



SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

The STC Houston Style Guide

This book serves as the style guide for the Society for Technical Communication, Houston Chapter (STC Houston).

Introduction

The Society for Technical Communication (STC) does not have a style guide.

The lack of a style guide can pose serious consequences for STC and its chapters, including STC Houston. Like other chapters, STC Houston expects to put its best foot forward to its membership, the technical writing community, and the professional community. A style guide helps to ensure consistent, accurate communication.

The April 2001 edition of *Usability Interface*, the STC Usability SIG newsletter, discusses the importance of having a style guide. The author, Chauncey E. Wilson, writes, “the goal of all style guides is to enforce consistency across a set of products” (10). The *STC Houston Style Guide* can take the initiative and help its members communicate more effectively.

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*George Slaughter
President
STC Houston
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STC Houston Style Guide

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Using the *STC Houston Style Guide*

While we created the *STC Houston Style Guide* for the use of STC Houston members, members of other STC chapters will find it useful as well.

Writers can use the *STC Houston Style Guide* to reduce errors and ensure consistency in their written works, regardless of where those works should appear, whether STC-related or not.

The *STC Houston Style Guide* was planned and created to be in the public domain, for use by STC Houston and its members, and for anyone else who wishes to use it as a reference.

Our hope is that the *STC Houston Style Guide* will improve our chapter communication products by ensuring consistent and accurate communication throughout the chapter and indeed, throughout STC.

abbreviations

Avoid abbreviations when possible.

EXCEPTIONS: Commonly used titles that the reader would recognize, such as *Gov. Jim Ferguson*, or advanced degrees, such as *Albert Robert, Ph.D.*

acronyms

Avoid acronyms when possible.

EXCEPTIONS: *STC*, *SIG*, or *STK*, or commonly used acronyms in company or product names: *BMC Software*, *GMC Trucks*. See *STC*, *SIG*, and *STK*.

addresses

Use abbreviations such as Ave., Blvd., and St. only with a numbered address: *901 Bagby St.* Always use figures for an address number. Spell out and capitalize *First* through *Ninth* when used as street names; use figures with two letters for *10th* and above: *21 First St.*, *2112 51st St.*

Administrative Council

The Administrative Council comprises the president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, immediate past president, and directors of communications, competitions, membership, planning, programs, satellites, and volunteer resources. Use *STC Houston Administrative Council* on first reference, and *council* on all subsequent references.

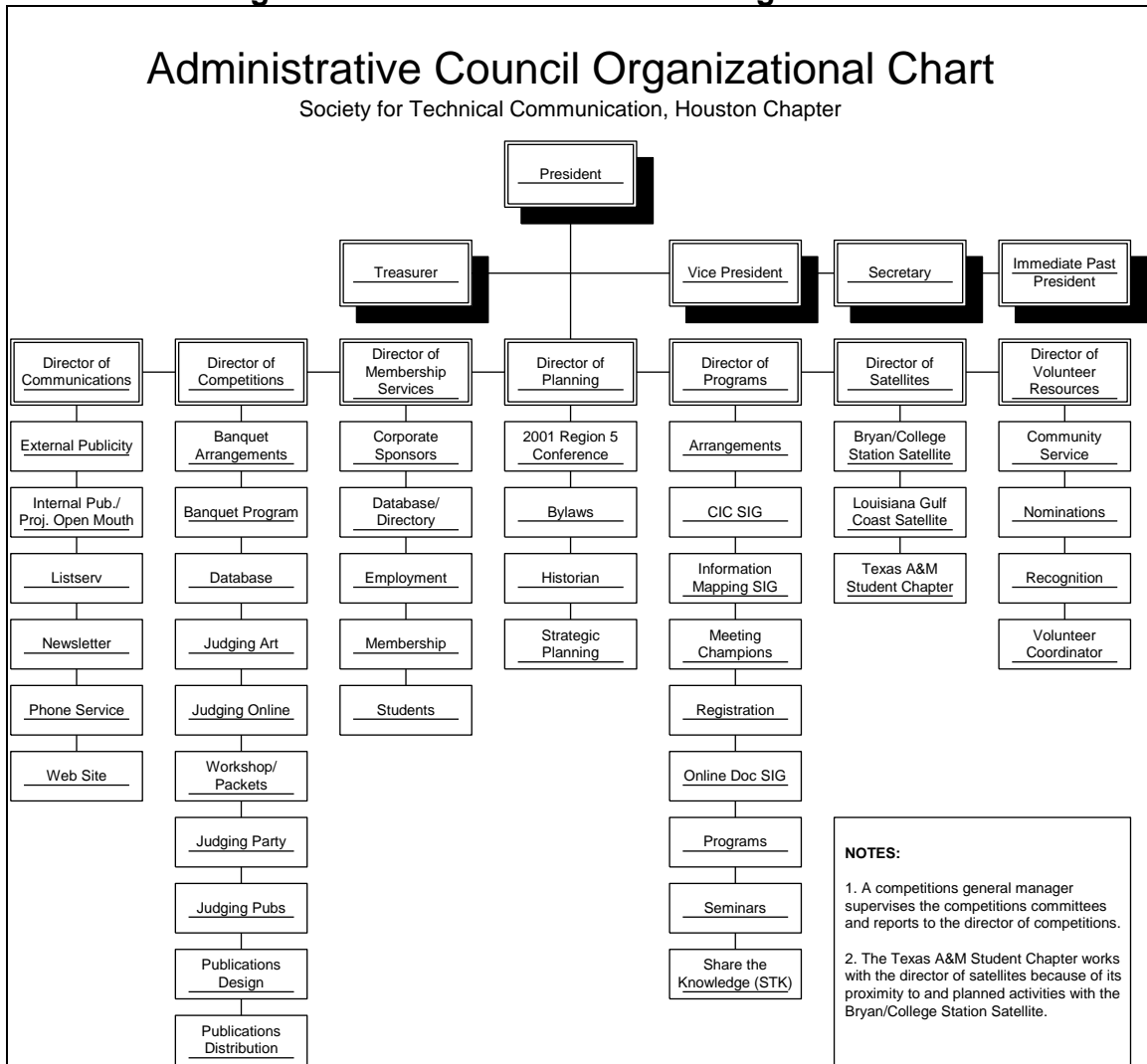
Do not use *board of directors* as a synonym for *Administrative Council*, or *board* for *council*, in written materials.

