

TechView

Semester Newsletter for STC-NIU
The NIU Student Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication



Volume 3, Issue 2
Fall 2010

Inside this Issue:

Basic HTML for nonprofessionals 2
Jessica Schlueter

Utilizing social networking 3
Pam Roesner

Judging a book by its cover design 4
Sandie Ellsworth

Writing recipes as technical writing 4
Shelley Korth

From the Keyboard of Cameron Orr

I didn't hear about the Society for Technical Communication until my last semester as an undergraduate. For those of you who are English students, if your experience has been anything like mine, you quickly got tired of the ubiquitous conversations with friends and family that went something like this:

"Oh, you're in school? What are you studying?"

"English."

"Oh, that's nice. Are you going to teach?"

Now, I have nothing against teaching – in fact, I wish I was better at it! – but it's never been my first choice for a career. Still, I was always frustrated by the assumption that there is no practical use for the ability to write. Believe it or not, there is a reason every student at NIU – regardless of major – is required to have credit in English 103 and 104. The ability to write and communicate important information effectively is extremely important. After all, how many times have referred to a technical manual only to find it to be badly written and designed?

If you're a student with an interest in writing who wants to know more about where that interest can be applied, STC-NIU is a great resource for you. Even if you're not



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interested in a direct career in Technical Communication, the organization can still be a great resource and a valuable place to earn volunteer experience, to add projects to your portfolio, and to meet others with similar interests in writing careers.

Cameron Orr is a graduate student at NIU studying English: Rhetoric and Professional Writing.

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From the Keyboard of Nina Mancuso

The Society for Technical Communication is a perfect way to acquire experience for the technical writing field. This organization enables you to improve writing and editing skills. One can improve skills by contributing to the TechView newsletter each semester as well as editing documents like the STC-NIU brochure. As an English major, I was concerned that the only job I may be able to find is teaching English; however, teaching is not my first choice. Therefore, when I heard about STC-NIU, I immediately joined because it provides the opportunity to explore other careers one can have with an English degree. Careers in Technical Communication include writing instructions for new web programs and at-home furniture/appliances, and newsletters. Many Technical Communicators also become information architects, and usability professionals, as well as editors for publications written by subject matter experts. There are many routes to take with a concentration in Technical Communication, and most companies need people who are able to write and edit important information in a clear and concise way. This organization is great for improving your writing and editing skills, as well as give you the experience of what it



STC-NIU Vice President

is like to be in a conference room discussing what should be done within the organization, which can also improve your public relations skills. I am ecstatic to be a member of STC-NIU because it is preparing me for writing and editing in the career world that I will soon be living in, and I am sure that STC-NIU can do the same for you.

Nina Mancuso is an undergraduate student at NIU studying Anthropology and English.

Basic HTML for Nonprofessionals

By Jessica Schlueter

As professional communicators, our primary responsibility is to make sure that our information is readable and accessible to the widest number of people possible. In today's growing world of technology and communication, web-based content distribution has become an increasingly important means for reaching our audiences. Though most of us will never be "web-programmers," even a basic knowledge of HTML can help significantly when writing content for our employers and our readers alike.

What is HTML?

HyperText Markup Language forms the basic, underlying structure for most, if not all websites that you encounter every day. HTML uses a series of tags that are interpreted by your internet browser (for example Internet Explorer, Firefox, or Chrome) to display the webpage you see in front of you. A *tag* is more-or-less a marker for how different content is understood by your browser in terms of layout, role, and importance. We'll examine a few examples to better understand how this works.

Every tag is contained between two angled <brackets>, and every HTML document starts with the very basic tag: <html>. This tag tells your browser that this content is contained within an HTML page. Simple, right?

Start and End Tags

The tag that we looked at above is called a *start tag*, because it shows where the tag begins. In HTML there are also *end tags*, which indicate when the browser should stop applying the tag to the document. These end tags are signified with the two angled brackets and a </slash>. The start and end tags are almost always used together:

“In today’s growing world of technology and communication, web-based content distribution has become an increasingly important means for reaching our audiences.”

at the bottom of every HTML document, there is a </html> tag.

These pairs of tags can be used for things like **bolding** or *italicizing*, as well as creating bulleted and numbered lists. Let's look at an example of the **bold** tag to see how that works:

In an HTML editor, you would type:

The cat with the hat is far too fat.

