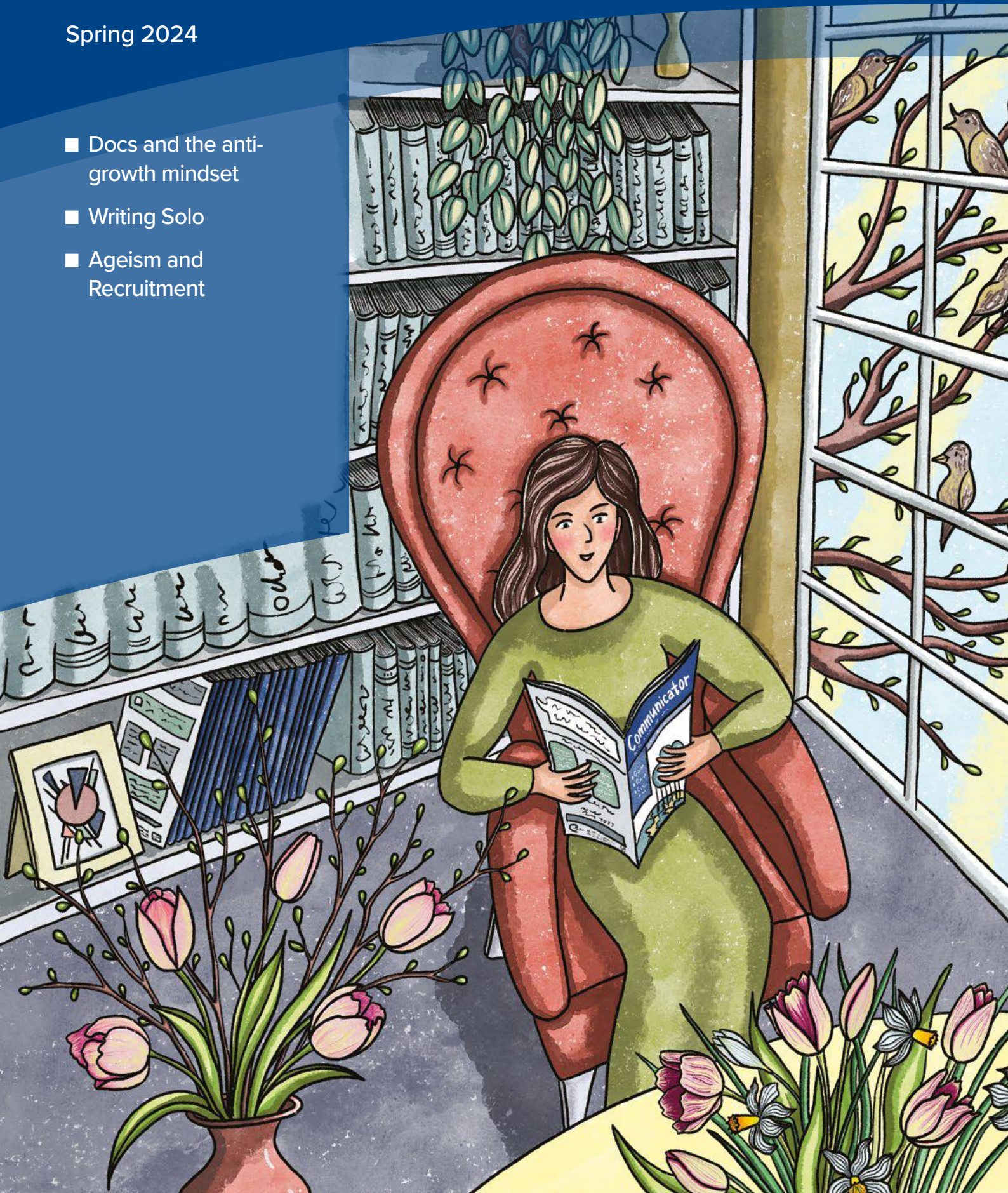


Communicator

The Institute of Scientific and Technical Communicators

Spring 2024

- Docs and the anti-growth mindset
- Writing Solo
- Ageism and Recruitment



President's View

Linda Robins shares the latest ISTC news.



