

Synopsis

Utah State Student Chapter
November 2007



Curtis Newbold instructing Landscape Architecture student how to create a logo.

STC Photoshop Workshop: A Huge Success

By Megan Allen

Curtis Newbold did a fantastic job of teaching students the basics of Photoshop. The workshop was geared towards inexperienced users. He gave an overview of the tools located in the tool pallet and taught students how to use the shape, text, and gradient tools to create a logo using their initials. They also learned how to manipulate pictures using the selection tools. Curtis gave the students helpful tips about using Photoshop:

- Basic web pixel setting is 72 pixels. For print, the pixels need to be a greater value. Curtis suggested between 240 and 300 pixels. This will prevent your project from looking grainy and pixelated in print.
- When considering color mode, remember that RGB color is best for the web and CMYK is best for print.
- If Photoshop will not let you change the color of a shape, you will most likely need to rasterize the layer. This is done by clicking the layers tab in the menu tool bar, choose rasterize. A menu will appear, choose layer. This will allow you to change the color but will lock the size of your shape. It is best to select your desired size before you rasterize the layer.

Curtis believes the best way to learn Photoshop is to experiment with tutorials. A good site is www.good-tutorials.com. This site includes many helpful Photoshop tutorials and offers great advice. 🏠

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Next Event

"The Office" Christmas Party

When: December 5, 2007

Where: RBW 114

Come help the STC finish out 2007 with a rockin' Christmas party. We'll be watching our favorite episodes of "The Office," saying goodbye to several of our officers, and electing new members into the STC Presidency. So if you like good shows, fun friends, and free food, come join us in RBW 114 at 6 pm on December 5th.

Look for our next activity in January!

Nunchuck Skills, Bowhunting Skills, InDesign Skills....

By Stephanie Wilson

Of all the variables in the world of job-seeking, one sure thing is this: employers want applicants with skills. And I'm not talking Napoleon Dynamite skills. Our future employers expect us to know how to use all the software in Microsoft Office and the Adobe Creative Suite, as well as other types of hardware and software. All in all, we have quite a bit of work to do during our undergraduate years.

In past years, understanding the programs listed above has given job applicants an edge; however, as the tech-savvy students of the next generation begin to graduate, these skills are becoming standard. For this reason, we need to be more diversified in our skills. We need to understand a wider variety of basic types of software. The ability to learn new software quickly is essential for any technical communicator.

We also need to be responsible for finding innovative ways to combine these skills. Each program we learn has its own strengths, and by using them collaboratively, we use each of those strengths to produce a higher-quality document. For example, using PhotoShop, InDesign, and DreamWeaver together can allow us to produce a visually-interesting website that includes well-designed documents.

Although we may not need nunchuck skills, bowhunting skills, or computer hacking skills like Napoleon, we do need to keep up on the latest technology in our field and find creative ways to use it. 📌

Credits

Synopsis is a monthly newsletter written and published by the Utah State University Student Chapter of the Society for Technical Communication.

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STC – Creating and supporting a forum for communities of practice in the profession of technical communication.

Synopsis invites writers to submit articles that they wish to be considered for publication. Note: By submitting an article, you implicitly grant a license to this chapter to use the article in any publication.

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Editor's Note

As the semester draws to a close, we would like to thank all of the graduating STC presidency members for their hard work. We wish them luck with their future careers!

I would also like to thank Brittany Bacon, my assistant editor, for all of her help editing and producing the *Synopsis* this semester. She is a great friend and a talented editor. You will be missed! Good luck!

With Brittany graduating, the *Synopsis* now has two Assistant Editor positions available. The job duties associated with the position include the following: editing and compiling articles, formatting monthly issues, and assigning articles to staff writers. If you are interested in becoming an editor for the *Synopsis*, please email me at heather.f@aggiemail.usu.edu. 📌

Heather Foster, Editor

New Features on the STC Website

By Thomas Kjar

Beginning spring semester, the USU STC website will not only be back online, but will sport a new look and new features. Most of the old features will remain, such as archives of the STC newsletter, Synopsis, and information on STC events and activities.

