a Web designer, I would ideally spend most of my time identifying and synthesizing requirements, but we often spend the bulk of our project time redesigning common interface elements. Instead, Robert Hoekman and Jared Spool offer us frameworks as a way to “standardize the boring support functionality so that we can spend less time reinventing and more time inventing” (p. 6).

Frameworks are sets of design patterns that collectively address the whole context of common Web design problems, such as sign-up, search, and checkout. Web Anatomy is a short, plain-spoken book that advocates reusability through frameworks composed of patterns and implemented with components. The authors’ goal is to teach you how to think about, identify, and use frameworks on your own. As such, this book is not a catalog of frameworks. Rather, it’s broken into three parts. The first part addresses the case for frameworks and how they are to be created and maintained within your organization. The second part details four significant frameworks, the research and usability studies behind them, and considerations for implementing them in your own projects. And the third part addresses creating frameworks, implementing frameworks, and making them practical through the use or creation of libraries and stencils. The authors also advise you on how to sell frameworks within your organization by explaining how to measure the cost of frustration caused by poor design.

The authors do a good job of describing the elements of an interaction design framework and how to document them. In addition, they document and comment on common frameworks in detail. They document the catalog framework, for example, with a description, the context of use, a task flow, co-requisite frameworks, related frameworks, framework elements, and design criteria. The discussion of each framework includes examples of successfully and not-so-successfully implemented framework elements. Patterns that compose these frameworks are also discussed.

The authors originally intended to “present a simple introduction to frameworks along with an in-depth discussion of a catalog’s worth of common examples” (p. 195). Instead, they have provided us with this short guide to thinking about, identifying, and using frameworks. That’s a good start. But they left the hard work of researching, documenting, and cataloging an interaction design framework library for another day. Such a reference guide would be helpful. I can see myself keeping such a book on my desk rather than on my bookshelf. The authors do promise us such a useful reference, not in book form, but as the first online, publicly available interaction design framework library. Indeed, the library exists and documents the same frameworks as Web Anatomy. But like many companion Web sites, the library has languished and has not been updated with additional frameworks since the book’s publication. Either way, the authors missed an opportunity. They would have done well to provide a more exhaustive catalog of frameworks, much as Christian Crumlish and Erin Malone’s Designing Social Interfaces (O’Reilly, 2009) details patterns for the social Web.

However, if you’re unfamiliar with the concept of patterns, components, and frameworks, this book is
great primer and will get you thinking critically about how to incorporate frameworks into your design process.

Stewart McCoy
Stewart McCoy is an information architect at Mule Design Studio in San Francisco, CA. He maintains a portfolio and blog at stewartmccoy.com.

From Black Codes to Recodification: Removing the Veil from Regulatory Writing

Although slim for a textbook, From Black Codes to Recodification is written to be a guide to regulatory writing for graduate students and undergrads in technical communication or public policy. At a little over 150 pages in length, including appendixes, the book is unintimidating and approachable even for students reluctant to tackle rhetoric studies. Miriam F. Williams makes efficient use of her pages, giving a detailed analysis of three case studies while concentrating on differences in language and intent, examining rhetoric, and illustrating what to do and what not to do when writing laws.

From Black Codes to Recodification provides a regulatory contextual view of technical documents, comparing the reprehensible post-Civil War Texas Black Codes (written as a way to legally enforce virtual slavery on recently freed slaves) with modern Child-Care Licensing Division regulations in the same state. In this manner, Williams shows how the complex, jargon-filled legalese historically used for law-writing creates a veil that marginalizes certain audiences and can be applied to conceal true intent, while the modern Plain English approach builds trust in affected communities by simplifying and clarifying regulations, thus removing the veil. Through analyzing the Texas Black Codes in their historical and rhetorical context, the author presents an argument for why African Americans may be distrustful of regulatory writing and outlines ways to build trust.

Williams makes her case in only six chapters, with one chapter serving as an introduction and another describing how technical documents at the time of the Texas Black Codes, including a “made plain” version, served to foment further distrust among African Americans. Three chapters are case studies that form the body of the book, covering how the Texas Black Codes contributed to distrust in affected constituents, the Plain English approach employed today by regulation writers, and how current African American business owners in Texas perceive both legalese and Plain English regulations.

In her final chapter, Williams offers a rule-making heuristic to build trust through regulatory writing. This heuristic seems to be what the entire book is leading up to, but ultimately it feels like From Black Codes to Recodification is written to argue the benefits of Plain English over legalese: Legalese (perhaps justifiably) is consistently portrayed negatively with few redeeming features, while Plain English is shown in a positive light. However, the shortcomings of Plain English are described as well, and Williams does take pains to show that Plain English needs to be properly written in order to build trust and make things better, echoing the Obama administration’s platform of government transparency.

Approximately one-third of the book, which is already short, is composed of four appendixes. Two appendixes are transcripts that detail Williams’s research processes, providing real-world examples that would be helpful to students and other researchers who want to re-create the author’s cultural-studies approach. I found the remaining appendixes to be the most useful, as the ample background information helped me better understand the case studies and Williams’s conclusions. The first one lists the original Texas Black Codes and the author’s Plain English versions. The second provides a rhetorical analysis of the legalese and Plain English versions of the Texas Black Codes and reads so well that it would actually work better as its own chapter.

Williams focuses her analysis on regulations pertaining to African Americans in Texas in order to keep analysis within a closed system (the Texas legislative body) and because of African Americans’ history of advocacy against discrimination. Williams also has personal experience writing for the government in the
Texas Child-Care Licensing Division, giving her insight into the more modern methods of regulatory writing. I understand this desire to maintain a narrow view, but I do wish that From Black Codes to Recodification contained more examples and case studies, possibly addressing federal regulations or other cultural groups. These could give additional support for the author’s arguments or a progressive history of developments in regulatory writing. Instead, the book is tightly focused on two extreme examples more than a century apart. Perhaps expansion is something to consider for further revisions or additional volumes.

At its current length, From Black Codes to Recodification would be ideal as a supporting text for any course combining technical communication and political science, and with the author’s concentration on using regulatory writing to build trust in historically marginalized communities, it is a perfect resource for anyone needing to communicate with a distrustful audience.

Devor Barton
Devor Barton holds a BA in communications from the University of Houston and a certificate of Project Management and an MS in technical communication from the University of Washington. He is a member of STC’s Puget Sound Chapter and is an ICIA Certified Technology Specialist.

Confessions of a Public Speaker

Many STC members, me included, have some degree of public speaking experience. In light of this fact, it might be easy for us to look past Scott Berkun’s new book. After all, STC member or not, the basics of effective public speaking have remained the same for generations: knowing your audience, preparing your materials, practicing your speech, knowing and dealing with likely objections, and so on.

Berkun provides the basic information, to be sure, but what sets this book apart is the personality that comes forth in the writing. A veteran public speaker who earns $5,000 per presentation, Berkun illustrates his points with examples from his own experience. He discusses practicing before giving a presentation and dealing with his own butterflies even after all the rehearsals.

