

## From the Editor's Desk

Benjamin Swiggett

The NIU Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication (STC-NIU) is an organization that focuses on writing, editing, and designing documents and all sorts of materials for the real world. Read on to see what we have been doing this semester.

In October, we attended a workshop on résumé writing and job interviewing strategies hosted by the Chicago chapter of STC. The speaker went over the dos and don'ts of résumés and offered helpful suggestions for job applications in general. Check out Amber Bell's article on page two for more details.

In November, we attended a virtual conference that covered a range of topics from social networking to medical writing. The conference was open to all NIU students, and it was held in a smart classroom in Reavis. Our faculty advisor, Dr. Jessica Reyman, logged in to a website where we listened to presenters and interacted with the rest of the online audience through a text chat. We asked questions and responded to questions posed by the presenters on-screen via the text chat. The virtual conference allowed us to welcome as many students as we could fit into a classroom, and we didn't have to spend time or money on travel.

Also in November, we found another outlet for our skills as writers and editors by initiating a collaboration with NIU's Engineers Without Borders (EWB) to help with their grant writing. EWB competes with other student organizations across the country for grant money that will fund projects such as a recent challenge they undertook at the Nyegina Secondary School in Tanzania. There, they installed a solar hot water heater for heated cooking water. Next semester, we plan to help EWB with grant proposals for other worthy projects. In the process, we can provide a service to the NIU community while we get some experience with a different kind of technical writing.

In December, Cameron Orr, our chapter president, conducted a workshop on InDesign. InDesign is a computer program used to create technical documents such as flyers, brochures, newsletters, books, and large projects. The workshop consisted of instruction and hands-on practice with a small activity. The workshop was very informative, and we learned valuable skills for future employment.

We also formed a small group to create this newsletter. Writers found the stories and wrote the articles, copyeditors edited the newsletter, document designers formatted the piece, and production specialists got the newsletter printed and distributed.

Working on a newsletter, grant writing, and practicing with computer applications like InDesign are great ways to build a portfolio with some new and unique samples of writing.

You may ask, "What is next for STC-NIU?" Well, the biggest event coming up is the STC Summit in May. The Summit is a national conference held by STC, our parent organization; this year, it's in Chicago. With some funding we received from the English Department's Larry

Johannessen Fund, we hope to participate in this three-day event at workshops, lectures, and mixers. It's a chance for us to learn and to meet people who might be able to help us find work.

We are always looking for new members. If you like what you have read, you are welcome to come to a meeting and get involved. Watch for flyers in Reavis for meeting times and locations. We also have a website that has resources and articles for your perusal. Visit <http://stc-niu.wikidot.com>.

Come discover another side to writing. Join STC-NIU today.

*Benjamin Swiggett is an undergraduate student at NIU studying English.*

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# STC-Chicago Résumé Secrets

Amber Bell

Ever wallowed in the depths of despair after not getting the job you interviewed for? Or worse, after not even getting an interview or a callback, have you wondered *what am I doing wrong?* Jack Molisani, president of ProSpring Technical Staffing, has the answer, and it might not be what you expect.

Molisani, who presented at the STC-Chicago meeting on October 20, 2011, says that it's not necessarily your qualifications but your résumé that's holding you back. According to Molisani, job applicants often misunderstand the purpose of a résumé: it is not merely a summary of your job history or an overview of your professional skills. Instead, a résumé is a tool for employers to see if you match what they are looking for, and this objective is the only reason employers will ever look at your résumé. Moreover, because there are so many applicants, many of whom they assume won't be qualified, and so little time, employers don't even read your entire résumé. They skim it, looking for key words that indicate you possess the specific qualifications they desire, and if you don't, your résumé is tossed in the trash without a second thought. Even if you are eventually hired, it won't be because the employer liked your résumé; it will be because it wasn't rejected.

Students studying technical communication or English might presume their impressive writing skills will make up for other shortcomings and help them avoid this type of rejection. However, as Molisani puts it bluntly, "Nobody is going to read your résumé from beginning to end and weep at the sheer beauty and insight of your writing . . . [or] your mastery of the English language." To expect that all of your hard work crafting the perfect résumé will pay off is unrealistic, which may come as a shock if you were counting on your impeccable formatting, grammar, and style to set you apart. While an error-free résumé is essential to avoiding rejection, Molisani argues that a well-written résumé alone will not get you the job.

