

I work in two fields: linguistics and technical communication.

Presentations

I can explain concepts in stand-up presentations that use projected slides and sometimes audio or video. My aim is to make the presentations both informative and engaging.

Linguistics

“Making Contract Language More Comprehensible.” A review of linguistic research about which aspects of written English commonly found in legal contracts might hinder the reader’s comprehension. The final goal is practical guidance for people who write, edit, or approve contracts. Paper presented to the biannual conference of the International Association for Forensic and Legal Linguistics, Manila, Philippines. July 2023.

“Forensic Linguistics: Wait, What Did He Mean?” An examination of the difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning in language, using three potential criminal cases as examples. Regional Gathering, San Francisco Regional Mensa, Pleasanton, CA. November 2022.

“What was in those Affidavits? A Linguist Examines Claims of Election Fraud.” An examination of the contents of 100 witness affidavits submitted in a lawsuit filed in Michigan to block certification of the 2020 election in Wayne County. Regional Gathering, San Francisco Regional Mensa, San Jose, CA. November 2021.

“Forensic Linguistics: Language Issues in Three Murder Cases.” A discussion of the place of linguistics in criminal trials, with three real-life cases as examples. Online presentation, San Francisco Regional Mensa. July 2021.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtmNrVjwaks>

“Discourse Analysis of Technical Instructions: Did 110 People Die because of Poor Communication?” A linguistic analysis of a technical manual whose poor quality was partly blamed by government investigators for an airplane crash. Forensic Linguistics conference, Arizona State University, Tempe, Arizona. October 2019.

“A teenage mother in a police interview: did she implicate her own mother in her baby’s death?” Discourse analysis of a police interview. Paper presented to the conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, Porto, Portugal. July 2017.

“Forensic Linguistics: Discourse Analysis.” An explanation of the linguistic subdiscipline of discourse analysis, and how it can be of use in the justice system, using real-life examples. (1.5 hours MCLE credit for California.) Alameda County Law Library, Oakland, CA. November 2016.

“Semantics and Pragmatics in a Florida Shooting.” A linguistic analysis of a portion of a conversation between a police dispatcher and a man later charged with murder. Paper presented to the conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, Guangzhou, Guangdong, China. July 2015.

“Forensic Linguistics: Discourse Analysis and the Law.” An explanation of semantics, pragmatics, and discourse analysis, and how these concepts can be applied to legal evidence. Joint Regional Gathering, San Francisco and Monterey Mensa, Monterey, California. November 2014.

“Forensic Linguistics: Law and the Science of Language.” Introduction for lawyers to the use of linguistics in civil and criminal cases. (1.5 hours MCLE credit for California.) Includes overviews of some of the subdisciplines of linguistics, and real-life examples of linguistics applied to evidence. Alameda County Law Library, July 2012, July 2013, July 2014; San Francisco Bar Association, October 2012. A shorter version of the same class (.75 hours’ CLE credit) delivered to the Alameda County Legal Secretaries’ Association, September 2013; Livermore Amador Valley Legal Professionals Association, September 2013.

“Forensic Linguistics: Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say?” An explanation of the difference between semantic meaning and pragmatic meaning, using a particular incident from a U.S. election as a case study. For general audiences. Richmond, California, Rotary Club. April 2014.

http://richmondcarotary.org/2014/04/?post_type=flywheel

“Language and Law: The Breadth of Forensic Linguistics.” A short overview of the many areas of law in which Linguistics can add value. Audience was undergraduate students in an introductory linguistics class. San Francisco State University, April 2014.

“Two Fields: Technical Writing, Forensic Linguistics.” A short talk about two possible career paths for Linguistics graduates. Audience was linguistics students at the University of California, Berkeley. “Enterprising Linguists” event, sponsored by Linguists Outside Academia, a special interest group of the Linguistic Society of America. October 2016.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z1XiDW72_6I&feature=youtu.be

“Clarity in Death Penalty Jury Instructions: Ensuring Justice by Explaining the Law to Non-Lawyers.” Analysis of a jury instruction used in death penalty cases in California, and how to make the information more comprehensible to the non-lawyers who make up the jury pool. Paper presented to the conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists. Amsterdam, Netherlands, July 2009.

