

STC Greater NY Metro, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Houston, and Rochester Regional TechComm Competition



Judge's Training
2017

Competition Contacts

- Chapter Presidents:
 - Tim Esposito – Philadelphia
 - Phoebe Forio – Atlanta
 - Scott McCoy – New York Metro
 - Kelly Schrank - Rochester
- Entries Co-Managers
 - Kamala Ragunath – Online Entries
 - Malu Schloss – Physical Entries

Competition Contacts

- Awards Manager – Bobbi Werner
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<https://www.stcnymetro.org/home/competitions/judges#TOC-Download-Resources-for-Judges>

Why Participate as a Judge?

- For professional growth
- To be familiar with professional standards
- To see what other companies are doing
- To evaluate entries for quality
- To build relationships with other technical communicators
- To build teamwork skills
- To give back to the professional community

My View of the Benefits of Judging for the STC Competition

- STC is dedicated to advancing the arts and sciences of technical communication. Local competitions foster these ideals.
- Acting as a judge in the competition fosters the spirit of sharing mutually beneficial knowledge and experience.
- It helps to elevate the quality of user information and to enhance the user experience throughout the Technical Communications industry.

My View of the Benefits of Judging (cont.)

- Judging offers you the opportunity to learn first-hand what user experiences other companies are offering their customers this year.
- Judging brings technical writing professionals (writers, editors, illustrators, and designers) together to evaluate materials that they would not otherwise experience.
- Every time I have joined in the judging process, I have learned from the experience and grown as a writer.

Why do Submitters Submit Entries?

- To receive professional-level feedback
- To test a format
- To prove a point
- To win an award
- To compete on the international level

Note: In the past, only entries that receive **Distinguished** or **Excellence** awards at the STC chapter-level (or regional-level) were eligible for the International STC Competition.

What is the competition process?

- Entries are evaluated by teams of 3 (sometimes 4) judges.
- Each judge completes an Entry Assessment form for each entry in their package.
- The lead judge for the team coordinates the assessment forms.
- The team prepares a summary form for each entry.
- On Consensus Day, teams meet (in person or virtually). **If (for any reason) you do not attend, you must provide your forms and award recommendations to the lead judge in advance.**
- The individual teams reach consensus on award levels for their entries.
- Distinguished award nominees are nominated by judging teams for “Best of Show” status.
- Finally, the Best of Show entry is selected.

Judging Responsibilities

- Check your entry package and confirm that you have all the entries assigned to your team.
NOTE: Contact your team leader if something is missing or if you feel that an entry is miscategorized.
- Judges are personally responsible for completing an Entry Assessment form for each entry their team is judging.
NOTE: This can take about 6 hours for each entry.
- Forms **must be** completed before Consensus Day (**January 20, 2018**).
- The lead judge coordinates a pre-Consensus Day meeting to see where everyone is in the process and to help the team as a whole. Try your best to attend this meeting with your Team.
- Entries and forms must be brought to Consensus Day.

Judging Responsibilities (cont.)

- The lead judge reviews all Entry Assessment forms for completeness.
- The lead judge records all award levels and submits nominations for Best of Show.
- The lead judge prepares the Summary forms.
- The lead judge returns all entries and Entry Assessment forms to the Competition Judging Managers.

Your Duties and Responsibilities

- When you receive your package, review the contents to ensure that you have all the entries assigned to you.
- Contact your lead judge or fellow judges with any questions.
- Attend the pre-Consensus meeting with your Team.
- Complete the Entry Assessment form for each entry before Consensus Day.
- Bring your completed forms and the physical entries to Consensus Day.

Your Duties and Responsibilities (cont.)

- Be prepared to make changes to your Entry Assessment forms during Consensus (sometimes, you change your mind about an entry after you discuss it with other judges).
Suggestion: Bring your computer and a thumb drive with the forms.
- Form an initial opinion about whether or not an entry should receive an award and be prepared to discuss the level of the award you feel that the entry should receive.
- Discuss. Discuss. Discuss

Lead Judge Responsibilities

- If your team has a large entry, determine what sections the team should focus on. For example, if you have a 300-page user guide, everyone should read the overview section and then assign another area or 2 as a focus for the team's evaluation.
NOTE: No one expects you to read all 300 pages.
- Use the additional comment sections and the summary section of the Entry Assessment forms as the basis for your summary evaluation form for each of the entries.
- Make sure that every Entry Assessment form is checked for completeness and that the tone of the comments is appropriate.
- Prepare the team's nominations for Best of Show entries.

