TECH comments

President's Message:

Farewell to Friends
by Karen Gilbert President, STC/SM

. . . for your kindness, I'm in debt to you. For your selflessness, my admiration. For everything you've done, you know I'm bound to thank you for it!

—Natalie Merchant

During my term as president, I've gained tremendous respect and appreciation for all my volunteers whose dedication and commitment have helped us grow into an outstanding chapter. I'm grateful that I had the opportunity to serve as president. I have always enjoyed being part of our chapter, especially since I began volunteering more than five years ago.

Being president has been the most challenging and rewarding position I've held with our chapter. It was truly an honor and a privilege to work with such a talented group of volunteers whose participation and devotion made my job fun!!

I cannot express in words how much I appreciate everyone's efforts this year—our chapter couldn't have succeeded without you. We have overcome many obstacles to accomplish our goals, together we have achieved the extraordinary!! This is only because everyone chose *not* to see obstacles as stumbling blocks to impede our progress. Rather, each obstacle was approached as if it were a stepping stone, allowing us to reach the next plateau. I offer my sincerest gratitude for your enthusiasm and spirit. Our chapter continues to flourish because of volunteers like you.

Lastly, I thank everyone who has guided and encouraged me while I served as president— I could not have done it without you. I thank everyone for making my term enjoyable and memorable.   □

Awards Correction

In last month's article, "We're a Chapter of Winners!," we inadvertently omitted one of our chapter's award recipients, Monica Milla. Monica, along with Catherine Juon, received an achievement award for the *Women Business Owners Web* in the Online Communications category of the Western Michigan Shores regional competition.

Inside . . .

True-Life Tales: A Writing Contest for Tek-Riders
by Jon Russell, Senior Member, Washington, DC Chapter

Are you a technical writer? Wish you were? Just look like one? Tell us your true-life Dilbertesque tales from the cubicle.

Submit your funniest, most nightmarish, hilarious, phantasmagoric workplace stories in about 20 pages, double-spaced (maximum). Specially formatted submissions will not get extra points, but well-conceived good writing will.

Prizes:

First prize	$250
Second prize	$100
Third prize	$50

Send your submissions with a short bio of yourself and a return address by email to: veritas@erols.com. If your submission is hardcopy, send snail mail with a self-addressed stamped envelope to:

True-Life Tales From The Cubicle
50 D Street
Vallejo, California 94590
Attention: Russell

Submissions must be received by midnight, January 1, 1999.

Winning entries will be posted at http://www.erols.com/veritas on February 15, 1999.   □

Director-Sponsor Message:
Bye! It's Been Fun!
by Nancy Hoffman, Region 4 Director-Sponsor
phone: 734.663.8118, fax: 734.663.8778
email: creekscom@aol.com

Thank you for electing me to serve as our region's director-sponsor for the past three years. Yes, it's been three years and now it's time for me to "turn the region over" to my successor, Thea Teich. Congratulations, Thea, and best of luck in this new job. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did!

We've accomplished so many things during the past three years! I really can't list all of them, but some of them are:

➢ Three Region 4 conferences. Many thanks to the Chicago, Northeast Ohio, and Southwestern Ohio chapters for hosting excellent regional conferences!

➢ Very successful competitions, seminars, workshops, and monthly meetings conducted in our chapters; many excellent newsletters published.

➢ Many worthwhile events sponsored by STC grants and loans. These include a successful membership drive in Central Illinois, a publicity campaign for the education committee and the Institute for Professional Development started by the Chicago chapter in affiliation with Northern Illinois University, and a grant to the Bowling Green State University student chapter to help start the Kirk Foster Memorial Fund.

➢ Student Chapter Achievement Awards to the Bowling Green State University (twice) and Michigan Technological University chapters. The Chapter Achievement Award to the Central Illinois chapter.

➢ Many awards and honors given to members of our region: Distinguished Chapter Service Awards, Sigma Tau Chi awards, Della Whittaker scholarship winners, Jay Gould Awards (to Sandi Harner and Bill Coggin), and many new associate fellows and fellows.

Thank you, everyone, for inviting me to visit your chapters and for all those chicken dinners (hee, hee!). Thank you for all of your hard work and dedication to STC. Thank you to all of the excellent leaders in our region's chapters. Thank you, everyone, for working with me to make our region "The Stars of STC!"