I’ve learned from the book two lessons that I wish I had known when I began speaking at STC events. Berkun describes how to deal with a small crowd in a big room. If you’ve spoken at an STC event, you might have spoken in a room with a capacity of 200 people but had only, say, 15 to 20 in attendance—and they were scattered throughout the room. Berkun writes that when a small crowd is dispersed throughout that big room, your energy never effectively reaches everyone because it is eaten by the dead space. He suggests that you ask everyone to move up toward the front and center of the room. In this way, you can better focus your energy toward the audience.

Another useful lesson concerns the use of titles in presentations. Many speakers think of their titles at the last minute, after preparing their presentation content. Berkun suggests that an interesting title makes for a stronger presentation because it can guide your thinking as you create your presentation. When you must create
your next presentation, consider using one of the following titles:

• “The top five problems you have with (your topic) and how to solve them”
• “Why (your topic) sucks and what we can do about it”
• “Mistakes I made in (your topic) and what I learned”
• “Smart shortcuts and clever tricks only experts know about (your topic)”
• “The most frequently asked questions and brilliant answers about (your topic)”

Even in reviewing these headings, I almost feel inspired to create a presentation for an STC event, or at least rewrite some of the presentations I have made at past conferences and meetings.

Not many how-to books can both inform and entertain. Berkun has written such a book.

George Slaughter
George Slaughter is a senior technical writer with The Integrity Group and a past STC Houston president.

Human-Computer Interaction: Development Process

In 2008, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates published the second edition of a 1,358-page collection of chapters by human-computer interaction (HCI) experts, The Handbook of Human-Computer Interaction: Fundamentals, Evolving Technologies, and Emerging Applications. This handbook, edited by highly respected HCI experts Andrew Sears and Julie A. Jacko, includes chapters for newcomers and experts in both research and practice.

The Handbook has chapters from recognized experts, and unlike many popular HCI books and blogs, contains supporting references rather than just the personal opinions found so often on blogs and wikis. However, this massive handbook is overkill for many professionals. A practitioner involved, for instance, in commercial software development might find quite useful the 15 chapters in the part “The Development Process” (offering sound practical and conceptual advice on such critical topics as personas, task analysis, requirements specification, prototyping and survey design); however, the same reader would not find the other 40 chapters too useful. A different reader might focus on a completely different set of chapters. For those working on emerging technologies such as wearable computing and tangible user interfaces, only a few chapters might be appropriate.

The publisher, perhaps responding to this problem, has taken most of the content from The Handbook and split it into separate books on four major themes. Here are the subtitles of the four books with sample topics.

• Fundamentals: 16 chapters. Emotion, persuasive technology, human error, input techniques, visual displays, haptic displays, and wearable computers.
• Design Issues, Solutions, and Applications: 16 chapters. Visual design principles, global design, mobile interaction design, online communities, and HCI and privacy.
• Designing for Diverse Users and Domains: 13 chapters. Gender, age, HCI for kids, perceptual impairments, designing for the deaf and hard of
hearing, HCI in health care, and motor vehicle–driver interfaces.

- *The Development Process*: 15 chapters. HCI and software engineering, inspection-based evaluation, usability testing, personas, task analysis, and requirements specification.

Each chapter in the four mini-handbooks starts with a detailed table of contents that directs you to specific topics—important since chapters are often 10 to 30 pages long. For example, I was recently looking in *Designing for Diverse Users and Domains* for information on text-entry issues for people with disabilities, and a quick scan of the chapter table of contents helped me quickly locate the desired information.

Although the number of chapters and the mix of research and practice across four books make it hard to critique the content in a short review, after heavy testing I rate the general quality of the content as high. Visual appeal and readability vary. Some chapters, especially those on research topics, are dense with text. Other chapters make good use of visuals, tables, and bulleted lists. The chapter on mental models in HCI in *Fundamentals*, for example, has good information, but its dense text makes for difficult reading.

A major issue is whether to purchase the Handbook with all the chapters or one or more of the set of four Human-Computer Interaction books that are relevant to your role and primary professional interests. The major problem with the separate books is that you may want general information on a topic like ethnographic methods (found in *The Development Process*) but also want details on how to apply that to the design of a health care product (found in *Designing for Diverse Users and Domains*) or a decision support system (found in *Design Issues, Solutions, and Applications*). Of the four mini-handbooks, *The Development Process* is likely to have the broadest appeal, since it describes methods (including contextual design, scenarios, and prototyping techniques) that are used by nearly all HCI practitioners. If you are a consultant, for example, and have broad interests and projects, you might want to purchase the single-volume Handbook. Students in HCI programs could make good use of the separate *Fundamentals and Design Issues, Solutions, and Applications* books. If your interests are on the practitioner side, *The Development Process* would be quite useful.

As a consumer of many chapters from the set of four books, I can give a hearty recommendation for the content and credibility of the chapters. My suggestion is to go online and check out the table of contents for each of the separate books and decide whether it is more cost-effective to buy one or more of them or to purchase the full *Handbook of Human-Computer Interaction*.

Chauncey Wilson

Chauncey Wilson is an STC Associate Fellow with 30 years of usability experience. He is senior manager of the Autodesk AEC User Research Team, an adjunct lecturer at Bentley University, and a frequent speaker at professional conferences. Chauncey has published many articles and book chapters on human-computer interaction and psychology.

The Rhetorical Nature of XML: Constructing Knowledge in Networked Environments


*The Rhetorical Nature of XML* shows technical communicators how they can “expand their skills and understand how to use, and not be used by, new communication technologies” (p. ix) such as single sourcing, classification systems, HTML, XML, and other social media venues. Its accompanying Web site, www.rhetoricalxml.com, contains “a repository of XML tools and tutorials, links of interest, and sample documents,” as well as code examples (p. 4).

HTML is all about how you set (format) text and images and how you link the text and images to “go” somewhere else. “XML is about identifying, separating, and recombining specific data” (p. 42) needed for other purposes or designated content by using document type definitions (DTDs) and schema. It lets you use software to search and retrieve or locate and extract specific data, provided those data have been marked and coded appropriately in a database or Web site.

Both markup languages use a CSS. Yet, XML has its own style sheet, XSL, composed of XPath (an XML document navigating language), XSL-FO (a formatting
language), and XSLT (a document transforming language). XML lets you combine, share, and repurpose content by semantically describing the parts so the computer does the work for you. Yet, computers still need you to select, group, and manage XML tags.

The final chapter of *The Rhetorical Nature of XML* discusses five XML professions: technical communicators, technical editors, digital media practitioners, library scientists, and interdisciplinary professionals/researchers. The authors interviewed five XML professionals: a college professor, two technical communicators, a software engineer, and a professor who is a software developer. Each person has a different educational background, XML familiarity, and profession, yet they all use XML for projects. Applen and McDaniel asked each person ten questions on the ways they personally use XML to solve problems for particular types of tasks; the validation, transformation, and parsing techniques they used; and why they chose XML to solve these problems. Each person’s response follows the question so that you can easily see the differences in how each XML professional handled resolving the problem or project with the use of XML.

