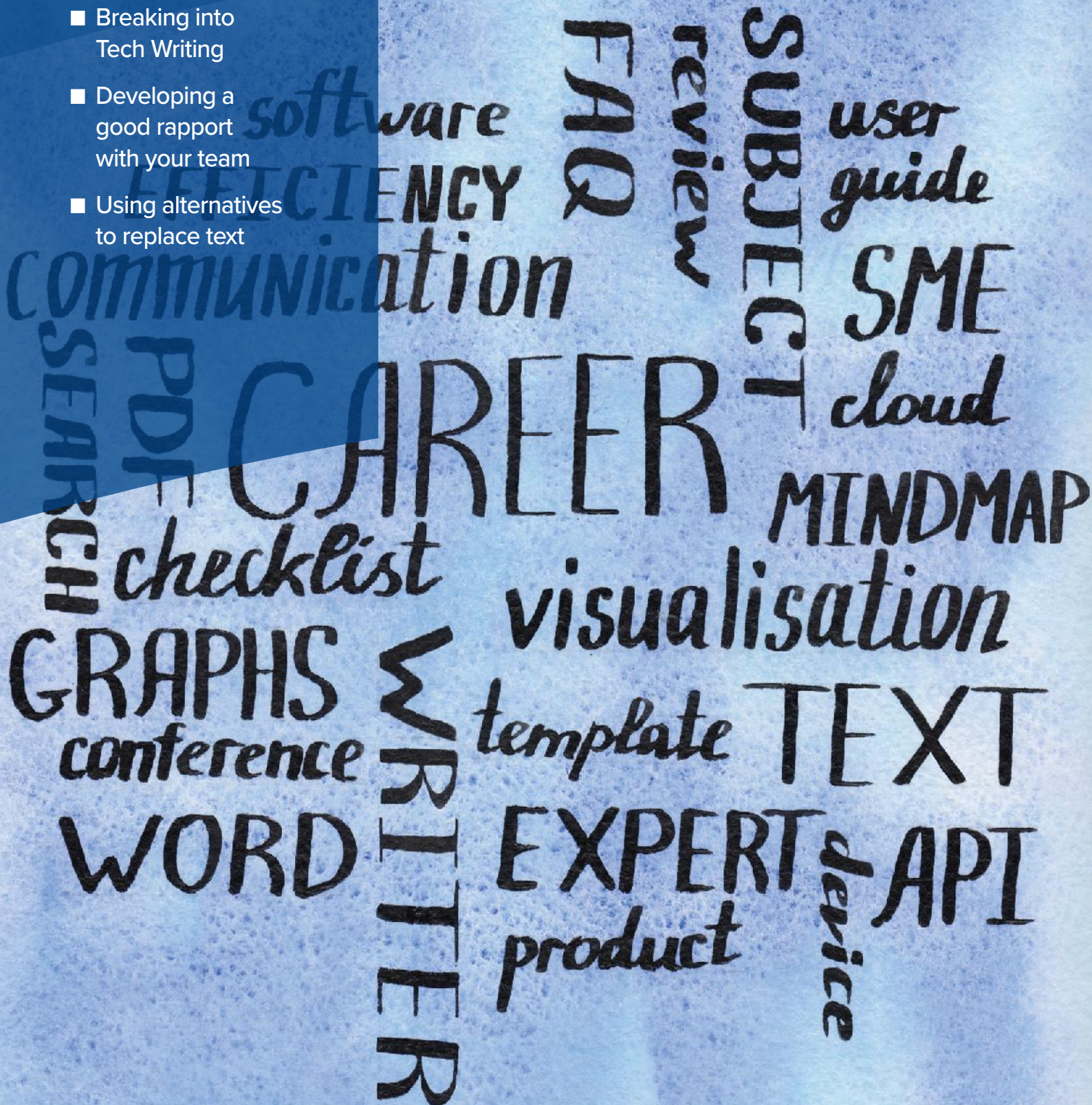


Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Spring 2022

- Breaking into Tech Writing
- Developing a good rapport with your team
- Using alternatives to replace text



President's View

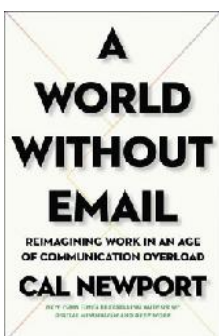
Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



I usually take the opportunity at the start of each year to reflect on how things went in the previous 12 months and to assess the potential for improvement in the coming year. This is not necessarily to make resolutions as such since this can be setting oneself up for failure. It is rather an opportunity to think that things can be different – that is, better – then set out to make it happen.

