



# CAPITAL LETTER

**“I have learned to use the word ‘impossible’ with the greatest caution.”**

*—Wernher von Braun*

## In This Issue

<b>Editor’s Corner</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>From the President</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Chapter Chatter</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Articles</b>	<b>5</b>
Turn Your Hobby Into Profit While Working From Home	1
Usability SIG - Guidelines for Web Design	7
Formatting Problems? MSWord Styles May Be Your Solution	8
Are You In A Professional Rut?	10
Built for Use: Driving Profitability Through the User Experience by Karen Donoghue	11

## Contributors

Daree Allen-Woodard  
Katharyn Bine  
EC Eklund  
Russell Woolard  
David Dick

## Turn Your Hobby Into Profit While Working From Home

by Daree Allen-Woodard

**M**any of us are multi-talented, yet our work places rarely include the things we might enjoy on a daily basis. A home-based business is a fun, fulfilling opportunity to turn a hobby into supplemental income—but it takes hard work to make the vision a reality. It’s a quantum leap from traditional full-time work toward independent consulting.

With the launch of my first home-based business in 2001, thanks to my mentors and some start-up money, I can offer services such as technical writing, resume writing, and desktop publishing. My second business, launched one year later, allows me to offer financial services such as life insurance, mortgage loans, and investments.

This article is not a comprehensive guide to starting a business; it is a condensed, anecdotal version of the insights that I’ve picked up along my journey to independence, and can successfully be applied to various industries.

### What Do You Want To Do?

Try to calm your enthusiasm a bit and focus on deciding what goals you want to accomplish:

- What is your true calling?
- What are you passionate about?
- Are you serious about being a bonafide independent consultant?
- Are you just testing the waters to see what happens?

Then it is time to get organized. What kind of equipment will you need? How much will it cost to obtain the equipment? You may want to apply for a small business loan from the Small Business Administration (see <http://www.sba.gov>). Successful business owners organize questions and answers into a business plan. The business plan is critical to all aspects of your business, including aiding you in getting the necessary funding. Do your research and see what others are doing in the field.

### Find Your Market

What do you have to offer? Decide what products and services you want to provide and

*(continued on page 5, column 1)*

Designing the Future of Technical  
Communication

**Society for Technical  
Communication (STC)**

901 North Stuart Street, Suite 904  
Arlington, VA 22203-1822  
Phone 703-522-4114  
<http://www.stc.org>

**Region 2**

[http://www.stcregion.org/region2/  
index.shtml](http://www.stcregion.org/region2/index.shtml)

**Washington, DC Chapter**

<http://www.stcwc.org/>

**STC Washington, DC Chapter  
Capital Letter**

**Managing Editor**

Pam Muskat  
[pamusk@yahoo.com](mailto:pamusk@yahoo.com)

**Production Manager**

Joe Halleman  
[halleman@lucent.com](mailto:halleman@lucent.com)

**Columns Manager**

EC Eklund  
[eceklund@erols.com](mailto:eceklund@erols.com)

**Copy Editor**

Jennifer Taylor  
[jennifer.taylor@spirentcom.com](mailto:jennifer.taylor@spirentcom.com)

The *Capital Letter* is published six times per year by the Washington, DC Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. Its purpose is to provide articles and essays in the field of technical communication as well as inform chapter members about special functions and regular activities of the chapter and Society. Material for publication should be submitted to the editor

**Pam Muskat**  
[pamusk@yahoo.com](mailto:pamusk@yahoo.com)

This newsletter invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this newsletter to run the article and for other STC publications to reprint it without permission. Copyright is held by the writer. In your cover letter, please let the editor know if this article has run elsewhere, and if it has been submitted for consideration to other publications. The design and layout of this newsletter are copyright STC 2002.

**A**s this Problems & Solutions themed issue unfolds, I ponder my take on the wonderful challenge of technical editing and the lessons learned in my path. Through coursework and experience I am more in tune with where most mistakes hide and strategies for finding and fixing them. Would you believe that most mistakes are found in the title? The top of the page is almost always overlooked, maybe under the assumption that if it is a printed document, it is professional and error free. Look closer.

One reliable method for me is to have a list, written or mental, of what to look for. First you read the document, and then you go through a rundown of the list. If time allows, a good editor may review it three or four times, dealing with a different aspect of the process each time. Here are a few tips:

- Double check pagination.
- Check spacing and page breaks.
- Double check the Table of Contents, this will likely reveal errors.
- Do not rely on spell check alone (form vs. from is a good case in point).
- Make sure sub-headings are numbered consecutively.
- Check that figure and table callouts precede the appropriate figure or table.
- Make sure all headers and footers are consistent.

More tips can be found at [http://www.lrc.com/tips/  
proofreading\\_editing.htm](http://www.lrc.com/tips/proofreading_editing.htm).