A Message from Our (New!) Director-Sponsor
by Thea Teich, Region 4 Director-Sponsor
phone: 513.522.4773, email: teichtmc@aol.com

Hello! I want to thank everyone in Region 4 who has shown such confidence in me to vote me into the very big shoes I have to fill, now that Nancy Hoffman's term as regional director-sponsor is ending.

Whew! I'm already receiving emails and being told where I have to be (and when) at the International Conference. Oh well, that's why we have calendars, I suppose.

I am looking forward to working with you and your successors in the coming few years and I hope that I will meet many of you in Anaheim.

The Southwestern Ohio Chapter (SWO) could use your help promoting the 1999 Conference, which will take place in Cincinnati (May 16-19, 1999). You'll be promoting a conference in your region. Although Cincinnati is not near Disneyland, King's Island is only 25 miles away for those who need a roller-coaster fix. Cincinnati is within a six-hour drive of about ¼ of the U.S. population. For those who have had a hard time getting your company to cut loose the dollars to cover expenses, Cincinnati may be an easier sell. We are fairly sure Cincinnati will be less expensive than the Anaheim conference. The word needs to be spread now!

Remember, besides King's Island, we're also the home of Fat-free Pringles—OK, let's not discuss that.

Thanks for all your help.

1997 Region 4 Salary Survey Results

by Maria M. Hlas, Member Northeast Ohio STC Chapter

The results are finally in from the 1997 Region 4 salary survey. A survey sent out in the summer of 1997 to the Region 4 chapters in Ohio, Michigan, and parts of Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois, yielded 358 responses. Here's how Region 4 technical communicators reported they are doing. The average salary for a full-time technical writer is $44,225, and the average hourly pay for a full-time technical writer is $20 per hour. The average hourly billing rate for an independent contractor is $47 an hour, and the average yearly income for an independent contractor is $49,133.

The survey included questions about employment status, employment level, age, years of experience, and education level. Let's look at how each of these areas affect our salaries. In areas in which information was not given, not applicable (N/A) is shown.

Region 4 Results

Employment Status

	Full-time	Part-time	Independent Consultant
Salary	$44,481	$31,800	$40,000
Hourly	$20/hr	$17/hr	$27/hr
Billing rate	$41/hr	$40/hr	$47/hr
Yearly income	$39,340	$2,000*	$51,452

Employment Level

	Entry Level	Mid-level Non-supervisory	Mid-level Management	Senior-level Non-supervisory	Senior-level Management	Owner
Salary	$32,671	$41,339	$48,284	$48,338	$63,375	N/A
Hourly	$14/hr	$20/hr	$15/hr*	$25/hr	$20/hr	N/A
Billing rate	N/A	$50/hr*	$40/hr	$45/hr	$54/hr	$54/hr
Yearly income	N/A	$41,986	$50,289	$50,000	$60,625	$60,000

Age

	20 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50+
Salary	$37,475	$44,190	$45,900	$48,589
Hourly	$17/hr	$17/hr	$23/hr	$24/hr
Billing rate	$48/hr	$43/hr*	$44/hr	$56/hr
Yearly income	$39,304	$53,111*	$48,615	$51,267

Years of Experience

	<2 years	2 - 5 years	6 - 10 years	11+ years
Salary	$34,804	$36,854	$43,585	$50,201
Hourly	$13/hr	$16/hr	$25/hr	$24/hr
Billing rate	$75/hr*	$52/hr*	$37/hr	$50/hr
Yearly income	$40,000*	$34,173*	$43,227	$57,059

1997 Region 4 Salary Survey Results

Education Level

	High School	Associates	Bachelors	Masters	Doctorate
Salary	$40,056	$39,692	$44,037	$44,374	$49,867
Hourly	$18/hr	$19/hr	$16/hr*	$26/hr	$29/hr
Billing rate	N/A	$42/hr	$40/hr*	$52/hr	$150/hr
Yearly income	N/A	$62,000	$44,405*	$54,333	$65,000

We also asked for gender and the type of industry in which the technical communicator works. The gender of a technical communicator appeared to have no significant effect on salary. Because of the huge array of industries and the multiple industries in which technical communicators are involved, this information was too complicated to calculate. The numbers marked with asterisks (*) indicate values that seem to be inconsistent with the rest of the data. Because of the small number of responses (358) upon which these averages are based, some areas had only a few responses, which may account for the inconsistencies.

STC/SM Results

The responses were also sorted by the first three numbers of the zip codes so that we could report the data by chapter. For the Southeastern Michigan chapter we had 57 responses. Here are the data the chapter's technical communicators reported.