See Figure 1 on page 2 for an illustration of the Administrative Council Organizational Chart. See Table 1 on page 5 for a list of directors and committee responsibilities.

EXAMPLE: John Doe will attend the *Administrative Council* meeting.

EXAMPLE: John serves on the *council*.

Figure 1. Administrative Council Organizational Chart



affect, effect

Affect, as a verb, means to influence. *Effect*, as a noun, means a result.

EXAMPLE: Moving the meeting location will *affect* attendance.

EXAMPLE: Improved attendance is an *effect* of the new location.

a.m., p.m.

Put in lowercase. See *times, dates, and places*.

annual conference

See *STC Annual Conference*.

Associate Fellow

See *STC Fellow*.

back up, backup

Back up is a verb. *Backup* is a noun or adjective.

EXAMPLE: John will back up the file.

EXAMPLE: Jane has the backup file.

backslash, slash

A backslash leans back: \. A slash, sometimes called a forward slash, leans forward: /. Use only slashes when listing web site addresses: **www.stc-houston.org/r5conference**.

board of directors

Do not use when referring to the STC Houston Administrative Council. See *Administrative Council*.

However, directors serve the Society at the Society-level.

book titles

Italicize book titles. On first reference, list books by title and author. Include the publisher only on references for citation.

EXAMPLE (not for citation): The *Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter.

EXAMPLE (for citation): The *Self-Publishing Manual* by Dan Poynter (Para Publishing).

bylines

Use name, title, and employer (or student, and school). Title is capitalized. If the writer is an STC Fellow, STC Associate Fellow, or STC Regional Director-Sponsor, add that designation at the end of the byline.

EXAMPLE: By John Doe, Technical Writer, Giganticus, Inc.

EXAMPLE: By George Washington, Technical Writer, Conglomerate, Inc., and STC Associate Fellow

can, may

Can indicates ability to do something: *Can I write the article?* *May* indicates permission to do something: *May I write the article?*

captions

A caption describes the contents of a figure or photograph. STC Houston style is to put captions below figures or photographs when possible. When writing a photo caption, identify the figures from left to right by STC title (preferable) or work title, and name.

EXAMPLE: STC Houston Planning Director John Doe, left, greets new member Jane Buck.

chairman, chairwoman

Capitalize as part of a formal title.

Do not use *chair* or *chairperson* unless it is an organization's formal title for an office.

chapter name

For news releases only, use *Society for Technical Communication, Houston Chapter*, on first reference. Use *STC Houston* or *the chapter* on all other references when referring to the Houston chapter.

Do not hyphenate *STC Houston*. Use *STC (name of chapter)* on all references when referring to other STC chapters.

EXAMPLE: Conrad Sauer will speak at the April program meeting of the *Society for Technical Communication, Houston Chapter*.