The editing process obviously works best if there is an organized system. At the office, we use folders and document control sheets,

color-coded, for each document. One document may have a dozen sections, thus a dozen folders coming and going. We each sign off on our task and hand it to the next person. It has become evident that teamwork is the best process.

Solid reading time can be quite torturous. I make sure to take occasional breaks so my eyes don't start playing tricks on me. Stare out the window for a few minutes to exercise the different eye muscles. Ask a co-worker to review the document to get a fresh set of eyes on it. Walk around and chat if need be to shake off that fatigue. The dive back in and repeat as needed.

Reading a document is a catch-22 because as an editor you don't have enough time, and the person you are editing for may not have enough patience. It is a very fast-paced world. If it were up to me, I would freeze time and manage to produce a flawless document. But I also recognize the unlikelihood of that being the case. It may not be 100% flawless. I am finding that aspect hard to accept. This remains a challenge in the industry. When is it really okay to let go?

Here is a glance of some articles in this issue:

- EC Eklund's article gives us a peek into the problem-solving practicality of styles in MSWord.
- Daree Allen-Woodard enlightens us with tips and tools for running a home business.
- Russell Woolard reveals strategies to finding your way out of a professional rut.

Next issue's theme: Membership Value



# From the President

Carolyn Kelley Klinger

November/December 2002, Vol. 34, No. 2

**H**ow much is really within our control? Keeping to the theme of this newsletter issue, my problem is that my answer to that question lately has been “not enough.” While I prioritized my health and family, I ignored a career going nowhere. Now that I have shed those 20 pounds and have my life more in balance, I am finally open to a change in my career. Thanks to Thea Teich, I have found my solution.

Why Thea Teich? Thea encouraged us on September 25 to nurture our inner expert. To do this, Thea recommends that we determine where we are, where we want to go, and how to get there. We need to take responsibility for our own professional development and ultimately our own happiness. Our employers, though they may benefit, are not responsible for increasing our opportunities for professional growth. While this maxim was not new to me, hearing it in the context of my own frustration woke me up.

My solution is that I will begin building a freelance technical communication business. Thankfully, my current employer will become a client. With the passion I have for this profession and the resources offered through STC, I know that I will enjoy the challenges that come along with independent consulting.

In November and December, you have three opportunities to network with STC members at interesting and motivating programs. On November 14, Suzanna Laurent comes to us from Oklahoma to discuss ways to demonstrate the value we add, how to measure that value, and add even more value. On November 19, John White comes to us from California to explain how to prepare to take our documentation worldwide. On December 9, Jim Jenkins, a highly recommended local career coach, shares innovative methods for reclaiming your creativity. Do not miss these opportunities to find new solutions!



## Scholarship Applications Available

Each year, STC offers scholarships to full-time graduate and undergraduate students pursuing careers in technical communication. Four awards of \$1,000 each will be granted for academic year 2003-2004. Application deadline is February 15, 2003. Application forms and instructions are available at [http://www.stc.org/scholarship\\_info.asp](http://www.stc.org/scholarship_info.asp).

## Chapter Leadership

### President

Carolyn Kelley Klinger  
carolyn.klinger@mindspring.com

### Immediate Past President/Web Diva

Cynthia Lockley  
webmaster@stcwc.org

### First Vice President/Programs Committee Manager

Daree Allen-Woodard  
daree76@earthlink.net

### Second Vice President/Public Relations Committee Manager

Stacia Kelly  
stacia@catklaw.com

### Secretary and History Committee Manager

Harold Hofstad  
hskhof@juno.com

### Treasurer

Laura Jackel  
jackelpubs@erols.com

### Region 2 Director-Sponsor

Chris Benz  
cjbenz@unforgettable.com

### Manager of Competition and Employment Committees

Ann Ray  
ann.ray@qwest.com

### Membership Committee Manager

Lynn Gandy  
membermgrwdc@earthlink.net

### Education Committee Manager

Alyssa Slotkin  
aslotkin@docucorp.com

### Manager of Strategic Planning and Volunteers Committees

Janet Scharp  
jscharp@aim4value.com

### Usability SIG Manager

Allen Rotz  
allen@dctechwriting.com

### Online SIG Manager

Melissa Brown  
mbrown123@prodigy.net

## Upcoming Chapter Events



**Event:** Revealing Your Hidden Value  
**When:** Thursday, November 14, 6:30-9:00 p.m.  
**Where:** Holiday Inn, Arlington, VA  
**Info:** [http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm\\_nov02.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm_nov02.shtml)



**Event:** How to Take Your Documentation Worldwide — Four Rules and a Box of Tools  
**When:** Tuesday, November 19, 6:30-8:30 p.m.  
**Where:** ASET International Services Corp, Arlington, VA  
**Info:** [http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm\\_translate\\_nov02.shtml](http://www.stcfdc.org/prgm_translate_nov02.shtml)