Employment Level

	Entry Level	Mid-level Non-supervisory	Mid-level Management	Senior-level Non-supervisory	Senior-level Management	Owner
Salary	$32,560	$48,391	$50,474	$48,000	$82,500	N/A
Hourly	$16	$23/hr	$18/hr*	$25/hr	N/A	N/A
Billing rate	N/A	$35/hr	$35/hr	$50/hr	N/A	$75/hr
Yearly Income	N/A	$32,400*	$67,500	$62,750	N/A	$60,000

Age

	20 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50+
Salary	$34,665	$49,483	$42,484*	$61,875
Hourly	$14/hr	$14/hr*	$31/hr	$22/hr*
Billing rate	$27/hr	$50/hr	$54/hr	$40/hr*
Yearly income	$65,000	$70,000	$45,750*	$48,700*

Years of Experience

	<2 years	2 - 5 years	6 - 10 years	11+ years
Salary	$31,685	$36,500	$43,000	$55,058
Hourly	$14/hr	$14/hr	N/A	$29/hr
Billing rate	N/A	$27/hr	$40/hr	N/A
Yearly income	N/A	$65,000	$51,200*	N/A

Continued from page 4
1997 Region 4 Salary Survey Results

	Education Level				
	High School	**Associates**	**Bachelors**	**Masters**	**Doctorate**
Salary	N/A	$48,900*	$47,095*	$42,953*	$50,058*
Hourly	N/A	$20/hr	$16/hr*	$35/hr	$29/hr*
Billing rate	N/A	N/A	$38/hr	$75/hr	N/A
Yearly income	N/A	N/A	$55,550	$60,000	N/A

The numbers marked with asterisks (*) indicate values that seem to be inconsistent with the rest of the data. Again, because of the small number of responses (57) upon which these averages are based, some areas had only a few responses, which may account for the inconsistencies.

Conclusion
When we originally proposed the idea of a salary survey for our region, we wanted to compare our results with the results reported for our area in the yearly salary survey performed by the international office. We felt that the salaries reported in the national survey seemed high. According to the results we received, we were wrong. Our results show that our numbers are slightly higher for Region 4 compared to the national survey results from Region 4. When the information is broken out into the various categories, Region 4 reports the same or slightly lower numbers than the national average.

Hopefully these results help each of us as technical communicators gauge how we are doing and give some of us a bargaining chip for salary negotiations. I would like to express my sincere thanks to Jill McCauslin and Angela Dianetti for their hard work and dedication in organizing and tabulating the Region 4 salary survey. Also, we thank all those who participated in the survey. □

Current Job Postings

Contract

5/6/98

Six-month contract at Ford (Dearborn). Responsibilities include:

➢ Write software release notes.

➢ Convert WordPerfect documents to Word.

➢ Enter flowcharts into ABC Flowchart.

➢ Write software unit test plans.

➢ Assist in maintaining project binders.

Primary Skills

➢ Technical writing, and communication.

➢ Word, Excel, and WordPerfect.

➢ MS Project, Access, ABC Flowchart, RF Flowchart helpful.

AA/AS , preferably in English, writing, or technical area (such as engineering technology). Computer science a plus.

David Sziraki
Audio Software Engineering Supervisor
Phone: 313.337.9772
Email: dsziraki@ford.com

5/7/98

Entry-level 18-month contract for Renaissance Worldwide, international information technology consulting firm in Lansing. Project is implementing Lawson HR, payroll, and benefits software to cover 65,000 state employees. Responsibilities include:

➢ Participate in joint application development sessions and help collect and document notes from interviews and meetings.

➢ Format and edit correspondence, reports, and project deliverables.

➢ Maintain correspondence and deliverables generated during project.

Requirements/Qualifications

➢ Word processing; MS Office Suite.

➢ One year of work or strong academic experience in technical writing.

➢ Exposure to procedural writing and presentations.

➢ Excellent interpersonal skills.

➢ Strong work ethic.

➢ Good understanding of business a plus.

Salary/Rate based on skill level. Opportunity to get experience working on high-profile project and exposure to consulting. Will have exposure to many management levels and will be depended on to produce high-quality deliverables.

