

STC 50th Annual Conference: Some Highlights for Science Editors

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The Society for Technical Communication (STC) held its 50th anniversary annual conference in Dallas, Texas, on 18-21 May 2003. The opening-session speaker and newly elected honorary fellow was Natalie Angier, Pulitzer Prize-winning science writer for such publications as *Time* magazine, *The Atlantic*, and *Reader's Digest*. Her wit, relaxed speaking style, and substantive remarks captured the audience quickly. Angier moved from the plagiarism debacle that had recently occurred at the *New York Times* to the importance of integrity in science and the reporting of science, whether by science writers or by scientists themselves.

Sessions of particular interest to science editors included the following. (Descriptions of some of these presentations have been adapted from the summaries in *Proceedings, 50th Annual Conference, 2003*. Contact STC at stc@stc.org or call [703] 522-4114.)

- Janet Mizrahi, of the University of California, Santa Barbara, discussed using the medical report as a tool for teaching technical writing. Their distinct vocabulary, their reliance on facts rather than opinions, their use of description and analysis, and the logic of the IMRAD (Introduction, Methods, Results, and Discussion) format, com-

bined with a medical topic of interest to each student, quickly leads students to understand many principles of technical communication. Mizrahi shared (with permission) papers from her freshman and upper-division students. Now, if I could just get the postdocs and faculty whose work I edit to write as clearly!

- The benefits of single sourcing for life-sciences companies preparing patient information and product information in a timely and cost-effective way were presented by Ann Rockley and Steve Manning, president and consultant, respectively, of The Rockley Group, Markham, Ontario, Canada. The benefits included faster time to market; greater ease of creating, maintaining, and reviewing content; improved quality and consistency; reduction in repetition of writing, editing, translating, and so forth; and an increase in ability to address regulatory initiatives, such as 21 CFR Part 11 (the regulations and criteria under which the Food and Drug Administration will accept electronic documents and signatures) and Six Sigma (a method for continuous improvement).
- Elaine Firestone, Tony Caruso, Barbara Simmons, Earlene Hammock, Michael Ebinger, and Sushil Oswal presented a panel discussion, "Certifications and Credentials for Scientific Editors", in which they talked about the value of participating in professional societies, the Board of Editors in the Life Sciences, the ever-present controversy over the nonscience vs the science background for scientific editing, and the diverse

degree and nondegree programs for scientific editors now available through many colleges and universities.

In an interactive panel discussion led by Michelle Corbin, Linda Oestreich, and Diane Feldman, panelists and the audience discussed lessons learned about managing the technical-editing process. The hottest topic of the session was how to query subject-matter experts to elicit usable responses—perhaps the Holy Grail for scientific editors and writers!

Certainly one of the strengths of the STC conference every year is the number of sessions devoted to technology and software, usability studies, information design, translation, the Web, training, management issues, and professional development. But with more than 20 sessions available during each of 10 periods at the conference, the process of deciding which sessions to attend is always daunting. In addition to the formal sessions, the 1400-plus attendees could also participate in several networking luncheons, 17 special-interest group meetings, and postconference workshops.

The conference included an employment booth, a bookstore devoted to technical communication, a time to meet and get autographs from authors, vendor displays and presentations, and a showcase of award-winning entries from STC's international competitions for technical publications, art, and online items.

And in honor of STC's 50th anniversary, STC publications, photos, and communication technology (such as typewriter, pencils, Leroy lettering set, and pasteup boards) from the 1950s were displayed. 

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