EXAMPLE: *STC Houston* has a membership of approximately 500 members.

EXAMPLE: Buck Rodgers is vice president of *STC Austin*.

chapter web site

The full chapter web site address is **http://www.stc-houston.org**, but do not use the hypertext transfer protocol prefix (http://). Always put the web site address in bold face.

EXAMPLE: For more information, visit the STC Houston web site at **www.stc-houston.org**.

commas

In a series of three or more items, use serial commas (insert the comma before the conjunction): *Moe, Larry, and Curly*. When a comma is for a quotation, always put the comma inside the closing quotation mark: *"I'm happy to be here," he said*.

commands

Put commands in **boldface**.

EXAMPLE. Use the **Print** command to print the document

committees

STC Houston has numerous committees. Each committee reports to a director that is elected by the chapter membership. The president and/or the director responsible for a committee appoints the committee manager. Capitalize a committee name only if using its proper name: *Employment Committee*.

See Table 1 for a list of directors and committee responsibilities. See Figure 1 on page 2 for an organizational chart of directors and committee responsibilities.

Table 1. Directors and Committee Responsibilities List (part 1 of 2)

Director	Committee Responsibilities
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Publicity• Mailing List• Newsletter• Phone Service• Web Site
Competitions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Banquet Arrangements• Banquet Program• Database (banquet)• Judging Art• Judging Online• Judging Workshop/Packets• Judging Party• Publications Design• Publications Distribution
Membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Corporate Sponsors• Database• Directory• Employment• Membership• Students
Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bylaws• 2001 Region 5 Conference• Strategic Planning

Table 1. Directors and Committee Responsibilities List (part 2 of 2)

Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Arrangements• Contractors/Independent Consultants (CIC) SIG• Information Mapping SIG• Meeting Champions• Registration• Online Documentation SIG• Programs• Seminars• STK
Satellites	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bryan/College Station Satellite• Louisiana Gulf Coast Satellite• Texas A&M Student Chapter
Volunteer Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community Service• Nominations• Recognition• Volunteer Coordinator

company names

Use the full company name on first reference.

Do not use possessives when referring to company assets or liabilities.

EXAMPLE: The *Acme* equipment will suit our needs.

DO NOT USE: *Acme's* equipment works well.

contact information

On all articles submitted, include the writer's name, phone number, and e-mail address should the editor need to check facts or ask for more information. See *times, dates, and places*.

EXAMPLE: For more information, contact John Doe at 713-987-6543 or e-mail him at **JohnDoe@address.com**.

competition general manager

The president and/or the director of competitions appoints the competition general manager. See *officer and director titles*.

courtesy titles

Avoid courtesy titles such as *Professor*, *Miss*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, and *Mr.* Use *Dr.* on only first reference as part of a title if applicable. Also see *names in articles*.

EXAMPLE: Dr. Albert Einstein spoke today. Albert said that $e=mc^2$.

dashes

Use an em dash to set off parenthetical phrases to signal a stronger break than parentheses provide.

Do not use two dashes in place of an em dash. Do not put spaces between a word and an em dash. Use an en dash to indicate ranges.

EXAMPLE (em dash): The STC Houston web site—known as “The Definitive Chapter Resource”—won an award.

EXAMPLE (en dash): John Doe said the booklet included approximately 12-16 photos.

database

One word, no hyphen.

dates

Cite the month and date. Spell out the month. See *times, dates, and places*.

Do not use the military date system where the date is listed before the month. Do not use the number of the month in the date.

EXAMPLE: The chapter banquet is *March 9*.

DO NOT USE (military): The chapter banquet is *9 March*.

DO NOT USE (numerals only): The chapter banquet is *3/9*.

Dateline Houston

Dateline Houston is the name of the STC Houston newsletter. Capitalize and italicize *Dateline Houston*. Use *Dateline Houston* on all references.

EXAMPLE: Jane Buck is editor of *Dateline Houston*.

directors

STC Houston has seven elected directors, representing committees for Communications, Competition, Membership, Planning, Programs, Satellites, and Volunteer Resources. See *Administrative Council* and *officer and director titles*.

director-sponsor

The director-sponsor oversees STC chapters in a given region and acts as sponsor to the STC Board of Directors for that region. STC Houston is part of Region 5. Lead with the region number in the title: *Region 5 Director-Sponsor John Doe*. See *officer and director titles*.

e-mail addresses

Always put e-mail addresses in **boldface**. Always hyphenate *e-mail*.

EXAMPLE: John's e-mail address is **JohnDoe@address.com**.

Fellow

See *STC Fellow*.

FrameMaker

Always refer to the product from Adobe as *FrameMaker*, not *Frame*.