As technical communicators, we need to understand how the rhetorical use of tools can help us improve our knowledge of subject areas, like XML, and the use of these tools in our profession.

**Jackie Damrau**

Jackie Damrau has more than 20 years of technical communication experience. She is a Fellow and member of the STC Puget Sound chapter and the Instructional Design & Learning SIG, and general manager of the STC International Summit Awards. She serves as the Book Review Editor for *Technical Communication*.

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**Good Faith Collaboration: The Culture of Wikipedia**


Wikipedia, as defined by both Michael Reagle and Lawrence Lessig, professor of law at Harvard Law School, who wrote the foreword to this book, is a community formed by collaboration. (In my opinion, this is true of all communities in human history.)

A technical communicator is more apt to think of Wikipedia as an encyclopedia of useful facts. That also was Reagle’s initial impression as he used the tool extensively for his graduate school research on Wikipedia. Because of his research interest, he eventually “found Wikipedia to be a compelling site for the study of collaboration” (p. xiii). This insight became the foundation for *Good Faith Collaboration*.

Of first importance, the author has performed a service by documenting in one location the progression of encyclopedias that preceded Wikipedia; the culture of that time; and the movers, shakers, and leaders of what has come to be the world’s most-used free and open source collaboration software. The 60 pages of notes and cross-reference material at the end of the book attest to the author’s extensive research.

Reagle explains terms common to Wikipedia and other online encyclopedias from their origin to current usage. For example, *Neutral Point of View (NPOV)* is the attitude that permits collaborators to write without judgment from the community, a freedom that is balanced by the reluctantly assumed role of *benevolent dictator*, who uses authority only in the face of events that might harm the community, such as a threatened hostile takeover by Neo-Nazis. The benevolent dictator prefers Theodore Roosevelt’s leadership style: Speak softly and carry a big stick. *Trolls* are those who post controversial or irrelevant messages on a page to disrupt an online community. *Forking* occurs when collaborators do not see eye to eye on a topic and each proceeds in a different direction, creating a fork or branch for Wiki
users to choose. Some forks have resulted in separate encyclopedias, such as the Spanish-language *Enciclopedia Libre Universal*.


Interesting though this history proves to be, it should be noted for those who wish to create an internal Wiki in their office that this is a “how-it-happened” book, not a “how-to” book.

Donna Ford
Donna Ford is current president of the Connecticut STC chapter. She has been a technical writer since 1987 in the hardware, software, and government health care industries.

**Digital Design for Print and Web: An Introduction to Theory, Principles, and Techniques**


The preface of *Digital Design for Print and Web* argues that designers “must marry the principles of design to software techniques” (p. 11). Following this premise, John DiMarco offers a valuable balance of principles and applications.

Part I is dedicated to theory and principles. Although the organization could be more effective, the content is clear and comprehensive. DiMarco defines *graphic communication* and then sorts communication goals into four categories: information, persuasion, education, and entertainment.

For each, he provides a brief explanation and a list of related design principles. This introductory framework would be even more helpful if it reminded readers that communication goals are rarely neatly contained by one of the four categories.

DiMarco also offers a definition of *design* itself that demonstrates this complexity, describing it as “a spiraling process that is used to solve a problem and achieve a goal” (p. 30). Through a concise overview of modern design movements and their influence on current design thinking, he provides a second frame through which to think about design. He also includes a brief, helpful introduction to elements such as line and shape, and an in-depth discussion of color and typography.

DiMarco takes readers through the process of conceptualizing and planning a design and discussing several types of projects. His seven-step design process again foregrounds problem solving and the importance of audience, purpose, and context. As he notes, it is not the only approach, but readers, especially those new to design, will find it useful and comprehensive.

Part II focuses on tools and techniques: raster graphics, vector graphics, digital layout for print, and Web site development. Each discussion begins with a helpful overview followed by step-by-step technique lessons. For example, a chapter includes lessons for using layers, selecting, transforming, and other relatively basic tools in Adobe Photoshop before addressing more sophisticated features, such as masking, using levels to modify tone, and adjusting color balance. Similarly, in the coverage of vector graphics and page layout software, the lessons move logically from basic to more advanced and cover the most useful tools in Illustrator and InDesign.

The final chapter, on Web site design and development, follows a slightly different pattern, beginning with a discussion of design and development tasks. DiMarco revisits the design process here, focusing on the creation of a personal Web portfolio. The lessons, involving Photoshop, Fireworks, and Dreamweaver, maintain this focus, covering techniques that should enable the reader to make a significant start on building a Web site.

A few organizational quirks notwithstanding, *Digital Design* covers considerable ground. Professional communicators seeking to strengthen their design abilities will find the book useful. Students, the primary audience, will welcome the straightforward style,
full-color examples, and clear step-by-step lessons. Instructors, too, will find the book valuable and will appreciate its online resources.

Eva Brumberger
Eva Brumberger teaches professional communication at Virginia Tech. She has worked as a technical writer/editor on both a full-time and a freelance basis. Her research interests include visual communication, international communication, and pedagogy. She is a member of STC and was president of the Border Network Chapter.

Designing with the Mind in Mind: Simple Guide to Understanding User Interface Design Rules

As technical communicators, we focus on people—on what works well for those who use what we and our colleagues are developing. Field studies and usability testing help us. So does having a deep understanding of “how people perceive, learn, reason, remember, and convert intentions into action” (p. xiii).

In Designing with the Mind in Mind, Jeff Johnson promises that “you will learn the most important aspects of the psychology underlying user-interface and usability design guidelines” (p. xiii). He delivers on that promise. Designing with the Mind in Mind is very well written and understandable. Johnson’s writing, even the chapter headings, speaks to his audience with personal pronouns that include all of us: “Our Color Vision Is Limited,” “Our Memory Is Imperfect,” “We Have Time Requirements.”

Technical communicators may be particularly interested in the chapter “Reading Is Unnatural.” As Johnson explains, “we’re wired for language, but not for reading” (p. 33). He goes on to explain how the brain deals with reading and gives excellent examples to show how poor information design can disrupt reading.

If you don’t have a background in cognitive psychology, Designing with the Mind in Mind can serve well as a “just enough” primer. In fewer than 200 pages, Johnson covers many aspects of psychology, linking each chapter to design guidelines with examples.

If you do have a background in cognitive psychology, you may find that Johnson updates your knowledge. For example, the modern view of short-term and long-term memory is quite different now than it was even a decade ago. Recent research shows that both are aspects of a single memory system rather than, in the old view, that short-term memory was a sort of buffer through which information passed, sometimes going on to long-term memory and sometimes not. Short-term memory is now thought of as “awareness” rather than as a “place.”

The book is beautifully presented. Like other recent books in the Elsevier/Morgan Kaufmann Interactive Technologies series, it is in full color with an open page design and many screenshots and other examples.