**Event:** Reclaiming Your Creativity  
**When:** Monday, December 9, 6:30-9:00 p.m.  
**Where:** Capitol City Brewing Co. near Union Station  
**Info:** <http://www.stcfdc.org/calendar.shtml>

## Membership News

### New Members, Since October 31, 2002

Benjamin L. Grimley	John R. Fisher
Brent H. Cottrell	Kevette Settles
Candee A. Wilson	Laura M. Byrd
Christie niDonnell	Mary S. Howland
Cynthia A. Reece	Maude D. L. Brossoie
Delaney C. Thomas	Priti T. Thanki
Denise A. Joseph	

**Welcome to STC!**

The grade of senior member is conferred upon those who have held the grade of member in STC for five years. We congratulate the following chapter members who have achieved senior member status.

### Senior Members

Allyson H. Benavides	Joseph G. Bury
Bing J. Crisologo	Judy Titterton
Bruce V. Curley	Kerry L. Ogata
Carmen Gore	Leah P. Chappell
Carol P. Tilles	Margaret G. Kessler
Cheryl S. Kariya	Steve Amoia
Christopher M. Johnston	Susan M. Lender
Elizabeth A. Garland	William B. Hurlbut
Janice L. Black	

### Congratulations!

### Member Totals

Total STC Members: 21,055

Total STC WDC Members: 687

## STC WDC Website Gems

Find jobs:

<http://www.stcfdc.org/employ.shtml>

Join e-mail chat or chapter announcement list:

<http://www.stcfdc.org/list.shtml>

Find out about related events:

<http://www.stcfdc.org/ recip.shtml>

### Advertising

If you would like to advertise your business in our newsletter, please send a message to Pam Muskat at [pamusk@yahoo.com](mailto:pamusk@yahoo.com). Please include your phone number in the message.

Advertising rates are as follows:

Full page: \$140

Half page: \$75

Quarter page: \$40

Business card: \$25

Discounts are available if the same ad runs in two or more issues within 6 months.

**(Turn Your Hobby..., continued from page 1, column 3)**

how they fulfill a need. You must offer your target audience the solution to the problem.

Where will you conduct business? Virtually (e-mail/fax/phone) and/or in person? Beware that if you invite someone into your home for business purposes, you'll need business insurance (in case there is an accident on the premises). And be sure to present a professional environment.

Decide what type of customers you want (in terms of demographics and psychographics—young or old? Student or professional? College education?). Targeting your customer guides you in your role. Sell to *somebody*, not everybody.

## **Design Yourself to the World**

Select a catchy company name (trade name) that can potentially work as a marketing ploy as well. File a DBA (doing business as) form in your county to get the name approved. You may also want to do a trademark search to ensure that the name is not already in use.

Then give yourself a fancy, professional title that conveys your role and your skill.

Design a logo to facilitate name recognition and use it for your website, brochure, business cards, and letterhead. Software templates can help you draft contracts, agreements, and other important forms (see <http://www.unleash.com/gary/logo/> or <http://graphicdesign.about.com/cs/designinglogos/>).

## **Choose Your Legal Business Structure**

The way you run your business is important to Uncle Sam and your state government in terms of how they view and tax your business. (Please note that I am not an attorney or tax authority, and only provide a synopsis of the legal business structures available.)

**Sole Proprietorship.** It's all you. Literally. You don't have to file paperwork except to state your business name, or DBA. Owners of sole proprietorships are personally liable for business debts and other obligations.

**General/Limited Partnership.** Two or more people who have not filed papers to become an LLC or a corporation.

**Limited Liability Company (LLC).** One or more owners of a business can file paperwork with the state they are doing business in to become an LLC. This limits the personal liability associated with the business. The LLC structure is said to combine the best features of the partnership and corporation structures.

**Corporation.** Just like an LLC except that more corporate formalities come into play, such as the requirement of ownership and management of meetings.

## **File the Paperwork**

Most business structures require that you file the appropriate forms, such as your trade name (DBA), and sales and use tax. You may be able to take a Home Office tax deduction—in general, utilities and square footage for the area of your home that is used *exclusively* to con-

November/December 2002, Vol. 34, No. 2

duct business. (Please consult a tax authority for specific information and exceptions.)

## **Set Your Prices**

Several different methods and formulas exist to compute pricing (refer to <http://www.sbinformation.about.com>, <http://www.careers.msn.com>, <http://www.money-at-home.com>, and <http://www.entrepreneur.com>).

The basic rules of thumb are to price services high enough to make a profit, and to charge no higher than the market will bear. Also remember that you want your clients to buy your services based on the perceived value, not on price. You may want to set up a separate checking account in your business name and name yourself as the trustee.

Price yourself reasonably and fairly in the marketplace, but don't sell yourself short—acknowledge your worth.