EXAMPLE: Some writers use *FrameMaker* to produce their work.

Houston

In STC Houston publications, this Texas city stands alone in all references, and does not need the state modifier.

EXAMPLE: John Doe is from *Houston*.

DO NOT USE: John Doe is from *Houston, Texas*.

if/then construction

If using an if/then structure, you can usually remove the *then* from the sentence.

immediate past president

The immediate past president is a chapter officer. See *officer and director titles*.

Intercom

Intercom is the name of the STC monthly magazine. Capitalize and italicize *Intercom*.

EXAMPLE: John Doe wrote a case study for *Intercom*.

listserv

See *mailing list*.

log on, logon, log off, logoff

Log on is a verb. *Logon* is an adjective. *Log off* is a verb. *Logoff* is an adjective.

EXAMPLE: *Log on* to the system.

EXAMPLE: Use the *logon* user name.

EXAMPLE: Close and *log off*.

EXAMPLE: The *logoff* procedure ends.

mailing addresses

Use two-letter state codes in mailing addresses only. Include an e-mail address where possible.

EXAMPLE: STC, 901 N. Stuart St., Suite 904, Arlington, VA 22203-1822, stc@stc.org.

mailing list

Do not use *listserv*. Those who have registered for the STC Houston mailing list receive e-mail messages with chapter and professional news. Mailing list membership is available to anyone who wishes to register, regardless of STC membership status. Mailing list registration instructions are on the chapter web site at www.stc-houston.org/maillinglist.html.

menu commands

See *commands*.

names in articles

Use the person's first and last name on first reference, and first name only on all subsequent references. Do not use courtesy titles. See *courtesy titles* and *quotation attribution*.

EXCEPTION: On news releases only, use the person's surname on the second and subsequent references.

EXAMPLE (normal): *John Doe* attended the meeting. *John* said he enjoyed the presentation very much.

EXAMPLE (news release): *John Doe* attended the meeting. *Doe* said he enjoyed the presentation very much.

numbers

Spell out numbers one through nine. Use Arabic numerals for 10 and above and for units of measure.

EXAMPLE: John said he wanted *three* volunteers for the committee.

EXAMPLE: John said the *231* people at the banquet enjoyed the evening.

EXAMPLE (unit of measure): John said his presentation would begin in *5* minutes.

officer and director titles

Capitalize a title only as a formal title before a name. Lowercase in all other uses.

EXAMPLE: *President* John Doe, *Vice President* Jane Buck.

EXAMPLE: John Doe, *director of planning*, will preside.

EXAMPLE: The *director of communications* said he would write the news release.

offline, online

Do not hyphenate *offline* or *online*.

possessives

Use apostrophes when indicating the possessive: *John Doe's paperwork*.

Do not use *it's* as a possessive. *It's* is a contraction for *it is*.

president

The president is a chapter officer. See *officer and director titles*.

press

Always *press* a button or key.

Do not *hit, depress, punch, push, or strike* a key.

quotation attribution

When attributing a quotation, use the person's first and last name on first reference, and first name only on all subsequent references. See *names in articles*.

EXCEPTION: In news releases, use the person's surname on the second and subsequent references.

EXAMPLE (normal): *John Doe* said he was pleased to be at the meeting. "I enjoy attending meetings because I can make new friends," *John* said.

EXAMPLE (news release): *John Doe* said he was pleased to be at the meeting. "I enjoy attending meetings because I can make new friends," *Doe* said.

quoting a source

Use *said* when quoting a person in an article, either directly or indirectly.

Do not use *says, stated, exclaimed, cried, shouted, laughed, joked, expressed, muttered, whispered,* or any other verb when quoting a person in an article.

EXAMPLE (indirect): John Doe *said* that STC is a good place to meet fellow technical writers.

EXAMPLE (direct): “STC is a good place to meet fellow technical writers,” John Doe *said*.

DO NOT USE (indirect): John Doe *muttered* that STC is a good place to meet fellow technical writers.

DO NOT USE (direct): “STC is a good place to meet fellow technical writers,” John Doe *stated*.

real time, real-time

Real time, without the hyphen, is a noun. *Real-time*, with the hyphen, is an adjective.

EXAMPLE: You need *real time* to write a document.

EXAMPLE: You get *real-time* results when you post to the web site.

secretary

The secretary is a chapter officer. See *officer and director titles*.

set up, setup

Set up is a verb. *Setup* is a noun or an adjective.

EXAMPLE: John Doe *set up* the computer.

EXAMPLE: The banquet had a nice *setup*.