When your browser sees the tag, it will render the sentence: The cat with the **hat** is far too fat.

As you can see, because the end tag immediately follows the word "hat," the rest of the words are no longer bolded. You can get the same effect with the tags (short for *emphasis*), but for an italicized text

instead of a bolded one. For a quick reference of easy HTML tags, see the HTML Cheatsheet attached to this newsletter.

HTML in the Workplace

Most HTML that professional communicators deal with is dealt within the confines of a *CMS*, or *Content Management System*. These systems often allow you to edit text

without requiring you to use HTML, but some systems do not. Additionally, most systems allow you to write in an "HTML View," which can be useful for troubleshooting when the CMS is displaying your text how you would like it to. Basic knowledge about how HTML works will significantly reduce your total number of headaches with web documents. So, best of luck and happy tagging!

Jessica Schlueter is a graduate student at NIU studying English: Rhetoric and Professional Writing.

HTML cheat sheet

Function	Tags
Bold (strong text)	
Italicize (emphasize text)	
Underline	<u></u>
Header (level 1, 2, 3...lower no.s = larger text)	<h1></h1><h2></h2><h3></h3>...
Horizontal Reference (straight, horizontal line)	<hr/>
Paragraph marker	<p></p>
Line Break	
Numbered or Bulleted List	 OR First list item here Second list item here Third list item here OR

Utilizing Social Networking

By Pam Roesner

Authors use social media to build platforms and connect with audiences. Dr. Craig Seymour, professor of Journalism 621, *The Changing Role of the Writer in Contemporary Culture* says, "Social media is changing the nature of what it means to be an author." Dr. Seymour says that authors should understand how to use social media like Twitter and Facebook to accomplish specific goals. This article goes through steps that authors can take to utilize social media to promote their writing and to establish an audience.

First, writers should draft their platform plan. According to Christina Katz, in her book, *Get Known Before the Book Deal*, "Writer platforms are based on active expertise. The effect of your accumulated knowledge on other people builds your name, establishes your reputation, and can eventually get you to the point where everyone knows your name." Katz says that an author should develop a strong platform that can be built upon gradually.

The next step is to write a blog, which is used as the hub for an author's writing and publicity. Blogging software and sites such as WordPress, Blogger, Weebly, and Posterous make this fast and easy. Authors should post to their blog at least weekly. Dr. Seymour says, "Design is content," therefore authors should give their blogs a look that reflects their writing.

Next, start accounts on social networking sites. A good starting point would be to tweet ten times a day on Twitter and post three times a day on Facebook. Dr. Seymour stresses the importance of getting our writing "out there"; the more you post, the quicker you develop a following. The author will expand and do what Dr. Seymour calls "creating community." Posts should relate to the author's topic or reflect on the author's perspective. The blog and social networking sites should all link to one another.

The next step is to make a movie and put it up on YouTube. YouTube is the most popular of the social network-

ing sites so authors should play into this to get their work noticed. It can be just a two to three minute movie of the author talking into the camera about a favorite topic or theme. The movie should be imbedded on the author's blog and advertised on Twitter and Facebook to get more "hits".

Often writers build a following through speaking opportunities. Authors should develop a one-sheet that includes three topics on which the author could speak. An author would start with a headshot, his/her name, and a tag-line on how the author would describe himself to an audience. The three topics on which the author is prepared to speak should each be described in two or three sentences utilizing good rhetorical style to try to sell the topics well. A short

biography is included and contact information that can link directly to each of the social networking accounts so that the one-sheet can be distributed through the Internet and the reader will be able to see everything that the author has done.

Authors should take advantage of what is available to them on the Internet and use social networking to build

their platform and get to noticed. Katz says, "The more visible you are, the more interested agents and editors will be." Dr. Seymour says, "Build your brand. Have the right packaging"

Pam Roesner is a graduate student at NIU studying Communication.

"Authors should take advantage of what is available to them on the Internet and use social networking to build their platform and get noticed."

References:

- Katz, Christina. *Get Known Before the Book Deal*. Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books, 2008
- Seymour, Craig. In-Class Notes. "The Changing Role of the Writer in Contemporary Culture."

