

C O R R I G O

newsletter of the stc's technical editing sig

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1 — March 2002

How Can You Correct Common Documentation Mistakes?

We know you want to make your documentation as useful to clients as you can. To help you achieve this goal, TE SIG member Heather Hall (Austin, Texas) compiled a list of 10 common documentation mistakes and what you, as an editor, can do to correct them.

We've listed the top five mistakes here. For the others, access the "Corrigo Supplement" section of the TE SIG Web site (www.stcsig.org/te/newsletter/supplement).

1. Combining Multiple Procedures Into One

Mistake: Grouping into one procedure several tasks that users can perform in a window.

Solution: Create a separate procedure for each task.

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Correct

Prepare a Document Revision for Production

You must change the state of a document revision to "approved" to use it in production. Once you have approved the document revision, you can no longer change it.

1. Select **Tools** -> **Sign-Off**.
2. Click the **Revision** tab.
3. Select the document revision you want to use in production.
4. Click **Approve**.

Incorrect

Sign Off a Document

1. Select **Tools** -> **Sign-Off**.
2. Click the **Revision** tab.
3. Select the document revision whose state you want to change.
4. Do one of the following:
 - To approve the document, click **Approve**.
 - To activate the document, click **Activate**.
 - To cancel the document, click **Cancel**.
 - To retire the document, click **Retire**.

2. Not Making Procedural Titles Task-Oriented

Mistake: Using system terminology in procedural titles.

Solution: Make the titles of procedures task-oriented, using the user's terminology. Only advanced users know the system's terminology.

Correct

Index a Topic

Incorrect

Add a Marker to a Paragraph

Correct

Set the Column Width

Incorrect

Use the Width Doctor Component

3. Not Explaining Why to Perform a Procedure

Mistake: Not providing the purpose of performing procedures.

Solution: Provide an introductory paragraph before procedures. Exclude the introduction if the reason for performing the

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ONLINE POLL

What's your style for the computer connection word **online**?

- online
- on line
- on-line
- I use another form. (Please specify in your comments.)

Cast your vote and give your comments by logging on to www.stcsig.org/te. We'll report the results in our next issue.

Results of our December online poll question are on page 4.

CORRECTING COMMON DOCUMENTATION MISTAKES

Continued from the cover

procedure is obvious. If users understand why they're performing procedures, they can become more proficient in the software and even learn to troubleshoot their problems.

Correct

Change the Viewing Resolution of a Scanned Image

Even fast computers tend to choke on TIFF files displayed at a high resolution. The images are so big that it takes a few seconds for the screen to redraw as you scroll up or down the page. Full gray-scale TIFFs can be 500 kilobytes (KB) or more. To speed up the redraw, you can change the display of the TIFF file to a lower resolution.

Correct

Create a Control Algorithm

Create a control algorithm when you want to perform a calculation. Scripts run control algorithms. For example, a control algorithm could recommend settings for Synergy to use.

4. Putting Steps in Paragraph Form

Mistake: Not using bulleted or numbered lists to clarify procedural steps.

Solution: Number procedural steps rather than lumping them into one paragraph. If the procedure consists of only one step, use a bullet rather than placing the step in a paragraph. Bullets or numbers signal users to perform one or more steps to make something happen.

Correct

1. Select **File -> Open -> Control Algorithm**.
2. In the **Algorithm Documents** list, select **<NEW>**.
3. In the **Revisions** list, select **<NEW>**, and then click **OK**.
4. In the **Document Name** field, type the name of the control algorithm.

Incorrect

Select **File -> Open -> Control Algorithm**. In the **Algorithm Documents** list, select **<NEW>**. In the **Revisions** list, select **<NEW>**, and then click **OK**. In the **Document Name** field, type the name of the control algorithm.

Correct

- To spell check a topic, select **Tools -> Spell Check Current Topic**.

Incorrect

To spell check a topic, select **Tools -> Spell Check Current Topic**.

5. Putting Too Much Information in a Step

Mistake: Placing explanations and multiple actions in a procedural step.

Solution: Put one action in each procedural step to let users quickly perform it. If the user must press **Enter** or click a button (for example, **OK**) after performing the action, include that next action in the same step as the main action. Place explanations in brief paragraphs below the action steps.

Correct

1. Select **Tools -> References**.
2. Click the **Tree** tab.
3. Select the **Pecan** check box, and then click **OK**.

Incorrect

1. Select **Tools -> References**. Click the **Tree** tab. Select the **Pecan** check box, and then click **OK**.

Correct

- To add photographs to a portfolio, type:

> addPhoto \$fdr

where *fdr* is a folder that contains the photographs.

This places copies of the photographs in the portfolio and in the PhotoWand folder.

Incorrect

- To add photographs to a portfolio, type > addPhoto \$fdr, where *fdr* is a folder that contains the photographs. This places copies of the photographs in the portfolio and in the PhotoWand folder.

Don't forget to check out the TE SIG Web site to learn about the other five common documentation errors.

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HELP US ACHIEVE OUR 2002 GOALS

In the past two years, the TE SIG has made great progress developing the structure needed to serve SIG members as a valuable resource. To ensure the SIG's vitality, TE SIG leadership drafted these goals for 2002:

- Establish an online discussion forum that SIG members can use for sharing tips and experiences.
- Continue to develop *Corrigo* as a valuable conduit for communication among SIG members. Key to this development is expanding the newsletter staff so *Corrigo* can be produced without requiring excessive amounts of time and attention from the individuals involved.
- Increase the visibility of the SIG at the annual conference.
- Expand the content of the SIG Web site to:
 - Include information about volunteer opportunities, chapter SIG activities and editing sessions at the annual conference
 - Further develop the resources page

These goals can be realized only with your assistance! Working with the SIG is a rewarding way to develop skills and to learn from and about other technical editors. If any of the above goals call to you, please contact me at (919) 960-7170 or dmfeldman@mindspring.com. I'll find a way for you to serve that fits your interests and your schedule.

