



Newsletters August + October 2009

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## Raising the Standard ASTC and PLAIN conference 2009

October 16-17

Four Points by Sheraton Hotel, 161 Sussex Street, Sydney

There are many really useful and interesting presentations awaiting you at this conference. This is a unique opportunity to learn about the different experiences of communication practitioners – both from Australia and overseas – an opportunity you won't otherwise get by staying 'at home'.

The following is a selection of the presentations, which I hope will show you the benefits for your work and professional development of attending the conference.

See the full program at [www.astcnsw.org.au](http://www.astcnsw.org.au) and select the Conference website



you

link.

### Martin Cutts (England)

Martin Cutts, research director of Plain Language Commission ([www.clearest.co.uk](http://www.clearest.co.uk)), has been at the heart of the plain-English movement since the mid-1970s. He co-founded the Plain English Campaign in July 1979 and remained a partner in the resulting business of the same name until 1988.

Martin is one of the most experienced plain-English editors in the UK, with over 30 years' work in the field. He is the author of *Plain English: A Guide for Writers and Editors* (OUP, 2009 (third edition)), and several books on plain language in the law. Three of these, including *Plain English: A Guide for Writers and Editors*, are on free download from [www.clearest.co.uk](http://www.clearest.co.uk).

### Instructions for consumer products: as easy as 1–2–3?

Instructions for consumer products may never be as easy to understand as the 'three steps to heaven' suggested by Eddie Cochran in his 1960 hit single, but they do need to be easy to follow, especially when the products can cause injury and death if not properly used, assembled and maintained.

An increasingly popular consumer purchase is the chain saw. Chain saws are fearsome implements. Once the preserve of professional users, chain saws are now widely used by people doing their own logging and tree felling.

From the perspective of first-time users and hobbyists, Martin examines the language, layout and graphics in the instructions for several makes of chain saw. He finds them generally poor. This presentation suggests ways of improving them and considers how chain-saw manufacturers could use better instructions as a low cost marketing aid.

### Dr Maria Riley

Dr. Maria Riley is the author of three books on written communications. Her approach to teaching business and technical writing is described by clients as: unique, interactive, exciting, non-traditional and fun.

Her goal is to raise students' writing standards, through learning activities, to the next level.

***With limited time to achieve your training goal, you can't afford to use valuable hours trying to motivate interest in writing. So what do you do?***

### Be Clear! Be Concise! Be Effective! Instructional Techniques that Work

Have you ever conducted a writing workshop where participants automatically felt the topic is boring and the class will be boring? Where participants were forced to attend and enter the room with a defiant attitude of "not interested." With limited time to achieve your training goal, you can't afford to use valuable hours trying to motivate interest in writing. So what do you do? Revive your training skills, survive the negative attitudes of reluctant students and thrive by conducting an exciting writing class that motivates participants to be clear, concise and effective - through **Instructional Techniques that Work!**

After this workshop, you'll leave with practical tools, techniques and resources to ensure that students will be interested in your training programs, enjoy the hands-on learning activities and produce documents that are clear, concise and effective!

**Diane McGregor (Canada)**

**Words and design working together to create clear communication**

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Diane has been involved in plain language since the 1980s, when she was plain language coordinator for the Alberta government in Canada. Highlights included helping to set Alberta's plain language goals, participating in the Alberta Law Reform Institute's plain language demonstration project for lawyers, and working with the Alberta Real Estate Association to rewrite its contracts.

Diane is currently the plain language editor with Communications Nova Scotia, the province's communications agency. She works with a wide range of provincial departments to help lawyers, doctors, accountants, engineers, social workers, and educators reach their target audiences.

Words and design work together to create clear communication. Yet this can be a struggle to achieve in a world that works linearly. Expectations within the communications field are that writing, editing, and design are discrete jobs that follow sequentially one after the other. The projects that I consider the most successful are those in which the content expert and writer work closely with the editor and designer right from the start. Together we find the best approach, content, organization, words, design, and illustrations to meet the needs of the target audience.

Diane will share with us four projects that were developed using this process:

- a safety manual for the fishing and aquaculture industry
- a rider's manual for off-highway vehicle owners
- a pocket guide to legislation for a professional audience
- a history of democracy in our province for a grade 7 audience.

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**Tricia Jackson and Dana Skopal (Australia)**

**So who is my audience?**

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Tricia Jackson has degrees in French and Law and has over 20 years experience presenting seminars to lawyers and clients on a variety of legal topics. She has also experience in lecturing post-graduate College of Law students through interactive workshops and on-line distance learning.