One of the new features is a portfolio section. This new section will serve two purposes. First, it will be an archive of student-submitted portfolios. As such, the archive will be an excellent place for students to

view past work from other students in Professional Writing Technologies and Capstone. This can help students generate ideas for their own projects, as well as help them get an idea of what is expected in these courses.

Secondly, the portfolio section will be the focus of a competition. Each semester, the USU STC presidency will call for portfolio submissions from students who have taken the abovementioned courses. Prizes will be awarded.

All portfolios submitted will be archived, and commentary by the students who created them will be encouraged. This will help students looking at the portfolios gain greater perspective of creating their portfolios and technical writing in general.

The site will also include useful information about how to join or contact the national STC and the USU STC.

Ideas and input for the website are welcome. The webmaster can be contacted at t.n.k@aggiemail.usu.edu. 🏠

Chapter News

The STC Presidency Wants YOU!

By Brittany Bacon

The Utah State STC Presidency is looking for hardworking, self-motivated sophomores and juniors to fill the following available positions:

President-Elect— V.P. for Spring and President for 2008-2009 will assist the President, organize STC activities, manage the budget, and conduct meetings

Assistant Editors (2)— edit, compile and format monthly issues of Synopsis in InDesign, assign articles to staff writers, and write articles

Public Relations— make and distribute flyers, coordinate class visits, and contact the Statesman to publicize STC events

Becoming apart of the STC will allow you to gain experience in the

following areas:

- Coordinating STC activities
- Becoming published in Synopsis
- Participating in a national organization
- Improving collaboration skills

Sign up by Nov. 30th on the STC Bulletin Board on the first floor of the Ray B. West building, or email Stephanie Wilson— stephanie.wilson@aggiemail.usu.edu. 🏠

Aggie Outreach

Q & A with Brynne Morley, Communications Coordinator in Orlando, FL

By Heather Foster

Synopsis: What is your job at Disney World and what does it involve?

Brynne: I am the Disney College, International and CareerStart Programs Communications Coordinator. This entails writing e-mail messages sent to 5, 500 internship program employees, designing fliers, updating web content on Disney's internal website, and writing, filming, and editing video segments for the 24-hour internal television channel.

Synopsis: Do you feel that your college courses adequately prepared you for your job?

Brynne: Yes and no! I think my English

major courses were essential. The main marketable skill I graduated with was an ability to write. I've grown by leaps and bounds in this position. If someone told me five years ago that I would be writing and producing video segments for Disney, I would have told them that they were crazy. I love the fact that I haven't been limited to purely professional writing.

Synopsis: What advice would you give to those entering the technical writing field?

Brynne: Try to find a job where you can write about things you care about and support. It will make writing about them so much easier.

Give yourself some time to adjust to a new environment. The professional world is very different than college. You will make mistakes that will affect others, but work hard, and learn from those mistakes and you will be fine.

Take time to learn new things. Find out what interests you and spend a few hours each week developing those interests. Make sure your leaders know about your interests and ask lots of questions.

Have fun! Writing is, and should always be, fun. Make sure you find a job where you enjoy going to work each day. 🏠

Photoshop: Working with Layer Masks

By Mitch Morby

Let's talk about one of Photoshop's most versatile tools—the layer mask. If you're not familiar with the concept of layer masks, here's how they work: When you apply a layer mask to a particular layer, you're essentially telling Photoshop how to display that layer. In a layer mask, you only use black, white, and shades of gray. A section of black on a layer mask turns the mask opaque, and a section of white is completely transparent. You can use the mask to show or hide sections of the layer, add effects, filters, and borders, or even adjust colors, all without modifying the original layer.

Now that you know the basics of layer masks, we'll go over the technique of fading an image using a gradient on a layer mask. This simple exercise will help you understand how to implement a layer mask and give you an idea of what masks are capable of.

Getting Started

1. Start with an image of your choice. (Figure 1) Create a new Photoshop document with a blank background. Copy and paste, or drag and drop, the desired image onto the background layer. You should now have two layers.