Jeff Johnson has the background to help us with this knowledge. He was part of the user interface team that created the Xerox Star (forerunner of the Macintosh and Windows). He has degrees in psychology from Yale and Stanford. Clearly, he has kept up with the literature on cognitive psychology and neuroscience to support his consulting and teaching work—and to bring us this book.

Janice (Ginny) Redish
Janice (Ginny) Redish is president of Redish & Associates in Bethesda, MD. Ginny is an STC Fellow and former member of STC’s Board of Directors. Her latest book, Letting Go of the Words—Writing Web Content That Works (Morgan Kaufmann, 2007), is still receiving rave reviews on book sites and in blogs.
Communicating Science: Professional, Popular, Literary


Contrary to what we might expect from its title, Communicating Science is not about how to communicate science. This book is an insightful discussion of the challenges and consequences of science communication. Drawing on his training as a botanist, freelance science writing experience, and extensive reading in both science and literature, Nicholas Russell explores how science communication shapes and reflects the interconnections of science and society.

Writing from a social constructionist stance in an informal style, as illustrated by such phrasing as “truth is slippery stuff” (p. 149), Russell divides his analytical survey into five sections, each with four or five chapters, on scientists communicating to other scientists, scientists communicating with the public, scientific journalism, the origins of science in cultural contexts, and literary portrayals of science.

The most engaging portions of this book are the vignettes that introduce each chapter. Some are obviously fictitious, reading like parables; others are factual stories. Slightly problematic is the difficulty of distinguishing between fact and fiction at times, particularly in the first-person narratives. This minor complaint aside, these rehearsals of each chapter’s themes delight as they instruct and entice us into the chapters.

The first three sections, based on extensive secondary research, are the strongest and most applicable to our profession. Arousing our interest with such chapter titles as “Walk Like an Egyptian” and “Counting the Horse’s Teeth,” Russell critiques the cronynism of the peer-review system and deplores the “snake pit” conditions of scientists’ competition for short-term grant funding. But ultimately he concludes that no better system of monitoring scientific research has been devised.

Russell tackles science education, primarily the problems scientists encounter when presenting science to the lay public. He asserts that the difficulties stem mainly from scientists’ belief in the cognitive deficit model. Scientists tend to assume that if the public just knew more about science and understood it better, they would value science and scientists more. Russell rejects the deficit model of science education, insisting instead that people want to understand only the science that has meaning within their own personal, social, and cultural contexts. This key idea has implications for technical communicators. We must bear in mind that our audiences are not always best served by a large quantity of information. Audiences benefit most from assistance in interpreting and applying information to their tasks.

The remaining two sections are less absorbing, possibly because Russell tries to cover too much territory. These sections, a bit idiosyncratic and superficial, read like a historical survey textbook, which is not surprising given that Russell compiled the material for his postgraduate science communication students at Imperial College London. Nevertheless, his review of magic and alchemy as 17th-century precursors of natural philosophy, along with his explication of how science is portrayed in 19th-century Gothic fiction, including Shelley’s Frankenstein, are worth reading.

Clear and easy to read, Communicating Science is an important and enjoyable book.

Nancy MacKenzie
Nancy MacKenzie is a professor in the technical communication program at Minnesota State University, Mankato. She is a senior member of STC.
**Handbook for Writing Proposals**


Robert J. Hamper and L. Sue Baugh jump right into their topic in the introduction. For each of their eight chapters, they list a question that pertains to writing proposals and then briefly report how the chapter helps answer that question. You can work your way linearly through the chapters or start with the one that applies to your situation.

The audience is those who own a business, manage a corporation, or just want to improve their proposal writing. This new edition incorporates more details on how to determine budgets and time/cost estimates, tips on international business English to accommodate a more global customer base, and downloadable forms that you can edit and customize. You have to register with McGraw-Hill to get to the download area.

The book starts abruptly, launching into three scenarios, and then succinctly moves to opportunities and pitfalls of proposal writing. The scenarios illustrate common responses to requests for proposals (RFPs). This rather short section demonstrates why the book was written: to show what to look at when developing an RFP, how to write your proposal, and how to present it to the potential customer.

The rest of the book gives in-depth advice and suggestions on the process. It presents the information in small chunks of clear, easy-to-read text with checklists and graphics interspersed throughout. Extensions of the first scenario appear periodically to illustrate the portion of the process being discussed.

Hamper and Baugh go over each section of a proposal, indicating who reads that section, how it should look, and what goes into it. They also include useful bits of knowledge, such as what is often the most underperforming portion of a proposal (management strategy) and why you should focus on it. The authors break down the criteria for using tables, charts, and graphics and explain how to avoid common mistakes in their use.

Many of the graphics and the first three appendixes contain samples of paperwork showing how the end result should look. In the example for the main portion of the proposal, the authors use an outline format; it would have been helpful to offer two or three variations to give you more options, especially if you’re a new proposal writer. The last three appendixes cover English usage in international business, frequently confused words, and frequently misspelled words.

Overall, this book offers well-thought-out, clearly written advice without extraneous intrusions. You might still have questions about your particular applications, but you will have the information that you need to realize you should be asking those questions.

**Writing for the Internet: A Guide to Real Communication in Virtual Space**


The title *Writing for the Internet: A Guide to Real Communication in Virtual Space* is somewhat misleading. This is not a how-to manual on writing for the Web. It is rather a collection of readings and essays, grounded in research and expert opinion, on issues and communication theory relating to media writing in today’s multimedia world.

This guide is intended for journalism students who are taking on the challenges of writing as a vocation. It is primarily for “newspaper or magazine writers . . . video and audio broadcast
writers and other forms of multiplatform writing and publishing.” Other Internet communicators, “literally anyone who writes any form of digital communication” (p. vii), are also included in the target audience.

This book covers a lot of ground. The titles of the main sections—“Online Publishing,” “New Media News Writing,” “Internet Writing and Technologies,” “Visual and Interactive Rhetoric,” and “Social Media”—provide a broad overview of the contents. But much like Internet writing itself, no one section exists in isolation. As Craig Baehr and Bob Schaller stress throughout the book, the nature of Internet writing is interdisciplinary: “Writers must familiarize themselves with the entire range of skills required of online publishing, which . . . extends well beyond the task of writing and editing content” (p. 110). Thus, for example, a theoretical discussion of media convergence early in the book relates directly to practical advice on using content management systems that appears later. Yet Baehr and Schaller, who both teach at the university level, have created a guide in which each chapter, such as the one on digital content ownership, is able to stand alone as the basis for classroom exploration and individual student study.

While the book is not a writing manual per se and it does venture well beyond the bounds of content creation, students will glean succinct, practical advice on writing, in features such as the sidebar containing guidelines for writing effective hyperlinks and the “Ten Interviewing Tips” in the appendix. The chapters on narrative theory and blogging provide especially valuable insights into effective writing.

