



DigiNews

*Featured
in this
issue:*

Freelancing

Portfolio
Preparation

*Also in this
issue:*

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Editing | 2 |
| Auction | 3 |
| Success stories | 4 |
| DigiKnow? | 7 |

Ten Tips for Successful Freelancing

By *Lovely Choubey*

If you're willing to face the challenges of freelancing, you can reap the benefits, too. Here are ten guidelines to follow that can help you find your way on the road to success.

Start small

Don't think that freelancing only means writing articles for magazines. You can write or edit a flyer, offer

your proofreading services, edit résumés for jobseekers, or do a grammatical check of copy. You can then put this experience on your résumé in order to work your way into the higher-paying business environments.

Set a fair rate

To get information about what rates to set for work you perform, look at a handy publication called *The Writer's Market*.

Published by Writer's Digest Books, this is an invaluable reference that, among other things, will provide you with a list of different freelance markets and the rates you can apply to each.

Set both hourly and per-page rates

The two rates will allow you to discriminate properly between different kinds of tasks. For example, if you are checking for typos or

See Freelance, 5

Preparing a Professional Portfolio (part 2)

By *Bill Reinert*

Your portfolio demonstrates you've done everything you claim on your résumé and shows how you did it. In the last issue of *DigiNews*, I discussed what to include in your portfolio and how to tailor your portfolio for a specific position.

Think of your portfolio as the third leg, along with your résumé and interviewing skills, of your marketing stool.

Cutting corners on any leg could cause you to lose your seat at the interviewer's table. So let's look at the details: samples, testimonials, and navigation tools.

Samples

If you're attempting to branch out in your current field or break into a new area, you may lack work samples appropriate to the requirements of the position you're targeting.

If you lack such samples, be resourceful:

- Include tests. Unless specifically copyrighted, include a hard copy of online editing tests administered by employment agencies on which you did well. Your queries and comments on those tests illustrate your knowledge and your thought processes.

- Include successful class projects or volunteer projects. If you collaborated, clarify your role in the project in your

See Portfolio, 8

Ask the Editor

By Beth Short

What are the essential editing resources? How can I build trust with writers? How do I land an editing job, anyway?

If you're a developing editor, seeking answers to some of the field's persistent questions might be your new pastime. I know it's mine.

Lucky for us, experienced technical communicators are often willing to share their knowledge. Leigh McDiarmid, an editor at a Whatcom County engineering firm, spoke with me recently about everything from her editorial mission to the rewards of finding order in chaos.

What is an editor's mission?

As an editor who collaborates with technical-minded subject matter experts, Leigh sees her mission as twofold. First, there is the task of ensuring a complicated document is comprehensible to the intended audience. But her work goes beyond providing a service to the reader. "Yes, I'm standing in for the reader when I'm talking to the writer – but I'm also helping the writer. I remind the writer of who the audience really is." This reminder allows the writer to stamp his or her name on a more effective document. Most writers,

Leigh says, quickly realize an editor's second mission – an editor helps them look good.

What are the essential editing resources?

Leigh doesn't think long before letting me in on the resources she finds most valuable, "*Fowler's Modern English Usage*, because it's so totally entertaining and so right." She also gives high marks to the Society for Technical Communication (STC) – for its monthly meetings and, especially, for its publications: *Intercom*, the monthly magazine, and *Technical Communications*, the quarterly journal.

How can I build trust with writers?

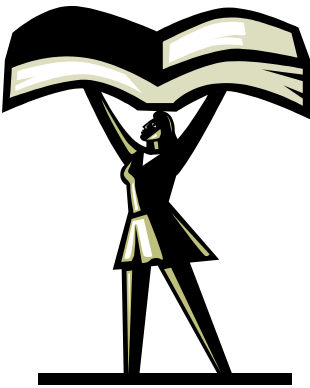
Like all editors, Leigh must regularly pit her pen against writing foibles – whether isolated spelling blunders or chronic mishandling of punctuation, syntax, or document organization. Critical to addressing mistakes without bruising egos, Leigh says, is gaining the trust of writers. The way to accomplish this? Listen and be kind. "Being able to really hear what is going on with what somebody else is saying and being willing to exercise a lot of care to make sure they maintain their dignity" are qualities that foster teamwork, help projects run smoothly, and, in turn, add value to an editor.

