

Southwest Chapter News



May 2003

2002–2003

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May Meeting Fourth Annual Career Roundtables Meeting

Wednesday, May 14, 2003, 6–8 pm
Houston, Texas

The Fourth Annual Career Roundtables Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 14, 2003, in the private banquet room of Baba Yega restaurant, an antique-filled bungalow located in Houston's historic Montrose district. This popular event provides an interactive, relaxed forum for discussing important aspects of biomedical communication. Each roundtable discussion will start with a brief presentation by an expert in an area of biomedical communication; lively discourse among all participants will follow. This event is an excellent introductory meeting for individuals who might be interested in joining AMWA, so please consider bringing a guest.

Participants may choose 1 of the following 4 roundtable discussion topics. Please make your reservations early to ensure your first choice.

1. Principles of Layout and Design, with Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS. This roundtable will focus on the basics of layout and design for editors and writers who occasionally must review the work of designers or who must do simple layout of newsletters, brochures, and slides. Discussion will focus on how to incorporate graphic elements into design and how to effectively use fonts, margins, and white space. Mr. Gegeny is currently Interim Director and Editor at The Center for AIDS: Hope and Remembrance Project (CFA) in Houston. He has extensive experience in design and layout, both in print and electronic media. His portfolio includes posters, newsletters, brochures, programs, and logos. He has taught numerous classes for AMWA as well as the Houston Academy of Medicine–Texas Medical Center Library, including PowerPoint Presentations, Biomedical Desktop Publishing, and Biomedical Writers Workshops I and II.

2. Get Them the Money: Editing Grant Proposals, with Maureen E. Goode, PhD, ELS. Editing grant proposals is one of the most important things editors can do to help their clients succeed in today's competitive research climate.

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However, many editors are not familiar with grant proposals, and most grant agencies ask for clear, persuasive proposals without telling authors how to write them. Back by popular demand, this roundtable will include discussion of the parts of a typical grant proposal's research plan (the part that describes the proposed study), some common mistakes novice grant writers make, how to "sell" the study, and what reviewers look for. Dr. Goode is Education Coordinator for Scientific Publications and a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at The University of Texas M. D. Anderson Cancer Center. She has edited grant proposals for 12 years and has given talks and workshops on grant writing at the National Cancer Institute and M. D. Anderson Cancer Center.

3. Medical Writing Meets Drug Development, with Dalal Murgai. The drug development process is highly regulated by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to ensure the safety and efficacy of drugs that enter the market. This regulation requires the submission of lengthy documents to the FDA that detail all aspects of the development of an investigational new drug or biologic. This discussion will outline the role of medical writers in regulatory document preparation, the types of documents that need to be written, and the challenges of writing for industrial clients and the FDA. Ms. Murgai is currently the President and Principal Consultant of Regulatory Outsource Consulting, Inc. She has more than 13 years of experience in the biotechnology/biomedical research industry, and currently serves on the Steering Committee of the Houston Biomedical Technology Club and on the Industry Advisory Committee for the Texas A&M University Professional Program in Biotechnology.

4. Working with Authors Who Are Nonnative Speakers of English, with Gayle Nesom. Editing for authors who are nonnative speakers of English can be challenging not only because of language barriers but also because of the variety of technical writing styles among cultures. This roundtable will provide insight into these differences and discuss considerations for working with clients whose native language is not English. Ms. Nesom is currently a scientific editor in the Department of Scientific Publications at M. D. Anderson. She is helping develop the department's program for international scientists on writing and publishing scientific articles. Before pursuing a career in editing, she taught English as a second language for 12 years in Louisiana, Texas, and the Middle East.

We will also conduct our annual chapter business meeting at this gathering, including voting on the new chapter officers. If you are unable to attend, please complete the absentee ballot printed on page 4 and mail it by Friday, May 9, to Thomas Gegeny, 1205 Banks Street, #1, Houston, TX 77006.