Dana Skopal has a combined Asian Studies and Law degree and has worked for many Australian and Japanese companies on documents ranging from contracts to technical translations. Dana has written several educational bilingual books for schools.

Just as you need to 'write for' your audience so, as a lecturer or trainer, you need to 'speak to' your audience. When people hear this they nod their head and agree. But how do you identify your audience? This conversation looks at what assumptions we make as speakers and what preconceptions the audience may have. As a speaker can I be sure that my audience understands the 'same' meaning for the terms that I intend? Do we come together in a room with the same understanding and purpose? Language, culture and interaction are wide-ranging concepts, but play an important role when presenting or facilitating. We will explore the strategies you can use to identify our audience and break down the hidden assumptions and preconceptions that can impact on the reception of our words.

How do you identify your audience? This conversation looks at what assumptions we make as speakers and what preconceptions the audience may have.

**Lynda Harris (New Zealand)**

**The Business Case for Plain Language**

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Lynda is founder and director of Write Limited, New Zealand's leading plain English business-writing company.

Lynda also established the WriteMark, New Zealand's document quality mark, and is the founder of New Zealand's annual plain English awards. Learn how to identify your real proposition, and how to answer the questions of why, cost, deliverables, risks, and success indicators.

Whether you're an employee trying to persuade others to adopt plain language, or a professional trying to sell plain language to clients, you need to present a convincing case for change and a clear return on investment.

Using a typical business case template, Lynda shares her organisation's success in persuading corporate and public sector CEOs to adopt an organisation-wide change in writing style.

In this session you'll learn how to identify your real proposition, and how to answer the questions of why, cost, deliverables, risks, and success indicators.

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**Amy Bunk and Joanne Locke (USA)**

Amy Bunk is the Director of Legal Affairs and Policy for the Office of the Federal Register, United States National Archives and Records Administration. She is currently the Chairperson of the Plain Language Action and Information Network, an organization of current and former U.S. government employees whose goal is to promote the use of plain language for all government communications.

Joanne Locke was a plain language advisor for the US Department of Health & Human Services from 2004–2008 where she focused on linking plain language and health literacy. From 1998–2004, Joanne was the Food and Drug Administration's Plain Language Coordinator and was one of the founders of the non-profit Center for Plain Language.

How do you keep the information easy-to-understand while maintaining the integrity and nuances of the science?

**Redesigning Your Web Site:  
Tips from a Guru and Putting it into Practice**

Hear ideas for improving the usability of web sites based on Ginny Redish's latest book,

. Then see how these ideas were put into practice to make health information more understandable in the newly redesigned U.S. Government Web site, healthfinder.gov.

Following Ginny's recommendations, the U.S. Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion developed research-based guidelines for writing and designing effective prevention-focused web content. These guidelines are based on three underlying principles:

- Information must be easy to locate, navigate, and use.
- Health information written for the public should improve understanding, build knowledge, and facilitate healthy decision-making.
- To influence behaviour change, information on prevention must be relevant, motivating, and actionable.

Early testing shows the small 'actionable' steps approach works. But the challenge remains: How do you keep the information easy-to-understand while maintaining the integrity and nuances of the science?

Join our conversation – Which guidelines solve your web site's problems and which will be challenging to apply to your sites?

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**Warren Lewington (Australia)**

Warren has been a technical communicator for over ten years specialising in engineering and infrastructure industries. He has authored and illustrated everything from high tech electronics to mining, automotive, transport systems and public works facilities. He is currently with a division of Siemens where the use of graphics in documentation has greatly improved the quality of delivery.

**Reducing the Words**

We are surrounded by images, icons, and pictures that assist ordering, control and guidance of society in general. Myriad graphics are used to convey technical, hazardous, useful or essential information.

Why don't authors use graphics more frequently in business documentation? Using graphical elements can reduce text and reading time. You can use graphics to reinforce, grab interest and generate comprehension. These issues will be highlighted using some simple activities.

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**Anne-Marie Chisnall and Sara Gilbert (New Zealand)**

As a plain English specialist, Anne-Marie leads or works on all types of document clarity projects, including document redrafting, document assessments, document audits, user-testing projects, style guides, and more. Much of her work involves complex or highly technical documentation.

Sara is part of a team of document consultants, working with clients in New Zealand's public and private sectors.

