

# sound.views

the newsletter of the Puget Sound Chapter of STC

www.stc-psc.org

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## Technical Editor Profile

By Robert Reynolds

In the spirit of this issue's editing theme, here's a profile on an editor in the area. **Kristine Haugseth** has worked many years at Microsoft, full-time for over 18 years and as a temp for over two years. Before that, she worked in academia and in public schools.

### A Day in the Life

#### What discipline/product category do you edit for?

I am an editing manager in Windows Server Solutions Division, working on protocol documentation. I have a team of five full-time editors and five contingent staff editors.

What's a typical day like? Do you work in multiple teams/products, or just one?

The editing team that I lead works with many different product groups. This provides a lot of challenge in terms of keeping on schedule and coordinating reviews with programming writers. The different technologies we cover make the work interesting and ever-changing.

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### At The Next Chapter Meeting: Tuesday, October 20, 2009

Topic:	Writing for Mobile Devices
Presenter:	Teresa Goertz and Jim Causey
Time:	6:00-6:45 PM: Networking and Buffet 6:45-7:00 PM: Announcements 7:00-8:15 PM: Presentation 8:15 PM: Informal Q&A
Location:	Microsoft Bldg 37 (Union) - Room 1717, Redmond, WA
Registration:	Register online ( <a href="https://asi-seattle.com/agent/stc2/register.php">https://asi-seattle.com/agent/stc2/register.php</a> ) or call 206-623-8632 by 10:00 AM, Monday, October 19
Cost:	\$10 for members; \$15 for non-members; \$5 for students, family <b>Note:</b> Price increases \$10 after deadline.

## about sound.views

*Sound Views* is published for members of the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

### Managing Editor

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Roger du Mars, Production Editor  
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### Submissions

All members are welcome to submit articles, comments, and letters. Articles must address topics of interest to technical communicators, especially to those in the Puget Sound region of Washington.

Send articles in Word (doc), Rich-Text Format (RTF), or ASCII (txt) formats to the Managing Editor. Accompanying graphics or photos should be provided as separate files.

The editorial staff reserves the right to edit letters and articles for length and clarity.

The submission deadline for the next issue of *Sound Views* is October 15, 2009.

### Reprints

You may reprint original material appearing in *Sound Views* as long as you acknowledge the source and send a copy of the reprint to the Managing Editor.

For more information about the Puget Sound Chapter of STC, visit the website at [www.stc-psc.org](http://www.stc-psc.org).

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## From the President: *Sailing Through the Straits*

By Mike Brazill, Chapter President

### strait

Spelled Pronunciation [streyt]

### –noun

1. Often, **straits**. (*used with a singular verb*) a narrow passage of water connecting two large bodies of water.
2. Often, **straits**. a position of difficulty, distress, or need : *Ill and penniless, he was in sad straits indeed.*

### Origin:

1150–1200; ME *streit* < OF *estreit* < L *strictus* ptp. of *stringere* to bind; see [STRAIN](#)<sup>1</sup>

### Related forms:

**straitly**, *adverb*  
**straitness**, *noun*

### Synonyms:

**2.** exigency, pinch, dilemma, predicament, plight.  
 See [EMERGENCY](#).

### Antonyms:

**2.** ease.

I can't help but think that *strait* describes the position of STC very well right now. As many of you know, our International parent is facing the challenge of an unprecedented financial shortfall. Some might say that our parent is "in sad straits indeed." On the other hand, we are hopeful that their recovery plan will enable STC to sail through these hard times into an ocean of opportunity.

Because of these cash flow problems, our chapter will not receive any funds from membership dues this year.

However, we plan to continue to provide a high level of support for our chapter members.

We look forward to bringing you a complete schedule of events for 2009-10. And we plan to provide the same services as we have in the past. But you will notice some changes from last year. Many of our meetings will be in corporate meeting rooms instead of hotels. You may be served sandwiches instead of roast turkey. Although some of the workshops and meetings might cost a little more, we'll work hard to hold down admission fees as much as possible. We understand that this is a difficult time for many.