Given these "cold, brutal truths," it might seem that getting a job would be nearly impossible. However, Molisani offers specific advice for how to improve your chances of getting an interview by writing a résumé that answers the employer's questions quickly and directly.

First and foremost, your primary goal is to avoid giving employers ammunition with which to reject you. In part, this means writing as succinctly as possible: the fewer pages employers have to read, the fewer chances they have to find fault. However, there is no magic number for appropriate page length. Molisani stresses that a résumé only needs to be long enough to accomplish two major goals: (1) it should provide a

complete description of all your relevant experience, phrased such that the employer can see you are qualified, and (2) it should be structured so that they see this information sooner rather than later.

This advice led to Molisani's next suggestion: write a summary of your résumé reviewing your experience and qualifications to show employers you are the right match for their job and then insert it at the top of your résumé. By including a summary statement, you avoid wasting the employer's time, and you also have the opportunity to tailor your résumé to meet the exact specifications of a given job.

As he explains, regardless of your qualifications, if your descriptions of past experience do not match the key words the employer is looking for within the first page, your résumé will be rejected. For example, if in the job description the employer states they are looking for a writer with experience in a particular genre, make sure your account of the work you did for previous companies and the summary statement frame your job tasks in that language, even if your official job title doesn't reflect it; what you did is more important than what you were called.

So, how do you find out which keywords an employer is looking for? Your first step is to do research. Look closely at the job posting or relevant information on their website: do they want experience with a certain program or in a certain field? If the job posting isn't specific enough, call or email the hiring manager and ask for more information. The worst they can do is say no, and any information you might gather through your research will be beneficial to you when writing your summary statement and phrasing your job descriptions.

In the end, Molisani says writing a résumé boils down to the cardinal rule of technical communication: know thy audience. Employers have short attention spans because they are busy; combat this problem by writing a résumé that is short and to the point featuring important information first. In addition, because there are so many applications to wade through, employers often believe, unfortunately for you, that all applicants are unqualified until proven otherwise; fight this assumption by using the language employers provide to tailor your experience to the specifications they desire. And finally, of course, make sure your résumé looks as competent and professional as you are. You can get the job you've always dreamed of; you just have to write your résumé so that it helps advance you, not reject you.

*Amber Bell is a undergraduate student at NIU studying English.*

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# Using Color: A Recipe for Success

Shelley Korth

Applying color to technical documents is one way for writers to grab readers' attention, but applying color with functional purpose can be challenging. Technical communicators must know how to enhance a point to ensure that readers will be moved to action.

So, what do technical communicators need to know about using color? Here are some practical strategies that leaders in the field recommend for the effective use of color.

## Determining When Color Should Be Used

The most important function of color in technical communication is to enhance reader comprehension (White 487–88). We should use color to increase usability, not to decorate. Use color to:

- Facilitate learning or decision making.
- Direct attention or add emphasis.
- Associate elements.
- Identify parts of a document and speed searches.
- Add contrast.
- Improve the aesthetic and professional quality.

## Choosing Color

Our own preferences for color may not match with readers' preferences. Consider these guidelines for choosing colors:

- Keep it simple.
- Borrow colors.
- Consult a color wheel.
- Test colors under actual viewing conditions.

## Using Color for Special Situations

There are other aspects of using color in technical documentation that require consideration.

### *Cultural, Social, and Emotional Color Associations*

To assign colors meaningfully, be mindful of cultural, social, and emotional connections with color. For example, Western cultures associate blue with males, and studies show that pink has a calming effect on emotionally disturbed patients.

Our cultural sense of beauty or utility affects our perceptions of colors, too. You should be aware, for example, that while red is generally understood to be a danger signal in Western cultures, red is associated with anger in Japan and joy in China. Take time to learn these kinds of associations so that your meaning is clear (Coe 318–20).

### *Vision Impairments*

To accommodate people with vision impairments such as color blindness (i.e., difficulty perceiving details in blue or distinguishing between red and green):

- Use colors that everyone can see—bright yellow, medium green, and dark red.
- Use color combinations that everyone can perceive—red and blue, red and cyan, or blue and yellow.
- Create graphics that are decipherable because of shape, pattern, or brightness—not color alone.

