



IDEal

The Official Publication of the STC
Instructional Design and Learning SIG

Note from the editor

*By Melanie Murphy,
IDEal Newsletter co-Editor*

As the seasons change from one to another, my mind also desires to change my immediate environment. In Fall and Winter, I'm motivated to clean and organize my creative spaces. I know Spring cleaning is "the thing," but I like to do it in the Fall because why not have your space clean, tidy, and organized when you spend so much more time there in the cold months? I'm feathering my nest in preparation for cold weather and staying cozy at home. I should also add that I'm a quilter, so I might be one of the few happy about the oncoming cold weather.

With change and reorganization in mind, the newsletter has a fresh look for this quarter! I enjoy exercising my layout and design skills, so I hope you enjoy this new look. It's a piece I will use in my portfolio, showcasing my design skills, which can get rusty if I'm not rocking my creative boat enough. I write in DITA at my full-time job in a regulated industry, so there isn't much room for creativity. Volunteering here gives me that extra outlet I need. I also enjoy being surrounded by many great

people who understand me and laugh at the same punny grammar jokes.

Would you like a way to exercise some of your skills or develop a new skill? A great way to do this is to contribute an article for the December issue of the IDL newsletter. If you know a lot about AI, share your AI knowledge in the context of instructional design and how it can be used as a tool for:

Content development

- Microlearning
- Augmented reality and virtual reality learning
- Data-driven instruction
- How accessibility and adaptability will increase in importance
- How courses can be developed to help in these areas

We welcome articles on any technical communication topic, and you can build your portfolio and experience while sharing your knowledge.

Read the Manager's Column this quarter to learn more about our upcoming events. I always look forward to meeting new people and connecting with old friends, and I hope to include you in one of those groups. 💡

Q3 2024

In this issue

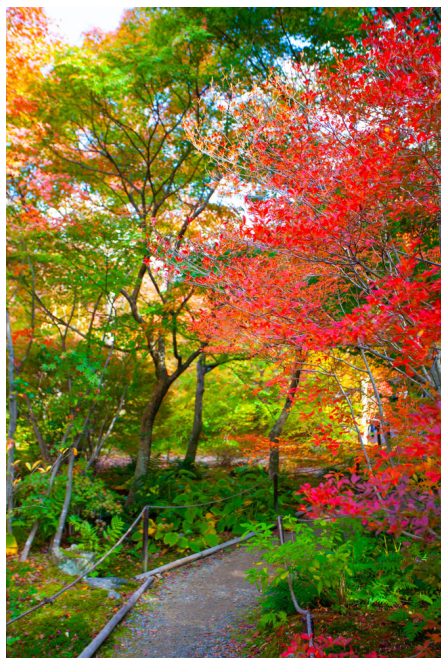
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The past, the present,
and the future walked
into a bar. It was tense.



Manager's Q3 Column

By Maralee Sautter, IDL SIG Manager



It's autumn, and the air is filled with change! Trees display their colorful autumn leaves in bold splendor and are ready to release their leaves to the first disagreeable wind. In October, local farmers sell their harvests of apples, pears, carrots, broccoli, green beans, and pumpkins. Farms in Oregon have pumpkin patches, hay rides, and corn mazes that lure kids of all ages to the countryside.

When Halloween is around the corner, I like to grab a pumpkin-spiced latte and head out to a local farm to find those perfect pumpkins to carve into jack-o-lanterns. I must be ready for the cute, costumed children standing on my front porch, chanting the candy password: Trick or Treat! Recently, a podcaster mentioned that the Irish carved turnips into jack-o-lanterns before pumpkins.

So, I had to research the history of Halloween. Its origins date back to the ancient Celtic festival of Samhain. "The Celts, who lived 2,000 years ago, mostly in the area that is now Ireland, the United Kingdom, and northern France, celebrated their new year on November 1. Halloween marked the end of summer and the harvest and the beginning of the dark, cold winter..." (History Channel)¹



Membership

While STC is not as old as Halloween, technology and technical communication have grown exponentially in the past 76 years since STC's inception. STC has kept pace with trends, education, and new methods that have supported the success of professional technical communicators.

As we move toward the end of the year, it's time to start thinking about joining or renewing your STC membership for 2025. There are various membership categories, but if you choose Gold, you can automatically benefit from membership in the IDL SIG and all other SIGs. For all membership categories, select the IDL SIG when you

submit the membership form. Details are on the membership page stc.org/membership.