Sara also project manages The Write Style Manual for New Zealanders: A Manual for Business Writing and Editing, which Write Limited customises for clients.

Before joining Write, Sara worked in Melbourne editing scientific and university publications, and was a freelance editor and trainer.

**Raising the standard across the Tasman—a New Zealand perspective on document assessment**

Many New Zealand businesses and government organisations are choosing to have their documents assessed against a recognised plain English standard. Some want to gain a plain English 'stamp of approval' on the document, some want multiple assessments as part of a wider writing audit, and others simply want guidance to improve an important document. Whatever the reasons behind an assessment, the benefits to organisations and practitioners are clear.

Anne-Marie and Sara will present two of the tools Write Limited uses to assess documents for clients:

- a short plain English standard and its accompanying checklist
- the WriteMark Plain English Standard (New Zealand's document quality mark).

This practical and thought-provoking workshop will touch briefly on the merits of a written techniques-based assessment compared with the benefits of interview-based user testing.

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**James Robertson (Australia)**

James Robertson is recognised internationally as a Content Management System (CMS) specialist. He has worked with a wide variety of organisations, including Melbourne University, BHP Billiton, and Woollahra Council, to select a CMS.

**How can we prove the value of content?**

Instinctively we can see the value of good content, but demonstrating this to an organisation can be challenging. James will tackle this problem from two angles: how to identify concrete benefits in operational and front-line environments; and how to align content to business priorities. Drawing on many real-world examples, he will challenge you to move beyond the words to broader business needs and opportunities.

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**Irene Wong (Australia)**

Irene Wong is Publishing Manager at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission.

Before joining ASIC Irene was an editor with Worksafe Australia. She has been an active member of the Australian Society of Technical Communications in NSW, producing their monthly newsletter and writing for their journal. She has spoken at their last eight annual conferences. For over nine years she organised speakers and discussions for lunchtime meetings of legal and financial communicators in central Sydney.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Economics, Irene taught English and Economics in Hong Kong.

**Satisfaction as a measure of usability**

More and more we are being asked to prove that people can use our information products in the way we intend. There are readability scores, performance benchmarks, usability measures such as easy to use, find and understand or descriptions such as clear, concise, effective, even conspicuous.

**Satisfaction** is rarely considered in that mix but it is part of the usability standard in ISO 9241 Part 11— a measure of requirements for office work with visual display terminals. The standard defines usability as the ‘extent to which a product can be used ... to achieve specified goals with effectiveness, efficiency and **satisfaction** in a specified context of use’.

The session will also look at whether we should consider satisfaction when designing and evaluating our information products.

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**Derek Corcoran (Australia)**

Derek Corcoran is Avoka's GM of Sales and Marketing. With years of experience in the IT industry, Derek has exceptional skills in demonstrating the real opportunities and business benefits that software solutions can deliver to organisations. His engaging presentation style will capture the audience and leave you with a clear picture what Adobe LiveCycle has to offer.

**Adobe enterprise solutions: engaging and efficient**

In recent years, Adobe have been developing a world-class suite of products for the enterprise. Known as the Adobe LiveCycle Enterprise Suite, the focus is to involve people in business processes: customers, citizens, partners and employees, while increasing efficiency.

During today's presentation Derek will demonstrate the key features of Adobe LiveCycle and show how it has helped large Australian organisations implement solutions to make a real difference to the bottom line.

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**Nad Rosenberg (USA)**

Nad Rosenberg is president and founder of TechWRITE, Inc ([www.techw.com](http://www.techw.com)), a company that creates high quality manuals and elearning tutorials for a wide range of clients.

Before starting TechWRITE, Nad managed documentation departments for several large corporations. She is a graduate of Carnegie Mellon University, a Senior Member of the Society for Technical Communication, and a Past President of the Philadelphia Metro Chapter of the STC.

**Using plain language in Flash online tutorials**

This session will showcase how to build an effective online tutorial in Flash. Nad will give a brief overview of how a Flash tutorial can be easily developed using Adobe Captivate 4.0. The emphasis will be on how the use of language affects the quality of the end product and will cover:

- Pros and cons of audio narration
  - Writing the script for the audio narration
  - Writing text captions
  - Integrating text captions with the narration
  - Recording options
  - Editing audio files.
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**Andrew Lockton (Australia)**

Andrew has worked as a freelance technical writer, graphic designer, proposal manager and software developer since 1991.

Andrew has extensive experience in a broad range of desktop software and develops tools and templates which assist companies to produce documentation efficiently.

