

# CERTIFICATION AND YOU



Steven Jong



STC Summit | May 2011

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# ACTIVITIES, 2010–2011

- STC Board approved certification: April 2010
- KSAs drafted: October 2010
- Assessments drafted: November 2010
- Process pilot begun: March 2011
- STC Certification Commission established: April 2011
- **Open for business: May 2011**

**KSA Workshop, Fairfax, VA, October 2011**



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At two intensive, face-to-face workshops last fall, participants worked to establish the what we would certify on and how we would do it.

Participants at the first KSA workshop at STC's offices in October 2010 are shown. Standing L to R: Rob Hanna, Steve Murphy, Liz Pohland, Mike Hughes, Jenna Moore, Steve Jong, Buck Chaffee, Dan Wise. Seated L to R: Karen Baranich, Charles Fisher. Not shown: Kathryn Burton, Lloyd Tucker

# STC CERTIFICATION COMMISSION

- ✓ Incorporated, in Virginia, as a 501(c)(6) organization independent of STC
- ✓ Responsible for establishing certification policies and overseeing day-to-day operations
- ✓ Separate bylaws, policies, procedures, finances
- ✓ One “member”—STC—and two crossover STC commissioners

## **Initial commissioners:**

- Steven Jong (Chair)
- Rob Hanna (Vice Chair)
- Stephen Murphy (Secretary)
- Charles Fisher (Treasurer)
- Saul Carliner
- Karen Baranich (STC Board)
- Kathryn Burton (STC CEO)



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The Commission administers the evaluation process and serves as the board of appeals. It is independent of STC.

# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Certification is voluntary
- Certification focuses on uniform areas of practice where technical communicators provide unique value
- Applicants must meet prerequisites to be eligible for certification
- Applicants must demonstrate knowledge, skills, and experience
- Assessment involves a variety of methods
- A core certification provides the basis for certification growth
- Applicants must agree to adhere to the STC Code of Ethics
- Opportunities are provided to applicants for remediation
- Once granted, certification must be maintained



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The CTF identified, and in April 2010 the Board of Directors approved, the following set of guiding principles for creating an STC certification process. They are common and ordinary, but each has consequences that shape the certification program. For example:

1. Being certified will not be a requirement for STC membership, and STC membership will not be a requirement for certification. Adherence to this principle will avoid potential anti-trust issues, and is necessary for an STC certification program to be accredited.
2. By focusing on uniform areas of practice, certification will appeal to the widest possible range of practitioners, and provide the greatest return on investment. By focusing on areas where technical communicators provide unique value, we set STC certification apart from other certification programs and maximize certification's value to employers.
3. To establish minimum standards, an applicant must meet a defined set of requirements before applying for certification. This is not an entry-level certification, and there is no grandfathering.
4. These areas are all necessary to a successful practitioner, so certification will assess all of these areas. An applicant without some combination of knowledge, skills, and experience cannot be certified.
5. Using a variety of methods, tools, and approaches will provide accurate evaluations and assessments. This avoids the uncertainties inherent in any single method of assessment.
6. Because technical communicators can specialize in a number of sub-disciplines, STC certification will have a common certification as well as specialized sub-certifications, which can be developed in the future.
7. Adherence to a code of ethics, which protects employers, clients, and customers, is a core element of any profession. While it is impractical to add this as a requirement for membership, it can be made a requirement for certification.
8. If an applicant is denied certification, there must be a policy for reexamination and a mechanism for appeal to an impartial body (the Certification Commission).
9. Certification is granted for a limited period of time. To maintain certification, the recipient must participate in approved continuing-education activities. This demonstrates an ongoing commitment to excellence and encourages recipients to stay up to date with tools, technologies, and best practices.

# CERTIFY WHY? *DRIVERS*

- Legitimize the contributions of, and respect for, our profession
- Establish uniform worldwide performance standards
- Increase the **employability** and **salary** of certified practitioners
- Satisfy employers' expectations
- Reduce **hiring risk** for employers
- Generate **non-dues revenue** for the Society



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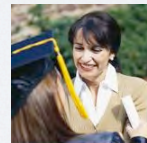
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The reasons why an organization would want certification are called drivers. The following drivers were identified, validated, and accepted by the STC Board in 2009.

