

# Ragged Left

FEBRUARY 2001

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THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

BERKELEY CHAPTER

## Zen and the Art of Online Help

**Y**ou wanted—or were forced—to write online help, so you learned how to use a help-authoring tool. That's like learning how to write poetry by reading a Microsoft Word manual.

Now you are ready to learn a new way to approach online help development. Mark Bloom will teach you a working knowledge of Zen and how it applies to technical communication. He will present techniques that will reshape how you think about online help. He will provide help options you might have missed. He will leave you with a sense of well-being and optimism. He will do all this without leaving his body.

His presentation is not hands-on, and it's not platform-specific or product-specific. Still, in a Zen-like way that makes the ordinary extraordinary. Mark employs samples and stories, sprinkled with wit and wisdom, that have implications to all facets of technical communication. He introduces, for example, the concepts of information exchange, information transfer, and knowledge engineering.

And of course there is his advice for online help.

Mark addresses the problems of most online help systems. He discusses the theory behind how people learn and how online help fits that model. He focuses on the theoretical skills and intrinsic knowledge that help authors need to produce a help system that meets the needs of its users. Mark's goal is to make help authors

aware of their many options, their many challenges, and the enormous impact they can have on their product and their company.

Using the Zen concepts Mark teaches, you will learn how to overcome the limitations implicit in online help to develop truly useful and creatively effective online help. Insights will emerge. Light bulbs will begin to flicker. You might even experience an epiphany.

Mark H. Bloom is an award-winning technical communicator and an acknowledged guru of online help development. Mark currently manages a Creative Services team for America Online, Inc. An active member of the Society for Technical Communication, he has presented at international events and is serving his second term as President of the Orange County chapter.

Join us on Wednesday, February 14th for this lively presentation. Meeting details appear on page 2 and you can make reservations online at [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org).

### Preemptive Planning Phone Seminar in February

Learn to prepare for projects, avoid nerve-wracking schedule crunches, and look like a hero in the process with STC's February Telephone Seminar, "Preemptive

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# About the STC

TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION is the bridge between those who create ideas and those who use them. Conveying scientific and technical information clearly, precisely, and accurately is an essential occupation in all sectors of business and government.



STC has more than 20,000 members and 144 chapters worldwide. Its members include writers, editors, artists, illustrators, photographers, audiovisual specialists,

managers, supervisors, educators, students, employees, and consultants.

STC strives to:

- Advance the theory and practice of technical communication.
- Promote awareness of trends and technology in technical communication.
- Aid the educational and professional development of its members.

## Membership

Membership is open to everyone. Regular membership is \$110/year, with an additional \$15 enrollment fee the first year. Student membership is \$45/year.

To receive additional information and an application form, via mail or email:

- Call our chapter voicemail number 510-466-5464 and leave a message.
- Send email to [bkymbrs@stc.org](mailto:bkymbrs@stc.org).
- Send mail to STC-Berkeley, PO Box 1007, Berkeley CA 94701-1007.

## Advertising Rates

Page \$70, 2/3 page \$50, 1/2 page \$40, 1/3 page \$30, 1/6 page \$20, business card \$10. STC members receive 20% off. Ad deadline is the fifteenth of the month prior to publication.

## Submissions

*Ragged Left* publishes original articles and illustrations. We edit them to meet our needs. You retain copyright but grant every STC publication royalty-free permission to reproduce the article or illustration in print or any other medium. Please contact the editor for details of how to submit articles and illustrations.

Deadline for unsolicited submissions is the 21st of the month preceding publication. Other STC publications are hereby granted permission to reprint articles from *Ragged Left*, provided such reprints credit the author and the specific *Ragged Left* issue, and a copy of any publication containing such a reprint is sent to the *Ragged Left* editor.