One of the authors’ stated goals is “to connect related theories and methods of Internet writing to working-world application and practice” (p. vii). Yet, like any book that sets out to teach about technology issues, it is in danger of being quickly outdated and, indeed, some of the material in Writing for the Internet already seems outmoded. Telling students how cell phones make use of Internet connections or that “university libraries are a particularly rich source of online material” (p. 67) suggests that some readings in this guide are less relevant to real-world application than others. However, used in conjunction with other texts and classroom discussion, Writing for the Internet should prove to be the catalyst for thoughtful exploration of contemporary issues in journalism.

Linda M. Davis
Linda M. Davis is an independent communications practitioner in the Los Angeles area. She holds a master’s degree in communication management and has specialized in strategic communication planning, publication management, writing, and editing for more than 20 years. Linda is a member of IABC.

Scientific Writing and Communication: Papers, Proposals, and Presentations

Angelika H. Hofmann’s comprehensive textbook, Scientific Writing and Communication, developed through “extensive class-testing” (p. xviii) in her science writing classes at Yale, stipulates that clear thinking depends on clear writing, that effective communication serves as a significant differentiator in scientific argument, and that the science writer’s fundamental objective is to “Write with the reader in mind” (p. 12). As Hofmann shows, studies indicate that scientific readers object most to a lack of structure in writing, so she organizes the book around this principle.

Hofmann also follows her own advice, laying out her argument in an organized, detailed, but highly cross-referenced and visual design. Though entirely in grayscale and more than 700 pages long, the book is quite usable by either students on their own or instructors in the classroom. Enumerated sections (2.1, 2.2, and so forth), structural white space, and highly visible headings make the text easy to refer to in classroom discussion. Thumbs-down and thumbs-up icons indicate a problematic example followed by an improved version, and brackets in the margin highlight the structural function of sentences and paragraphs in the examples. English as a second language (ESL) problems and solutions are also bracketed and labeled “ESL advice.” Chapters end with lists of principles.
studied and with a generous set of problems for students to solve (a key is provided in back).

Each element of the basic IMRAD report structure (Introduction, Methods and Materials, Results, and Discussion) is given a separate, detailed chapter, with particular emphasis on the “funnel” structure of introductions; the difference between results and discussion; the critical importance of abstracts as often the only thing editors and reviewers read or databases retrieve; and the need to make titles informative, the first page perfect, and the manuscript fit a journal’s specifications exactly.

Hofmann also explains why studying the granting organization before submitting proposals is vital and how “Many proposals are rejected by reviewers because of a bad Research Design section” (p. 452). She offers practical advice on how to deal with rejection and practical guidance on presenting schedules and budgets—topics not usually covered in technical writing textbooks.

Also helpful for students are the chapters on posters, presentations, and the job search. Posters should tell the story visually and “Provide an explicit, take-home message” (p. 500). Oral presentations require you to “Get to know your audience”; “Practice, practice, practice” (p. 517); follow the preacher’s maxim; “Think graphically” (p. 521); and “Avoid appalling sounds” such as “ums” and “uhs” (p. 529). The job search requires continual revision of CVs and resumes based on research into prospective employers, and the development of teaching and research statements, as well as portfolios.

The exhaustiveness and usability of Hofmann’s text make it a candidate for the only scientific writing textbook anybody would ever need. The classroom-tested approach, highly detailed and clear explanations, a profusion of excellent examples, and attention to topics usually unfamiliar to students render the book an excellent resource and a very good value. Were I to teach a class in science writing at any level, this is the text I would use.

**Donald R. Riccomini**

Donald R. Riccomini is a member of STC and a lecturer in English at Santa Clara University, where he specializes in teaching engineering and technical communications. He previously spent 23 years in high technology as a technical writer, engineer, and manager in semiconductors, instrumentation, and server development.

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**Programming the Mobile Web**


At the beginning of 2010, the United Nations Telecommunications Agency noted that more than 68 percent of the world is using mobile devices. Currently, there are more than 3,000 mobile devices on the market with about 30 different browsers. Statistics also indicate that the percentage of Web browsing done from mobile devices will increase from the current figure of less than 4 percent as more Web sites are designed with the mobile market in mind.

Although the mobile Web architecture is much the same as that on your desktop, there are differences. For example, mobile devices involve different screen sizes, bandwidth, and processing capacity. Firtman’s *Programming the Mobile Web* identifies best practices for creating Web applications for these mobile browsers.

The main difference between desktop and mobile is screen size. A mobile screen measures only 1.5 to 3 inches diagonally, in contrast to a desktop screen of 17 or more inches, and it has roughly half the resolution. For the small screen, Firtman suggests such strategies as avoiding horizontal scrolling, using lists rather than tables, and keeping the main navigation to three or four links.

Browsers used on mobile devices include Internet Explorer, Safari on iOS, Android, webOS, Symbian WebKit, and BlackBerry. Firtman includes many useful compatibility tables for these and other browsers, showing how each handles such things as Adobe Flash, file upload, text input, and other coding markup.

Firtman points out the 80/20 law that 80% of your desktop site will not be useful to the mobile user. Therefore, you should consider what the navigation tree will be prior to doing any coding. He also suggests defining use cases, keeping in mind where the user is, why he is accessing your mobile Web site, and what information is he looking for.

Since I work with testing the user interfaces for our mobile applications, I like two cited resources in
particular: Firtman’s list of user interface guidelines for both mobile and tablet Web application design at www.mobilexweb.com/go/uiguides and the W3C mobile best practices page, http://www.w3.org/TR/mobile-bp/.

Geolocation on a mobile device can help shoppers seeking a particular department inside a store or travelers trying to determine their current location. Firtman helpfully includes a table showing which browser/platforms support client geolocation.

Because it can be difficult to test your Web site on real devices, the chapter on testing, debugging, and performance includes alternatives to buying or renting devices. For example, Firtman suggests using a testing house company (an expensive solution), creating a beta tester program, or using a remote lab.

Because the mobile Web brings with it new usability patterns and best practices, Firtman’s book is a useful one-stop reference. For example, he includes browser compatibility tables, along with the tips and suggestions (associated with the footprint icons) throughout that are helpful when doing mobile Web design.

Rhonda Lunemann
Rhonda Lunemann is a senior technical writer with Siemens PLM Software, a senior member of STC’s Twin Cities Chapter, and a member of the Hill Speakers Toastmasters Club (Club 4415).

The Practice of Qualitative Research

The Practice of Qualitative Research provides a reference for readers interested in qualitative research. The authors are sociologists, and many examples from sociology appear throughout the book.

The book is designed elegantly, and chapters contain several helpful features. Each has a glossary of key terms. Discussion questions allow for further reflection and could be used effectively in a class. The Resources section of each chapter provides an annotated list of relevant Web sites and identifies relevant journals.

The first four chapters define qualitative research and provide lenses through which it may be viewed. You learn how to select the methodology for your study, which in turn will affect the research questions and the methods used to answer them. The discussions of sampling, validity, and reliability are brief but helpful. The chapter on ethics goes beyond the necessary mechanics of obtaining participants’ informed consent and satisfying the requirements of institutional review boards: It describes common ethical issues that novice researchers face and offers strategies for finding effective solutions.