## **Market Yourself**

What good is your service if no one knows about it? You must engage in self-promotion activities at every opportunity. Here are some ideas.

**Differentiate yourself.** There's stiff competition out there. You must prove that you're the best person for the job with your experience, credentials, and specialization (don't base your competitive advantage on price). Your elevator pitch and networking discussions should mention what you do without sounding like you're selling something. Say, "I offer (name product or service) to (name target audience)." Let the person ask for

more information, and only then, explain how (offer the solution). Find out what a prospect is looking for, and then customize your approach.

**Promote your services for free—initially.** This is a good approach if you are unsure of your audience or niche, or if you don't have much experience. Offer a sampling of your skills to schools, not-for-profit organizations, neighbors, anyone! You can get a feel for what you're doing and how well your work is received and appreciated. And don't forget, word of mouth brings success to many all the time.

**Network!** It is crucial that you build a strong network to find business and keep it alive. Get involved in your local Chamber of Commerce, and in professional organizations related to your field (such as STC). Become an active volunteer on committees and mingle with the crowds. Tell everyone about your business; they may be your next client or referral; again, word of mouth works wonders.

**Create a Website.** Write the content yourself, hire a graphic designer to create the professional look you want to convey, select a web host, and most importantly, promote it (using search engines and your business stationery)! Be sure to highlight your experience in the field and any related credentials to stand out from the competition.

## Free Ways to Market Yourself

**Write Articles.** Write articles, press releases, and case studies, and get them published in related newsletters (like the *Capital Letter*), e-zines, and on your own website. Send a query or suggest an article idea to the point of contact. You have nothing to lose!

**Presentations.** Arrange speaking engagements in your community with a local chamber of commerce and related business organizations with members that would likely be interested.

**Distribute e-lists.** E-lists make for great resources that potential clients can refer to for a better understanding of your services and skills. Make sure to distribute these lists to all prospects.

## Time Management

Use your time wisely. Prioritize with goal-setting, and rank your to-do list items on five levels from high importance to low importance. Then sub-prioritize within each of these five levels.

Continuing education is an important goal! Unlike many professions that have industry-standard certification or licensing procedures, the technical communication field has not yet established criteria to ascertain professional credentials. So that means it's up to you! Budget your time for self-improvement activities each year, whether that means attending a three-day conference, reading the latest books on trends in technical communication (or the field repre-

sented by your business), or revisiting the basics from time to time. Continuing education keeps you current with the latest trends, and validates your worth and expertise in the marketplace. These activities establish your professional credibility.

## General Advice

Be ready to work! In the beginning you will be everything—secretary, marketer, accountant (you should hire a professional, but still keep good track of your business expenses for tax purposes), etc. Make sure the business you choose is fun and enjoyable. It will benefit you when times get tough.

Stay focused! It's easy to become frustrated or overwhelmed with all the work it takes to get your business started, and may take several months. Don't be discouraged. The most important step you can take is to get started. Keep your day job, build your business on the side, and see how things go. It's good to have that steady income until your business can take care of you. Maintain a good support system of people who care about you and want to see you succeed. Avoid nay-sayers who only serve as dreamkillers. You don't need anyone to dampen your spirits when you're struggling and just starting out on your own.

*Daree Allen-Woodard is the Founder of Woodard Communication & Design.*  
<http://www.WoodardCommDesign.com>.



## Resources and URLs

Starting a New Business (Maryland): <http://www.dat.state.md.us/sdatweb/checklist.html>  
Business Licenses (Maryland): <http://www.blis.state.md.us/>  
Business Tax Applications (Maryland): <http://business.marylandtaxes.com/>  
Web hosting options: <http://www.GoDaddy.com>, <http://www.MWKhosting.com>, or <http://www.bcentral.com>  
E-lists: <http://www.topica.com>  
US SBA Business Development Centers: <http://www.wbcnova.org>  
*The E-Myth Revisited: Why Small Business Don't Work and What To Do About Them*, by Michael Gerber  
*The Black Enterprise Guide to Starting Your Own Business*, by Wendy Beech  
*The Best Home Businesses for the 21st Century*, by Paul and Sarah Edwards

## Usability SIG - Guidelines for Web Design

by Katharyn Bine

**R**esearch, eyetracking studies, and observation tell us what works in website design, and what does not. Many web developers and usability practitioners, however, rely on their experience rather than on research to identify what users want. While the recommendations they make may be correct, they have no explanation—short of saying “That’s what I have seen work”—as to why some approaches are more usable than others.

Sanjay Koyani and Susan Allison of the National Cancer Institute’s (NCI) Communication Technologies Branch are working to change that model. Koyani and Allison spoke to the Washington DC Usability SIG on October 8, 2002.