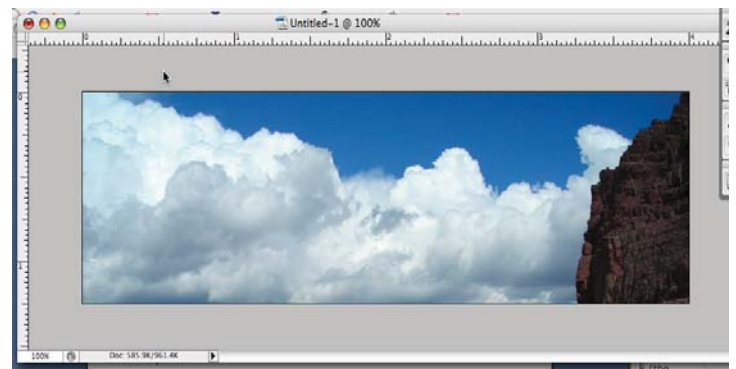


Figure 1

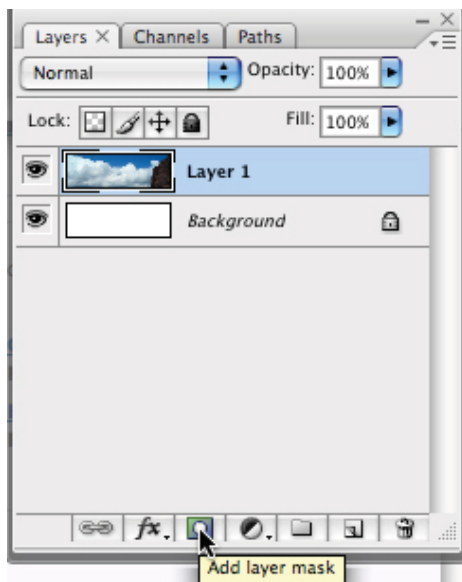


Figure 2

2. Select the layer with the image in it. Click on the "Add Layer Mask" button on the layers palette. (Figure 2) The layer mask will show up as a white rectangle linked to the layer in the layers palette. (Figure 3)

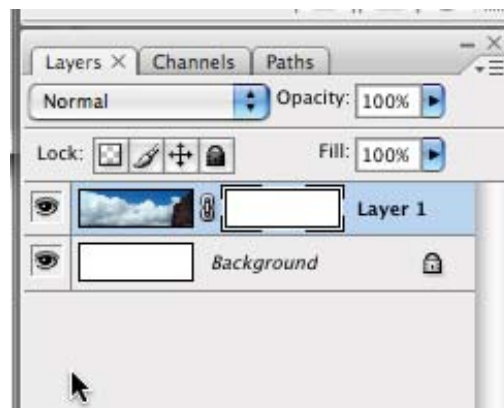


Figure 3

3. Making sure the layer mask is selected, choose the gradient tool from the tool palette and select a black-to-white gradient. (Figure 4)

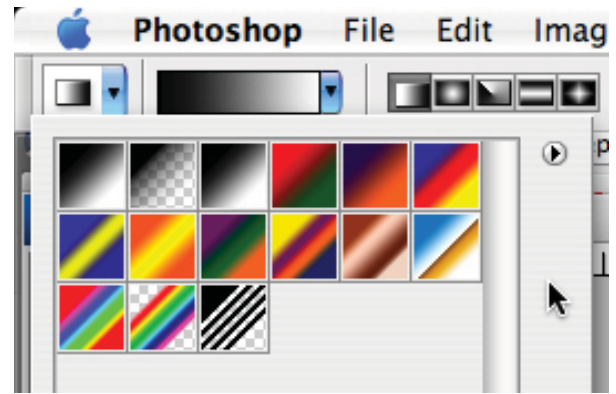


Figure 4



Figure 5

That's all there is to it. Try experimenting with the paintbrush, text, borders, filters, and other effects. Try unlinking the mask from its layer to see what happens when you move it around. Be creative and see if you can come up with something interesting. (Figure 6)

4. Drag the gradient tool across the mask to achieve the desired transparency. It may take a couple of tries to get the hang of it. (Figure 5)



Figure 6

Why should you use Layer Masks? Because...