Mark your calendars

- First Fridays @ 5 (November 1 and December 6).
Our award-winning series occurs at 5:00 p.m. ET on the first Friday of each month. Some sessions are lively conversations, some are educational presentations, and some are short presentations that inspire lively exchange. Join the conversation! It's free to all STC members. If you would like to present or ask questions, email managersidlsig@gmail.com.
- IDL Leadership Meetings, Saturdays (October 26 and November 16) 12:30 to 2:00 PM ET.
Any IDL SIG member is encouraged to attend. To receive login information, contact Maralee at managersidlsig@gmail.com before the meeting, no later than Friday evening. Or, join the meeting by using [the link on our site calendar](#).

One thing is certain: the IDL SIG is giving out treats for members to enjoy this season. And they're sugar-free! Happy Halloween! 🍬



¹ History Channel-Halloween. Accessed October 2024.

<https://www.history.com/topics/halloween/history-of-halloween/>

The Value of SIG Membership

Special Interest Groups (SIGs) provide a community of learning centered around a specific topic or technical communication discipline. Topical groups like the Instructional Design and Learning (IDL) SIG provide pointed learning on IDL-relevant topics rather than the breadth of topics that chapters might discuss in their locations. SIGs can dive deeper into specific technical communication topics with like-minded individuals with experience in those fields. There are two types of SIGs: Communities of Interest (COIs) and Communities of Practice (COPs).

For STC members with Professional and Academic or New Professional membership levels, joining a SIG costs \$10 for each COI and \$15 for each COP. You can join SIGs a la carte with these two memberships or upgrade to the Gold membership to get free access to any and all SIGs (student and retired members can join SIGs free of charge as well).

So, what additional value do you get from joining a SIG? Every SIG has offerings and meetups that may provide value. Many maintain social media pages and an STC page, and host webinars with topics relevant to that SIG. Every SIG provides value, but let's say you want to join them all. Here is the vast choice you get in the types of available SIGs:

- Academic (COI)
- Accessibility (COI)
- Agile (COI)
- Application Program Interface (COI)
- Consulting & Independent Contracting (COI)

- Health & Medicine (COI)
 - Instructional Design & Learning (COP)
 - Solo Technical Communicator (formerly Lone Writer) (COI)
 - Policies & Procedures (COP)
 - Technical Editing (COP)
 - Usability & User Experience (COI)
 - Women in TechComm (COI)
- The student and retired memberships enjoy all the same benefits as the professional or academic membership levels, with the added benefit of free chapter and SIG memberships. The Gold membership enjoys those same benefits along with:
- Free live webinars
 - Additional 20% off online courses
 - Extended early bird price for the annual conference (STC Summit)

So, what does the IDL SIG offer?

The IDL SIG offers monthly virtual meetups called First Fridays at 5 (ET), where we discuss a specific topic in a casual atmosphere. We also publish a quarterly newsletter with valuable articles to help technical communicators to skill-up in IDL topics. The SIG also offers frequent live webinars with special speakers on relevant IDL topics.

In addition to the typical benefits of IDL SIG membership, SIG members can participate in STC's coalition initiative free of charge. The coalition brings together SIGs, chapters, and STC members into monthly webinars, monthly virtual lunches, and a book club. Other STC members must pay extra for each event. SIG members not only have an intimate connection in a specific, small community but

also have the opportunity to connect with members in the greater STC community easily. In-person events are expensive and logistically difficult, so virtual connections lead to meaningful in-person connections at the STC Summit.

Real Opinions About SIG Membership

Janell Kennedy, IDL SIG Secretary and Newsletter co-Editor

One of the primary reasons I chose to sign up with a Gold membership from the start was to participate in multiple SIGs at no extra cost. In fact, SIGs were the things that most caught my eye when researching how being a member of STC could help me advance my skills and career. Since my background and desired path forward are in training writing/development and other types of technical writing, I was interested in being part of the Instructional Design and Learning, Technical Editing, and Policies and Procedures SIGs. Having the Gold membership allowed me to quickly be part of those communities without worrying about extra dues, and I can access webinars for free and gain discounted training videos. If you want to learn more about specific topics, look into the SIGs list and see what aligns with your interests and skills. There may also be leadership opportunities that could Grow your professional resume. I highly recommend joining a SIG that fits you! By the way, instructional design is not just training course development; it involves communicating technical concepts in multiple environments, so the IDL SIG fits everyone!