The NCI’s objective, said Koyani, is to move from a “country doctor” experience-based approach to a “teaching hospital” model. In a teaching hospital, physicians rely on evidence from research to determine a course of treatment for patients. Koyani described guidelines that the study found to be supported by physical and behavioral studies.

Susan Allison described the protocol used to identify current practices, whether research supported the practice, and to prioritize, edit, and winnow the practices.

The most important finding thus far is the lack of research, and the numerous assumptions made in the industry, regarding usability

and websites. Koyani and Allison are producing a list of research topics for investigation.

Users are good at telling researchers what they like and what they don’t like. The solutions they propose, however, often are not effective. Koyani emphasized that usability practitioners must resist the impulse to “make it so” based on one evaluator’s feedback, and instead wait for additional evaluators to provide their comments.

A website or device may be designed for ease of use or ease of learning. These objectives often conflict: an easily used website may use more steps than an easily learned website, said Koyani. Bal-

---

**Nearly 70 people gathered for the October 8th Usability SIG meeting in Ballston. It was a great opportunity to meet new people, since many attendees were not STC members. The results of the Zoomerang survey indicated tremendous attendee satisfaction. Now all we need is for you to help us identify good topics and speakers for the next Usability SIG event.**

---

ancing these objectives requires understanding the audience for the website.

The guidelines Koyani and Allison have identified thus far are the result of two rounds of review with the same group of 16 practitioners. Allison said that in the second round of guideline review, the group kept 6 guidelines in the top 10 most important guidelines. Nine of the guidelines in the new top 10 were in the previous top 20.

When ranked for “strength of research,” the top 10 changed even less from round 1 to round 2: 8 of the 10 guidelines remained in the top 10, and all were in the top 20.

When the top 10 lists are compared, though, only 3 items overlap. It’s unclear what this means—and a complete ranked list of all guidelines is unavailable—but a very likely answer is that the body of research for web usability is small compared to the ideas promulgated as good design.

Koyani and Allison continued their research with the assistance of 8 PhD researchers, who further reduced the guidelines to 225. This group has determined which guidelines have any research support and established a framework for rating the guidelines. The next step is to rate the guidelines on a common scale.

The present guidelines are published at <http://usability.gov/guidelines>.

A review found significant differences between the guidelines on the website and those in the top 10 lists developed from the second round with practitioners. There is a stronger correlation between what’s presently on the website and the top 10 list for importance, versus the top 10 list for research. While many headings seem generic (e.g., provide usable content), the website provides clarification and examples.



## Formatting Problems? MSWord Styles May Be Your Solution

by EC Eklund

I once worked for an organization that produced correspondence courses for the Federal government. The assignment taught me a lot – most notably, that I *could* survive a completely dysfunctional manager. One of the most tried and true survival skills I learned was the ability to use Microsoft Word’s “styles” feature effectively.

Has something like this ever happened to you? You spend a couple of weeks preparing a complex document, with headings, bulleted and numbered lists, indented paragraphs, etc. Maybe you’ve even had several meetings to discuss the formatting of the document or you’re using an approved style sheet for the organization. Nonetheless, on the day before the document is due, your manager demands numerous formatting changes to your document. Herein lies the problem. You spend until the wee hours of the next morning making all the changes and ensuring all the various elements are still consistent. And you just know the decisionmakers will change the formatting again before the document is finally published.

Using styles are the solution. Styles won’t make your boss a better manager, and they won’t prevent him/her from wanting something else yet again, but they will help you avoid the drudgery of making the changes paragraph-by-para-

graph and they will ensure consistency in your document.

### What is a Style?

Otherwise rational people seem to have an almost allergic reaction to styles. They avoid them at all costs. They’re convinced that styles are some sort of complicated programming hocus-pocus, beyond the ability of mere mortals to understand. Nothing could be farther from the truth. If you’ve ever formatted characters and paragraphs (such as, bolding, italicizing, indenting, and then some), you’ve already done most of the work involved with creating styles.

Styles are nothing more (or less) than a collection of stored formatting options. That’s it. You simply type and format the paragraph the way you want it to look, then define a style that describes the nature of the text – say, “QUESTION,” for example. Then, whenever you have a paragraph that you want to format as a question, just type the text, choose the QUESTION style and presto – the new text is formatted like a question. But it gets even better. If you decide to change any part of the formatting –reducing the text size from 12 points to 11 points, for example – you only need to make the change once, to the style. The change is then immediately reflected in all the paragraphs using that style. Change the section heading style to small caps and the

change is made to all section headings in your document. Formatting consistency is assured. You can spend your time worrying about matters that are more important.

### Character vs. Paragraph Styles

MSWord allows us to utilize two different types of styles: character styles and paragraph styles. I will focus on paragraph styles since I rarely use character styles. They work the same way though, so if you have a need to use character styles, these instructions will work. Merely highlight the characters you want to style instead of the paragraph. Be aware, though, that character formatting supercedes paragraph formatting.