We are looking ahead to another interesting and eventful year in the life of a technical communicator. There are certainly challenges, given the changes to working conditions post-pandemic. There were some adjustments during last year with the 'new normal' settling in for many as hybrid working. Employees made gains here with a greater flexibility in employment conditions.

The most prominent changes to work content, professional roles and career prospects were occasioned by developments in AI technology, particularly with the rise of generative AI. I have been tracking its spread into all aspects of life and the impact on different business sectors. Perhaps more prosaically, but most directly relevant are the prospective changes in professional life, with products, processes and working practices. To assess the impact on our respective careers, I returned to one of the presentations from the ASTC Conference I attended virtually in October last year.

Tony Self gave a very stimulating presentation, 'Artificial Intelligence as a Tool in Technical Communication'. He pointed out that the speed of development and take-up have outpaced ethical, legal and moral considerations. Tony's summary points are very pertinent and relevant just now:

- Ignoring AI isn't going to work.
- Elimination of drudgery.

- Make sure it's a new tool in our toolbox.
 - Offers huge efficiency and productivity improvements.
 - Be wise to legal, IP and ethical implications.
 - Keep up-to-date and be ready to supply advice to management.
- And his final observation presents a timely reminder of the importance to technical communicators: "*Content creation is our domain.*"

Working methods

I wrote about Oliver Burkeman's book, 'Four Thousand Weeks (Time Management for Mortals)' (Reference 1) in the Winter 2023 issue of *Communicator*. Burkeman takes as his start point that the average life only lasts four thousand weeks; that life is short; Burkeman is telling readers that there will never be time to do everything they want or feel they need to; accept this, then decide how to make best use of the time available. I have been selecting elements of this book to adopt or at least experiment with. The most obvious points are the 'top ten tips' the author concludes with. He commends adoption of these to "gain control of your time".

1. Adopt a 'fixed volume' approach to productivity.
2. Serialise, serialise, serialise (focus on one big project at a time).
3. Decide in advance what to 'fail' at.
4. Focus on what you have completed; not just what is left to complete.
5. Consolidate your caring.
6. Embrace boring and single purpose technology (choose devices with single purpose to attain focus).
7. Seek out novelty in the mundane (pay more attention to every moment).
8. Be a 'researcher' in relationships (choose to be curious about what might happen next).
9. Cultivate instantaneous generosity (act on impulse straight away).
10. Practise doing nothing (let things be as they are).

I believe each of these tips (and much of the book) merits further examination; there is positive guidance throughout the book on taking control and using your time to best effect.

ISTC News

Strategy for 2024

During TCUK23 in September, we had the opportunity to compare notes with other professionals and offer support and encouragement for our respective career developments. When the ISTC Council met soon afterwards to plan for 2024, supporting our members quickly became the focus of our discussions. It became clear that we want to strengthen this in all our activities.

Our tagline for 2024 is "The ISTC supports the community of Technical Communicators".

We already see the ISTC as being a community-focused organisation, all the volunteers that make the ISTC run are a part of the community we serve, our community, and this is already reflected in what we do.

To this end, 2024 will be about learning what you need, and learning how to keep updating that so we are always acting to support the community the best we can. Essentially, we are working on improving what we do already and will be concentrating on the following:

- Sharing expert knowledge:
 - ♦ Publishing the professional journal, *Communicator*
 - ♦ Building a library of recorded presentations from industry experts
 - ♦ Developing a new, online journal, in collaboration with professional bodies from other countries, expanding our connections around the globe
- Building connections between members:
 - ♦ Connect with presenters, sponsors and business affiliates to support mutual objectives.
 - ♦ Ask questions directly to experts at our monthly webinars, ISTC Meets.
 - ♦ Build our network of local Area Groups, meeting both in person and online.
 - ♦ Expand our mentoring scheme to include peer support, putting people directly in connection with others who are willing and able to share their expertise.
- Learning what you need:

- ♦ Reaching out via email, the InfoPlus newsletter, the discussion forums, social media, and in person to ask how we can help.
- ♦ Continuing to pay attention to what the community tells us works for them, and what doesn't.