## Putting Knowledge to Action

You can communicate effectively by strategically applying color to documents. Aesthetically pleasing documents can persuade people to read your work. By linking color choices with your understanding of usability and performance, you will help readers learn and complete tasks because they will see, find, understand, and remember information quickly. Because color can enhance technical communication, you should “understand color, respect its limitations, and use it for specific, functional purposes” (Horton 160). Your efforts will be rewarded.

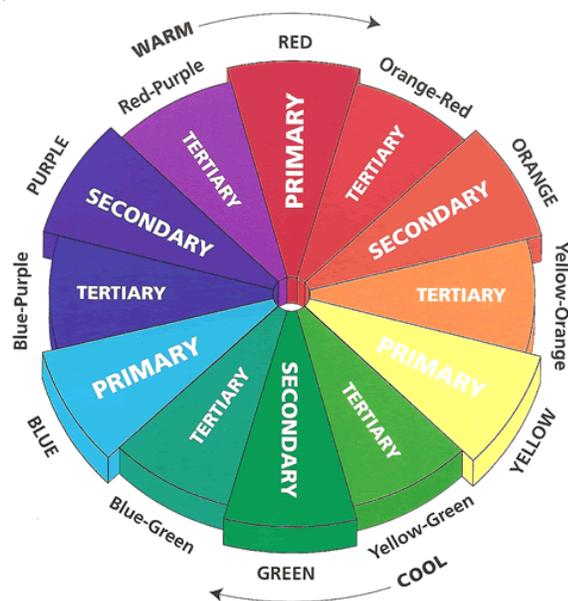
## Check It Out

For more tips and information, see my reference card—Using Color: A Quick Reference Card for Technical Communicators—attached or on the STC-NIU wiki (<http://stc-niu.wikidot.com>).

## References

- Coe, Marlana. *Human Factors for Technical Communicators*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1996.
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*Shelley Korth is a graduate student at NIU studying English with a focus in Rhetoric and Professional Writing.*



Source: <http://casually-chic.blogspot.com>

# Using Graphics in Tech Comm

Benjamin Swiggett

Have you ever looked at a set of instructions with a graphic and not understood what it meant? When properly used, graphics can be powerful aids for your reader, but graphics can cause confusion and distract from the text of your document if not used in the right context. In this article, I will provide some tips on how to use graphics to clarify information for your audience.

To begin, your graphic should have a descriptive title (see Fig. 1). Also, use labels that make sense. You generally want labels that explain what the different parts of the graphic mean; however, you do not want to have too many labels because they can clutter the graphic and make it unclear. For example, if you use labels to mark the axes and place labels at the end of each bar, the reader might get confused by the redundancy. When creating titles and labels, a simple, clear approach is best.

Graphics should be used as an addition to the document, not as a replacement for the textual information. For example, if you have a table in a document, the narrative should explain what the table shows. In addition, the graphic should be referenced at first mention in the text. A brief summary of the point you are trying to make with your table will suffice. This brief summary will ensure your audience will understand the graphic.

Another reason for explaining the graphic is to avoid excluding a potential audience. People who are blind or visually impaired are often excluded. This audience can usually read captions with a regular scanner and software called Optical Character

Recognition (OCR) that extracts the text from the document. However, if you do not explain the graphic or figure sufficiently, you may exclude this group of readers. It is important to note that explanations may not be important in all situations, but you may want to use a graphic to help advance your purpose. For example, brochures about vacationing might have graphics of people sitting on a beach or swimming in the ocean. In this situation, an explanation would not be necessary for a visually impaired reader because some graphics are not meant for that audience. These graphics do not add value to the document, but they do persuade a sighted audience.

Graphics are important, and if you remember to use them wisely, you can make more persuasive documents. They need to be accurate and straightforward and also designed in a way that presents information as clearly as possible. Remember: responsible graphics demand honest and careful design. Like the written word, graphics should be used as tools to get your point across and influence your audience. When creating documents, think about the graphic's function and how it will increase understanding and support your purpose. Also, use relevant graphics and explain all key points in the text. If you use graphics well, you will create a more successful document and could see an increase in readership.