“Forensic Linguistics: Real-Life ‘CSI’ with Word People.” An overview of the tools used for linguistic analysis of criminally oriented communication. The presentation is aimed at a non-specialist audience, and includes a lot of audience participation. San Francisco Mensa Regional Gathering, November 2008; Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, September 2009; Greater Los Angeles Area Mensa Regional Gathering, February 2010; Society for Technical Communication, Phoenix chapter, December 2010.

Technical Communication

“How Your Audience Reads your Writing: Insights from Psycholinguistics.” An explanation of how the brain interprets written English, for the benefit of technical writers, whose goal is to have their writing understood quickly and accurately by the reader. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, February 2020.

“Linguistic Analysis: Are You Cooperating with Your Readers?” A webinar sponsored by the Society for Technical Communication. An explanation of how the maxims of conversational cooperation, a tool used by linguists in pragmatics and discourse analysis, can be applied to analyze the effectiveness of technical writing. December 2018.

“Evaluating (and Improving) Your Technical Documentation: Save Money, Reduce Risk.” An explanation of ways to identify weaknesses in product documentation, and how to fix them. Introduces the use of Grice’s maxims of conversational cooperation, a concept borrowed from linguistics, as a way to evaluate technical documentation. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter. December 2017.

“A Quick Intro to Document Design.” An explanation of some basic concepts in document design, including typography, readability, visual hierarchy, page design. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, April 2015; San Francisco chapter August 2016.

“Clarity Above All: Writing to be Understood.” An explanation for writers about techniques to improve comprehensibility. Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, April 2016.

“Unhappy Customers are Just the Beginning.” A webinar in two parts, delivered through TC Dojo. A shortened version of a stand-up presentation I have given in the past, with some new material. Part 1 October 2014, Part 2 May 2015.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ov5J5mgP_bw

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQkJnQtwXPc>

“Unhappy Customers are Just the Beginning: The Costs of Poor or Missing Documentation.” Explanation for technical communicators about how to argue for the business value of good technical documentation by focusing on the potentially large business costs of skimping on product documentation. Society for Technical Communication: Berkeley chapter, October 2012; Silicon Valley chapter, March 2013, East Bay chapter, November 2013.

“Managing Multiple Information Channels: Strategies for Effective Presentations.” An explanation of the strengths and weaknesses of the tools available to a speaker: voice, projected slides, paper handouts, etc., and how to use each to best advantage. Georgetown University Linguistics Department, March 2009; Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter, July 2011; Society for Technical Communication, Silicon Valley chapter, September 2011.

Publications

“Conversational Maxims and Technical Documentation: Using a tool from linguistics in technical writing.” October 2018 issue of *Intercom*, published by the Society for Technical Communication.

“Whodunit?: Bringing justice with forensic linguistics.” An interview with me about forensic linguistics, published on Reed James’s blog. September 13, 2017.

<http://www.reed-james.com/single-post/2017/09/13/Whodunit-Bringing-justice-with-forensic-linguistics>

“Managing Multiple Information Channels: Strategies for Designing Effective Presentations.” October 2013 issue of *Intercom*, published by the Society for Technical Communication.

“Unhappy Customers are Just the Beginning: Potential Costs of Poor or Missing Technical Documentation.” Covered operational costs, potential for lost business, and the implications of lawsuits and regulatory penalties for poor or missing documentation. February 2013 issue of *Intercom*, published by the Society for Technical Communication.

Book Note for *Bastard tongues: A trailblazing linguist finds clues to our common humanity in the world’s lowliest languages* by Derek Bickerton. *Language in Society*, volume 38, issue 05, pp. 646-647, November 2009.

Multiple articles for the Holy Names University (formerly College) alumni magazine, 1993–2005. My contributions included the following feature articles:

- “Holy Names and the High Court.” Profile of Justice Carol Corrigan, an alumna who was appointed to the California Supreme Court in 2006. *HNU Today*, Spring 2006 issue.
- “Educational Therapy: Holy Names Nurtures a Growing Discipline.” Article about the work being done by educational therapists at the Raskob Learning Institute. *HNU Today*, Fall 2004 issue.
- “Every Time You Turn on a Tap, You Should Thank a Meadow.” Description of a long-term research project on the ecology of alpine meadows in California conducted by Julia Smith, Ph.D. *HNC Today*, Spring 2004 issue.
- “First Woman President of Kaiser Permanente in Northern California has a Holy Names Background.” Profile of Mary Ann Thode. *HNC Today*, Winter 2003 issue.