Everyone—practitioners, employers, and the Society—stands to gain from certification, including financially.

# CERTIFY WHO? YOU!

- All practitioners are eligible; STC membership is not required
- Prerequisites: a combination of education and experience, on a sliding scale
  - 3 years of experience plus a BS in a specified field (such as Technical Communication)
  - 4 years of experience plus a BS in a related field (such as English)
  - 5 years of experience plus a high-school diploma or equivalent
- Academic experience counts



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The target audience is mid-career professionals. We are targeting practitioners, not just STC members, which chains back to the principle that certification is voluntary. (It also increases the target market by a factor of 10.)

The prerequisites chain back to the principle that applicants must meet prerequisites to be eligible for certification.

Sliding scale:

Bachelor's degree in specified field (such as Technical Communication, Information Design, or Science Journalism) plus three years of experience

Bachelor's degree in related field (such as English, Computer Science, or Journalism) plus four years of experience

High-school diploma plus five years of experience

# CERTIFY HOW? *APPLICATION PACKET*

- Application form attesting to prerequisites
- Signed Code of Conduct
- Packet of submissions:
  - Work samples
  - Artifacts
  - Case studies
  - Commentaries



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The application form starts the process, but you can submit packet items as you complete them.

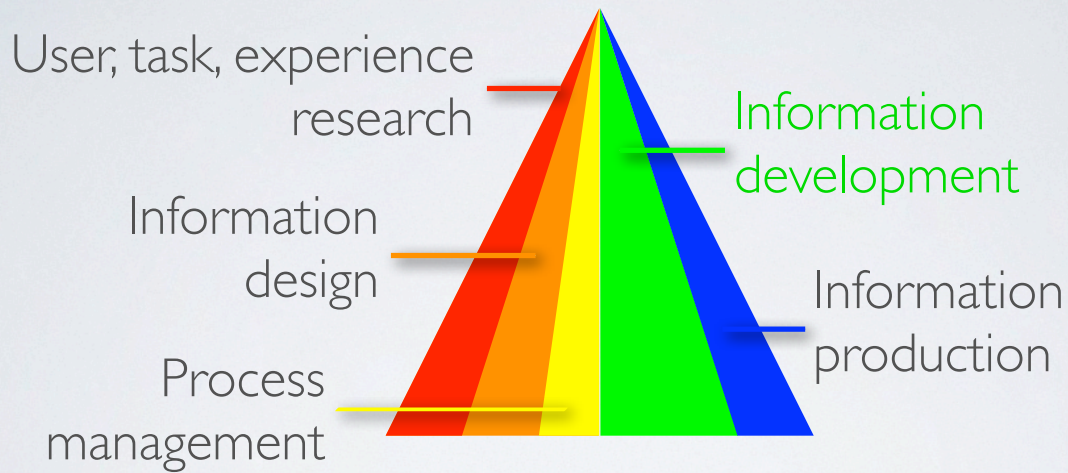
The Code of Conduct is an enforceable offshoot of the Code of Ethics. Violating the Code of Conduct is grounds for losing your certification. This chains back to the principle that applicants must agree to adhere to the STC Code of Ethics.

The packet consists of nine submissions, but is not test-based. This chains back to the principle that assessment involves a variety of methods.

We have set up many of the submissions so that you can satisfy them with samples of current work, artifacts of previous work, or work created or recreated for the process.

Samples may be redacted.

# CERTIFY WHAT? AREAS OF PRACTICE



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Chains back to the principle that certification focuses on uniform areas of practice where technical communicators provide unique value.

Let's use an an example one area, information development. The general term is meant to encompass text, graphics, or instructional material.

# KSAs

- Knowledge, skills, abilities
- Derived from areas of practice
- *Example:* Top three KSAs for Information Development—
  1. Knowledge of grammar and composition  
(written, visual, or audio)
  2. Knowledge of technical communication styles and applications  
(voice/tense/person; drawing/photo/video; stand-up/self-led)
  3. Ability to implement concepts of consistency



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KSAs are the things a practitioners needs to be competent in an area of practice. We drilled down from the areas of practice to KSAs.

This chains back to the principle that applicants must demonstrate knowledge, skills, and experience.

Taking the Information Development area, here are the top three KSAs for that area (as determined by the Certification Task Force at the workshops and validated by a survey of thought leaders).