We will gather at 6 pm at Baba Yega for socializing, with dinner and the business meeting beginning at 6:30 pm. The price is \$26 for AMWA members and \$28 for guests and nonmembers. Dinner will start with a Caesar salad and precede with your choice of either chicken breast topped with a marsala wine and mushroom cream sauce accompanied by mashed potatoes and julienne-style vegetables, or penne pasta with fresh pomodoro sauce, portabella mushrooms, asparagus, broccoli, julienne zucchini, yellow squash, and carrots. Dessert will consist of a white layered cake with fresh strawberries and whipped cream frosting, served with a choice of tea or coffee. Soft drinks will be provided, and a cash bar will be available before the dinner begins.

Directions to Baba Yega

Baba Yega is located at 2607 Grant Street (2 blocks east of Montrose Boulevard and between Westheimer and Fairview). ♦ From the Museum District, travel north on Montrose and pass Westheimer. The second street after Westheimer is Missouri Street; turn right and go 2 blocks. The restaurant is at the intersection of Missouri and Grant. ♦ From I-10 (the Heights area), travel south on Montrose and pass Fairview. The second street after Fairview is Missouri Street; turn left and go 2 blocks. The restaurant is located at the intersection of Missouri and Grant. ♦ For more detailed directions, please call the restaurant at 713.522.0042.

Southwest Chapter Lecturer Carol Ann Wilson Advocates Using Plain Language

Clear and effective communication requires not only being heard but also being understood. On March 13, 2003, the Southwest Chapter of the American Medical Writers Association welcomed guest lecturer Carol Ann Wilson, coordinator of the Plain Language Association International (PLAIN), to The University of Texas School of Public Health in the Texas Medical Center in Houston. Ms. Wilson's talk, "The Economics of Plain Language," stressed the value of using plain language to communicate both effectively and efficiently. She used numerous real-world examples to demonstrate how plain language not only ensures strong communication but also saves money by streamlining procedures and paperwork, reducing confusion and complaints, and increasing sales.

Ms. Wilson stressed 7 key principles of plain language:

1. Write for your reader
2. Use active instead of passive voice
3. Use strong verbs (and avoid turning verbs into nouns)
4. Organize your thinking to organize your document
5. Omit unnecessary, useless, and weak words
6. Emphasize the positive (eliminate the negative)
7. Use good document design (include white space)

Although these rules are not hard and fast for every instance in every document, a piece of writing composed with these principles in mind will be more effective.

Quoting Churchill—"I apologize for the long letter, but I didn't have time to write a short one"—Ms. Wilson acknowledged that writing in plain language is not necessarily easier on the writer but is easier on (and indeed essential for) the reader. To write in plain language, one must first write and then go back and rewrite to find hidden verbs and passive constructions, to

shorten sentences, to write in the "positive," and to ensure clear, concise, and parallel sentence structure. Overall, the writer should make sure that the reader is driving the writing.

A voluntary association of plain language advocates, PLAIN was founded in 1993 to promote the interests of plain language professionals, promote standards and practices of the plain language profession, promote research and development in plain language, and provide marketing and networking services for members of the organization. According to PLAIN, plain language "saves time, money, and lives. Whether you are . . . writing a procedure, running a business, publishing a newsletter, managing a department, or training workers, you need plain language." To find out more about PLAIN and to learn more tips on how to write in plain language, visit the PLAIN website at <http://www.plainlanguagenetwork.org/>.

Ms. Wilson is actively involved in advocating the use of plain language in every area of communication, and her lecture was appreciated by about 40 attendees. A professional legal secretary since 1981, Ms. Wilson is currently a corporate secretary for ITIS Holdings Inc. (formerly Internet Law Library, Inc.) in Houston. She has authored several articles on various aspects of writing and written two books, entitled *Guide to Research on the Internet* and *Plain Language Pleadings*. Ms. Wilson also teaches courses on writing and serves on the State Bar of Texas Plain Language Committee. Several copies of *Plain Language Pleadings* and other informative books, all of which were kindly donated by Ms. Wilson, were given to lucky attendees as door prizes before the lecture. The lecture was also preceded by a delicious dinner of fajitas with all the trimmings that was catered by Pico's Mex-Mex Restaurant in Houston.