How do I land my first editing job?

The latest job search strategy I've heard is extending prospective employers a period of work without pay to demonstrate your skills. Leigh is part of a hiring team, so I asked her what she thought of the free-trial strategy. She responded, "What kind of a message does it send – that your work isn't worth anything?" While Leigh doesn't advocate this tactic, here are three things she does recommend:

- Heed the Boy Scout motto: Be prepared. Before you start pounding the pavement, Leigh advises investing a significant chunk of time in your résumé and cover letter – ensure they are relevant, well written, and free of errors. Never underestimate the power – for good or ill – of your image on paper. You'll also benefit from a solid grasp of standard industry software. Word, Excel, and at least one graphics program will show you're computer competent; online tools such as RoboHelp will attract attention. Take some time to bring your skills up to date.
- Volunteer for non-profits. The slim non-profit budget can work to the advantage of less experienced editors.

See *Editing*, 3



"Yes, I'm standing in for the reader when I'm talking to the writer – but I'm also helping the writer. I remind the writer of who the audience really is."

BCC Goes to Auction

By Mike Klassen

Imagine using your writing, editing, or designing skills to help people in need while learning something new at the same time. Some BCC students in the Technical and Professional Communication programs recently put their skills to use helping St. Andrew's Housing Group, a local non-profit organization.

Since 1987, St. Andrew's Housing Group (SAHG) has provided quality housing communities for people in financial need on King County's Eastside. Each year SAHG holds an auction that raises a large portion of the group's annual operating budget.

For this year's event, held April 26, BCC students designed, wrote, edited, and managed the production of the auction catalog.

Last fall, SAHG Office Manager and Volunteer Coordinator Jason Francis contacted Gloria Campbell, director of the Technical and Professional Communication programs at BCC. Francis had the idea to work with students after seeing how much work it took one person to handle the job in the past. "Our former process of using a single volunteer or staff member for all the auction publications over-taxed the individual involved each year," said Francis. He felt that having a

team put together the publication was not only a better idea, but would enable the BCC team to produce a real-life portfolio piece.

Once the initial contact was made, Campbell recruited BCC instructor Claudia Mazzie-Ballheim. "Since I'd managed writers and editors in my previous work, it seemed like a good fit and a great way for students to get real-world experience working with clients and samples for their portfolios. I was also excited because it's a cause I believe in – affordable housing for the working poor."

See Auction, 6



Editing

Continued from page 2

Charities may not be able to pay you, but they probably won't turn down pro bono services, and they are always happy to lend their names to a volunteer's résumé. Leigh suggests finding an organization with needs that match your own. "Find that and use it to build your place in the community, your portfolio, a network."

- Seek *prospecting* interviews. An interview with a company that isn't yet hiring is what Leigh calls a prospecting interview. She conducts them regularly not only as a service to the community but also to scout fresh talent. Her advice is to submit that stunning résumé along with an appropriate cover letter. If you're appealing on paper, you'll probably win a chance to

practice your interview skills and make new contacts. If you're appealing in person, you might pick up the phone one day to a job offer.

What keeps an editor editing?

Imagine it's the future now – you understand your mission, you've chuckled through Fowler's cover-to-cover, that dream job title has finally materialized on your letterhead. How do you stay inspired? Although that question is likely one you'll have to answer yourself, Leigh doesn't make it sound difficult. "It's brainwork and I like that. You can't do it and not have your brain fully engaged. If you like seeing order out of chaos. If you like that kind of thing, it's rewarding."

Students' Success Stories

By Dave Longmuir

It's always a good idea to investigate how others have succeeded. When you learn about niches in the job market that you weren't aware of, when you get inside information about industry trends, and when you analyze what courses prepared people especially well, you can more effectively map your own career path. No time to investigate? No worries. *DigiNews* has done some sleuthing for you and turned up some great stories.