Each of the chapters on data selection focuses on a particular research method or a closely related set of methods. They offer useful how-to information while also providing a helpful overview, both of which will benefit you even if you do not plan to implement a particular method. The authors address in-depth interviews, oral history, focus group interviews, ethnography, content analysis, and “unobtrusive methods” (such as analyzing pictures, advertisements, audiovisual files, Web sites, and online discussions), case studies, and mixed method research.

Many “behind the scenes” vignettes provide insight into research projects researchers have conducted. These vignettes include subjects such as choosing a research topic and negotiating access to a research site. While some vignettes read like e-mails from the researcher, others are taken from the researcher’s published work. They bring in examples outside the research by the book’s authors while still focusing on typical social studies topics.

The final section addresses the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data. You might find the description of a four-step process helpful. The authors discuss in general how to choose a computer program for managing and coding qualitative data, but they identify only a few of the many programs available. Although the chapter on writing and presenting research results is short, it does contain a valuable section on representing participants’ voices. Finally, the authors reiterate that ontology, epistemology, theory, and method all come together a holistic “research nexus.” They identify emerging methods of research—and some
of the ethical considerations they bring—and note that your nexus will change over time.

Because the examples in the book are academic studies, I would encourage anyone interested in applying research in a workplace setting to seek out a different book. I would recommend this text for possible use in a research methods class or on a reading list for a graduate degree.

Russell Willerton
Russell Willerton teaches in the technical communication program at Boise State University.

Usability Testing Essentials:
Ready, Set . . . Test!


“U R Usability” is what Carol Barnum would say if you are a software or Web developer, interaction designer, information architect, technical communicator, visual or graphic designer, user-assistance specialist, instructional technologist, or involved in the development or support of a product of any type. In Usability Testing Essentials, she intends to provide “the tools and techniques you need to get going or advance your knowledge of what you’re already doing” (p. 3).

Comprehensive and informative, Usability Testing Essentials is helpful for those who are new to usability testing and usability specialists. Barnum’s writing style is rather informal and very accessible. Much of the content is based on her practical experience as a usability professor and the director of the Usability Center at Southern Polytechnic University. She packs the book with real-world examples and tips, in addition to citing others in the field, such as Peter Morville and Jakob Nielsen.

With a diverse audience in mind, Barnum lucidly defines key terms such as usability and heuristics and explains the difference between task and goal, as well as between summative, formative, and iterative testing. In addition, she employs chapter summaries, illustrations, screenshots, margin notes, and boxed sections that contain resources and tips to organize the material efficiently. If you are new to usability testing, you will appreciate the abundant sample documents (for example, screener form, moderator’s checklist, permission form, consent form, and pretest and posttask questionnaires) and the informative boxed sections, such as “Methods for Successful ‘Think-out-loud’ Procedure” (p. 211). The recommended books and articles that appear in the margins are also helpful for those who want additional information on the subject.

This book is very similar to Barnum’s Usability Testing and Research (Allyn & Bacon, 2001; reviewed in the May 2003 issue of Technical Communication) in that it provides a clear description of analyzing users, choosing testing models, planning and preparing for usability testing, conducting the test, and analyzing and reporting results.

However, in comparison to her previous book, Usability Testing Essentials is enriched with many full-color illustrations, in addition to having a chapter on international usability testing at the end. Although the basics of testing are similar in both local and international contexts, Barnum urges her readers working in an international context to consider the norms and expectations of the culture that they are testing. In particular, she explains the cultural differences in Internet shopping characteristics, information architecture, search patterns, and technology adoption. She also draws on the cultural research of anthropologist Edward Hall and sociologist Geert Hofstede to explain how we can better understand international users.

Furthermore, Barnum demonstrates the concepts she has presented with actual case studies based on the Chinese Holiday Inn Web site and the Costa Rican Web site for UPS. Examples from these case studies appear throughout the book (conveniently positioned between chapters on green pages) and include heuristic evaluation, usability test plan, sample test materials, session log, findings analysis, usability study report, and Web site analysis.

Barnum does not define user-centered design as thoroughly as she did in Usability Testing and Research, nor does she specifically discuss collaborative work or Web usability, although she does include numerous Web site examples in this book. The information on team
processes and group dynamics would have been useful for those who do collaborative work (which is perhaps a large percentage of the readers).

Overall, this is a thorough introduction and guide to usability testing. Barnum guides her readers from developing an understanding of usability and users, to planning, preparing and conducting the test, and finally analyzing and reporting the findings, in addition to giving them a brief overview of international usability testing.

Felicia Chong
Felicia Chong is pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and technical communication at Michigan Technological University. Her current research interests include usability testing and multimedia development and production. She has experience in teaching graphic design, Web design, digital photography, and college composition.

Concise Rules of APA Style

The 4.5 by 8.5-inch spiral-bound Concise Rules of APA Style, sixth edition, provides an easy-to-use summary of the more commonly used rules and guidelines found in the sixth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association. Although the introduction to Concise Rules points out that it covers the nuts and bolts of the rules for preparing manuscripts for the American Psychological Association journals, many publications in other social sciences also follow APA style.

The chapters of Concise Rules cover the following topics:
1. Planning and writing articles
2. Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization
3. Italics and abbreviations
4. Numbers, metrification (using the metric system), and statistics
5. APA style for illustrations, figures, and tables
6. Footnotes, appendixes, and other supplemental material
7. Citing contributions of others and formatting quotations
8. Illustration of APA styles with examples

In addition, Concise Rules explains the changes in guidelines from earlier editions and then recommends that readers supplement the concise rules by reviewing the AP style Web site (www.apastyle.org).

Both the APA Manual and Concise Rules provide detailed guidance on the emergence of electronic publishing, including headings, citations with URLs and DOI identification numbers, and other changes. For example, in explaining DOI numbers, the Concise Rules says,

The DOI as article identifier. A DOI is a unique alphanumeric string assigned by a registration agency (the International DOI Foundation) to identify content and provide a consistent link to its location on the Internet. (p. 203)

Both books provide guidance on how to find the DOI identifier in journals as well as in electronic databases. For APA journals, the DOI identifier appears on the first page of the article in the upper right-hand corner and below the copyright information. In databases, the DOI is listed on a separate line of the Full Record Display.

APA style now calls for including the DOI identifier when citing journal articles in the reference lists of articles, and the DOI identifier should follow the last page number of the article in the reference list.

Overall, Concise Rules is carefully laid out, easy to read, and easy to follow. Colored tabs signify the different chapters. The table of contents and index indicate the respective guideline using a paragraph number and its page number.

With its spiral binding, the Concise Rules when open takes up only 9 inches by 8.5 inches and lies flat on the desk or computer table. That design makes it easier to flip through and find information than in the...
perfect-bound APA Manual, which takes up about 10 inches by 14 inches when open—and does not lie flat.