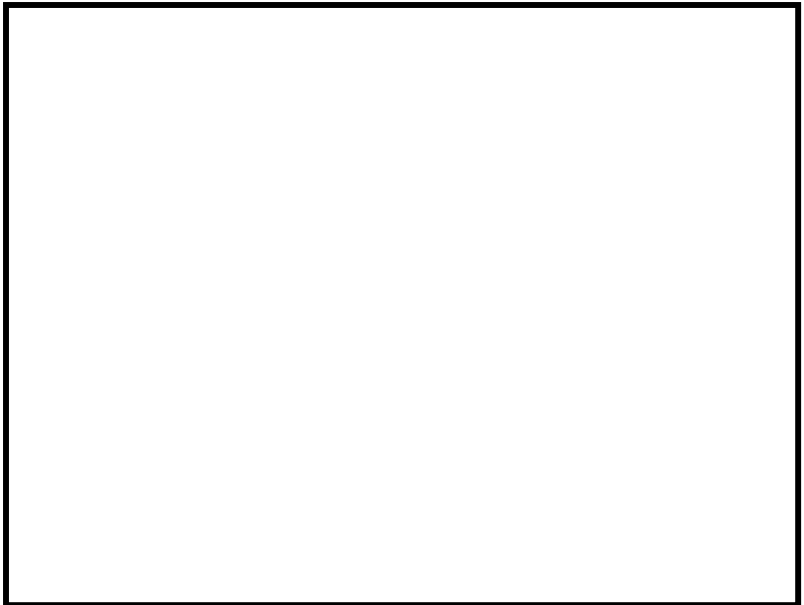
Spring National Board of Directors & Chapter Delegates Meetings

On March 28 and 29, 2003, members of the Southwest Chapter attended the Board of Directors and Chapter Delegates Meetings in Alexandria, Virginia. AMWA President Mariann Mallia, ELS, led the proceedings. Other chapter members who attended the Board of Directors Meeting as members of the national board were AMWA Treasurer Jane Krauhs, PhD, ELS, and Administrator of Publications Thomas Gegeny, MS, ELS. Attendees discussed AMWA's national initiatives, reviewed the activities of the past year, and previewed programs that will be included in the 63rd Annual Conference, "Enriching Biomedical Communications," to be held in Miami (September 18-20, 2003). Southwest Chapter Program Chair Kate Ó Súilleabháin served as the chapter's representative at the Delegates Meeting.

AMWA Southwest Chapter News

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Ballot

Officer Candidates for 2003–2004

- President ♦ Kate Ó Súilleabháin
- Program Chair ♦ Elisabeth Wann, PhD
- Assistant Program Chair ♦ Natasha Calder
- Treasurer ♦ Christine Wogan, ELS
- Secretary ♦ Penny Logan
- Newsletter Editor ♦ Dawn Chalaire
- Director-at-Large ♦ Susan Madigan, RN
- Director-at-Large ♦ Chrissy Chambers

If you will not be attending the May 14 Roundtables Meeting, please mail this ballot by Friday, May 9, to Thomas Gegeny, 1205 Banks Street, #1, Houston, TX 77006.

Registration Form Roundtables Meeting Wednesday, May 14, 2003

Registrant(s)

Name(s): _____
Daytime phone: _____

Roundtable (Mark your first choice with “1” and your second choice with “2”):

Principles of Layout _____
Grant Writing _____
Drug Development _____
Nonnative Speakers of English _____

Entrée (check one):

Chicken marsala _____ Vegetarian pasta _____

_____ AMWA members x \$26 = \$ _____

_____ nonmembers x \$28 = \$ _____

Please RSVP by Friday, May 9. Mail this form with your check (payable to AMWA Southwest) to Elisabeth Wann, 3502 Burlington Street, #13, Houston, TX 77006.