Communication for the Real World
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I can remember the first time I heard about hypertext. It was 1995 and I was taking an advanced first-year English course at UBC. The texts and lectures were mostly incomprehensible – we studied Derrida, Foucault, Barthes, structuralism, post-structuralism, deconstructionism – but I was lucky enough to have a TA who explained these theories in real-world terms. During his tutorial session on Roland Barthes' "Death of the Author", the TA explained a project he was involved with to turn text into hypertext. He explained how hypertext could link different texts and its potential to free readers to read texts any way they want.

It was a novel concept at the time. Now, hypertext is a big part of my learning and writing life. For example, I write a blog (a small personal blog, to be sure) and two kinds of hyperlinks make up the currency of blogging: other people's blogs linking back to mine and the comment link, which states how many comments the post has generated. Hyperlinks to other sites function as references for my blog's content. Writing with hypertext forces me to think beyond myself in the text and organize it to respond to the audience.

My career goal is to be an editor, and I foresee a lot of my work to be writing and editing for the web. Blogging has taught me a lot about writing for the web and capturing a diverse, elusive, and most of all impatient audience. The key to webwriting seems to be researching the audience and organizing the text to suit it. Editors and technical communicators share a common concern with the readers needs, and I am ideally suited to make the transition from print-based publications to those delivered via the Web.

Technical communication, including instructions, reports, manuals, memos, and proposals, is reader-centred. Good technical writing is also persuasive; it convinces someone to do something. Before I learned about rhetoric, I thought reports and instructions were a waste of paper (i.e. not

expressive or literary) and that persuasion was the lot of sneaky salesman. Studying technical communication in Print Futures taught me that those everyday documents deserved care and attention from the writer. For example, anticipating a reader's questions and thinking about what is important to them makes for a much more persuasive proposal. I also learned how design can influence a reader, and to consider how an introduction, the ordering of steps, and illustrations could enhance a set of instructions.

I've now worked on many documents that communicate complex ideas to readers such as:

- A research report on fundraising for a small non-profit society
- Manuals on Word and PowerPoint aimed at beginning users
- Instructions for operating the terrain parks for Mount Seymour employees
- How-to books with CD-ROMs for people who want to start their own businesses

In the last instance, I worked on trade books as an editorial assistant at Self-Counsel Press. Although I did work with text for print, much of the work involved creating interactive content such as lists of Web resources and customizable worksheets for the CD-ROMs. It stretched my skills as an editor and as a content creator. I created many files with Word, Excel, and Acrobat, but the goal was not to make fancy documents to impress the reader; the goal was to pare them down and make them the most usable and error-free files possible.

Technology has changed a lot about communication in the past few years, especially the medium and the expectations of readers. As an editor working with technology, my main focus still must be the readers. My goal is to make the text and the technology disappear, leaving behind the information they need.

Thank you for considering this application for the Julia Broderick Scholarship Award. The Society for Technical Communication will be an important source of professional support and development in the years to come.