Both writers and editors should find Concise Rules a handy guide when using APA style in their manuscripts.

Don Zimmerman
Don Zimmerman is a professor in the Department of Journalism and Technical Communication at Colorado State University, Fort Collins. He played key roles in developing the department's MS and PhD degrees. His research includes Web site and interface design; usability testing; health, environmental, science, and technical communication; and technology transfer.

The Business Playground: Where Creativity and Commerce Collide

When The Business Playground arrived in the mail and I opened the package, I have to say I was a little disappointed. I knew it was going to be about creativity; hence, the title. However, I was expecting a professionally published book like all the other books I purchase. What I got instead looks more like a child's book with weird-looking characters on the cover and what I considered to be boldly obnoxious colors, and the inside seemed even worse. Some of the text is slanted, there are deep yellow highlights and big bolded text, the weird-looking characters run throughout the pages, and the colors, although toned down a bit, thankfully, are also part of every page.

I spend time telling you this because the design of the book has a great deal to do with the content. Within moments of starting The Business Playground, I was actually enjoying it far more than I should. I devoured this book, and not just because the content is rich with examples of creative successes in the workplace and fun and playful suggestions for breaking through barriers to creativity. The book was just downright fun to read. The language, the style of writing, the content, the examples, the highlights, the colors, the weird-looking characters that became cute and fun to look at, and the genius evident on every page all took me by surprise.

OK, so what's the book about? In a word, creativity. It doesn't get any simpler than that. The authors create a compelling, fun, and playful environment to discuss what it means to be creative, how we lose our creativity, the barriers we run into when we try to reach those “aha moments.” “Business Playground is about how we grownups can rediscover the magic of creativity that we all lived and breathed every day as children, and apply it to business” (p. 229). To this end, they include “techniques and games that can help get our creative muscles trained and ready for action” (p. 230). But the book is not all fun and games. Well, OK, it is, but you will also learn a great deal along the way about when to work with others, when to develop ideas on your own, effective and fun ways to collaborate with others, and, most important, how to look at problems from different angles and come up with the right questions that could eventually lead to the very solution for one of the world's most pressing problems.

Who should read The Business Playground? All adults—no matter what your profession. Even if you don't fancy yourself a creative individual or someone who wants to change the world with the next best idea, read this book just so you stop settling for the status quo in your life. The only thing that could possibly go wrong is that you end up with an innovative idea.

Diane Martinez
Diane Martinez is a writing specialist for Kaplan University’s online Writing Center and a PhD student at Utah State University. Her technical writing experience has been mostly in higher education, engineering, and government contracting. She has been with Kaplan since 2004 and a member of STC since 2005.
I sat down to read *Will Write for Food* with a steaming cup of white peony tea after running errands on a day that desperately wanted to snow. It was like sitting down with Dianne Jacob as my personal mentor for writing about food. Jacob's personality shines through her writing, making it a joy to read.

The book is organized to take you on a journey through the craft of food writing through the eyes of many seasoned writers, including Jacob: “People who love food are an eager, enthusiastic bunch, and it carries over when they write” (p. 22). But niche writing is a very competitive business. Because it is so competitive, Jacob suggests you start small, with a blog or coffeehouse newsletter, from which you can later jump to grander pursuits covering various subjects, from cookbooks and restaurant reviews to fiction. I find particularly intriguing cozies, “food-based murder mysteries based on ordinary characters” (p. 248). The final chapter is all about getting published, particularly in nonfiction, detailing how to create a book proposal and when and why to use an agent.

Practically speaking, the book is laid out chronologically, which makes it read almost like a novel. But because you are trying to learn, Jacob also includes references to other sections of the book that pertain to the current information. I would recommend reading the first three chapters, because they are a beginner’s guide to food writing. The author explains that “many newcomers to the form focus on how food tastes and skimp on the other senses” (p. 8). After those chapters, the layout and references allow you to use the book as a set of instructions, and you can select whatever chapters meet your needs. This new edition includes more information about how to use the Web to your advantage, as in blogging. If you are starting with a blog, this is a great jumping-off point; you have your first posts specific to the type of food writing you crave. Writing exercises end each chapter.

This book would be useful for both new writers and experienced writers who have not written for their own pleasure. It covers mostly writing imbued with personality because food is so personal: “A food writer’s job is to be honest” (p. 30). Unlike more clinical and stoic writing, food writing encourages personality, even within the steps of a recipe. But as with any writing, if you are writing for a company, you may have to follow its style instead of your own.

In fact, this book contains so much useful information that with a creative eye you could use it as a guide to any type of niche writing, like knitting. The examples won’t be directly useful, as in a comparison of writing styles from specific cooking magazines, but the examples still illustrate the point.

**Angela Boyle**

Angela Boyle is a technical writer for Tyler Technologies, Inc., where she has worked since April 2006. She graduated from the University of Washington with a BS in technical communication.
methods allow researchers to understand the contexts and reasons for the responses.

James Conklin and George Hayhoe rightly describe a problem for technical communicators who must use research results in persuading scientists and engineers: Disciplines that rely on quantitative results for proof and support frequently ignore or devalue results that are not derived from quantitative methods. Their collection argues against this bias.

The editors also point out that students and researchers must adapt the descriptions of qualitative research methodology found in many social science texts to a technical communication situation in order to use qualitative research methods. However, 12 of the reprinted articles report results rather than describe methods.

The audience envisioned for this book includes practitioners, students, and anyone wanting to know how technical communication is practiced both today and in the future. The editors divide the book’s 16 chapters into three parts: The first two chapters, conceptual essays from the 1990s, set the context for what is to follow. The second section (Chapters 3 to 14) reports the results of qualitative research projects. The book concludes with a synthesis and literature review and then a look ahead.

The introduction to each chapter sets the context and shows the relationship of that chapter to the rest of the book. These introductions relate to a specific article by Barbara Giammona (Chapter 3). That 2004 article reports the results of an extensive questionnaire addressing the future of technical communication. Of interest to the editors are the nine questions that Giammona poses based on the results.

One of the three new pieces in the collection, by Linda Driskill and Julie Watts, is a case study in communication among mathematicians. While the editors point out lessons for technical communicators in their short introduction to the piece, readers will need to extrapolate the techniques, methods, and interpretations of the data to their own situation.

The second new article, by Michael Hughes and Tom Reeves, is more directly related to technical communication, focusing on usability teams and the new knowledge they develop that leads to improvements in Web page design.

The third is an extended literature review by Debbie Davy and Christina Valecillos, students of coeditor Hayhoe. It examines articles from 2003 to 2007, a rather narrow window considering that there have been four more years of qualitative research articles and books since.

In their conclusion, Hayhoe and Conklin make a strong case for the future of qualitative research methods in technical communication. Future practitioners as well as students at both the undergraduate and graduate levels will need to understand how qualitative research works—whether they intend to use such methods or need to read critically the research results of others.