Diane Feldman

NOT SO GRIMM: CHILDREN'S STORIES PROVE THEIR WORTH DURING UNCERTAIN JOB MARKETS

Just as fairy tales and fables soothed you as a child, so can they soothe you as an adult facing the prospects of layoffs, downsizing and restructuring.

It's a hectic world out there. We often wish we were children again — enjoying the carefree days of our youth. But, alas, we're adults trying to prove our worth, enhance our skills and pad our resumes with as much value as possible in case the knock, knock, knock of layoffs comes to our door.

But the stories of our younger days can provide us valuable guidance as we prepare for an uncertain world. How, you ask? Easy. It starts out like this: Once upon a time. ...

The Ant and the Grasshopper

We all know the ant worked hard to prepare for the harsh reality of winter, while the grasshopper played away his days. Like the ant, we must prepare for our potential winter — the job search. But instead of collecting food and drops of water, we're collecting experiences and skills.

Consider offering your skills and talents to a local — or a national —

organization. Write an article ... design a Web page ... manage a mailing list. The contacts you make could be invaluable, and you might brush up on existing skills or learn new ones that may help you later.

With luck, we won't need to call on these reserves. We may weather the winter just fine and see ourselves sitting pretty in the spring. But what advantages our preparations will have brought us. Our skills are enhanced, our resumes are polished, and our confidence is soaring. Even if we continue happily in our present job for years to come, we'll be all the wiser and more prepared.

Cinderella

C'mon, haven't you ever felt like Cinderella at your desk? Stuck with all the boring projects that challenge you about as much as writing your name does, while your coworkers get all the plum projects? Cinderella scrubbed the floors and watched her stepsisters get treated like queens, yet she came out on top in the end. You can do the same. How can you perform a mundane job but perform it in a way that enhances your skills and

marketability? Rather than doing hard-copy editing, could you learn Acrobat to perform online edits? Could you learn a layout program and convert your team's documentation into something nicer? (If pumpkins can turn into carriages, just think what you can do to job aids!)

Don't wait for your Prince Charming-like job — go out and make your own destiny. You'll be surprised at what you can learn even while performing your usual tasks.

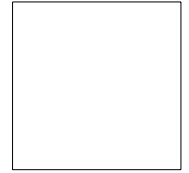
Happily Ever After

I could go on and on with my comparisons of children's stories to everyday life, but I think you get the picture.

In the real world, we can shape our own destinies and take charge of our own futures. We don't have to wait for a fairy godmother to change our lives. We can do it all on our own. But it never hurts to keep the child inside us alive — you never know just what you might learn.

The End.

Julia Neunreiter



DECEMBER ONLINE POLL RESULTS

In our previous issue, we asked for your style of referring to **electronic mail**. Here's how you voted:

- e-mail — 58% (149 votes)
- email — 34% (88 votes)
- E-mail — 4% (10 votes)
- Email — 4% (9 votes)
- We don't shorten it 0% (0 votes)

What You Said

- “The hyphen slows people down, and there's no reason for it. If someone doesn't know what **email** is, they're not gonna know **e-mail** either!”
- “Properly, it should be **e. mail** if shortened at all, but **e-mail** seems to be fairly industry-standard.”
- “The Microsoft standard is **e-mail** (e-whatever ... always small e, always a hyphen).”

For other comments, see the “*Corrigo* Supplement” section of the TE SIG Web site (www.stcsig.org/te/newsletter/supplement).

In Our Next Issue ...

- **Tips on Developing a Style Guide for Your Organization**
- **Editing Documents: How Long Should it Take?**
- **TE SIG Listserv Update**

RESOURCES

Want more details on topics covered in this issue as well as other great editing information? Look here.

- www.jeanweber.com — great tips and links for technical editors.
- www.webopedia.com — Webopedia online dictionary (billed as the “only online dictionary and search engine you need for computer and Internet technology”).

Q & A

Q. What is the Work menu in Microsoft Word 2000?

A. Don't you hate it when you go to open a document from the “recently used” file list at the bottom of the File menu and you find that your document has dropped off the list? For immediate access to often-used files in Word 2000 — and to prevent files from dropping off when you open others — add the Work menu to your menu bar.

1. From the menu bar, click **Tools**, then **Customize**.
2. Click the **Commands** tab.
3. In the **Categories** pane, click **Built-in Menus**.
4. In the **Commands** pane, click and drag **Work** to your menu bar.
5. Click **Close**.

When you have a file open that you want to add to the Work menu, perform this step:

- From the menu bar, click **Work**, then **Add to Work Menu**.

Now you can easily open the file the next time you open Word:

- From the menu bar, click **Work**, then select the file name.

To remove an item from the menu:

1. Press **Ctrl+Alt+Hyphen**. The pointer turns into a horizontal black bar.
2. Click the **Work** menu, then click the file name you want to remove.

Thanks to Jean Weber's *Technical Editors' Eyrrie Newsletter* for this tip. See “Resources” above for information on Jean's Web site. And see the “*Corrigo* Supplement” section of the TE SIG Web site (www.stcsig.org/te/newsletter/supplement) for information on restoring items you accidentally delete from a Word menu.