*Benjamin Swiggett is a undergraduate student at NIU studying English.*

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**"Graphics should be used as an addition to the document, not as a replacement for textual information."**

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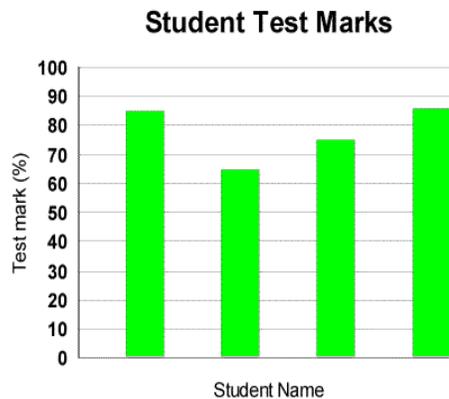


Fig. 1. A graphic using described techniques.

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## 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 the editor at [stniu@gmail.com](mailto:stniu@gmail.com) (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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## STC-NIU Team Fall 2011

STC-NIU President:	Cameron Orr	Newsletter Editors:	Amber Bell
Vice-President:	Shelley Korth		Ben Swiggett
Website Editors:	Cameron Orr	Newsletter Advisor:	Shelley Korth
	Shelley Korth	Design Advisor:	Linda Watson
Communications Officer:	Erica Brown	Layout Consultant:	Cameron Orr
Treasurer:	Lindsay Massie		
Faculty Advisor:	Dr. Jessica Reyman		



# Using Color: A Quick Reference Guide for Technical Communicators

SHELLEY KORTH

## When and How to Use Color:

### To Facilitate Learning or Decision Making

- Use color in graphics, icons, and hyperlinks
- Use color with important labels, warnings, cautions, and notes
- Use color to improve users' recall (images)

### To Direct Attention or Add Emphasis

- Use warm colors (red, orange, yellow) to draw attention
- Note:** cool colors (blue or green) recede; white, black, and gray are neutral
- Announce a change in headings or subheadings with color

### To Associate Elements

- Distinguish parts of a document or unite a series of documents with colors
- Set off sections within a document, highlight examples, or emphasize warnings with color
- Draw attention with shaded areas in tables to highlight column titles or sets of data

### To Identify Parts of a Document and Speed Searches

- Code colors (e.g., pair colors with graphics to distinguish objects)
- Signal organization and pattern with:
  - Colored boxes or shapes
  - Colored borders or edges of pages
  - Colored icons
  - Colored text
    - Use to emphasize words or phrases (occasionally)
    - Use for cautionary content
    - Distinguish section heads
    - Choose dark shades of color that contrast with the page background

### To Add Contrast

- Use colors that allow readers to easily separate different parts of the text; to maximize legibility, use black and white.
- Use chromatic colors for text and small details:
  - Ensure lightness contrast between foreground and background
  - Avoid low-contrast combinations like yellow on white or navy blue on black

## To Improve the Aesthetic and Professional Quality

- Use precise colors that match logos and other corporate documentation
- Use color schemes for text and images to build a harmonious design

## How to Choose Color:

### Keep It Simple

- Select a single hue that seems appropriate for the audience and message, and then choose a strategy to complete the color scheme:
  - Monochromatic (single base hue)
  - Triads (three hues equally spaced)
  - Analogous (any three adjacent hues)
  - Complementary (opposite colors)
  - Split-complements (one hue combined with two colors on either side of the complement)
- Borrow a color from the logo or image
- Use red, yellow, green, and blue
- Stick to black and white, or pick one of these combinations (see Table 1):

Table 1

Background	Use	Avoid
<b>White</b>	Black	Yellow
	Blue	Cyan
	Red	
<b>Black</b>	White	Blue
	Yellow	Red
	Green	Magenta

Source: Horton, William. "Overcoming Chromophobia: A Guide to the Confident and Appropriate Use of Color." *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 34.4 (1991): 164.