*President continued on page 3*

## chapter contacts

### officers

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## Editor's Corner

By Mary Corder

I am pleased to begin my second year as Newsletter Manager for the Puget Sound STC with our newly-rebranded *Sound Views* newsletter. This year, each issue will cover a specific theme that is relevant to technical communication.

This issue of *Sound Views* covers topics related to editing. It includes a profile of a local technical editing manager, a review of a book by Jennie Ruby that describes the use of Microsoft Word 2007 as part of an editorial process, and an article about how the role of a technical editor evolves when moving to DITA and topic-based authoring.

The leadership council of the Puget Sound Chapter has an exciting year prepared. The first chapter meeting was September 15 and featured Sabra Goldick in a presentation titled, "Using LinkedIn Effectively to Find a Job." The other chapter meetings this fall include the October 20 presentation on "Writing for Mobile Devices" by Teresa Goertz and Jim Causey and the November 17 presentation by Leah Guren on "ABCs of Documentation Usability Testing." We are also continuing our *Sound Table Topics* round table meetings.

The success of the chapter's newsletter depends largely on you for contributions, and I welcome any newsletter articles, suggestions, or ideas you have for improving *Sound Views*. Some ideas for articles include career or educational experiences, a review of a software tool, or a review of a relevant book.

Feel free to send me your newsletter articles and feedback at [newsletter@stc-psc.org](mailto:newsletter@stc-psc.org).

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*President continued from page 2*

In addition to our meetings and workshops, we're looking forward to continuing the Round Table Topic sessions that we started last year. These popular sessions are a great way to get to know some other technical communicators in an informal setting and discuss the issues you care about.

And I encourage you to think about participating in or helping judge our annual competition this October. This is a chance to get some great feedback on your communication products and receive professional recognition for your best work. STC Competition awards can enhance the credibility of your portfolio or website. They are also a great way to provide visibility for your work in your organization.

We value our Puget Sound Community and appreciate your support as we sail through these rough waters.

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**What is the editor/writer ratio where you work?**

The ratio can vary from project to project. It is often one editor to every five or six writers.

**Skills**

**What editorial training, if any, did you go through to become an editor? Where did you get the training?**

I took graduate education in linguistics and have always been interested in the written word. Most of

**Editors should look for ways to add additional value to projects besides editing.**

my editing training was on-the-job from editors who had strong book publishing backgrounds. I have

also taken training in indexing, developmental editing, technical writing, and so on along the way.

In most cases, though, hiring managers today are interested in candidates with education and experience in editing. This makes it a bit of a challenge in starting out as a new editor.

**Was there any technical training required? Did you need to know computer programming/coding?**

When I was a technical editor, I took a lot of training to be familiar with terminology and programming. As a manager, I still read technical books occasionally to know more about technologies.

**What kind of training or classes would be beneficial for your discipline? Where did you get the training?**

For people interested in starting as a technical editor, I would suggest studying at a college or university and volunteering your newly acquired skills at schools, professional organizations like *STC*, or non-profits. I'd suggest getting as broad a background as possible because the field is very dynamic and constantly changing. Although most of my career has centered around editing, I have also been a release manager and project manager as well. Flexibility is key.

**Employment Outlook**

**What are the opportunities for your industry right now? Is it growing or shrinking?**

The economic downturn has reduced the numbers of positions currently. It was difficult to get positions as well after the dot com bust, but a year ago there was great demand for editors and salaries were higher. Technical editors need to be tenacious and be willing to wait out downturns when they happen.

**What is the long term outlook for technical editors in this discipline?**

It is hard to predict the future. However, editing is hard to outsource abroad given language differences (even the minor ones that exist across English-speaking countries).

Editors should look for ways to add additional value to projects besides editing. This strategy increases job skills, helps broaden experience, and increases employability.

**From a geographical perspective, where are the jobs for your discipline these days?**

Although full-time jobs are hard to find right now, job possibilities exist across the country. Freelance remote work is also available at publishing firms.