MSWord offers a range of predefined styles. In fact, everything you put into an MSWord document already has a style. If you don’t assign one, MSWord uses one called “Normal,” a sort of generic, or default format. You can tell which style is currently being used if you have the Formatting toolbar displayed in MSWord. (If the Formatting toolbar is not visible, right-click in the menu area, then click next to “Formatting” in the drop-down menu that appears.) The Formatting toolbar should appear as a separate line, as shown in Figure 1: Formatting toolbar in MSWord.

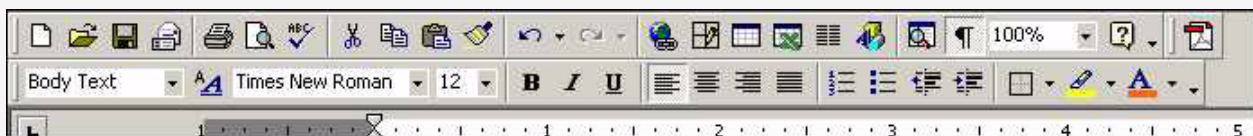


Figure 1: Formatting toolbar in MSWord

## Redefining Styles

After a period of working with styles, you'll probably find that some don't quite meet your needs. They're close, but not quite right.

(The pre-defined heading styles are a good example.) No problem. There's no rule that says you can't use your own judgment of what looks good. Merely redefine the

style to your liking, using the "Modify Style" dialog box shown in Figure 2: Modify Style Dialog Box (from menu).

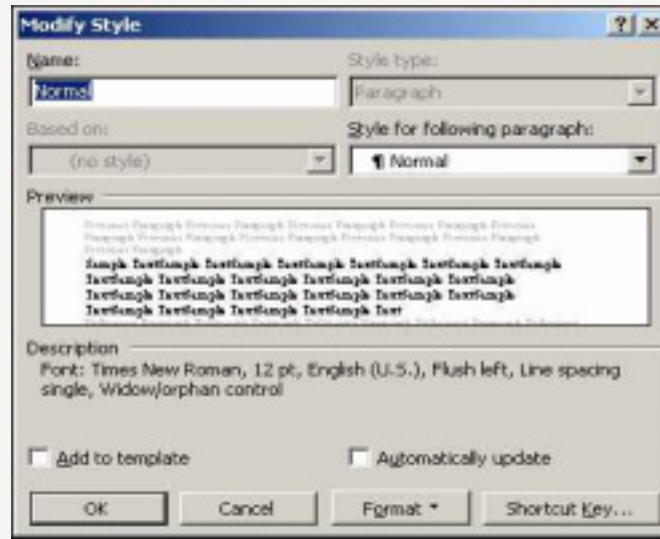


Figure 2: Modify Style Dialog Box (from menu)

## Based On

The Modify Style dialog box contains several options that warrant discussion. If strange things are happening when you use styles, the problem is likely in one of these four options.

The **Based on:** option tells MSWord which style to use as the starting point for the current style. This allows you to structure your styles so you can cascade changes throughout your document. Suppose, for example, you have two dozen styles in your document. Now suppose your boss tells you to change the font size from 12 points to 11 points throughout the document. You might think you'd have to change the fonts for each of the styles in your document. Not too bad if you only have a few, but if you have a dozen or more, it becomes a chore.

Now suppose you had the foresight to base all your styles on the

basic MSWord Normal style. If you did, you'd only have to change the font for the Normal style and the change would ripple throughout all the other styles in your document. That's the power of the **Based on:** option.

## Style for Following Paragraph

The **Style for following paragraph:** option, as the name implies, tells MSWord which style to use for the next paragraph in your document. Existing styles have a default following style, usually either the style itself or Normal. Change the existing **Style for following paragraph:** by using the drop-down list or by typing in the name of the style you want in the text box.

This option can be a great time-saver if you know you will always want to use a particular style after another one. For example, since I typically use a heading style followed by text, I've changed the fol-

lowing style for all the heading styles from Normal (the default) to Body Text, which is what I normally use for text paragraphs.

## Add to Template

At the bottom of the Modify Style dialog box are two check boxes: **Add to template** and **Automatically update**.

Sometimes I modify styles only for a specific document. Yet other times, I make changes to a style that I want to be permanent – changing the following paragraph on all heading styles. In this case, when I modify the style, I make sure to check the **Add to template** box. MSWord will then add the style not only to the current document, but to the Normal template as well. (The Normal template is a collection of settings that new MSWord documents automatically inherit.) If you select the **Add to template** option when you make

changes to a style, any subsequent document you create will include those changes.

