



# STC Alliance Competition

Judging Training 2021

Carolyn Reynolds, (Trainer)

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# Competition Council



**Bobbi Werner**  
Awards Mgr. & Co-Manager



**Carolyn Klinger**  
Judging Mgr. & Co-Manager



**Malu Schloss**  
Entries Mgr. & Co-Manager



**Mike Reynolds**  
New England



**Steve Jong**  
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**Phoebe Forio**  
Lead Trainer, Assessments  
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# Competition Contacts

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## Co-Managers:

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- Carolyn Klinger - [Judging Manager](#)
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<http://www.stcnymetro.org/home/competitions/judges>

- Access to blank Assessment Forms, Training Materials, videos and examples



# 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 (and regional) 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 these experiences and have grown as a writer.

# Why do Submitters Submit Entries?

- To receive professional-level feedback (some entrants are the sole writer for their entity)
- To test a format
- To prove a point
- To win an award

**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 or online listing.
- The lead judge for the team coordinates the judging worksheets and assessment forms.
- The team assists the lead judge in preparing a summary form for each entry.
- On Consensus Day, teams meet (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. This includes the designation “No Award.”
- 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 (or have pointers to 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 4 - 6 hours for each entry.
- Forms **must be** completed **before** Consensus Day (**April 17, 2021**). Earlier if you are not attending the event.
- 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 available on 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 the Best of Show.
- The lead judge prepares the Summary forms for each entry.
- The lead judge returns all entries and Entry Assessment forms to the Competition Judging and Entries Managers. See [Slide 3](#) of this presentation.

# 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 Judge Worksheet for each entry before the team meeting. **(NOTE: This is a new form this year.)**
- Complete the Entry Assessment form for each entry before Consensus Day.
- Have your completed assessment forms and any physical entries with you on 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:** Have your computer and a thumb drive with the forms available.

- 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 and your team to read all 300 pages.
- **Use the correct forms. The forms were updated this year.**
- 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 the Best of Show selection.

# 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 sections 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.
- If an entry is problematic, do not rewrite the project for them. Just make reasonable suggestions for improvements.

## Recommendations (cont.)

- List the most important 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 development 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.”

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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.”

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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 for the 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.

# Award Designations

- *Best of Show*
- *Distinguished Technical Communications*
- *Excellence*
- *Merit*



## Best of Show

- Only one entry can be designated as “Best of Show.”
- This entry is selected by the judging teams present on Consensus Day from those entries that have been categorized as “Distinguished Technical Communications.”
- It is the best of the best for this year.

## 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 Make Notes for Entries

- Do not write on any physical entry.
- If you want to note comments for specific pages to use in your comments section of the assessment form, use sticky notes as placeholders.
- Return the physical entries as they were given to you. Remove even the sticky notes from the entry that were applied during judging when you have finished.

# Confidentiality

- 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 STC Alliance 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 important way.
- Your participation provides a source of revenue for our chapters.