*Robert E. Reynolds is in his second year as a technical writer after wearing hats as a software tester and landscape designer/environmental planner. He currently works at EDIFECS in Bellevue, and he can be reached at rer22@cornell.edu.*

**Sound Table Topics**

Are you a recent graduate? New to Puget Sound *STC*? Looking for advice or help with a project?

Check out our informal discussion and networking series, *Sound Table Topics*, where technical communicators discuss innovative trends in the field, present their latest projects, and network with colleagues. The events are free, open to all, and held at a variety of Puget Sound-area locations.

Check our website ([www.stc-psc.org](http://www.stc-psc.org)) and email announcements for times and locations.

# Editing DITA Topics: The changing role of the technical editor in the age of DITA and topic-based authoring

By Michelle Carey, Michelle Corbin, and Shannon Rouiller, IBM Corporation

*Editor's Note:* This article originally appeared in the December 2007 issue of *Best Practices: A Publication of The Center for Information-Development Management* (Volume 9, Issue 6, p. 129, 133-135). You can subscribe to the hardcopy newsletter or sign up for a free e-newsletter at the Center for Information-Development Management website: [www.infomanagementcenter.com/publications.htm](http://www.infomanagementcenter.com/publications.htm).

Can we live without books? Certainly, we can't live without those wonderful novels that we pick up at the airport. But we can and should replace the book with a more useful vehicle to deliver technical information, and, as editors, we can learn to help create and edit the content for this new information delivery vehicle.

In the past, technical editors worried mostly about the meaning and appearance of the text in printed books or online help. We focused on margins, font sizes and types, line spacing, grammar, punctuation, and the clarity and organization of the text. However, much has changed in technical documentation. Although we never forget the importance of clear language and style, we have shifted much of our attention to a new paradigm: topic-based authoring.

With Darwin Information Typing Architecture (DITA) and topic-based authoring, we focus first on the external text that the users read, but we must also focus on the DITA XML elements and technology that are used to produce that external text. This new focus on DITA elements and technology has re-created the role of the technical editor in the age of topic-based authoring.

## Learning the DITA XML elements and technology

Editors must now focus on the content in a different way and must also review the XML elements that writers use to create that content. DITA XML elements identify content for what it is,

not for what it should look like. Editors must help writers use DITA elements properly because using the correct DITA elements can ensure that search engines return more precise results for searches or help users filter through lots of information. By understanding and using the tools and technology that produce the text, we can communicate more effectively with our writers. If we use the names of elements and attributes to explain the change that needs to be made to improve the text, writers are more likely to use elements consistently.

Editors must also work with authoring tool developers to ensure that DITA contains the most appropriate semantic elements and that the DITA elements generate the appropriate highlighting (bold, italic, monospace type, and so on). One of the current challenges for editors and writers is knowing what DITA element to use for which type of content. For example, DITA has an element called `<apiname>`, but should we use that element for all content about APIs, such as methods, classes, and packages? Separate elements do not exist for methods and classes. Editors can step in and ask the tool developers to create more specialized API elements, such as `<apiMethod>` and `<apiClass>`.

## Editing topics

In addition to strong writing at the sentence level, an effective topic should meet certain criteria. Editors should look for:

- **A precise title**  
One topic collection from one product might be displayed with other collections from other products. Therefore, topic titles must often be more precise to distinguish them from other similar information. For example, many software products have information about security. You cannot simply title those topics "Security." A better title might be "Database

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*DITA continued from page 5*

security” or “Configuring ACLs for database security.”

- **Useful content**

At IBM, editors try to ensure that topics are not used simply as navigation devices, but that they contain some useful content. Also, we ensure that each topic’s content is independent of other topics.

- **One or more links to other topics**

Users should never be stranded in a topic. You can use linking, indexes, and tables of contents to ensure that users get to the right information quickly and easily.

### **Editing topic collections versus books**

Users of software and hardware products typically require the right information at the right time.

Users no longer sit in their living rooms next to the fire and read the manual. They want easy-to-read, useful information that will help them complete some task right now. To accommodate our users’ expectations, we must create self-contained, reusable topics that can be packaged in small or large collections.