# STC-Berkeley Chapter Meeting Details

**Next meeting:** Wednesday, February 14.

Café de la Paz serves STC-Berkeley members delicious South American food. The meeting begins at 6 P.M. with networking, conversation, and a no-host bar, followed by the buffet at 6:30 P.M. Chapter business and announcements are made around 7:15 P.M., followed by the speaker.

If you want to eat dinner, reservations are required and *must* be received (by Bill) no later than 12:00 NOON the Monday before the meeting (February 12). Reservations are necessary so that we can order the right amount of food. Do *not* contact the restaurant.

Send checks to Ruth Wright, 586 Vernon Street, Oakland, CA 94610.



**RSVP online:** Use your credit card to order meeting reservations via the chapter Web site, [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org).

With a reservation, the meeting fee with food for members is \$17, for student members is \$14, and for nonmembers is \$20; if you come for the program only, starting at 7:30 P.M., the fee is \$12 for members and non-members (\$10 for students). If you are not eating, payments may be made at the door.

## Fix Your Résumé

STC-Berkeley offers free résumé reviews to all comers, whether they are members or not. If you know someone who is a technical writer and would like some help with his or her résumé, we offer résumé reviews by people who have experience making hiring decisions.

With the average employer taking less than a minute to look at your résumé, another pair of eyes can help present your qualifications in the best light, *and* get you hired.

Résumés for review must be received the Friday before the monthly meeting (February 9). Send résumés to [employment@stc-berkeley.org](mailto:employment@stc-berkeley.org). Arrangements will be made to meet at the monthly meeting and to discuss the suggestions.

*Project Planning: An STC Telephone Seminar.* Information about the February 7 seminar with award-winning author John Hedtke is now on the Web at <http://www.stc-va.org/phoneseminar.html>.

STC will hold a two-part telephone seminar, March 7 and March 14, on "*Getting Started with Usability Testing*." Carol M. Barnum, a professor of technical communication at Southern Polytechnic State University and an award-winning author, will conduct the seminar. She will address the basics of usability and testing, explain what to test, how many subjects to test, and where and when testing should occur. If you have questions about the seminar, please contact Sara Fulmer at (703) 522-4114 ext. 207 or [sara@stc-va.org](mailto:sara@stc-va.org)

## Director Sponsor Elections Coming to Your Mailbox

BY ANDREA L. AMES

STC REGION 8 DIRECTOR-SPONSOR (1998-2001)

Happy New Year, everyone! If you've not already received it, there's an STC membership renewal form in the mail with your name on it. The sooner you renew, the sooner you'll get your 2001 STC election ballot. You can't vote if you aren't a member, and the "polls" close in March, so don't be late with your renewal form.

Here's how it works. By mid-March, all members who renewed their membership before February 28 will receive a ballot. All you have to do is read the ballot statements of all the candidates, and vote! You'll be voting for a new Second Vice President who will, according to STC bylaws, go on to become First Vice President, then President, an then Immediate Past President. You'll also vote for a new STC Treasurer--who will serve a two-year term--and two of the four members of the STC Nominating Committee.

The part of the 2001 election that affects each of us and our chapters most directly, however, is the election of a new Region 8 Director-Sponsor. As we learned in November during the US Presidential election, every vote DOES make a difference, and your new DS will be representing you for three years, so don't sit out this election! You have a difficult choice to make, as we have two excellent candidates: Alison Reynolds, from the New Zealand chapter, and Bonni Graham, from the San Diego chapter.

For more information on both candidates' qualifications, platforms and goals, read Andrea Ames' extensive interviews with Bonni Graham and Alison Reynolds on the STC-Berkeley website at [www.stc-berkeley.org](http://www.stc-berkeley.org).

## Conquering Your Interview

BY AZURE KACURA

"If you talk money first, you'll leave money on the table." That's one of the many interviewing tips that the Dean of Northern California Technical Communications Recruiters, Andrew Davis, drove home during his presentation on "*Acing the Interview*" at January's STC-Berkeley meeting.

To get the job you want, Mr. Davis offered strategies that you can employ before, during, and after the interview.