From Deb Wingert:

When I walked into BCC's Technical and Professional Communication programs' orientation in April 2002, I was not sure where it would take me. When I left, I wanted to become a technical writer, immediately. Now, I am.

In mid-July, with one class to go, I quit my job to start my new career. Knowing of my training in this program, my boss offered me another job. Now, I am responsible for both process development and documentation. I am having so much fun I can hardly believe I am being paid for it!

The Technical Writing and Communication

program works. Mike Paul's class in *Fundamentals of Technical Writing* gives confidence.

Pamela Johnson's *Writing Software Documentation* gives tools to write effective procedures. John Graham's *Creating Process Documentation* gives ideas to build easy-to-use forms and flowcharts.

Steve Fout's *Overview of Computer Programming for Technical Writers* gives an understanding of how to communicate with programmer/developers. Patricia Cornette's *Writing Online Help* gives skills far beyond writing help file content.

Finally, Molly Gerhard's *Groanless Grammar* and her *Professional Proofreading and Editing* give the ability to provide finished work, ready for publication.

Anyone interested should attend the Technical and Professional Communication programs' orientation. It is worth it!

Thanks, BCC, for this excellent program.

From Mike Klassen:

I was a software tester at Microsoft when I decided to pursue a technical writing career. While I had a writing background, I realized I needed to get

a solid foundation specifically in technical writing. When talking to other writers at Microsoft on the best plan of action to achieve my goal, the conversation inevitably led to BCC. More than a few people recommended I look into the college's technical writing program.

Now that I've completed the program, I can see why people kept pointing me in that direction. Through the various classes, I was able to shape the skills I already had into something I could use in the technical writing field. This was especially important since I actually became a technical writer at Microsoft while I was working my way through the program. Because of the education I was getting at BCC, I had increased confidence in taking on my new role.

About the best endorsement I can give is that even though I've completed the program, I have no doubt I'll be taking more writing related courses at BCC to keep building my skills.



"Anyone interested should attend the Technical and Professional Communication programs' orientation. It is worth it!"

Thanks, BCC, for this excellent program."

Freelance

Continued from page 1

grammatical inconsistencies, you will probably want to use a per-page rate. On the other hand, if you are doing in-house work for a small business, or for someone who wants a résumé polished, you should probably charge an hourly rate.

Consider the barter system

Swap your expertise for others' skills and materials. Not only will you get assistance for no money, you will make friends and connections who can help you get more clients.

Suggest freelancing in interviews

If you get an interview with a company that interests you but you don't seem quite right for the job, suggest that you freelance for them. This allows the company to test your skills while you find out if you like the work and the company.

Write queries

The query letter is becoming the only way to break into some of the best markets.

By querying before you write, you give the editor a chance to provide feedback on your idea. The editor may want to suggest a particular length or approach, or

recommend experts to interview. She may want you to cover other aspects of your subject in sidebars. By finding out what the editor wants before you start to write, you'll avoid having to revise the piece later.

A well-written query can also result in assignments you didn't expect. If you impress the editor with your style and credentials, he may offer you some other assignment, even if your original idea isn't usable.

A successful query letter usually includes these five components:

- **The hook:** Your letter's very first line should grab an editor's attention. It must demonstrate that you can write effectively, and that you understand your market.
- **The pitch:** Its purpose is to explain exactly what you're offering. Your pitch should include a working title for your article, a word count (make sure you've checked the publication's guidelines!), and a brief summary of what the article will cover.
- **The body:** This is where you really start to sell. The body of your query will consist of two to four paragraphs that present the details of your article. Remember, an editor wants to know exactly what the article

will cover, so precisely detail your proposed article's scope.

- **The credentials:** Editors want to know why you are the best person to write the article you've proposed.
- **The close:** Use the final paragraph of your article to thank the editor for reviewing your proposal – and to offer one last nudge to encourage the editor to respond.

Be professional

Set up definite appointment times; be punctual; dress at least semi-formally; schedule realistically, and deliver on deadline.

