



# Lakeshore Connection

Wisconsin Chapter, Society for Technical Communication Volume 6, Issue 1 February 2005

## “I have to write something for e-learning? But, I don't know anything about e-learning!”

Have you recently:

- been assigned to work with or for your company's Training Department
- been asked to create an online learning module
- been told that you will be working on a team to create your company's first e-learning tools

... and you haven't a clue where to start?

You've written lots of technical documents — standard operating procedures (SOPs), user manuals, quick start guides. Now you're faced with creating training material. Not just training material, but, e-learning material. Before the panic sets in, let a few training veterans help guide you through the jungle of online learning.



Join us for a fun evening in March as we creatively explore some of the basics of designing and creating online training material. You'll have opportunities to participate in hands-on activities to help reduce the Fear Factor of developing training materials.

The schedule for this evening will be slightly different than our usual chapter meetings. Watch for details later in February!

Be sure to reserve this date on your calendar — Wednesday, March 9, 2005 at the Midway Hotel, 1005 South Moorland Road, Brookfield. ♦

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## “Single-sourcing with RoboHELP”

Mike Starr, a senior member of the Wisconsin Chapter STC, presented “Adventures in Single-sourcing with RoboHelp” for our January chapter meeting. The meeting was one in a continuing series of our “west side Wednesday” meetings, and was held January 12 at the Midway Hotel in Brookfield.

Mike is a contract and freelance technical writer currently on assignment at Volkswagen Credit in Libertyville, Illinois. He has almost 20 years of experience in technical writing, and has created both print and online documentation for a wide variety of high-tech products (both hardware and software).

Mike emphasized that there is no “one-click solution” for creating multiple output from a RoboHelp project. But “it’s not too difficult to get a structure suitable for both online and non-online [printed] documentation,” he said.

Mike described the step-by-step process of creating a high-quality Word document starting from a RoboHelp online Help project.

One of the keys to successfully managing this type of project lies in handling the “gotchas” — the little kinks and/or quirks that can trip you up while you are in the process of creating a project for both online and non-online use.

Some of these “gotchas” — and the strategies for dealing with or working around them — include:

- RoboHelp’s default Word template is almost “locked.” For your first step, you need to prepare your own Word template that has everything in it that you need (cover page, front matter, table of contents, etc.).
- When you create a Help project, there is no way to synchronize the tables of contents between the online help and the printed help. The solution is to make the table of contents as complete as possible in the online help, and then create the layout for your print document.
- When RoboHelp generates a Word file from the project, it puts a section break in front of every topic heading. In Word, you’ll want to go to Normal view, and then delete all of the section breaks, except for the breaks after the table of contents and before the index. The unneeded section breaks can foul up the footers and the page numbering in your final Word document.

“It takes about an hour,” Mike said, “to go from a Help project to a ready-to-publish Word file for a fairly lengthy document.”

And, he said, “this process is handy when you inherit documents from somebody else” and there are formatting issues (odd formats, unusual styles, etc). ♦

### Member news



Diane Newbury, our Chapter membership manager, reports the following membership changes:

#### **Members achieving senior member status:**

Virgil N. Chapman  
Elizabeth D. Dupee  
Phyllis A. Walker

#### **Members transferring in:**

Jill C. Wesolowski

#### **New members:**

Thomas P. Anderson  
Paula Kull  
Kathleen A. McIntyre  
Stephanie L. Parrett  
John E. Pieper  
Cheryl A. Schmelzer  
Steven C. Woida

**Congratulations!** ♦

## February recap

Our February 8 meeting was held at the MSOE Alumni Partnership Center in Milwaukee. The meeting theme was "Topics in Technical Communication Education – Trends and Projects." We had presentations by three panelists:

- Dick Gage, the Gateway Technical College Racine Campus General Education Department Chair for Communications, Languages, and Technical Communications
- Dr. Katherine Wikoff is program director for the technical communication degree at MSOE
- Rebekka Andersen is a second-year doctoral student in Professional Writing at UW – Milwaukee