### Automatically Update

**Automatically update** is the one option I always uncheck whenever I'm looking at an existing style. Here's why.

**Automatically update** tells MSWord to assume that any changes you make to the formatting of a paragraph should immediately be added to the style on which that paragraph is based. No warnings, no second chances. MSWord immediately changes the style and all paragraphs based on it. This includes any styles based on the changed style. So you're making a quick change to a document before your boss has to go to a meeting – say, italicizing a short paragraph. You make the change and suddenly most of the document is italicized. You don't know why. Your boss is screaming at you to print the document so he can go to his meeting.

Avoid the panic attack. Uncheck the automatically update box each time you find it checked.

You can also redefine styles by formatting a paragraph and updating its style using the Styles text box. This option also works well if you make changes to a paragraph's formatting, and then decide you don't like them.

### Create Your Own Styles

You may find that none of the pre-defined styles are exactly what you want. Again, no problem. MSWord allows you to create your own styles easily. In fact, there are two ways to create styles: (1) apply formatting to a paragraph, then name a style for it, or (2) pre-define the style through the Style dialog box.

Attaching a style name to a pre-formatted paragraph is the easier method. After you have formatted the paragraph to your liking:

1. Place the cursor anywhere in the paragraph.

2. Click on the current style name in the Style text box and enter a new name for the style.

The case of the name doesn't matter to MSWord, but as a matter of convention, I find it's a good idea to name my own styles in capital letters. This makes it easier to distinguish mine from Microsoft's.

Applying a style name to a formatted paragraph is easy, but it doesn't take care of everything. You won't be able to define the following paragraph style or add the style to the Normal template. If you need more than just the basic formatting, use the New Style dialog box to pre-define a style.

In conclusion, the MSWord styles feature is not a mystical other-world that you don't dare to enter. It is a useful tool for formatting more consistently and conveniently. Use it and save the wee hours of the morning for more important things. See <http://www.stcwdc.org/newsletter.shtml> for a supplement to this article that contains additional Word procedures.



---

## Are You In A Professional Rut?

---

by Russell Woolard

**A**t what point does your technical writing career, which has likely been zooming along on the fast track, land in a rut? What exactly is a professional rut, anyway? Rather than attempting a one-size-fits-all definition of a professional rut, it may be best to paraphrase former Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's famous definition of pornography: You know it when you see it.

You also know you have to get out of it. Life is simply too short to go to work every day with feelings of

boredom over your work, disaffection with your bosses or co-workers, or malaise that may come from having done the same thing for too long, with no apparent opportunity to expand your horizons.

What should you do about it? The obvious answer is to find a new career, or a new employer. When the economy's humming along, and when you have skills employers want, getting out of a professional rut is a piece of cake. But when the economy is itself in a rut, the challenge becomes tougher

even for the most seasoned professionals. There aren't as many possible places to land, and the dream of escaping an unsatisfactory job can clash with the reality of a mortgage payment.

In the last decade, technical writers have seen it from both ends. Technical writing, already a hot ticket for people interested in using writing skills, became even hotter during the dot-com boom of the 1990s as myriad start-up companies created a high-tech boom town with jobs for virtually anyone

who wanted one. But when the bubble burst, it created a more difficult climate for technical writers looking to escape a professional rut.

“In this environment, everybody has to bear down and deal with his or her situation,” said Joseph Halleman, a member of STC Washington, DC. “You certainly don't want to lose your job.”

Still, some forward momentum toward getting out of a professional rut is essential, even in difficult times. The essential elements of career advancement - networking, developing new and marketable skills, and making sure your motivation level is high - apply regardless of the state of the economy. But in the midst of a downturn, more creativity—and patience—will probably be required.

One strategy that pays off is involvement in interests and groups outside of your job. For example, Halleman, a technical writer with over 20 years of experience, devoted part of the summer helping build houses for Habitat for Humanity, and has pursued an interest in flying as well.

“If you're in a high-pressure environment, and if you don't have something outside to revitalize yourself, your writing suffers, and your enthusiasm suffers,” said Halleman. “You can get burned out. You can feel like you're just going through the motions. This helps me to concentrate on something other than the day-to-day work.”

Other outside interests can be valuable breakthroughs in expanding your base of marketable skills - with potentially rewarding results for your career. Halleman's search for outside interests, in addition to flying airplanes and building houses, also led him to become involved with the *Capital Letter*. By producing this newsletter, Halleman expanded his hands-on experience with FrameMaker. Producing the newsletter gives Halleman a chance to be creative, expand his network by collaborating with people outside his workplace, and get praise for his efforts.

And the recognition hasn't stopped there. Halleman recently entered an installation guide he wrote for his employer in the annual 2001 Washington, DC,

Online Communication Competition, and received a Distinguished award for his work.

STC and its Washington, DC Chapter provide many such opportunities for technical writers or those interested in entering the field. The DC chapter offers monthly programs and workshops concentrating on topics of interest to both new and advanced technical communicators. These events have both educational and networking value. Participating in the chapter's annual competitions as a judge or entrant is also a valuable learning and networking experience.