From this, we determined what we need from an applicant to assess the applicant's competence with these KSAs

# SAMPLE SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS

From “Written Communication Competencies”:

- 1. Provide a representative sample of a published information product whose content you wrote.*
- 2. Provide a written commentary that explains how your knowledge of objectives and audience influenced your choice of terminology, vocabulary, level of detail, and so on. Reference specific elements within the sample, and identify and explain any internal inconsistencies in style.*



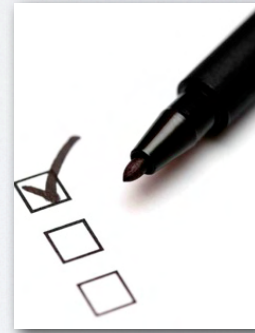
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Finally, here are two requirements within one submission of the packet that elicits the information development KSAs.

# EVALUATION PROCESS

- Applications screened first by STC office
  - Multiple sessions per year
  - Packets examined by trained, compensated evaluators under non-disclosure agreements
  - Objective evaluation against established criteria
- Results of evaluation:
    - 2–0 vote: Certify
    - 1–1 vote: Bring in a third evaluator to break the tie
    - 0–2 (or 1–2) vote: Reject



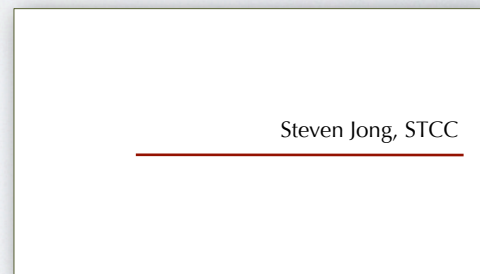
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The STC office does an administrative screening. There's no evaluation, but if the application says you must provide something and you don't, you won't get past this step.

# CERTIFICATION MARKS

- Certificate
- Pin (?)
- Logo
- Designation
- Listing on Certification Web site



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Here's how you can show the world that you're certified.

# MAINTAINING YOUR CERTIFICATION

- Certification is valid for three years
- To maintain it, continue your education to maintain current skills or learn new skills, and stay active in field
- Reapplication packet contains proof of activity
- Screened by STC office
- Results: Recertify or return



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Certification is not a one-time event. This chains to the principle that once granted, certification must be maintained.

Our field is changing, and we all know we have to keep up. Re-credentialing keeps people in "continuous learning" mode.

Seminars, conferences (STC and others), adult education, programs (STC chapters and SIGs, or others).

Remain active in professional societies (STC or others), publish (for STC or elsewhere).

Both certification and recertification unlock access to corporate training and development budgets.

Previously, there was no way to know if a practitioner was up to date or not; recertification provides this knowledge (and an incentive). Three years and ongoing professional membership is standard.

The certification program itself, and especially its list of competencies, must change, and we will keep it fresh.

This is a market opportunity for chapters, SIGs, and training firms.

# FEE SCHEDULE

Item	First Year	STC Member	Non-Member
Application	\$99	\$99	\$125
Assessment	\$495	\$595	\$695
Maintenance (yearly)	\$TBA	\$TBA	\$TBA
Recertification (every 3 years)	No charge	No charge	No charge

All fees are in USD



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You don't have to be an STC member to become certified, but there is a cost advantage to membership!

First-year fees are lower, because the process will be slower, so if cost is an issue, get in on the ground floor

We will not have a fee for recertification, but instead a yearly maintenance fee

There will be a process to appeal a rejection

# CERTIFY WHEN? *NOW!*

- Application form available at [www.stc.org/education/stc-certification](http://www.stc.org/education/stc-certification)
- Free post-Summit workshop (Wednesday, after closing luncheon)



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We're open now! Just don't touch the walls.

# SHORT-TERM PLANS

- Discounts for charter applicants (through 2011)
- Paper-based process
- Evaluators meet face to face (like Competitions consensus judging)
- Marketing to employers



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For the first year, prices will be lower

We will probably start off with a paper process

The initial evaluation session will be face to face, so we can ensure that everyone is on the same page

The great bulk of work worldwide is done in English for the North American market, but the structure and methodology we are designing can work internationally

# LONG-TERM PLANS

- Align STC training offerings to certification needs
- Distributed, Web-based process for both applicants and evaluators
- Examinations based on Body of Knowledge
- Expand beyond North American market
- Specialty sub-certifications



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Our intention is to provide training in the areas of practice.