Popular Social Networking Sites

General

- Facebook: facebook.com
- Google Buzz: buzz.google.com
- Tumblr: tumblr.com
- Twitter: twitter.com

Blogging

- Blogger: blogger.com
- Posterous: posterous.com
- Weebly: weebly.com
- Wordpress: wordpress.org

Academics and Professional

- Academia: academia.edu
- italki: italki.com

- LinkedIn: linkedin.com

Art and Film

- deviantART: deviantart.com
- FilmAffinity: filmaffinity.com
- Flickr: flickr.com
- Last Fm: Last.fm

Books and Genre

- Elftown: elftown.com
- Goodreads: goodreads.com
- Weread: weread.com

Misc.

- CafeMom: cafemom.com
- Disaboom: disaboom.com

Judging a Book by its Cover Design

By Sandie Ellsworth

We hear “never judge a book by its cover,” but we do it anyway. Why exactly shouldn’t we study the book cover? As a part of the book it is the first thing we see; the cover is meant to entice us into opening its pages and purchasing its contents; however, picking out the picture or graphic to grace a cover that works with the story content is not an easy task. The publishing company and author have to make at least five important decisions before even coming up with a cover: the author font, title font, whether the author or title will be all uppercase letters, what picture or graphic to use (if any), what quote should be used (if any), and the color scheme.

The choices designers make can influence readers when they look at the book, which is a powerful position. Brighter colors and an intriguing cover will draw the book browsers’

eyes and entice them into coming closer, motivating them to pick up the book, and read the back excerpt. For instance, depending on whom the author is trying to reach, darker colors could also attract an audience by referring to a darker story line between its pages.

It’s imperative to choose an appropriate cover in order to reach an intended audience, which emphasizes the importance of graphic arts. Although we may not all be designing book covers or thinking about them, the same process and ideas apply to the magazines or newspapers we read like *National Geographic* or the *Chicago Tribune* making document design a key competent to why those media sell.

Sandie Ellsworth is an undergraduate student at NIU studying English.

Writing Recipes as Technical Writing

By Shelley Korth

In conversation, the mere mention of technical writing makes some people mentally press the snooze button. When I see their eyes glaze over, I know what they’re thinking. But tech writing is interesting. Blogs, brochures, forms, lab notes, medical communication, newsletters, online help, presentations, press releases, proposals, reports, surveys, user manuals, and Web sites all fall under the heading: technical writing. Since technical writing can take so many forms, it isn’t necessarily boring. Align it with your own interests. What do you like to do?

I like to cook, so I combine my interest in writing with cooking. Since food writing can cross many genres, I’m free to write about all kinds of things. For example: recipes, restaurant reviews, reference works, food history, travel-related stories about food, food memoirs, food-themed fiction, news stories, and articles with a nutritional or healthy eating emphasis. My favorite is sharing recipes.

People Chow by Shelley Korth

This recipe makes a tasty sweet snack mix.

Store it in an airtight container—if you don’t eat it all after it cools.

DIRECTIONS

- Melt chocolate chips and butter in a medium saucepan over medium heat; stir constantly.
- Remove from heat. Add peanut butter and cinnamon.
- Stir mixture until smooth. Place cereal in a large bowl.
- Pour chocolate mixture over cereal; stir until evenly coated.
- Pour confectioners sugar into a large paper bag; add chocolate-coated cereal.

- Shake bag gently until mixture is evenly coated with sugar.
- Spread onto waxed paper; allow mixture to cool completely.

Note: Nuts are good mixed in, too.

Yield: about 13 cups

INGREDIENTS

- 1 package (6 oz.) chocolate chips
- ½ cup butter or margarine
- ½ teaspoon creamy peanut butter
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 8 cups round toasted oat cereal
- 2 to 3 cups sifted powdered sugar

There are lots of ways to write a recipe; here’s an example of my instructions.

This recipe for People Chow makes a pretty tasty snack. Follow my instructions and let me know if you like it.

Shelley Korth is a graduate student at NIU studying English: Rhetoric and Professional Writing.

We would love to hear from you!

▫ Share your knowledge about technical writing, your internships, and your jobs. Send us 250–500 word stories; include photos and other images as appropriate. Your article could appear in *TechView*. Email to the editor at corr@niu.edu (subject line: TechView News).

▫ Sign up for your free copy of the *TechView* e-newsletter at <http://stc-niu.wikidot.com/>

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