The Value of SIG Membership Continued

Maralee Sautter, IDL SIG Manager and CAC Member

When I joined STC 25 years ago, Technical Communication was a term that eluded specific definition; it was a general, all-encompassing term. As I grew in the profession, joining several SIGs helped me explore specific areas of interest and solidify my career track. It was my university teaching that led me to the IDL SIG, and rubbing shoulders with other ID instructors and trainers advanced my career in many ways.

The value of membership in a SIG remains today; it's an opportunity to dive deeper into the area of interest. Members of the IDL SIG enjoy an array of benefits such as quarterly newsletters, meeting with like-minded folks, IDL-specific webinars, First Fridays at 5 conversations, Summit networking, and free or discounted entry to special events.

Beth Bailey, PhD., IDL SIG Membership and Treasurer

Joining an organization's special interest group offers benefits from knowledge expansion and skill development to networking, influence, and personal growth. By becoming part of a vibrant community of like-minded individuals, members can leverage their collective expertise and resources to make a meaningful impact within their organization and beyond.

Our SIG welcomes everyone who wants to learn more about instructional design, including those:

- With experience in technical communication but want more information about instructional design.
- With a background in teaching but are now entering the field of technical communication.
- Who are curious about how to apply professional experience to instructional design and training.

- With a background in instructional design and would like to share your expertise.

It might sound surprising, but everyone uses instructional design concepts in nearly every professional position. Join our SIG to find out how instructional design is already part of your role and how to improve it!

[Read more about reasons to join a SIG in the IDeaL Q4 2023 newsletter.](#) 💡



Communication: Learn to Speak the Receiver's Language

Janell Kennedy, IDL SIG Secretary and Newsletter co-Editor

Have you ever heard someone say, "What are you going to do with a communication degree?" Many have been asked that question without a ready answer. Here it is—nearly anything! Communication is likely the most important aspect of any task, and it is required in any job you do. Many of us have professional experience with someone who clearly doesn't know the job as well as we do, but because they are such great

communicators, they get a promotion. Communication is just as important (if not more) to instructional design as anything else.

Whether creating a training module, a user manual, or anything else in the instructional design world, you must always communicate with other people to gather all the information you need. You could add or save time depending on how you approach communication with these points of contact. So, without a communications degree, how

do you communicate well? No one wants to be a lousy communicator. There are three keys to good communication whether it's in writing or speech.

1. Communicate in the Receiver's "Language"

We all prefer to communicate in varying ways. Some people (like me) prefer the written word because we have plenty of time to think about what we're communicating. We can write it, re-read it, revise it, read it again, revise it again as many times as needed to make sure

the request or explanation is accurately communicated. Others think much better through audible speech and organize their thoughts as they speak. We all want to communicate with others in our preferred method, but if their preference doesn't match ours, miscommunication can easily occur. We all want to communicate in our preferred style, but sometimes, you must step out of your comfort zone and communicate in the recipient's preferred style for maximum clarity.

After working with technical experts to develop training material and proposal volumes, I have plenty of experience learning the communication ropes with engineers and fellows who can be some of the most challenging individuals to communicate with. When working with engineers, I have learned that they all have different communication methods. Some can easily review the script and my edits/comments and feel comfortable responding through text comments in the document. Others prefer to get on the phone and talk through questions and issues while I share my screen so they can see me make the changes. While my preference is written communication, I have learned the value of embracing the recipient's communication method because it increases certainty up front and decreases the possibility of confusion and wasted time later. So, learning to speak your recipient's preferred communication "language" is the first step to good communication.

2. Consider Tone and Connotation

When you write or speak, consider carefully the words you choose and tone you take.

We all know the same phrase spoken with different tones can completely change the perceived meaning or intent. The same goes for the written word; denotation is the literal definition of a word (and many words have several definitions). Connotation is the perceived meaning that a word or group of words could imply. Tone and connotation are typically subjective, so you can't fully control how someone will interpret your audible words or written text. However, you can take great care with how you speak your words and read your written words over and over again (even out loud) to avoid any misunderstanding.

There are some caveats when discussing tone and word choice. You don't want to take such a soft tone that you sound like a wimp. There's a careful balance between speaking confidently and with a harsh or condescending tone. Many times, it takes practice and mistakes to master the balance. If you are practicing a speech or what you will say to your boss when you are asking for a raise, do it in front of another friend in the corporate world and ask them what impression they got after listening to you. Ask where you could improve tone or even word choice. Choosing the right words is important in both spoken and written speech, but because written speech cannot communicate tone very well (if at all), word choice is extremely important. An accurate word or statement does not necessarily mean it is the right one.