In addition to editing a topic, we must also edit collections of topics. Editing topic collections is not the same as editing book chapters. What’s changed for editors is that many of us rarely edit books as linear sets of information. We don’t look at how one chapter flows to another or how chapters build on previous chapters. We also no longer assume that users read the first chapter and work their way to the final chapter. For example, many technical manuals use transitions such as “The previous chapter showed you how to create profiles. This chapter focuses on editing profiles.” Such a transition never makes sense in a set of topics because we cannot assume that users read linearly or arrived at the topic through some predefined sequence. What topic writers might use instead of the transition is an imperative to the user to do a prerequisite task of, say, creating profiles. However, the topic writer cannot assume that users have read the topic about creating profiles.

Think of topics as buoys floating in a sea. The buoys are connected to other buoys, but not necessarily in any particular order. Books are typically written as if they were train cars connected linearly. We don’t want to make users get on the train and have to walk through each train car to find the right nugget of information. The editor’s job is to ensure that we provide the buoys, or topics, that

users need and that the buoys are easy to find.

Also, users must be able to jump from one

buoy to the next whenever they need to.

**Editors must now focus on the content in a different way...**

To make topics easy to find in the collections, editors need to help arrange topic collections and topics within collections in ways that make the most sense to users. For example, topic collections might be organized by product or by user goals (such as administering or troubleshooting).

### **Picking our battles: Focus on the rules**

When you are struggling to convert libraries to topics and reorganize a mountain of information, smaller things such as whether a list is compact can seem much less important to you. White space, font choices, widows, orphans, and transitions don’t matter as much in an online, topic-based world. You find that you can let go of many of your old pet peeves, and that can be liberating.

Although we were able to let go of many pet peeves, we found that others needed to be championed. In cases where DITA doesn’t provide what we need, editors must play a key role as the advocates for needed changes to DITA. We can submit requirements to DITA, or find workarounds, or sometimes both. At first, we were tempted to submit requirements for all sorts of esoteric issues. We soon found that without a business case, requirements were not going to be accepted. We quickly learned to pick our battles and submit requirements only when prudent.

For example, we submitted a requirement to add a new element inside the <steps> element for task topics. No element was available for the “To”

*DITA continued on page 7*

*Continued from page 6*

statement to introduce a set of steps. For purposes of clarity and reinforcement, we want to introduce steps with a statement that indicates what the steps are for, such as “To print the report:”. But there is no place to put the “To” statement so that it can be part of the <steps> element. Because we were not willing to wait for that requirement to be addressed, we came up with a workaround to add the “To” statement as the last paragraph of the <context> element in the task topic. We don’t like the workaround because it separates the “To” statement from the list of steps, and therefore does not support clean reuse of the <steps> element. But we had to do something in the interim while we waited for the requirement to be addressed.

### **Short descriptions: Focus on the content**

Change of focus spans more than just DITA requirements and restrictions. The move to DITA and topic architecture has made us question our content: Is the content pertinent to the topic? Or was it just put there to make the book flow? Do users really need it? If they don’t need it, then why are we writing it, translating it, and maintaining it?

#### **Focus on the content—the content that makes the most impact and the most sense to your users.**

With topics, we need topic introductions, not transitions. In the days before DITA,

we rarely thought of section introductions as standard. But we’ve discovered that an effective short description can focus a topic more clearly than a title alone can. The short description should state the main point of the topic and provide useful information. For example, suppose you create a topic with a title “Links in DITA.” Instead of starting with a short description that says “This topic is about linking in DITA,” you can start with a short description that says “DITA supports inline links, related links, and map-generated links.” In this way, you are stating the main point of the topic and providing useful information that is not already found in the title of the topic.

Short descriptions are also key retrievability aids because they can appear in search results, as hover text for links, or underneath child links. Writing one or two sentences that serve all these purposes

well is difficult, and so editors must provide guidelines and examples to help our writers create effective short descriptions.