As may be gathered from above, one disappointment of this volume is that it does not specifically address the unique issues faced by students in technical communication when doing or evaluating qualitative research. But, to be fair, that was not its intent. A second disappointment is that 12 of the 15 articles are reprints that are easily located, and of the 12 articles 11 come from one journal: Technical Communication. The lone exception is from Technical Communication Quarterly.

The value of this collection lies in its adding to the value of qualitative research methods for those doing and evaluating research in the academic and workplace settings. Should there be a second edition, I would hope that the editors would add at least one essay on qualitative research methodology itself and not leave it to the students and practitioners to deduce that method from the research reports published here.

Tom Warren
Tom Warren is an STC Fellow, a winner of the Jay R. Gould Award for teaching excellence, and professor emeritus of English (technical writing) at Oklahoma State University, where he established the BA, MA, and PhD technical writing programs. Past president of INTECOM, he serves as guest professor at the University of Paderborn, Germany.
The Book of “Unnecessary” Quotation Marks: A Celebration of Creative Punctuation

The Great Typo Hunt: Two Friends Changing the World, One Correction at a Time

Copyeditors and other grammar geeks who cringe at public displays of bad punctuation, rest assured that we are not “alone.” Two recent volumes take us on a tour of bad signage across the country. For editors like me, these books fulfill an armchair fantasy to scale billboards and save humanity from misguided quotation marks and other typos.

Bethany Keeley, a PhD candidate in rhetoric, has spent seven years blogging about “unnecessary” quotation marks; she recently turned her blog into a full-color photo book that had me chuckling from cover to cover. She and her blog fans contributed photos and cheeky captions.

Jeff Deck, a former academic editor, collects typo sightings on his blog, too, but the heart of his book is a grand road tour with pal Benjamin Henson, “two friends changing the world, one correction at a time.” Their focus on correcting—not just documenting—typos lands them in serious trouble with a federal agency, adding heft to their narrative.

Both books take us along for a ride, and Keeley’s color photos virtually put us in the passenger seat. She limits herself to a single punctuation error—misplaced quotation marks—and doggedly documents them.

Deck and Herson’s quest is broader, seeking out any type of typographical error and correcting it on the spot, usually (but not always) with permission of the sign maker. Their narrated tour is more of an inside joke, and it takes me back to the righteous indignation I felt at age 23, when I took my first editing job.

The two pals debate whether handwritten signs should be edited according to Chicago or AP style and offer insight into the nature of capitalism, employment, and education in the United States. They end with a proposal for reforming elementary school English instruction. Their “Appendix: A Field Guide to Typo Avoidance” (p. 251), is just as witty as Keeley’s photo captions.

Meek wordsmiths can find themselves emboldened by either author’s instructions on how to construct a personal typo kit. I envision armies of English majors whipping weapons out of a safari vest or shoulder sling. I particularly liked Keeley’s addition of a camera that can record video, “in case you catch someone making finger quotes in their speech,” and—inexplicably—a kazoo. Deck carried his typo correction kit like a sidearm, and a photo of it ended up as evidence in a federal case.

Deck started his Typo Eradication Advancement League (TEAL) with an ambitious (if tongue-in-cheek) mission statement: “[S]lowly the once-unassailable foundations of spelling are crumbling, and the time has come for the crisis to be addressed. We believe that only through working together with vigilance and a love of correctness can we achieve the beauty of a typo-free society” (p. 139).

Somewhere on the West Coast, a schism developed in the League, between the textbook-perfect prescriptivists, or “grammar hawks,” and the descriptivist “grammar hippies,” who recognize the fluidity of the English language. The argument led to a philosophical question: What if typos were not mistakes, but part of the natural evolution of English?

Keeley’s narrower mission gives her a platform for more humor and less zeal. She has come to view quotation marks as the “character actors of print, playing a wide variety of roles,” including “the word dimples that mark an adorable pun.” She hopes her audience will “find that quotation marks are merely the makings of a fun linguistic puzzle for you to solve” (p. 6).

Neither book is a grammar text or reference manual, but both have potential as supplemental reading for students. Deck and Herson take us along for a ride
with a pair of cool guys who take grammar seriously. Keeley’s book resembles a PowerPoint show more than a narrative but could provide a platform for an engaging and educational scavenger hunt.

The two books would make dandy companion pieces for editors who like to keep their own scorecards, teachers who want to promote precision with a spoonful of sugar, and friends looking for the perfect gift for an editor pal.

Katherine J. Hall
Katherine J. Hall, PhD, edits *Northwest Public Health*, the journal of the University of Washington School of Public Health. An STC senior member, she won a “distinguished” award in the 2009–2010 International Technical Publications Competition.

**EPUB Straight to the Point: Creating Ebooks for the Apple iPad and Other Ereaders**

Reading Elizabeth Castro’s *EPUB Straight to the Point* is like sitting down at the computer with a knowledgeable friend who patiently walks you through the process of turning your text into a fully functional electronic book (e-book), helping you to avoid the pitfalls along the way. This book is for anyone who wants to publish an e-book for e-readers that support the EPUB format, such as iPad, Nook, Sony Reader, Mobipocket (Blackberry) and Aldiko (Android), among others. The EPUB format is developed and maintained by International Digital Publishing Forum. An EPUB book is a specially constructed .zip file with the extension *epub*. Castro also gives advice and references for converting from EPUB to Amazon Kindle’s Mobi format.

Using the model of her *Teach Yourself Visually* books, Castro uses copious examples, screen captures, and graphics in explaining how to use Microsoft Word and Adobe InDesign to generate the files needed to make up the EPUB book. She also explains how to use a text editor to manually improve the files to take advantage of the abilities of the most advanced e-readers. EPUB is based on XHTML and CSS, and while Castro assumes some knowledge of these, the examples are understandable without this background. She refers you to other books for a full tutorial.

The chapters on using Word and InDesign to create EPUB files have extremely detailed procedures, interspersed with tips and helpful asides for both PC and Mac users. Castro also counsels about eliminating extraneous information that Word or InDesign might have inserted.

Castro also explains just enough of what’s going on under the EPUB hood to help you optimize your EPUB file, including creating the e-book cover, adding metadata, compressing the files, getting your new EPUB file to the iPad, and checking the EPUB file’s validity—a requirement for Apple’s iBookstore. She describes how to download validation software and run the test yourself or have your EPUB files validated by a third-party vendor.

Castro provides an intriguing chapter on advanced EPUB formatting, including inserting images and controlling text wrap around them; and adding links, tables, and even video into your e-book. I wish she had also included a comprehensive list of the books she refers to, perhaps as an appendix.

In all, as promised, anyone who wants to publish an e-book should find this approachable little book very helpful. Elizabeth Castro is an accomplished and prolific author who writes in an engaging, conversational style and illustrates her points with short, relevant examples. This book left me wanting to try creating an EPUB book myself.

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Marguerite Krupp is an STC Fellow, an adjunct professor at Northeastern University, and a technical writer with more than four decades of experience in the computer industry. She is a frequent presenter at conferences, an accomplished photographer and playwright, and the author of several general-interest freelance pieces.