"My co-worker dropped the ball at the ABC project meeting." This is a popular euphemism, but it is loaded with the ability for the hearer/reader to perceive any number of inaccurate

intents. "Drop the ball" could mean anything: lost the account, deleted an important file, or simply missed a meeting. It's best to avoid colloquialisms and slang since it can be perceived any number of ways. And in this example, it sounds accusatory. A better way to phrase this would be: "My co-worker missed Thursday's ABC project meeting, so the team still needs direction on how to proceed with the cost volume." This communicates that there is still a need that should have been resolved at that meeting, but it does feel accusatory toward the co-worker. It simply states the reason the team still needs direction. You can't take back your poorly chosen words when you speak them and written communication done too quickly can lead to assumptions, confusion, and sometimes animosity. So be sure to carefully consider your sentence construction and tone in both verbal and written communication.

3. Confirm your Communication was Accurately Received

Even if you take every precaution to be clear, there's still a chance people could misunderstand. Sometimes, you think you explained it as clearly as possible, but someone walks away with a completely different understanding of what you explained. Here are a few approaches to avoid this:

1. Ask the hearers to verbally repeat back to you their understanding of the request; if it's not quite right, you can clarify on the spot;
2. Send an email with a detailed description of what you verbally requested; if there's anything that seems confusing or new to the

recipients, they have the opportunity to clarify before starting;

3. Ask the individuals to send a written description of their understanding of the request; if anything in their description seems off from your expectation, you can clarify.

Confirmation is not just something to do up front; you also need to continually check in with people to make sure they are staying within request parameters. Frequently follow up with a phone call to ensure their progress stays on track with

your original request. You can do the same thing with written communication by sending a check-in email every few days or weeks (depending on the timeline) requesting a progress summary. Even if your request was accurately understood initially doesn't mean the doer will adhere to that along the way. People often get sidetracked by one or two aspects of a project and then forget about others, or they find a cool new approach or feature that takes up time or changes the result altogether. To save time and avoid frustration,

checking in and confirming progress is staying on track with your original explanation is best.

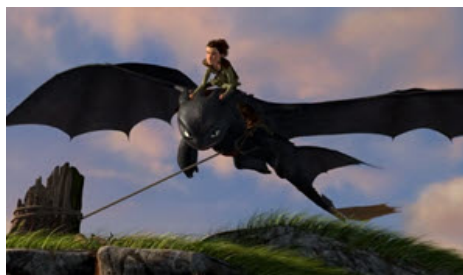
Communication is a life-long learning journey. Those who have a communication degree are not the epitome of communication excellence. Many still have more practice to complete before being considered good communicators. The most important thing to remember is that if you make a communication mistake, don't beat yourself up. Learn from it. Failure and mistakes are always the best teachers, so take note and do it differently next time. 💡

Recap: How to Train Your Dragon® Practical Lessons in Training & Learning

By Maralee Sautter

Introduction

On June 7, 2024, I presented practical lessons in training



and learning as applied to the children's animated film, *How to Train Your Dragon*. The presentation focuses on trainers and learners, and learning styles in everyday, informal situations. My presentation summary follows:

- Trainers and Learners
- Informal and Formal Training
- Learning Styles Using the VARK Model

- *How to Train Your Dragon*

Analysis

- a. Synopsis of the plot
- b. Character analysis
- c. The hero's journey from trainee to trainer

- Conclusion

Trainers and Learners

We are in training from the moment of birth. We learn from our families, community, and surroundings. We learn behaviors and mimic those humans around us as we grow. In school, we continue to learn from classroom teachers, and as we grow, we become teachers ourselves by passing on the knowledge to our peers. For example, a teacher can be an older sibling who shows a younger sibling how to hold a spoon or a classmate who shows another how to do a math problem. As an adult, we may ask a photographer friend to train us to use a camera or change the oil in our cars. We take on the roles of trainers and learners throughout our lives.

Trainers and learners share an important relationship in the act of training, and the *How to Train Your Dragon* presentation provides some simple lessons from the standpoint of the trainer and learner (trainee).

Informal and Formal Training

Formal training is structured and planned, while informal training is unstructured and spontaneous (*Google, AI*).