Jenifer Chamberlain
Renaissance Worldwide, Inc.
8420 West Bryn Mawr, Suite 1100
Chicago, IL 60631
Phone: 800.695.9119
Fax: 773.380.9397
Email: jchamerlain@rens.com
Web site: http//www.rens.com

Note: If you know of employers seeking technical writers or editors for contract, free-lance, or permanent positions, please have them contact our ERS manager. This service is free to employers and benefits our fellow STC members who are seeking new job opportunities. □

Readability Formulas: Measuring the Readability of Your Words
by Steven Fraiberg

Can you judge a book without reading a page of it? In essence, readability formulas claim that they can do just this. These mathematical formulas are supposed to assess the *readability* of a document by measuring two features of a text: the average number of words per sentence and the average number of syllables per word. In this article, I want to address the problems with using these criteria to evaluate writing. Furthermore, I want to examine how it ever became acceptable to evaluate writing without using the most important measure of all: the reader.

Sentence Length

One criterion that readability formulas use is sentence length. You have probably heard that you should keep your sentence length to an average of no more than twenty words, a number that many textbooks suggest based on readability-formula research. The assumption is that shorter sentences mean more readable writing.

Try reading through the following passage. How easy is it for you to read?

The procedure is actually quite simple. First you arrange things into different groups. Of course, one pile may be sufficient depending on how much there is to do. If you have to go somewhere else due to lack of facilities that is the next step, otherwise you are pretty well set. It is important not to overdo things. That is, it is better to do too few things at once than too many. In the short run this may not seem important but complications can easily arise. A mistake can be expensive as well. At first, the whole procedure will seem complicated. Soon, however, it will become just another fact of life. It is difficult to foresee any end to the necessity of this task in the immediate future, but then, one never can tell. After the procedure is completed one arranges the materials into different groups again. They can be put into their appropriate places. Eventually they will be used once more and the whole cycle will then have to be repeated. This is a part of life.[1]

If you are like the majority of the readers, you are having problems reading this passage. Yet the passage itself has an average sentence length of eight. In this instance, you do not need short sentences to make sense of the passage as much as you need the context. You need to know that this passage is about washing clothes. Now that you have this context you should find the passage is easier to read—a readability formula does not measure this difference.

Word Length

The other criterion that most readability formulas use to measure text is the number of syllables per word. There are two problems with using this criterion. The first problem is the assumption that words with longer syllables are more difficult to understand. This is not always the case. For example, consider the word *erg* and the word *satellite*. Despite the fact that *satellite* has several syllables, most people understand this word without difficulty, while *erg* is a more difficult word even though it has only one syllable.

To complicate matters, a scientist would understand the word *erg*

without a problem. In this instance, the level of word difficulty depends on the reader. However, readability formulas do not account for different types of readers.

The second problem with measuring word length is the assumption that harder words mean the passage itself will be harder to read. Difficult words do not always indicate a difficult passage. To demonstrate this to yourself, take sixty seconds to study the words in the three columns below, and make a note of any words you do not know.

The	Centroid	Solution
Axis	Involves	To
A	Corresponding	Of
Subject	Reference	Placing
Table	Until	Configuration
Magnitude	Obtaining	Which
Inconsequential	Certain	Correlations
Vectors	Are	First
And	Process	Residual
Through	Factor	Considered

Chances are that you can read all and define all but a few of the words in these columns. Based on this information, you might think that you would be prepared to read these same words in the context of a written passage. The following passage is made up of the words in the columns above:

The centroid solution involves placing the first reference axis through the configuration of vectors; obtaining a table of residual correlations, which are subject to certain adjustments; placing the second factor through the centroid corresponding to the table of residual correlations; and continuing the process until the magnitude of the residuals can be considered inconsequential.[2]

In all likelihood, you aren't going to be able to make sense of the passage. The difficulty in this passage lies not in the words themselves but in the context that the words are placed. Even when the context is a something that we are all familiar with, such as washing clothes, the writer must still set the context or even the simplest meanings will not make sense. Readability formulas, however, do not account for the context.

But how did it become acceptable to judge writing out of

Readability Formulas: Measuring the Readability of Your Words

context? The answer has to do with the way that writing was taught in school. Many people were taught that learning to write was learning the rules. Never begin a sentence with the word *because*. Don't end a sentence with a preposition. Don't split an infinitive. These are just a few examples of the rules you probably remember learning at one time or another.

Sometimes these rules were good advice, often they were not. Instead of serving a larger purpose of communication, the rules became an end in themselves. This is the reason no one remembers their grammar. Grammar was learned as an arbitrary set of rules: a list of do's and don'ts. Readability formulas are just another in a long line of such rules. If we follow a mathematical formula, we can produce readable writing.