“I am fairly confident that, with [my involvement in] STC, I'd get a more favorable look from my peers inside and outside my office,” said Halleman. “It definitely helps.”

See the following links for more information in getting out of a professional rut:

<http://www.erecoach.com/index.html>  
<http://healthcare.monster.com/articles/clinical/>



---

## ***Built for Use: Driving Profitability Through the User Experience by Karen Donoghue***

---

by David Dick

**H**ave you wondered why so many dot-com enterprises have disappeared from the Internet while others continue to amass a large and loyal audience?

The situation is reminiscent of the pun, ‘dot-com today, dot-gone



tomorrow’. If you want to understand how satisfying user experience contributes to the profitability of enterprises that use the Internet as a customer relationship channel, you want to read *Built for Use* by Karen Donoghue.

Donoghue describes how successful user experiences deliver a firm's value proposition—the brand promise—to customers in the

most effective and appropriate way.

If you're a usability advocate, you'll be happy to know that usability is now linked to revenues and profits as never before: The value proposition is diminished if a customer cannot engage in the full brand experience because of poor usability. To convince decisionmakers, however, you need the facts to jus-

tify usability efforts and resources. Donoghue explains the importance of understanding and satisfying users' expectations by using case studies of corporations for which she has provided consultancy, and which produced profitable returns on user experience.

Karen Donoghue wrote *Built for Use* because the web has made usability and user experience a business issue—cutting across business strategy, design, and technology—and nobody had written a useful, practical book about the subject. There were no business books that successfully linked usability with profitability on the web. Being a practitioner, it was the book she often searched for in bookstores. Another reason for writing *Built for Use* was the comments Donoghue received from audiences at her lectures; audience members would come up afterwards and ask if there was a book that she had written or books that she could suggest. *Built for Use* consists of three parts:

**1. The Case for the Customer Experience** is the framework for which the book is based. It describes why understanding what customers want online is critical to success, why a gap between what customers want and receive detracts from user satisfaction, and how poorly designed products cost firms lost revenue. Donoghue describes how to present a defensible business case for defining a successful user experience and why trust (security of personal data) is essential for branding and loyal customers.

**2. Strategic Experience Envisioning** presents strategies for identifying what customers want in the user experience. It describes how to mesh the business model with the interface, and guidelines for driving online strategy efforts

by organizing and effectively managing multidisciplinary teams. It concludes with a suggested model for defining, developing, and measuring ongoing user experience success, and recommendations for maintaining the model as a central part of an organization's business strategy and culture. What I like most about "Strategic Experience Envisioning" is that it describes how to define "the Experience Matrix." The Experience Matrix is a tool to help in strategic planning, involves mapping business goals and user goals to features that contribute to the goal, and the user experience mechanisms that satisfy these goals.

**3. The Future** examines why satisfying a new generation of consumers will involve delivering global, mobile, and intelligent solutions. The chapter begins with an explanation that although technology evolves at breakneck speed, humans do not. Bridging the gap requires simplifying complex design. Donoghue contrasts how the Shakers'<sup>1</sup> craftsmanship, known for simplicity and admired for excellence, should serve as a model for companies to create successful user experiences.

While Donoghue provides a variety of examples to justify her conclusion, I can offer one from my own experience. It is that cell phones and portable data agendas offer access to the Internet and a platform for a multitude of services, creating new user experience design challenges. Meeting these user needs and satisfying business goals at the same time requires understanding how these new mobile and global platforms impact the user experience and

---

1. See <http://www.crinsy.org/not-for-profit/shakerw/> for information about the history and origin of the Shakers.

make or break the opportunity to produce profitable returns on investment.

Donoghue argues that in the post dot-com world, pervasive computing will require a different way of thinking about the design of successful user experiences because they will be invisible and more integrated—think of using an E-Z Pass to pay for drive-through fast food and you get the idea. Nevertheless, firms continue to be under increased pressure to deliver returns on investment in technology, with shorter development cycles. She describes the need to better understand how usability impacts the business case, before things are designed, and that firms need to focus more effort and resources on the experiences and interfaces that will produce measurable value.

The chapter concludes with a picture of a child wearing oversized headphones and audio equipment (circa 1960) for producing audio stimuli. The child wears rabbit ears to subdue fear of the equipment. The devices are oversized and bulky when compared with the dimensions of the same equipment today. The caption reads, 'If technology doesn't seem like magic, it's probably obsolete.' You need only to examine the picture and realize that the equipment depicted is obsolete when compared with today's technology advances in science and medicine.

For the latest information, resources, and insights about Donoghue's user experience strategy, visit <http://www.builtforuse.com>.

Donoghue, Karen. *Built for use: driving profitability through the user experience*, McGraw-Hill, 2002. ISBN 0-07-158304-2, 262 pages, \$27.95.