- Layer Masks are editable selections that play an important role in non-destructive editing
- Layer Masks offer flexibility because they can be almost completely treated as a full gray scale image, which allows the use of filters, selection tools, adjustment tools, etc.
- Layer Masks have a visual strength, meaning that with a short look on the layers you can see how they affect the image
- Layer Masks offer extra flexibility by being part of vector masks, layer sets, adjustment layers, etc.
- Layer masks allow you to save selections

The Future of Technical Writing and Editing

By George F. Hayhoe, Editor—Adapted from *Technical Communication*
Volume 54, Number 3, August 2007, pp. 281-282(2)

These days, we often speak of technical communication as an umbrella profession because it subsumes a great variety of tasks. Chat up your colleagues at an STC chapter meeting or conference, and you may be amazed at the range of titles they hold: usability expert, content management specialist, user experience designer, information development manager, instructional designer, user assistance professional, and Web master, to name only a few. Of course, there are still many who call themselves technical writers or editors, but those jobs don't seem as interesting or trendy as the more recent additions to the catalog.

More importantly, when we look at what these folks do, how they spend their time on the job, it often seems as though writing and editing account for a very small portion of their typical workdays. So it's only natural to wonder whether there is a future for technical writing and editing.

THE NEW GENERATION

Students graduating from the undergraduate technical communication program are well prepared for almost any task that technical communicators do. They have learned to design for print and electronic delivery.

They have planned, conducted, and reported the results of usability tests. They have mastered the principles of instructional design, and have planned and executed learning modules. Their electives may have included visual communication, management communication, and a special topics seminar on internationalization. Naturally, they have also learned the major genres of technical writing and the skills required for copyediting, production editing, and comprehensive editing. They have experience working in teams, interviewing subject matter experts, and managing projects, and they have all participated in a full-time,

semester-long internship.

When I ask seniors in this program what kinds of jobs they are looking for when they enter the professional ranks, most are interested in Web or multimedia design, or usability work. If they consider a position similar to my first job in the field (writing software user documentation) at all, it's strictly as a quick stop on the way to something they consider more challenging or fulfilling than technical writing.

THE NEW TECHNICAL WRITING AND EDITING

Although software user documentation is not the trailblazing career opportunity it was in the early 1980s, many jobs under the technical communication umbrella require finely honed writing and editing skills.

Writing and editing for the Web

Ask a corporate Web master where the content for their site comes from. If their company is typical, they probably create most of that content themselves, rewriting a variety of documents that originated in the research, engineering, marketing, and training departments. The challenge of repurposing this content, of course, is that people want to be able to find what they need quickly on the Web, and they don't want to have to read a lot.

Although these characteristics are applicable to most of the text that technical communicators write, they are particularly important on the Web, which makes finding and reading information more difficult than with printed text. So it is important to know the most effective ways of helping people find what they need and presenting it in a style that works with and not against the delivery medium. We cannot simply assume that because we write good instructions for printed manuals, we know how to write and

edit Webbased text that is equally user friendly and effective.

Writing and editing for single sourcing

Technical writing and editing are evolving not only because we are challenged to communicate through new media. As companies increasingly move to single sourcing and publish their information products from content management repositories, we find that the units in which we compose, the rules governing the combination of those units, and the very act of writing are changing.

When the same text is used multiple times—as part of a printed manual, in online help, in an advertisement, and on the product packaging, for example—the company can leverage significant savings by having to create the text only once and also having to translate it only once into various target languages. For companies that produce millions of words of documentation in various media each year, the benefit is obvious, but even for companies with smaller outputs of text, the cost saving can be considerable.

A NEW DIRECTION

As I've thought about the future of technical writing and editing, I have realized that the ways many academics (me included) have taught these skills in the past are inadequate to prepare young professionals to face the challenges of today, much less tomorrow. I don't mean that we must abandon all the resources and techniques we've used in teaching technical writing and editing in the past. However, we must certainly add to them, and adapt our courses to the media, genres, and composing and editing processes that did not exist just a few years ago. And those of us in industry must likewise add to our knowledge base and retool our skills to be effective professionals. 📌

Quirks of QuarkXPress

By Josh McGee

Before InDesign® there was QuarkXPress®. QuarkXPress began in 1987. During the 1990's, it held 90% of the market share for desktop publishing programs. InDesign didn't enter the scene until 1999 after Quark was criticized for its monopolistic qualities.