Andrew has lectured in Technical Communication at Swinburne University in Melbourne since 2003.

**Migrating to Word 2007 quickly and efficiently**

The file format and interface for Word 2007 is very different to that of earlier versions and general acceptance of the new interface has slowed the corporate upgrades to this version. However under the covers, much of the old functionality is still present and existing templates will generally work as per the earlier versions. This workshop will focus on enabling long-time users of Word to adapt quickly to the new version and reduce the productivity hit of learning a new interface.

The workshop will also discuss ways to customise and use Word 2007 in a corporate environment to maximise productivity.

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**Professor Stuart Campbell and Sarah Forget (Australia)**

Professor Stuart Campbell is the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) at the University of Western Sydney.

His specialisation is in the psycholinguistics of translation particularly Arabic to English.

Sarah Forget graduated from the University of Rennes (France) and was a translation and localisation specialist in France before coming to Australia three years ago. Sarah is currently managing translations for Infomedia.

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**New challenges for the writer: how to write for translation**

Professional writers are very unlikely to be writing just to their primary readership, but also to a secondary readership, the translators of their work. This introduces new challenges for the writer and raises some weighty questions: how can a professional writer know what might be unclear in a translation? Are some things translated more easily into one language than another? Are some things universally tricky to translate, regardless of the target language?

Stuart Campbell attempts to answer these questions.

Sarah Forget will then take us from research to professional practice; to demonstrate that understanding and translatability are key points of the writing process, illustrating her argument with examples taken from her experience as a technical writer.

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**Three views of *Coherence* from Australia**

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**Professor Christopher Candlin**

Before joining Macquarie University as Professor of Linguistics in 1987, Chris was Professor of Applied Linguistics at Lancaster University in the UK. From 1998–2002 he was Chair Professor of Applied Linguistics at The City University of Hong Kong. Chris returned to Macquarie in 2002 as Senior Research Professor in Linguistics. Chris currently edits or co-edits seven international book series, and sits on the editorial boards of six major journals.

What is coherence? How important is it? Can it be measured? First we will look at how we can define this concept. Secondly, what role does coherence play in plain English, and in business discourse as opposed to academic writing? My work in discourse analysis has led me into the medical and legal professions, and I will discuss the links between workplace, professional and academic writing. I argue that research-based analysis can translate into practical application in writer training and in the professional development of trainers and practitioners.

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**Dr Alan Jones**

Alan has a longstanding interest in descriptive linguistics and in language typology. In 1998 he joined Macquarie University, and now convenes a Doctorate in Professional Communication and a Masters program in Communication in Professions and Organisations. Alan is currently researching communicative expertise in professions and organisations, with a special interest in the way communicative skills contribute to professional expertise. He has carried out collaborative research and co-published with specialists in physics, accounting, and law.

Coherence is traditionally distinguished from cohesion. Cohesion is the effect of large numbers of surface 'ties' between identifiable language features (like pronouns or synonyms) and explicit linking devices (like thus, however, etc.). It gives the reader the impression of a unified or 'cohesive' text. Coherence is much harder to define, being very largely a matter of conceptual development. Coherence depends on the writer's ability to lead the reader along a conceptual pathway that is perceived as logical and inevitable. The effect depends on the writer's ability to anticipate gaps in the reader's knowledge and to supply (only) the relevant information. I show how conceptual development in a text can be made visible, and how texts can thus be evaluated in terms of overall coherence and purpose.

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**Dana Skopal**

Dana Skopal – With a combined Asian Studies and Law degree, Dana has worked for many Australian and Japanese companies in Sydney on documents ranging from contracts to technical translations. Her interest in languages led her into the education field, and she has written several educational bilingual books for schools. Dana is also a trainer for the Plain English Foundation, and is completing her thesis in the Master of Communication in Professions and Organisations at Macquarie University.

Linguists or professionals working with grammar or plain English may be familiar with the term 'coherence'. From a functional grammar perspective, M.A.K Halliday states that if a text is to be coherent it must be cohesive and have structure. For those working with plain English it makes sense. However, how do you convey this to those writing business documents and who have minimal interest in grammar? When facilitating writing workshops I often see the participants' faces relax when they read a 'coherent' document, but they are frustrated when navigating around and checking the flow of ideas in their documents. So how do we make coherence relevant to graduates beginning their career in an organisation or to writers of business documents in general? This session looks at a number of ways to teach coherence to writers who are not familiar with the concept.