



What is the Technical Communication Knowledge Portal?

The STC web-based knowledge portal will make accessible both broad and deep information about the practice of technical communication. It is intended to be the first step in defining a body of knowledge (BOK) for technical communication. The draft site map displayed at the 2008 Summit as “the wall” is a way of organizing the domains of knowledge, skills, and concepts necessary for the practice. The final version of the map will be the initial framework for the knowledge portal.

The concept of the knowledge portal and the draft site map were developed by the STC Body of Knowledge Task Force in spring 2008. The map is a **work in progress** that needs *your* comments and revisions.

Please “walk the wall” and help us build the framework for the knowledge portal.

Why do we need this portal?

In order to become a recognized profession, technical communication needs a definition of the skills, concepts, and fundamentals that make up what is called a body of knowledge. This body of knowledge would define the profession and offer the following advantages to technical communicators:

- A way to communicate the *value* of technical communication
- A self-assessment tool
- A means of evaluating TC programs
- For all audiences, the choice of either a quick or a more detailed definition of what it means to be a global technical communicator in the 21st century

A value proposition for technical communication

A value proposition situates a profession in the worlds of industry, government, academia, non-profits and describes the unique value that profession brings to the table.

Here is the value proposition developed by the BOK task force:

Technical communicators clarify the complex for organizations and their constituents and provide core organizational value by designing and enhancing communications and by reusing content in cost-effective ways.

The task force distilled that one-sentence proposition from their fuller definition of what technical communicators do:

Technical communicators clarify the complex for organizations and their constituents (customers, employees, citizens, or private individuals) as they discover, adopt, use, and discuss products, processes, and services.

Technical communicators develop, design, test, and implement instructional and informational tools needed to assure safe, easy, proper, and complete use of technical goods and services. They provide core organizational value by designing and enhancing internal communications and by reusing content in cost-effective ways.

This definition stands behind the site map intended to be the framework of the knowledge portal.

Articulating the value brought by technical communicators allows us to identify metrics for successful technical communication.

Metrics for the value of technical communication:

- Reduced costs to develop, produce, and maintain product information and products, by:
 - implementing mature information development processes
 - choosing and using appropriate tools and technologies for content development, translation/localization, deployment, and management
 - reusing content strategically
- Reduced product or information support costs by clearly communicating product setup, use, and maintenance instructions or public-interest information so that users and readers can be more self-reliant
- Improved operational efficiency by providing performance support systems and documentation that assure repeatable, high-quality employee and customer performance
- Accelerated user adoption and increased user satisfaction and loyalty by making it easier to use products and services effectively
- Reduced liability and risk through effective communication of safe and correct processes

About the Body of Knowledge Task Force

The STC Body of Knowledge (BOK) Task Force was formed in early 2008 at the direction of the Board, which appointed David Dayton and Hillary Hart to be co-chairs. The plan to form a BOK Task Force was one of the outcomes of the STC Academic-Industry Summit held in Houston on September 29, 2007.

Below are the 10 members of the BOK Task Force who collaborated online and through conference calls from February through mid-April. All except the first listed participated in a culminating meeting held in Herndon, Virginia, April 24-26, 2008.

Alex Blanton, Microsoft
Kelli Cargile Cook, Utah State University
Nancy W. Coppola, New Jersey Institute of Technology
Marjorie T. Davis, Mercer University
David D. Dayton, Towson University
Mark Hanigan, On the Write Track
Hillary Hart, University of Texas, Austin
Michael A. Hughes, IBM Internet Security Systems
Janice (Ginny) Redish, Redish & Associates, Inc.
Daphne R. Walmer, Medtronic, Inc.

BOK Task Force sessions

Members of the BOK Task Force will present and discuss the results of their deliberations in two sessions during the conference:

Monday, 2-3 pm: A Framework for Moving Forward. Room: 108B.

Tuesday, 1:30-2:30: Open Forum for Discussion and Feedback. Room: 113A

About the design personas for the TC Knowledge Portal

To guide its discussions leading to the creation and revision of a draft site map of the TC Knowledge Portal, the BOK Task Force created over a dozen personas to represent the most important audiences for the portal. The personas and scenarios on the following pages represent the four primary audience groups envisioned by the Task Force: practitioners, managers, students, and academics. The full set of personas, the original and revised site map, and the session materials from the conference will be published by the STC on its website later this summer. If you would like to be kept informed of the work of the BOK Task Force, please leave your business card at the "Walk the Wall" table or send an email to Lloyd Tucker, STC Director of Education: Lloyd@stc.org.