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## Wisconsin Chapter Officers and Contacts

**Web site:**  
[www.stcmilwaukee.org](http://www.stcmilwaukee.org)

**President:**  
Kathie Gorski  
262-628-1672  
[kgorski@execpc.com](mailto:kgorski@execpc.com)

**Vice President and Public Relations Manager:**  
Mollye Barrett  
414-331-1378  
[mollye@clearpath.cc](mailto:mollye@clearpath.cc)

**Treasurer:**  
Mike Witas  
414-224-1661  
[mwitas@execpc.com](mailto:mwitas@execpc.com)

**Secretary and newsletter editor:**  
Jim Green  
262-879-5148  
[jim.green@fiserv.com](mailto:jim.green@fiserv.com)

**Membership Manager:**  
Diane Newbury  
414-228-8416  
[dnewbury@execpc.com](mailto:dnewbury@execpc.com)

**Program Manager:**  
Amy Carlson  
[Amy.L.Carlson@jci.com](mailto:Amy.L.Carlson@jci.com)

**Mentoring:**  
Dave Clark  
[dclark@uwm.edu](mailto:dclark@uwm.edu)

**Webmaster:**  
open



*February recap, continued from page 3*

Dick Gage stated that technical communication programs “have to keep pace with technology, and with employer and employee wishes. If you don’t keep pace, your students and programs are at a disadvantage.”

In the Gateway program, Dick said, “Students are building a portfolio from Day One.” The program also reinforces the realities and consequences of deadlines.

Katherine Wickoff noted that, in the MSOE technical communication program, the current trends are to:

- Teach life-long learning skills
- Focus of globalization and localization
- Emphasize management, especially project management
- Require real-world class projects
- Encourage technical specialization

Rebekka Andersen studies knowledge management and the relationship of technical communication to other fields. She has found that other fields don’t know about our expertise.

And, she has found that technical communicators

are perceived as end-users or “tool jockeys” – not as developers of, or designers of, technology.

A new training approach that emphasizes integration with other areas, and is less tool-oriented, would let us influence technology development and business technology development, she said. ♦

## Letter from the President

*By Kathie Gorski  
President, WI Chapter STC*

We are midway into our 2004-2005 term, with six programs completed and four to go. A good time to pause and reflect, right? Reflecting on our past programs, I am reminded of the excellent speakers, convivial discussions, and pleasant meals we have shared. Reflecting on what lies ahead, I focus first again on programs. We have an excellent lineup for the rest of the term (see summary below). If you haven’t made it to a chapter meeting yet this term, I encourage you to make the effort to attend at least one. You won’t be disappointed! And if you have attended one or more, we hope to see you again!

In addition, we will be launching our revamped chapter website soon, will be gathering information on member demographics and interests via a questionnaire developed by the Membership Team, and will be completing a rechartering exercise (pretty much the same thing as developing a strategic plan). We’re also looking at the possibility of offering scholarships and are hoping to offer two in-depth workshops in the second half of this term.

As always, we are trying to keep front and center the goal of being a valuable resource to you, one that will make a difference in your professional life. What can we do to help your career? We’d love to hear some ideas from you! Finally, I’d like to encourage you to consider volunteering for a position on the Administrative Council for next term (September 2005 – June 2006). Volunteering to be a board member – as programming or membership chair, treasurer, secretary, PR manager, or newsletter editor – is a rewarding experience in many, many ways. Contact any current board member to discuss your interest. ♦

Date and Location	Topic and Speaker
Wednesday March 9, Midway Hotel	Preparing training courses - panel of trainers
Tuesday April 12, MSOE	Joint meeting with WORDS: trade show
Wednesday May 18, Midway Hotel	Portfolio development - Lance Gelein
Tuesday June 14, MSOE	Brainstorming for next term, award ceremony, prize drawing