## Definitions:

### Color Components

- Hue:** Color; term to include indistinct shades (reddish-blue) and also pure colors (red)
- Value:** Relative appearance to black or white (i.e., how light or dark a color appears)
- Saturation:** Purity of the hue; fully saturated refers to a color at its most intense compared to a less saturated color that has been muted or grayed by mixing with another hue

## Color Schemes

- RYB:** (Red, Yellow, Blue) Used for artistic reference (See Fig. 1)
- RGB:** (Red, Green, Blue) Used for computer screens (See Fig. 2)
- CMYK:** (Cyan, Magenta, Yellow, Key—for Black) Used for print documents (see Fig. 2)

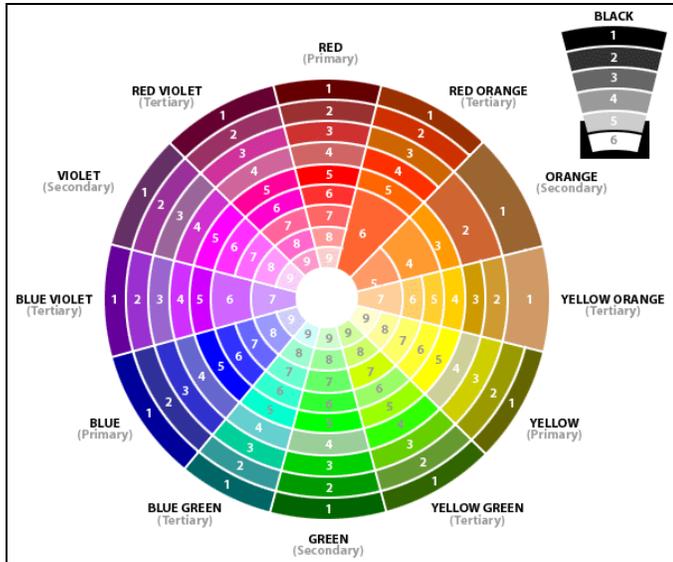


Figure 1. RYB Color Scheme.

Source: [http://07185536d.blogspot.com/2008\\_10\\_01\\_archive.html](http://07185536d.blogspot.com/2008_10_01_archive.html)

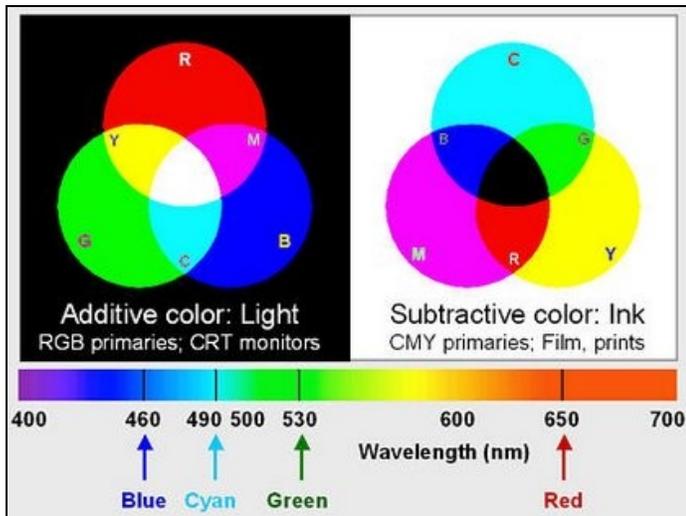


Figure 2. RGB and CMYK Schemes.

Source: [http://www.normankoren.com/light\\_color.html](http://www.normankoren.com/light_color.html)

## Special Situations and Considerations:

### Cultural Associations

- Avoid confusion by logically assigning colors and specify the meaning with a description (e.g., in a legend or color key)
- Consult experts about cultural associations with color when creating documentation for a transnational audience (Coe's book: *Human Factors*)

## Vision Impairments

- Color blindness: Readers may have difficulty perceiving details in blue and/or in distinguishing red and green.
- To overcome problems:
  - Use color redundantly, make monochrome reproductions of the graphic decipherable by combining color with other graphical characteristics, such as shape, pattern, or brightness
  - Avoid the problem colors
  - Use colors with different values
  - Select colors everyone can distinguish: bright yellow, medium green, dark red
  - Use color combinations everyone can see: red and blue, red and cyan, blue and yellow
  - Limit the number of colors viewers must distinguish
  - Put comparable colors close together
  - Test for reaction and response

## Resources:

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