

Awards, awards and more awards!

UK Technical Communication, Horace Hockley and Mike Austin



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Horace Hockley Award Winner 2017

Information design and technical communication researcher, **Karen Schriver**, shares a bit about how her interests evolved.



Horace Hockley Award 2017

I am just thrilled to be the 2017 recipient of the ISTC Horace Hockley Award. I am grateful that the ISTC has recognized my contributions with an award in the name of someone who was so passionate about excellence in scientific and technical communication.

Getting started

I began in our field as a professor of rhetoric and document design at Carnegie Mellon University. During the early 1980s, there were few programs available for students with a passion for untangling complex technical or scientific content. When I started teaching, most courses focused on issues of editing or style. While I enjoyed teaching courses that sharpened students' abilities to size up a text, I felt they didn't go far enough. I developed a class called "Planning and Testing Documents", designed to teach planning and usability testing to students taking a degree in professional writing or technical communication. Shortly after the success of that class, I designed "Integrating Visual and Verbal Texts". My boss used to tease me and said, "For goodness sake's Schriver, this is an English Department. First,

you want students to test their writing on readers, and now, you want them to integrate visuals with their writing? What on earth will our students do with that?"

I remember writing to Dr. Patricia Wright, who was at the University of Cambridge at the time, working on problems of clear communication. I explained that I was designing a new course on document design and hoped to draw on some of the work from the UK, such as her research and that of Rob Waller, Michael Twyman, Paul Stiff, Michael Macdonald Ross, and Robin Kinross. I concluded my letter saying that in my eyes she was the "queen of document design" and I would appreciate her advice. She wrote back a lovely letter, telling me she thought the course was a great idea, but I should drop my reference to her being the queen of document design, as she didn't feel very aligned with the monarchy.

Mid-course correction

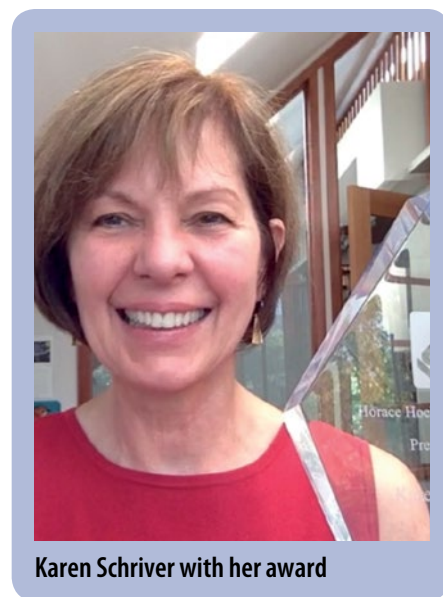
By the mid 1990s, I got the itch to leave the academy and start my own company, and for the past few decades, have been traversing the worlds of business, government, and the academy. I have worked for companies and government agencies across the globe. Along the way, I wrote a fat book called *Dynamics in Document Design*, in which it took me almost 400 pages to say that we need to take readers seriously. Years later, I am still obsessed with understanding readers and with how we can design clear and useful content.

Still keeping on

I have gone on to examine what technical communicators need to know about our sister field of information design. I've integrated what we know about quality in technical communication and document design. I've explored the nature of expertise in professional communication, asking what it takes to be a high-achieving professional. This review of the literature led me to conclude that acquiring many years of experience in technical communication is not enough. Instead, experts in

professional communication learn to solve problems of writing and design in novel ways that others on-the-job miss altogether or dismiss as irrelevant. Moreover, one thing every professional must consider is the "rhetoric of redesign" in bureaucratic settings, especially when working for large organisations that may not value individual or collective expertise in technical communication.

Recently, I've been chronicling the ways in which the field of plain language burgeoned over the past decades. My new article explores how plain language in the United States evolved and gained momentum between 1940 and 2015. It shows the intersections among the fields of technical communication, information design and plain language. In it, I take a close look at the past 75 years, tracing how professionals altered their goals as communicators — from readability — to usability — to believability. I argue that understanding our history is important in this age of "alternative facts", when plain language can be used for nefarious purposes. The article will appear in the December 2017 issue of *IEEE Transactions in Professional Communication*. I am now working on a new book about evidence-based information design and plain language. **C**



Karen Schriver with her award

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Dr. Karen Schrivier is owner of KSA Communication Design and Research, a research consultancy based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States. She is the recipient of 12 awards for her work. In 2016, she was named a “legend of technical communication” by the US-based Society for Technical Communication. She has taught at Carnegie Mellon University (Pittsburgh, PA), the University of Utrecht, the University of Washington, the University of Stellenbosch, and the University of Gothenburg. Some of her clients include Sony, Microsoft, Apple, Mitsubishi, IBM, and the Japanese Ministry of Education.
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Mike Austin Award 2017

Paul Ballard FISTC is the recipient of this award in recognition of his continuing work on the ISTC Council.


I was chuffed to have been selected for the Mike Austin Award this year and would like to thank Council for this recognition. Apparently, as I’m still on Council, there needed to be several secret discussions behind my back so that I wouldn’t get wind of the rest of Council’s deliberations. Just as when Nick Robson¹ received the call from me in 2013, when Alison Peck called me with the news, I immediately assumed I’d forgotten to do something for ‘The President’.

My experience of contributing as a volunteer to the ISTC since 2004 has been immensely rewarding, and in some unexpected ways.

I am a member of the ISTC Council and have been involved in Marketing, TCUK, as President and now as a Past President.

After a few years of leading the refresh of our marketing, I agreed to lead the team that would refresh the old and tired ISTC Conference. Seeing Technical Communication UK

take shape was brilliant fun, nerve-racking and exciting, with the bonus of having given me the opportunity to get to know Rachel Potts. As we started to work on the 2010 2nd TCUK conference planning we stopped being just fellow volunteers and in 2012 Rachel Potts also became Rachel Ballard. We had the pleasure of bringing our 6 month old twins Jake and Thea along to the TCUK conference this year in Nottingham.

So, although I can’t guarantee that volunteering for the ISTC will enable you to meet your soul-mate, you never know where it might lead. 

¹ Eyre T and Robson N (2013) ‘Mike Austin Award 2013: Tony Eyre and Nick Robson’ *Communicator*, Winter 2013: 10

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Paul Ballard with his Mike Austin Award alongside his wife, Rachel Potts and their 3di UK Technical Communication Awards.