



# Jumpstarting Your Tech Comm Career



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# About the Speaker

## Jack Molisani

- President, *ProSpring* and *LavaCon*
- Previous Manager of Training and Documentation for a Software Company
- Past President, Los Angeles STC
- Chair, Year 2000 Pan-Pacific Conference

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## **In This Session**

- **Career Strategies**
- **10 Common Mistakes When Looking for Work**
- **Questions and Answers**

# Breaking into Tech Writing

- **How do you get experience when it takes experience to get experience?**
  - Take an “Introduction To Tech Writing” Class
  - Learn Your Authoring Tools
    - FrameMaker
    - Doc-To-Help ([www.componentone.com](http://www.componentone.com))
    - RoboHELP ([www.adobe.com](http://www.adobe.com))

# Breaking into Tech Writing (cont)

- Create your own samples.
- Then find independent contractors and help them with *their* projects.
- Even offer to work for free — *anything* that will help you get “real” samples for your portfolio.

# Breaking into Tech Writing (cont)

- **Continue Taking Classes**

- Do you really need a certificate (degree)? In what?
- Do learn the techniques of technical writing...
- ...but also learn about the technology you will be documenting
  - Programming
  - Networking
  - Databases

# Breaking into Tech Writing (cont)

- **Create a Killer Portfolio**
  - Use a “real” artist’s portfolio (not a notebook)
  - Start with a documentation plan or project plan
  - Include before-and-after examples
  - Include sample pages/screens from many projects
  - Tailor your portfolio to the job for which you are interviewing

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## Breaking into Tech Writing (cont)

- **Next, network at STC meetings**
  - Meet writers and hiring managers
  - They will know of entry-level positions
  - Getting a personal referral is the easiest way to get a job
  - Volunteer — you'll meet even more people *and* gain valuable experience!



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## 10 Common Mistakes

- Presented in order of chronology, not severity.
- The less applicable experience you have, the fewer mistakes you can get away with.

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## **1. Not Building Personal Relationships**

- **Develop a personal relationship with your recruiter (or other writers).**
- **You want someone who will sing your praises to the next person in the hiring process.**
- **...Especially if you are not an exact match or have some other special situation.**

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## 1. Not Building Personal Relationships (cont.)

- **Plus, when a cool (or entry level job) comes in, who do you think they will call first?**

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## 2. Not Following Submission Directions

- **Read the directions!**
- **First Impressions Last**
- **Email, Fax or Snail Mail?**
- **Formatted or ASCII Resume?**

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### 3. Bad Manners

- **It's poor form to mail your resume to 45 recruiters in one email...**
- **...especially when you display them all in the To: field!**
- **Keep a log of where your resume has been sent.**
- **Insulting the Recruiter (I'm not kidding—it happens!)**

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#### 4. Applying when you are not even *remotely* qualified.

- Don't apply without considering the requirements.
- Do apply for jobs that are a bit of a stretch, but at least be in the ballpark!
- Don't do "shotgun" applications.
- Pay attention to the "must have" vs. "nice to have" requirements.

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## 5. Not Summarizing Skills vs. Requirements

- Remember, recruiters get 10's if not 100's of resumes a day.
- Not all recruiters have the time to read your resume from top to bottom—they just skim for keywords and needed skills.

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## 5. Not Summarizing Skills vs. Requirements (cont.)

- If you are qualified, the recruiter will write a summary of how your skills match the job requirements before passing it on.
- However, they are not professional technical writers. Do you *really* want them to decide if you are a good enough match to pass on?



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## 5. Not Summarizing Skills vs. Requirements (cont.)

- **Be pro-active: send a matrix of the job requirements vs. your skills so they don't have to do it for you.**
- **If you don't have one of the needed skills, this is where you say, "I don't have XYZ, but I *do* have ABC, which is very similar."**

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## 5. Not Summarizing Skills vs. Requirements (cont.)

- **Suddenly, you are the recruiter's best friend:**
  - They didn't have to search for the information.
  - You typed the summary for them.
  - You pointed out the important stuff they may have missed.
  - All they had to do is verify the information and pass it on.

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## 6. Misnaming Your Resume

- Remember, recruiters get 10's if not 100's of resumes a day.
- Put yourself in the recruiter's shoes.
- Would *you* want to receive 100 resumes a day named "resume.doc"?
- Name your resume so it can be found easily: for example, "Joe\_Jones.doc"

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## 7. Poorly Written or Formatted Resume

- **Your resume is the first sample of your writing skill.**
- **Programmers can get away with bad writing and formatting, but technical writers cannot!**
- **Documentation managers judge candidates based on their resumes...**

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## 7. Poorly Written or Formatted Resume (cont.)

- **...and will disqualify you if you don't apply the same standards to your resume that you do your documentation.**
- **Pay attention to:**
  - Headers, Indentation and White Space
  - Poor Use of Authoring Tool
  - Misspellings (including the name of STC!)

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## 8. Mis-evaluation of What's Important

- **Highlight Strengths**
- **Minimize Weaknesses**
- **For example, put the most applicable information, experience or skills near the top of your resume.**
- **Put less- on non-applicable experience near the bottom.**

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## 9. Not Anticipating and Answering Questions

- **Recruiters will wonder about oddities in your resume, so go ahead and explain them.**
- **Examples:**
  - Gaps in Your Work History
  - Your Citizenship or Work Visa Status
  - Moving from Contract to Perm
  - Moving from Perm to Contract (to a lesser degree)
  - Need Relocation Assistance if Out-of-state?

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## **10. Not Keeping Your Skills Current**

- **Not Knowing Latest Authoring Tools**
- **If you really can “learn the tool in a weekend”, how come you haven’t done so already?**
- **Between chapter meetings, chapter mentor programs, and regional/international conferences, there is no reason not to stay current.**



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## Summary

0. **Get experience and a killer portfolio.**
1. **Follow submission directions.**
2. **Build personal relationships.**
3. **Use good manners and “netiquette”.**
4. **Apply for jobs for which you are qualified.**
5. **Submit a summary of how your skills match the job requirements when you submit your resume.**

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## Summary (Cont.)

6. Name your electronic resume so it can be identified.
7. Apply the usability factors to your resume like you do for manuals.
8. Highlight your strength, minimize your weaknesses.
9. Anticipate and answer questions.

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## Summary (Cont.)

**10. Keep your skills current.**

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## Questions and Answers

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