Informal training applies to everyday life where we train individuals or groups in informal, largely unstructured settings. Bona fide, paid instructional designers would be considered formal trainers because they are working in corporations, businesses, or classroom settings with defined jobs and approaches to learning and instructional design. The table provides examples of both formal training in formal settings and informal training settings (including the types of informal training used in *How to Train Your Dragon*).

Informal Training	Formal Training
Train in informal settings like a sports field, kitchen table, or a relaxed space with less systematic approaches.	Train in formal settings like corporate offices, businesses, or classroom settings with systematic approaches.
Informal training types in <i>How to Train Your Dragon</i> are:	Examples include:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-the-field Training • Coaching (group and individual) • Mentoring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-the-Job Training • Coaching/Job Shadowing • Simulation • Case Studies • Gamification • Instructor-led Sessions • eLearning • Instructional Videos

Learning Styles Using the VARK Model

Neil Fleming, a New Zealand teacher, developed the VARK model of learning styles in 1987. VARK styles are divided into 4 quadrants: Visual, Aural (auditory), Kinesthetic, and Read/Write (reading); thus, the acronym VARK.

By applying this model to learners, trainers can attempt to cover all the styles in conversations, lesson plans, visual aids, and interactions with their learners. The VARK model is not accepted in all academic circles, but the application of the model works well on the characters of *How to Train Your Dragon*.

How to Train Your Dragon Analysis

How to Train Your Dragon is a children's animated film about a teenager who befriends a dragon.

Synopsis of the plot

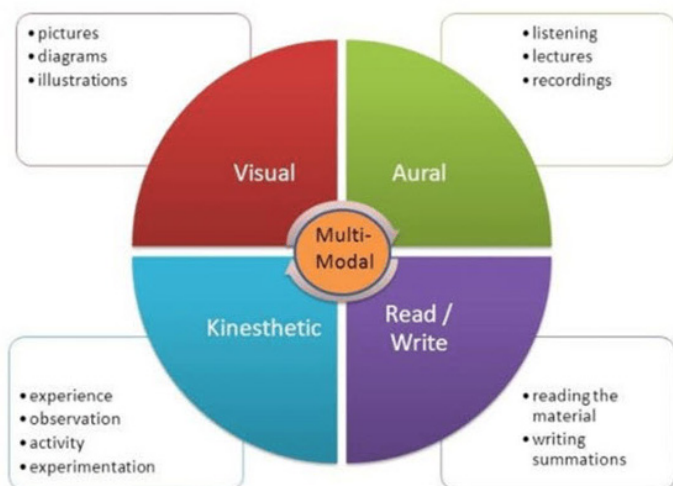
The story takes place in Berk, a mythical Viking village. Hiccup, an undersized teen wishing to become a dragon slayer like the other Vikings, injures a rare Night Fury dragon, Toothless, but is unable to bring himself to kill it.

He instead helps, befriends, and trains the dragon, and quickly discovers that things are not exactly as they seem in the conflict between Vikings and dragons.



Hiccup approaching Toothless
[dreamworks.com/how-to-train-your-dragon](https://www.dreamworks.com/how-to-train-your-dragon)

VARK Learning Styles



VARK model

<https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Aysha-Alshamsi-4>

VARK is based on predominant learning styles, and typically, individuals have strengths in two areas. If you are curious about your dominant strengths, you can self-test using the following questionnaire: [The-VARK-Questionnaire](#).

Through a series of events, Hiccup is left behind while his father and the Viking warriors pursue the dragons. Hatching a bold plan, Hiccup asks his training classmates to help him save the Viking warriors and Toothless from the nefarious "Red

Death" dragon.
Watch the trailer for a visual synopsis of the film: [HTTYD synopsis](#)

Character analysis

The main character roles and the dominant VARK learning types are evaluated in the graphic on the next page.

The other teenage characters' VARK learning types are analyzed in the additional graphic on the next page. Most of the trainees are Kinesthetic and Auditory (aural) learners because they are athletic and respond to verbal commands quickly. The exception is Fishlegs, who is a Reading/ Writing and Visual learner. He is great at statistics and learning from books and has limited athletic ability.

The hero's journey from trainee to trainer

Hiccup's intelligence, hands-on skills, and compassion allow him to transition from a learner/ trainee into a dragon trainer and hero during the course of the film. He uses his problem-solving skills to become an exceptional trainer (see problem/resolution table).