TCUK Conferences

As recorded in the Winter 2023 issue of *Communicator*, TCUK23 in September was a great success. We had a positive and stimulating two days; sponsors, speakers, and delegates alike were enthusiastic and engaged at our first in-person conference since 2019. We have been collecting feedback from the event, from conversations, emails and the survey of delegates. Our plan is to make our next in-person conference even better for all.

The ISTC Council reviewed all aspects of conference; we concluded that for assured success we should allow a longer lead time to plan the next event. We plan to hold our next in-person conference next year (TCUK25). This will: help us enlist a strong team of volunteers; enable us to attract sponsors and preferred speakers, and select a suitable venue.

TCUK24

This year we return to an online conference for TCUK24 in September. TCUK24 will be similar in format to 2022, including the following:

- ISTC AGM (for members)
- UKTC Awards
- Speakers' presentations followed by Q&A sessions.

We are in the early stages of preparation for TCUK24. We will be letting you know details as plans take shape.

New online digital publications platform

As reported in the Winter issue of *Communicator*, the ISTC, Australian Society for Technical Communication (ASTC) and TechCommNZ have been working together to launch a new online digital publications platform. The platform will be available to our members and subscribers and will feature online articles on topics relevant to technical communication.

This new platform, once launched, will run independently of *Communicator*, and we have no plans

to discontinue *Communicator*. The new platform is a collaborative, inter-organisational initiative, which will provide an additional resource for you.

We are looking to launch the pilot platform soon. Thanks to all who took part in the survey to choose a name for the new publication. The clear winner in all three organisations was '*The International Journal of Technical Communication (IJTC)*'.

UKTC Awards

We are now taking entries for UK Technical Communication Awards 2024. 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.

Details for entry to the UKTC Awards can be found on the ISTC website UKTC Awards.

This year the Awards presentation ceremony will be held at TCUK24 online in September. See the Winter 2023 issue of *Communicator* for articles by last year's winners.

Closing date for submissions is 30 June 2024. Please contact the office (at istc@istc.org.uk) for details.

ISTC Mentoring scheme

The ISTC offers a voluntary mentoring scheme for Entry-level Members. The scheme matches up new/inexperienced members who are just starting out in the profession of scientific and technical communication with experienced technical communicators for advice and guidance. The goal of the scheme is to provide a framework for the professional development of ISTC Entry-level Members and gives them a considerable advantage over other new starters in the profession who may have nowhere to turn to for practical help. The scheme is designed to help Entry-level Members progress to the full Member grade.

Our volunteer mentors are all Fellows or Members of the ISTC who are keen to share their knowledge and experience with new entrants to the profession.

If you are an Entry-level Member of the ISTC and would like to take part in

the scheme, or if you are a Member (MISTC) or Fellow (FISTC) who would like to volunteer as a Mentor, please contact the Mentoring Scheme coordinator on mentoring@istc.org.uk,

Community

Local Area Groups continued to meet in various forms: in-person, online and as hybrid sessions. We are expanding these groups, and plan to establish Special Interest Groups. We are now making more use of social media to publicise activities and raise our profile.

Professional Development

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.' Also, we continue to assess courses for ISTC accreditation.

Each year, we invite all Members and Fellows to submit their CPD records on a voluntary basis, for review. Please send your CPD record by email to istc@istc.org.uk using the subject line "ISTC CPD record 2023". You may send a Microsoft Word or PDF document as an attachment or send a link to a web address.

For guidance on our CPD framework, check the website CPD information for members. The deadline was 31 January; but we welcome any records you would like to submit.

Resources

We continue to review and add to the members' only page with details of tools and resources; these 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.

The discussion forum and jobs board on the ISTC website provide valuable information for ISTC members. We plan to promote use of these facilities particularly this year. ■

References

1. 'The Design Manual': David Whitbread: W: Whitbread (third edition: 2023); ISBN 978-0-646-86312-2.
2. 'Four Thousand Weeks': Oliver Burkeman: Penguin Random House (2021); ISBN 978-1-70400-1.