General Guidelines

- Use the criteria questions as guidelines to consider as you evaluate entries.
- Use prompts in the form as a starting point for your review.
- Use your own knowledge of technical communications to augment the criteria.
- Note that some criteria may not be applicable to all entries (for example, training material questions don't apply to user guides or promotional materials).

Recommendations for Comments

- Write *useful* comments for all entries (even those that will not win an award).
- Comments are both important and required.
- Try to include 3 compliments and 3 suggestions for improvement for all entries.

Recommendations (cont.)

- List the high points first. 😊
- Use specific examples.
- Keep comments to the point.
- Don't lecture. 😞
- Give concrete suggestions for improvement.
- Phrase feedback in a positive way. + 👍
- Evaluate the work, not the subject matter.
- Don't be preoccupied with finding small flaws.

Recommendations (cont.)

- Don't try to be humorous as some people may take offense. They cannot see your face or appreciate your personality when they read your comments.
- Try not to be influenced by your own company's style guide or standards for design.
- Try not to be influenced by your personal preferences.
- Check **your own comments** for spelling and grammar. Word has a Spelling/Grammar Check feature built into the program.

Production Values

- Consider that some contributors will not have control over the entire process.
- Some pieces are produced on a limited budget.
- Consider how effectively available resources were used.
- Consider how well the entry communicates the message to its intended audience.

Examples of Comments

“People can come to an index with many different words in mind for the same action or concept, so try to anticipate what those words might be and include them.”

This comment suggests a way to improve the index without criticizing the author’s approach.

Examples (cont.)

“The more you use **highlighting**, the less effective it becomes, so you might want to reconsider your choice of highlighting all notes and tips.”

Examples (cont.)

“One man in 8 has difficulty distinguishing between **red** and **green**, so you should use another way to indicate the right way and the wrong way to do something.”

Here you could offer a suggestion like,
“Consider using an icon for this purpose.”

Major vs. Minor Flaws

Major

- Illogical organization
- Incomplete or missing content
- Consistently unclear style
- Procedural steps buried in text
- Inconsistent pattern of spelling
- Grammatical errors
- Consistently confusing terminology
- Unresolved links

Minor

- Issues that might cause minor confusion, but don't slow the user down too much
- A few instances of spelling or grammatical errors
- A misplaced graphic
- Inconsistent capitalization
- Some confusing terminology

Awards

- There is no limit to the number of awards you can give at any level (except Best of Show).
- Be objective, impartial, and helpful.
- Constructive feedback is valuable even if the work is below-average.
- Look for effectiveness, appropriateness, and professionalism.

Distinguished Technical Communication Award - Features

- Clearly superior in all areas.
- Contains no major flaws and few (if any) minor ones.
- Applies the principles of technical communication in an outstanding way.
- Anticipates and fulfills the needs of its audience.

Excellence Award – Features

- Consistently meets high standards in all areas.
- Might contain a single major flaw or a few minor ones.
- Clearly demonstrates an exceptional understanding of technical communication principles.

Merit Award – Features

- Consistently meets high standards in most areas.
- Might contain a small number of major flaws or minor ones.
- Applies technical communication principles in a highly-proficient manner.

Feedback for All

- Even if an entry is Distinguished, it should receive feedback in the form of written comments.
- If the entry is of a high quality, your comments should highlight those things that set it apart in a good way.
- Comment on the entry as to why it received a particular award and provide positive reinforcement for good work.

How to Mark Entries

- Do not write on any physical entry.
- If you want to note comments for specific pages, use sticky notes as placeholders.
- Return the physical entries as they were given to you. Remove even the sticky notes when you have finished judging.

Confidentiality

- You can show other technical communicators the entries you are judging. Take them to work and show your friends.
- Treat all information regarding awards to be given (or not given) as confidential until after the judging committee has sent out the notification letters.
- The official notification process usually takes about a month.

Thank you for volunteering

- Everyone associated with the TechComm Competition appreciates your time and energy.
- Your insights are most valuable to the submitters. From experience, we know that they read them carefully.
- We appreciate your professionalism in stepping up to serve in this way.
- Your participation provides a source of revenue for our chapters.