Participate in contests

Don't forget the writer-of-the-month or poet-of-the-year contests – they can increase your credibility and your confidence. In addition, you will be creating another piece to put in your portfolio that can impress prospective clients with your zeal for quality.

Learn to cope with rejections

Unfortunately, being rejected comes with being a writer. Not just beginning writers get rejections, but experienced writers get them as well. You've probably heard that editors who reject your work aren't rejecting you; that's true. However, they

may not be rejecting your work either. Poor quality is not the only reason for rejection. It could be sheer volume. If an editor can only accept five articles per month out of a pile of 500, it isn't only the bad articles that are going to be rejected.

There's a t-shirt with a picture of the Titanic on the front and the words on the back: "It sank. Get over it." Take that attitude about rejections.

Join a group

Join a networking group. There are so many out there for every type of interest; there's at least one for you. Attend meetings; meet editors, writers, and reporters. Your contacts could be a good source of future assignments.

Don't forget online resources

Take advantage of sites where you can subscribe as a service provider. Look for projects posted on the Web site. Some good sites are:

www.freelance.com

www.elance.com

www.freelanceworkexchange.com

Good luck ... and happy freelancing.

“BCC students got real-world experience to add to their portfolios.”



Auction

Continued from page 3

A team was put together consisting of former and current students from different Technical and Professional Communication programs. At various points in the project, the group included Lisa Blauvelt, Anita Castle, and Dave Longmuir as writers, Julie Fornia Saathoff as editor, and Jubilee Cooke as information designer, with Mазzie-Ballheim as project manager.

If you think of technical communication as computer documentation or some other formal method of communication, an auction catalog might seem like an odd project.

“Although we relied on tech comm principles to organize the catalog information, the project didn’t involve technical content,” said Mазzie-Ballheim. “One of the goals was to make sure the publications were consistent with the overall auction design goals – creating the feeling of an *old-fashioned* yet elegant Italian homecoming. And there was much more graphic design work than we anticipated. Luckily, Jubilee – our information designer – turned out to be a talented artist as well.”

Jubilee’s artistic contribution turned out to be an important one. The cover of the catalog and the artwork for the invitation were original watercolors that she designed and painted specifically for the auction. Both originals were framed; one was auctioned for \$500 and the other raised \$330. The auction itself raised just over \$136,000.

For the students, helping a worthy cause was just one benefit. The BCC team also identified a number of things they learned that will help them in their future jobs including:

- How to work better with writers.
- How to prioritize tasks.
- How software affects the writing process.
- How and when to say *no* to last-minute suggestions.
- How to handle the responsibility that comes when you’re the last person to see the publication before it gets sent to the printer.

As for what the future holds, Francis thinks the SAHG/BCC relationship will continue. “We are thrilled with the relationship established now with BCC’s [Continuing Education] program, and hope in the future to both benefit from the carefully groomed publishing talent BCC is creating and give budding professionals their first crack at a budgeted professional product.”

Anna Porter, the Chair of the Auction

Publication Committee, was also happy with the results. “Frankly, we couldn’t have done it without the team! They were great to work with and put in many long, late hours!

“They were very eager and willing to go to great lengths to create all of our printed materials, which at times was a special challenge because none of them had ever attended a benefit auction.

“They asked lots of good questions and helped us to really get the perspective of people who might be new to the event. This led to a very user-friendly catalog that got rave reviews from even the most seasoned of auction-goers!”

In the end, the project turned out to be a classic win-win. BCC students got real-world experience to add to their portfolios, and St. Andrew’s Housing Group got a high-quality catalog for an auction which helped to raise money and assist people in need.

For more information about St. Andrew’s Housing Group, visit them at <http://www.sahg.org/>.

DigiKnow?

By Mike Klassen

DigiKnow? The Science Writing certificate program includes a new class.

The one-day *Medical and Science Terminology* class will familiarize you with the fundamentals of frequently used terminology in medicine and various fields of science. You'll come away with a basic understanding of concepts in science and medicine that will serve as resources in reading or writing a scientific article. The Aug. 8 class will be a combination of lecture and exercises. By the end of the class, you should be able to recognize common terms or understand their meaning through breaking them down to their components. In addition, you'll be able to find sources that will help you recognize new terms or concepts.