Although Quark is still the leader in desktop publishing, InDesign is quickly closing the gap. Quark has some quirky features that may explain InDesign's success. The problems I have run into using Quark have been with QuarkXPress 6.

My first concern with Quark 6 is the overall speed. For example, my computer has 4 GB of RAM, but I am continually waiting for my screen to scroll in a 45-page document.

Second, Quark displays pictures at an extremely low resolution. I have recently run into a problem where,

instead of showing in low resolution, the picture doesn't show at all.

Third, although the price has dropped dramatically for Quark 7, it is still more expensive than InDesign. Here are the retail prices that I found on their websites:

QuarkXPress 7--\$799

- Upgrade \$299

InDesign CS3--\$699

- Upgrade \$199

If InDesign is surpassing Quark in features, usability, and price, why should technical writers learn QuarkXPress?

1. Quark is older and more established; therefore, many companies are still choosing it over InDesign. It's difficult to switch years of documents into a new program.

2. QuarkXPress Passport, an

enhanced, more expensive version of Quark, can translate documents into different languages quickly and easily.

3. Quark 7 does have some features that InDesign doesn't. The one I find most appealing is Job Jackets, which enforces job specifications. Job Jackets allows you to outsource your work without losing the specifications of the documents like color, format, and page size.

Although I prefer InDesign, many jobs for technical writers require knowledge of Quark. You can download a 30-day trial version from Quark.com. I wouldn't recommend buying Quark unless you know that's what you want to use or you have clients that use it. 📌

Opening New Windows of Opportunity for Writers: OpenOffice.org

By Marinda Burningham

It's free. It's compatible. It's multilingual. It's new and ready for you.

Although it might sound like an ad for an online dating service, the OpenOffice.org suite, commonly and incorrectly known as Open Office, delivers what it says it will deliver: up-to-date software free of charge to any inquiring internet user.

Introduced in October 2005 to the public, OpenOffice.org is compatible with a number of different operating systems. OpenOffice.org provides an alternative to Word 2007 and other Microsoft Office programs while keeping the natural mapping of word-processing programs that users have been familiar with for years.

The OpenOffice.org suite can be used for writing, drawing, creating spreadsheets, designing presentations, and for finding information. For technical communicators, the most helpful program in the suite is

WRITER, a fully-equipped word processor and desktop publisher. WRITER is simple to use but has the ability to create complete books including tables of contents, indexes, and diagrams. It comes with templates for writing standard documents and also allows users to create their own. Several customary features are included: AutoCorrect dictionary checks spelling, AutoComplete suggests words or phrases to complete what users are typing, and AutoFormat leaves users free to concentrate on content rather than design.

Cited by www.forbes.com as a cost-effective alternative to Microsoft desktop programs (costing \$399 for a standard edition), the OpenOffice.org suite doesn't require a tracking code when downloaded and installed on computers. Forbes points out that the only downside to OpenOffice.org is the fact that "it doesn't offer full support for certain arcane

features, such as certain macros in Microsoft Office." While this may not seem like a drawback to a student, for businesses these features are necessary. Forbes suggests that businesses bridge the gap by hiring developers. Currently, OpenOffice.org is working to develop programming to make the OpenOffice.org suite compatible with more Microsoft Office macros.

As developers are continuing to work on OpenOffice.org programming, outside developers are also encouraged to work with the program and expand it by adding extensions to the software. Version 3.0 will be unveiled next year. Meanwhile, users can download the OpenOffice.org version 2.4 online anytime at www.openoffice.org. 📌

Calendar

December 2007

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

5 "The Office" Christmas Party

7 Last day of classes

10-14 Finals Week

15 Fall Graduation

25 Christmas Day

January 2008

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30	31		

1 New Year's Day

7 Spring Semester Starts