Summary of Hiccup's learning and training journey: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yHjejU3HvRE>

Conclusion

In conclusion, some lessons learned from *How to Train Your Dragon* presentation are:

- Trainers (teachers) and trainees (learners) can learn from one another, and even switch roles as the need arises.
- Training and learning occur in both structured (formal) and unstructured (informal) environments.
- By observing and applying the VARK learning styles to the film's characters, the analysis revealed character and role strengths. More importantly, by adapting coursework and training to all VARK learning styles (Visual, Aural/Read-Write/Kinesthetic), trainers can engage each type of learner.
- Hiccup's problem-solving skills, intelligence, hands-on skills, and compassion allow him to develop into a hero and transition from trainee to trainer.

View the video presentation on *How to Train Your Dragon*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-QK8lKffiMs>

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Problem: Toothless the dragon lost a back tail fin and cannot fly
Resolution: Hiccup builds a prosthetic tailpiece for Toothless
Problem: Hiccup cannot ride Toothless bareback
Resolution: Hiccup builds a harness and stirrups to ride Toothless
Problem: Hiccup does not want to kill Toothless or any dragon
Resolution: By training Toothless, Hiccup applies his learned skills and knowledge to train other dragons

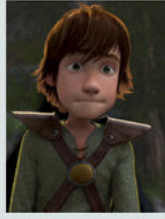
Characters



Gobber the Belch
Mentor/Coach/Trainer

Gobber is known for his *practical, hands-on approach to teaching*, often providing direct, concrete examples and demonstrations.

VARK: **Kinesthetic learning**. They prefer a hands-on approach and learn best by doing. They benefit from real-life examples, practical exercises, and direct involvement in the learning process. This seems to align with Gobber's teaching methods, as he often demonstrates dragon-fighting techniques firsthand and encourages his students to learn through direct interaction and experience.



Hiccup the Horrendous
Trainee/Trainer

Hiccup's training style is *unique and innovative*. Unlike the traditional Viking methods of dragon training, which involve yelling and physical dominance, He adopts a more empathetic and understanding approach and uses his problem-solving skills and creativity in his training methods

VARK: Hiccup's training style aligns with **Kinesthetic learning**. He learns by doing, through direct interaction and experience with Toothless. His training style also has elements of **Visual learning**, as he often uses drawings and diagrams to understand and communicate ideas about dragons

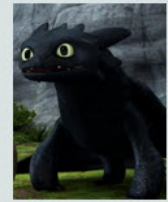


Stoick the Vast
Viking Chief, Father of Hiccup

Stoick the Vast is characterized by a *traditional and authoritative training style*. His approach is grounded in the Viking warrior culture, which emphasizes strength, bravery, and combat skills.

VARK: **Auditory**. He values oral traditions and storytelling, which are integral parts of Viking culture. He likely learns and teaches through spoken instructions and discussions.

Kinesthetic: As a warrior and leader, Stoick's training involves physical activities, hands-on experiences, and direct engagement in combat scenarios.



Toothless the Night Fury
Trainee of a different sort

As a dragon, Toothless learns through direct experience, physical activity, and practice. He shows a strong preference for hands-on engagement and learning by doing.

VARK: **Kinesthetic learner**.

Non-Verbal Communication: Toothless relies on non-verbal cues and body language, which are important aspects of Kinesthetic learning.

Trainees/Leaners



Fishlegs - VARK: Reading/Writing & Visual
All others - VARK: Kinesthetic & Auditory

Mission Statement

Our mission is to help STC members identify and develop knowledge and practical skills for designing, developing, and implementing technical instruction in electronic and

traditional classroom settings. The SIG strives to promote sound design practices and provide information and education about instructional theory and research.

Disclaimer

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Q3 2024

About IDL SIG

Formed in 2000, our mission is to help STC members identify and develop knowledge and practical skills for designing, developing, and implementing technical instruction in electronic and traditional classroom settings. The SIG strives to promote sound design practices, provide information, and educate about instructional theory and research.

The primary goals of the IDL SIG are to:

- Build the instructional design skills of members at all experience levels, leveraging the knowledge of experienced members to deliver formal and informal guidance to the community of practice.
- Build the IDL SIG through a proactive combination of activities that includes member recognition, internal and external partnerships, and awareness activities.
- Provide a forum and mechanism for the free exchange of knowledge, ideas, and skills.