SIG

Special Interest Group. A SIG is a group of STC Houston members who meet to discuss and learn about a specific topic. Unlike STKs (see *STK*), a SIG is an ongoing group. STC Houston has a SIG for consultants and independent contractors (CIC SIG). It also has a combined SIG that addresses both online documentation and Information Mapping issues. Spell out *Special Interest Group* on first reference, and use *SIG* in all subsequent references.

EXAMPLE: The *Contractors and Independent Consultants Special Interest Group* will meet at 2 p.m. Tuesday in the conference room. *SIG* members will discuss employment trends for contractors.

sign-off, sign-on

Hyphenate *sign-off* and *sign-on*.

Society

Use to describe items or activities at the STC international headquarters, or Society, level. Always capitalize *Society* when referring to STC headquarters-level topics.

EXAMPLE: STC Fellow is a *Society-level* award.

STC

Society for Technical Communication. Use *STC* in all references when referring to the international headquarters and its related activities. See *chapter name*.

EXAMPLE: *STC* provides ample opportunities for volunteering.

STC Annual Conference

The STC Annual Conference is held each spring. Use *STC Annual Conference* on first reference, *conference* on all subsequent references.

EXAMPLE: John Doe will speak at the *STC Annual Conference*. The conference will be held in Chicago.

STC Fellow

STC Fellows are STC members of the highest rank. *STC Associate Fellows* are STC members of the second highest rank. Always include the STC Fellow or STC Associate Fellow title in the person's name (see *bylines*). Always capitalize STC Fellow and STC Associate Fellow.

EXAMPLE: John Doe was named *STC Associate Fellow*.

STC Houston

Do not hyphenate. See *chapter name*.

STK

Share-the-Knowledge. STK sessions can be seminars, meetings, or brown-bag lunches that have a training focus. STK sessions can be about any topic pertaining to technical communication. Use *Share-the-Knowledge session* in first reference, and *STK* in all subsequent references.

EXAMPLE: John Doe will discuss indexing at the upcoming *Share the Knowledge session*. The *STK* is open to the public.

Technical communication

Technical communication is name of the STC quarterly journal. Italicize *Technical communication*. Note that *communication* is in lowercase.

EXAMPLE: John Doe has written a book review for *Technical communication*.

times, dates, and places

When announcing an activity or event, say that the event will take place at the appropriate time, on the appropriate date, at the appropriate address. Include contact information. See *dates* and *contact information*.

EXAMPLE: The STC Houston program meeting will be at 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, April 10, at the Westchase Hilton, 9999 Westheimer. For more information, contact John Doe at 713-987-6543 or e-mail him at **JohnDoe@address.com**.

toward

Do not use *towards*.

EXAMPLE: He walked *toward* the podium.

DO NOT USE: He walked *towards* the podium.

treasurer

The treasurer is a chapter officer. See *officer and director titles*.

user name

Use as two words, then put the actual user name in **boldface**.

EXAMPLE: John Doe's *user name* is **JDoe**.

vice president

The vice president is a chapter officer.

Do not hyphenate. See *officer and director titles*.

voice

Use active voice. Avoid passive voice.

EXAMPLE: John Doe *led* the meeting.

DO NOT USE: The meeting *was led* by John Doe.

Web

See *World Wide Web*.

World Wide Web

The World Wide Web is part of the Internet. Use *World Wide Web* on first reference, *the Web* on all subsequent references. Capitalize World Wide Web.

Do not use *WWW*.

EXAMPLE: The *World Wide Web* has a lot of information. STC Houston has a presence on the *Web*.

web page

Two words, lowercase, in all references.

EXAMPLE: You can see the committee web page at **www.stc-houston.org/committees**.

web site

Two words, lowercase, in all references.

EXAMPLE: STC Houston redesigned its *web site*.

WWW

Do not use. See *World Wide Web*.

Bibliography

The following web pages have links to related documents of interest:

www.stc-houston.org/committees has a listing of the STC Houston committees and links to the e-mail addresses of the respective managers.

www.stc-houston.org/descriptions has a complete listing of the various STC Houston committees and their responsibilities.

www.stc-houston.org/leaderresources.html has links to the STC Chapter Handbook, STC Houston Chapter bylaws, and chapter reimbursement form.

www.stc-houston.org/maillinglist.html has instructions for subscribing to the STC Houston listserv.

The following books and publications were consulted in preparing the STC Houston Style Guide:

Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual
BMC Software Style Guide for Technical Publications
Chicago Manual of Style, 14th edition
Guidelines for Integrating STC's Brand
Merriam-Webster Dictionary

The following web sites include information related to STC and STC Houston:

www.stc.org
www.stc-houston.org