Before the interview, do your homework. Dig into the company's website, refine your presentation and portfolio to meet the audience's needs, and anticipate the interviewers' concerns about your ability to do the job.

During the interview, communicate. Ask tough questions and show your interest for the work. "Passion sells and excitement is infectious," Davis contended. Connecting with the hiring manager is fundamental to a successful interview.

After the interview, assess the fit. Does the job excite you? Is it the kind of emotional environment you want to work in, or will it suck you dry? "If you know you can't succeed," Davis said, "don't take the job."

Andrew Davis can be reached through [www.synergistech.com](http://www.synergistech.com).

## How to Create Winning Technical Communications

STC SAN FRANCISCO CHAPTER  
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 21ST, 2001  
6:00 P.M.: NETWORKING AND SELF-SERVE HORS D'OEUVRES  
7:00 P.M.: PROGRAM

Ever wonder what it takes to create award-winning technical communications? Touchstone Guru Richard Mateosian will discuss the process of evaluating entries at the local and international levels. He will explain the judging criteria and offer tips on how to produce winning entries. Entries from the 2000 international competition will be on display.

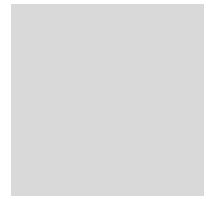
Richard Mateosian is a technical communicator with Documentum, Inc., where he produces documentation for developers. He is the review editor of IEEE Micro, [www.computer.org/micro](http://www.computer.org/micro), and reviews hardware, software, and books. Richard has been involved in the local technical communication competition (Touchstone) for the last six years. In 1996 he directed the competition, and in 2000 he was responsible for ensuring the quality of the judging.

Meeting Location: London Wine Bar, downstairs 415 Sansome Street, Downtown San Francisco  
STC members: \$10; Non-members: \$12; Students: \$8  
Details: <http://stc.org/region8/sfc/www/index.html>

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## Next Meeting:

# Wednesday February 14

## Zen and the Art of Online Help with Mark Bloom

Meal reservations required by Monday, February 12.

See page 2 of costs and contact info. **RSVP online:**

Credit cards accepted at Café de la Paz.

Please do not call the restaurant!

Café de la Paz: 1600 Shattuck Avenue (at Cedar)

Buffet and No-Host Bar 6:30 - 7:30

Announcements and Program 7:30 - 9:00

## STC-BERKELEY MEETING LOCATION AND DIRECTIONS

By BART: Exit the Berkeley station (Richmond line) at Center and proceed north six blocks up Shattuck Ave. to 1600 Shattuck at Cedar.

From north of Berkeley: From I-80, take the University Avenue exit. Go east (towards UCB) to Shattuck Ave. Turn left (north) on Shattuck and go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From south of Berkeley: Take I-880 north from San Jose through Oakland. Follow the highway as it curves sharply to the right (where traffic merges) and becomes I-980. Continue on I-980 to Highway 24 (toward Berkeley/Walnut Creek). Take the first exit from 24 (Martin Luther King Jr./51st). Turn right on 51st St. and make first left onto Shattuck Ave. Proceed north on Shattuck to downtown Berkeley. Turn left on University Ave., then right again at first light (north) onto Shattuck. Go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From San Francisco: Take the Bay Bridge towards Oakland (I-80 East). At the end of the bridge, stay in the left-hand lanes and head towards Berkeley and Sacramento. Proceed two miles and exit onto University Avenue (on the exit ramp, stay in left lane of split). Go east (towards UCB) to Shattuck Ave. Turn left (north) on Shattuck and go seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

From far East Bay: Take Highway 24 west through Caldecott Tunnel, exit Ashby Avenue. West on Ashby to Shattuck Ave. Right on Shattuck to downtown Berkeley. Turn left (west) on University Ave., then right again at first light (north) onto Shattuck for seven blocks to 1600 Shattuck. Turn left on Cedar for parking.