Although *Medical and Science Terminology* is part of the Science Writing curriculum, students in other technical writing certificate programs are welcome to take this class.

DigiKnow? There's a new writing course

geared for 15- to 18-year-olds.

Young Writers' Workshop is all about writing for fun. Students will learn how to find ideas and begin new writing projects. They'll explore different forms of writing such as fiction, non-fiction, and poetry. To round out the six-session course, students will learn about editing, reworking, and getting feedback on their writing.

Before the course is complete, students will create a 'zine and participate in a special reading night to share their work. If you know someone in this age group who loves to write, make sure they're signed up for *Young Writers' Workshop*. The course begins July 22.

DigiKnow? The spring quarter featured many new courses.

- *Getting Federal Grants* is part of BCC's Science Writing certificate program, but can be used as an elective in the other Technical and Professional Communication certificate programs. During the 15-hour course you'll learn how to pursue a grant, how

to find the appropriate funding agency, and how to provide grant reviewers what they expect to see.

- *Marcom Writing – Adding the Flash and Dazzle* is a one-day, six-hour course designed to introduce you to marketing communication. You'll learn the types of writing skills it takes to become a successful Marcom writer, the four elements of style a Marcom writer can control, and how to know, analyze, and segment an audience.

- The Publishing Institute added to its already solid list of courses. New spring quarter courses included *Humor Writing: How to Make People Laugh*, *Editing Your Own Writing*, *Self-Publishing*, *The Art of Story Telling*, and *Writing Personal Histories and Memoirs*.

You can find complete course descriptions at <http://www.conted.bcc.ctc.edu/>.

DigiKnow? Two graduates of BCC Technical and Professional Communication programs will be leading the Puget Sound Chapter of the Society for Technical

Communication. The 2003 – 2004 board president will be Teresa Goertz. Jane Sheridan will serve as secretary.

For STC information: <http://www.stc-psc.org/>.

DigiKnow? BCC and the University of Washington have teamed up for a new FrameMaker workshop. *Single-Source Content Management Using FrameMaker* is for intermediate and advanced FrameMaker users.

You will create a single-source content management system, which will enable you to assemble a number of documentation products from a single body of content. You will learn how to modularize content for reuse in a single-source content management system. You will then map the content from modules into topics, chapters, and sections in the final documentation products.

The two-part workshop will be held July 19 and 26 from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at the BCC North Campus.

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Portfolio

Continued from page 1

cover sheet. If the work wasn't published, include a professional-looking hard copy.

- Include – sparingly – collateral material from projects you've included in the portfolio, such as e-mail that illustrates your professionalism in communicating with team members.

Testimonials

Include certificates of any training you've had relevant to the position you're after. Conversely, don't include evidence of classes that aren't relevant to the job.

Include correspondence from colleagues or clients that puts you in a flattering light. Again, keep these relevant to the position you're after. These can include:

- Congratulatory and laudatory e-mails from

managers and colleagues concerning your efforts on various projects.

- Letters of recommendation from former supervisors or community leaders.
- Thank-you notes from clients, colleagues, or readers.

Navigation tools

As you would with any technical communication project, think usability when organizing your portfolio. Your portfolio needs navigation tools just as a Web page or a technical document does.

Use colored index tabs to divide your portfolio into sections, keeping in mind the requirements of the position you're seeking. For example, sections could include profile, writing, editing, design, scheduling, and testimonials. By planning carefully, you can make modules that you can

easily slip in or out of your portfolio as the situation requires.

Usability applies to your presentation, as well. Use properly sequenced copies of your portfolio's cover sheets to guide and track an interviewer's progress through the pieces so you are prepared to explain your decisions on each piece.

Every such extra step you take that someone else might not bother with will be apparent to a sharp interviewer. Someone in the industry said of my portfolio, "When I look at this, [it] tells me exactly what you'd do if you sat down at a desk in this office."

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