As usual I consulted the experts for inspiration. I settled on looking at two aspects of professional life: managing the working day and how to work effectively with others.

Managing the working day



The striking and intriguing title of Cal Newport's book attracted me: "A World without email" (Ref.1). The strap line is "Reimagining work in the age of overload" with

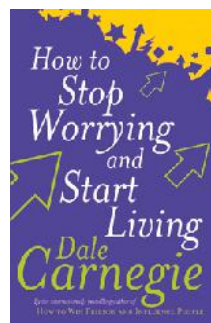
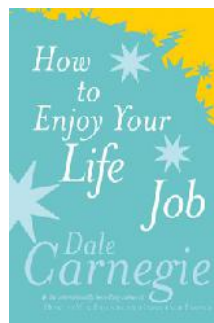
the invitation to "find focus; transform productivity; improve communication". There is significant evidence in the book of the inefficiency inherent in the usual way of working. This encourages the individual to respond 'instantly' to the items in an inbox without considering the relative importance or urgency of specific items. The author cites case studies where use of email was abandoned entirely (by accident or design). They found without exception

that productivity and innovation improved in the new way (of working).

This may all sound over-dramatic and the solution too radical. There is significant supporting theory which makes the book very thought provoking. An individual cannot opt out of email, nor is that the only way of making improvements. At the very least there are valuable tips on arranging the seemingly relentless flow of messages to best effect. There is good advice on meaningful categorisation and practical organisation of email so the individual can work effectively and according to priority. I have now improved the place of email in my own workflow and made associated changes. I cannot claim yet to have mastered its management, but with improved categorising of importance/speed of response required and so on, I can now claim to be working more efficiently; so far, so good.

Working effectively with others

For a better way of working effectively with others, I returned to the classic protagonist, the American author and lecturer, Dale Carnegie. His best sellers and influential books, "How to win friends and influence people" and "How to stop worrying and start living" were first published in 1936 and 1948 respectively. Excerpts from these and other books of his, relating to man management, have been combined into new titles and published in India. I turned for inspiration to one of these books, "How to enjoy your life and your job" (Ref.2).



I first encountered the author's writing on public speaking some years ago when working on my technique for presentations. At the time I also read "How to stop worrying and start living". This made quite an impression on

me with his life lesson. Dale Carnegie exhorts the reader to imagine the worst outcome of a given situation, then one must decide how to cope with this and find resolution. Having done so, the reader is ready to face anything and move on. Some examples he gives are startling but the method is surprisingly effective in everyday life and working life.

In "How to enjoy your life and your job" – again there are worked real-life examples. Dale Carnegie draws on anecdotes about significant figures including former US Presidents and business magnates, and social entrepreneurs. This is a different sort of read, but very refreshing with its positive life-affirming message of how to succeed; this entails valuing the thoughts and opinions of others, by showing respect always. There are tips too for effective working (pre-dating email of course). Most important though, are the stories from life which show how to get the best from others while remaining true to oneself. I am working through some of the specific tips, with some success to date.

I encourage you all to take the opportunity to explore ways of working more effectively and efficiently. It is always possible to make improvements and you should reap the benefits in your working lives.

ISTC News: reflecting and looking ahead

TCUK important announcement

Council has been considering when to return to an in-person conference. We now feel that we have the best chance of success by staging this next year; so TCUK 2023 will be an in-person event. For this year we plan an online event in the last week in September (including the ISTC AGM and UKTC Awards as in the last two years). We will be seeking support from members interested in helping to make both events happen. More information will be sent out separately in the near future; however you can contact us now via istc@istc.org.uk if you would like to know more.