Readability formulas, however, are not a measure of effective writing. They cannot be a measure of good writing because they lack the most important measure of all: the reader. If you really want to improve your writing, test it out on someone. Nothing improves writing faster than truly understanding what is happening to someone who is reading your words.

Notes

1. John D. Bransford and Marcia K. Johnson, "Contextual Prerequisites for Understanding: Some Investigations of Comprehension and Recall," *Journal of Verbal Learning and Behavior* 11 (1972): 724.

2. Judith B. Cheatham, Ruth J. Colvin, and Lester L. Laminack, *Tutor: A Collaborative Approach to Literacy Instruction,* 7th ed. (Syracuse, NY: Literacy Volunteers of America, 1993), 15.

Steven Fraiberg holds an M.S. in technical communication from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. He has taught technical writing at several colleges.

JUNE 10, 1998

Program Meeting

Volunteer Celebration

Surprise Speaker

Holiday Inn North Campus
3600 Plymouth Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Cash Bar 6:30
Refreshments Provided

RSVP: Ellen Burgett
734.913.3074
Email: ellen_burgett@medstat.com

Did You Know . . .

➢ President Garfield could simultaneously write in Latin with one hand and in Greek with the other.

➢ The dial tone of a normal telephone is in the key of "F."

➢ Barbie's full name is Barbara Millicent Roberts.

➢ The door to the cave in which a bear hibernates is always on the north slope.

➢ The average ear of corn has eight-hundred kernels arranged in sixteen rows.

Quote of the Month

There is always another chance . . . this thing called "failure" is not falling down, but staying down.

—Mary Pickford

Volunteer Celebration

You've worked hard for STC/SM this year. Come to our Volunteer Celebration and let us show you how much we appreciate your volunteer work! We've planned an evening of fun and surprises for you. We'll have food and refreshments. Here's a chance to relax, be recognized for your

contributions, and have some fun. We have a special, surprise guest speaker for this event. Here are some hints. This author says that a lifelong love of writing, history, and happily-ever-afters naturally led her to a career as a romance writer. Her eight historical romances have earned her a place on national bestseller lists and praise from *Publishers Weekly*. She's a *Reader's Choice* award winner and, in 1995, the readers of *Affaire de*

Coeur magazine voted her one of America's Top Ten Favorite Romance Authors. In addition to romance novels, this author has written many business-related articles for national magazines, including *Entrepreneur*. Come meet this successful, local author and hear what she has to say about getting published.

We look forward to seeing you on Wednesday, June 10!

Calendar of Events

June 10 (Wednesday)
Program Meeting/Volunteer Celebration
Surprise Guest Speaker
Holiday Inn North Campus
Ann Arbor
Cash bar 6:30 p.m.
Food provided
Contact: Ellen Burgett
313.913.3074
Email: ellen_burgett@medstat.com

June 12 (Wednesday)
Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon
Cooker (on Plymouth Road)
Begins between 11:30 and 12 noon
Contact: Kathy Carter
313.475.5865
bluehoo@provide.net

July 9 (Thursday)
Ann Arbor Networking Luncheon
Red Lobster (on Carpenter Road)
Begins between 11:30 and 12 noon
Contact: See above.

Welcome, New Members!

David D. Brenner

Karen H. Brown

Makiko Fvjino

Laura Lou Gary

Derek S. Hall

Xiang Li

Valerie E. Madill-Gibbs

Sharon L. McDonnell

Cheryl A. Murphy

Sean R. Pollock

MariVawn Tinney

Martha A. Visnaw

We look forward to seeing you at future STC/SM functions!

Publication and Reprint Policies

TECH comments is published monthly September through June for members and friends of the Southeast Michigan chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. We welcome feature articles; letters to the editor; and information about meetings, courses, and workshops. We accept manuscripts in both hardcopy and electronic format with MS Word or ASCII text. Submissions will be edited.

Reprints from *TECH Comments* are permitted if credit is given and a copy is sent to the managing editor.

Send submissions to:

Jill Bornemeier, Managing Editor
P.O. Box 1289
Ann Arbor, MI 48106
jbornemeier@nei.com

TECH comments is printed by Print Tech, Inc. of Madison Heights, Michigan - 248.585.6600

TECH comments

STC/SM
P.O. Box 1289
Ann Arbor, MI 48106

TECH comments Staff
Jill Bornemeier, Managing Editor
Mary Kearney, Designer/Editor
Barbara MacGregor, Distribution