We will set up a Web site so that applicants can apply and store submissions online, and evaluators can work on submissions online.

As the Body of Knowledge fills out, we will switch to examination-based certification, which scales better and is more economical.

The great bulk of work worldwide is done in English for the North American market, but the structure and methodology we are designing can work internationally.

Subcertification chains to the principle that a core certification provides the basis for certification growth.

# PMP GROWTH, 1984–1993



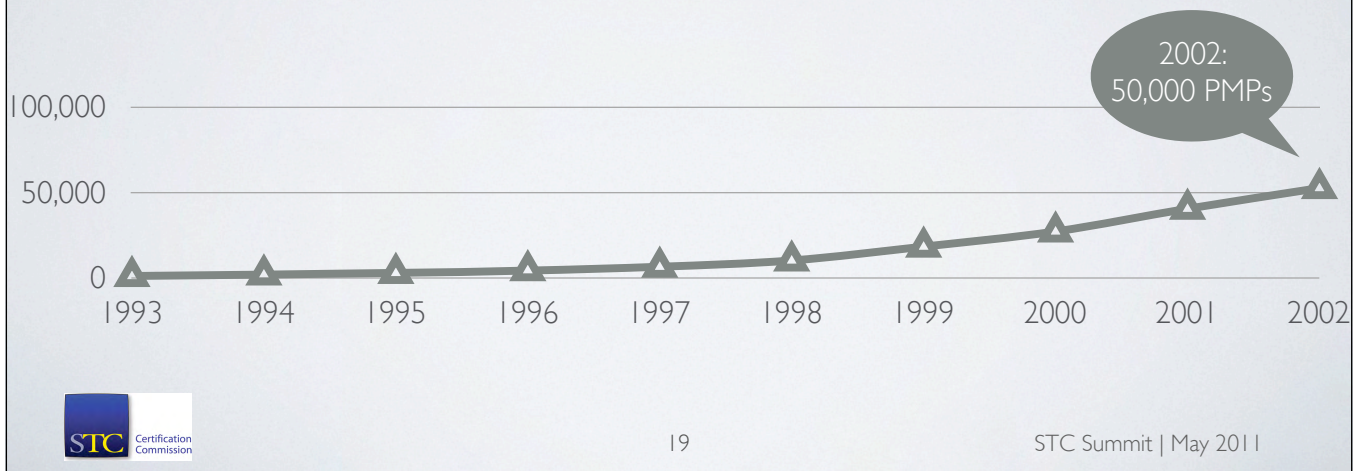
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This is a tale of two organizations. The Project Management Institute, founded in 1969, began its certification program in 1984, one year before the STC Board was presented with a certification proposal but decided not to pursue it.

It took nine years for the first 1000 PMPs to be awarded. PMI doesn't even show data from this period, so I've estimated it. On this scale, it's miniscule. (Yes, I know this is poor data presentation, but I have a point to make.)