UK Technical Communication Awards

We are taking entries for UK Technical Communication Awards 2022. The established guidelines apply again this year. They are open to any individual or team, whether employed, self-employed, contracting, volunteering, permanent, temporary, full-time or part-time. We continue to encourage entries of all types, from traditional documentation to those demonstrating technical innovation.

There is a dedicated UKTC Awards website: <https://uktcawards.com/>.

Details of last year's entries and their authors are given on the website: <https://uktcawards.com/past-years/winners-2021/>.

See the Winter 2021 issue of *Communicator* for articles by last year's winners (Ref. 3)

Closing date for submissions is 31 July. Please contact the office (at istc@istc.org.uk) for details.

Community

Fortunately some Local Area Groups were able to meet in person during last year with others continuing online. We plan to encourage expansion of these groups, and to establish Special Interest Groups. Also we will capitalise further on use of social media to publicise activities.

Professional Development

With membership renewal for 2022, we have renamed the 'junior member' grade to 'entry level member' grade. The junior member grade was introduced to bridge a gap between student grade and full member grade. This was accompanied by the mentoring scheme to guide juniors through their early years in the profession as they gained the experience needed for full membership.

We have made the change of grade name to 'entry level' in recognition of the fact that many entrants are second or third career professionals. The current issue of *Communicator* exemplifies this with an article by a very experienced engineer now moving into technical writing (Ref. 4). We want these entrants to be aware that we recognise their special situation. Usually they have considerable relevant experience in

their scientific or technical discipline, but now need to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for effective technical communication.

This year we are reviewing our CPD framework and our mentoring scheme to ensure that all members can benefit and contribute effectively in recognition of the value of 'lifelong learning'.

Resources

We continue to review and add to the members-only page introduced last year. Tools and resources here are available only to ISTC members and business affiliates. There are free courses on technical communication, articles, reference material, online discussion forums, presentations, videos, the ISTC YouTube channel and much more.

Also on the ISTC website we provide details of resources available to non-members, including courses accredited by the ISTC.

ISTC Meets 2022 – new name for our monthly online meetings

The TCUK Online monthly meetings continued throughout last year; these sessions started as a spin-off from TCUK Metro Online in 2020.

The presentations are short (half hour, plus questions), provided free of charge. It's a good opportunity for members to stay in touch, share knowledge, and practise presentation skills, as well as something to include in your CPD.

Since the start of 2022, these meetings are now called ISTC Meets. Details of previous events are available on the ISTC website at istc.org.uk/events. Please follow ISTC Meets on our Eventbrite page to be notified of upcoming events.

ISTC Meets

Each month, we have a speaker offering a presentation on a topic related to technical communication, along with a chance to ask questions and join in a discussion about the topic – all in just one hour!

If you'd like to be added to our mailing list for these events, contact istc@istc.org.uk

ISTC Podcasts

The monthly podcast launched at the end of 2020 continued throughout last year. Each podcast is about half an hour of chat with technical communicators covering experiences working as a communications professional. The last podcast of last year featured a review of the year's podcasts (Ref 5) : 2021 Review Special (December)



If you would like to participate, please contact the office (istc@istc.org.uk).

Finally

We are always keen to hear your opinions on how we are doing and with your ideas for improvement and as always, we have opportunities for volunteers for projects great and small.

Please contact the office if you would like to get involved (at istc@istc.org.uk).

We always welcome suggestions from ISTC members and all readers of *Communicator*. Please contact me (president@istc.org.uk) or the ISTC office (istc@istc.org.uk). ■

Linda Robins FISTC

president@istc.org.uk

References

Reference 1: 'A World without email' Cal Newport: ISBN 978-0-241-34141-4 (2021) <https://www.calnewport.com/books/a-world-without-email/>

Reference 2: 'How to enjoy your life and your job': Dale Carnegie: ISBN 978-83-8252-990-8 (2018) <https://www.amazon.co.uk/How-Enjoy-Your-Life-Job/dp/0749305932>

Reference 3: Robins, L. (2021) 'Presentation of the UKTC Awards 2021' (Winter 2021: 14-16)

Reference 4: Dowding, N. (2022) 'Breaking into Technical Writing' (Spring 2022)

Reference 5: ISTC Podcast. <https://istctechcomm.podbean.com/>