### **Best practices for editing DITA topics**

As editors, we must work with writers, with information architects, and with user experience professionals to focus on topic-based authoring from the top down and the bottom up. We must understand and work with the technology while still delivering a complete information experience based on solid information architecture principles. Here are some best practices for editing DITA topics that we collected:

- Create self-contained topics that are easily moved from one area of the information set to another and that don’t rely on other topics to make sense (after all, topics can be linked to other topics to provide that additional information).
- Edit the overall navigation structures for the topic collections to ensure that the topic collections are grouped in a way that makes sense for your users.
- Learn enough about DITA to ensure that the content is represented semantically by the correct XML elements, thereby making you, your writers, and your information more effective and efficient. Also, ensure that the DITA element generates the appropriate highlighting that your style guidelines suggest.
- Compare the rules of DITA with the rules of your style guides and know where to draw the line for both rule sets.
- Focus on the content—the content that makes the most impact and the most sense to your users.

DITA offers new opportunities for editors to improve the user experience with information. Editors are becoming leaders in driving the movement to topic-based authoring. After all, books are out; topics are in!

*\*\* IBM is a trademark of International Business Machines Corporation in the United States, other countries, or both.*

## Book Review: *Editing with Microsoft Word 2007*

By David Kowalsky

As Microsoft pushes forward with the start of a limited Technical Preview Program for Office 2010, numerous technical communicators in the Windows world are not even using Word 2007 for onscreen editing. For staff at a company that will roll out Office 2007 or for those interested in trying Word 2007 on their own, IconLogic has published a spiral bound workbook called *Editing with Microsoft Word 2007*, by Jennie Ruby. The workbook is used with IconLogic's instructor-led online training classes and eLearning courses, but adequately functions as a stand-alone self-study book, especially for those who prefer "hands-on" learning.

*Editing with Microsoft Word 2007* is divided into seven modules, which are sub-divided into tasks, each called a "student activity." After several activities follows a "Confidence Check," which has no step-by-step instructions, forcing the user to test comprehension of the material just presented. The activities and confidence checks require working with actual Word files, so it is necessary to first download data files found at the IconLogic's website.

All the major topics of the modules are related to using Word as part of an editorial process. The workbook starts with a module that discusses version control and naming and storing document files. This is followed by two modules on tools usage, one for spelling and grammar, the other on Find and Replace. The remaining modules include: Formatting with styles; and the more advanced topic of creating macros.

*Editing with Microsoft Word 2007* may initially appear geared only for beginners. However, given that Word 2007 has a redesigned user interface (with a ribbon that replaces Word 2003's menu bar and standard and formatting toolbars), new users to Word 2007 may appreciate this workbook. It will

likely provide much assistance to quickly learn the all-important ribbon. For example, before using the Visual Basic Editor to edit macros and add functionality, you must first add the Developer tab, which by default, does not appear on the Ribbon. The Protect Document tool on the Review (and Developer) tab is also thoroughly explained. I learned how to "protect" a document to prevent others from making untracked changes and the two ways to allow multiple reviewers to review the document. In a different module I learned how to restrict the selection of style on a template – the other major functionality that comprises the Protect Document tool.

IconLogic does not provide a website for corrections or updates, or even any resource section in the back of the workbook. However, Geoff Hart's *Effective Onscreen Editing* (Diaskeuasis Publishing, 2008) offers complete coverage of onscreen editing for editors by an experienced editor. Interested in macros for assisting with the process of editing? If so, see [www.editorium.com](http://www.editorium.com). To help ease the transition from Word 2003 to 2007, [www.addintools.com](http://www.addintools.com) sells "Classic Menu for Office 2007," which adds Word 2003's style menus and toolbars to the Ribbon in Word 2007.

A 60-day free trial version of Office Home and Student 2007, which includes Word 2007, is available from Microsoft.

*David Kowalsky is a technical writer for NEC Corporation of America and a senior member of STC's Puget Sound Chapter. He can be reached at [david.kowalsky@necam.com](mailto:david.kowalsky@necam.com).*