# PMP GROWTH, 1993–2002

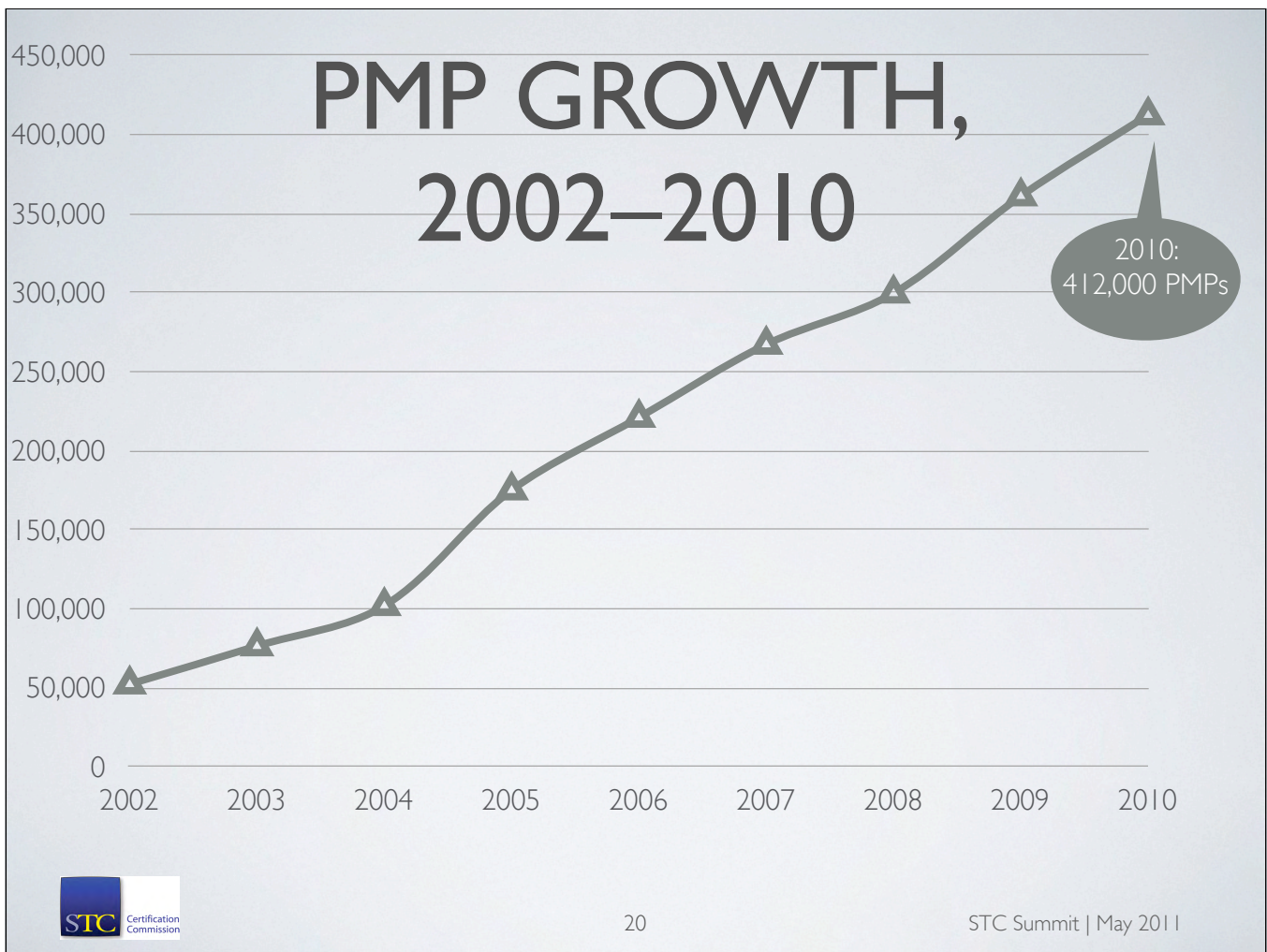


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After nine years, the number of PMPs broke the 1000 mark, and the pace began to pick up. (This is now actual data on the same scale as the previous slide.) At the end of 2002 the total number of PMPs broke 50,000.

But that's when 9/11 happened; in the resulting economic shock, surely practitioners retrenched, right...?



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No! if anything, the pace of certification increased during those times, as project managers tried to differentiate themselves. (Again, this is actual data on the same scale as the previous slides.)

By the end of 2010 there were 412,503 PMPs worldwide. There are more PMPs than current members of PMI, which means project managers see more value in being certified than in being members of the association.

Now, PMI is about 10 times our size, so you'd have to drop a zero to get a comparable scale. But still...!

# CERTIFY WHERE? *HERE*

*Let's get started!*

Post-Summit Workshop, Wednesday, 2:30–3:30  
Hyatt Mezzanine, Golden State (A)

STC Certification Commission  
Steven Jong, [stevefjong@comcast.net](mailto:stevefjong@comcast.net)

[www.stc.org/education/stc-certification](http://www.stc.org/education/stc-certification)



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No one can promise you that getting certified will help you individually, or guarantee you a higher salary or even a job.

I've shown you a growth chart over 25 years, the first third of which was essentially flat.

But certification is the missing piece that establishes technical communication as a full-fledged profession. Certification will be transformational to the profession, to practitioners, and to the Society.

I think there are people in this room who will someday say this was the best thing that ever happened to them.