Multiple articles for the *Ragged Left*, the newsletter of the Berkeley chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. 1998–2003.

“Linguistics in the World of High Tech.” Guest post for the MLC blog (Masters in Language and Communication), Georgetown University. August 2013.

Technical consultant for *Off the Edge* by Carolyn Crane, 2013. A novelist created a character who was a linguist (and a spy!), and I made sure that the linguistic elements of the story were realistic. The novel won a RITA award for “Best Romantic Suspense” in 2014. <https://www.rwa.org/p/cm/ld/fid=535>

“Why do we have silent letters in English?” An answer I wrote for Quora.com was reprinted in *The Independent* (U.K.) on January 3, 2015. <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/why-do-we-have-silent-letters-in-the-english-language-9952944.html>

LinkedIn Articles

“A Linguist in the Courtroom, Briefly.” A description of my experience being summoned for jury duty, and then released, probably because of my background in forensic linguistics. Published April 20, 2018.

<http://www.reed-james.com/single-post/2017/09/13/Whodunit-Bringing-justice-with-forensic-linguistics>

“False Missile Alert: Blaming ‘Operator Error’ is Misguided.” An explanation of why I think the problem at the heart of the missile alert sent out in error in Hawaii in January 2017 was probably the lack of a professional user interface designer. Published January 14, 2018.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/false-missile-alarm-operator-error-misguided-joe-devney/>

“Forensic Linguistics: When the Smoking Gun is a Red Herring.” Descriptions of two situations involving potential criminal activity in which an utterance was interpreted incorrectly. Published August 30, 2017.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/forensic-linguistics-when-smoking-gun-red-herring-joe-devney/>

“When Technical Writing and Forensic Linguistics Meet.” A description of the events surrounding the crash of ValuJet flight 592. Everyone on board died. Part of the blame was placed on poorly written technical instructions. My article goes into more detail than the NTSB report did. Published August 14, 2017.

<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/when-technical-writing-forensic-linguistics-meet-joe-devney/>

“Forensic Linguistics: Helping to Bring Justice.” A report on the 13th Biannual Conference of the International Association of Forensic Linguists, held in Portugal in 2017. Published August 2, 2017.

www.linkedin.com/pulse/forensic-linguists-helping-bring-justice-joe-devney

Broadcast

Guest, *The Colin McEnroe Show*, WNPR-FM (Connecticut), 25 June 2012. Discussion of the Supreme Court’s June 2012 ruling on FCC regulations about broadcast indecency.

Teaching

“Visual Rhetoric and Document Design.” A class in the Technical and Professional Writing degree program that focused on the concepts and tools of design that supports the communication goals of the document (paper or online). Topics included typography, use of grids, use of colors, use of photos, and other tools. The students also learned to use Adobe InDesign to create the documents. San Francisco State University, 2014.

“Fundamentals of Language.” An introductory Linguistics class for undergraduate students. Main topics covered were morphology, syntax, semantics, language acquisition, pidgins and creoles, and dialects. Supplemental material included videos and a class session devoted to forensic linguistics. Holy Names University, Oakland, California. 2012.

“Adobe FrameMaker at Synaptics.” An introduction to this publishing application for software engineers and technical writers at a microchip company that was switching some document production from Microsoft Word to FrameMaker. December 2011.

“An Introduction to Adobe FrameMaker.” Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley chapter. A half-day class for technical writers. Designed, wrote, and delivered

the class, which included slides, lecture, and in-class exercises with sample material I developed. June 2006.

Volunteer adult literacy tutor, Second Start program, Oakland Public Library. Completed training in the Laubach method for teaching reading before beginning to tutor. My student was a native English speaking adult whose reading skills were limited to identifying the letters of the alphabet. 1988-89.

Tutoring in advanced math. Helped a middle-aged adult enrolled in community college with his calculus homework. 1971.

Other Linguistics Projects

Discourse analysis. Analyzed a recorded conversation relevant to an attempted murder conviction. May 2020.

Historical linguistics research for a lawsuit initiated by a non-profit organization. 2019.

Native US English Linguistics Expert, Defined Crowd Corporation. Semantic analysis of short paragraphs, to be used for training data for artificial intelligence software. May–June 2019.

Expert witness doing linguistic analyses of a police interview and a witness statement. Submitted two written declarations of my findings. 2017.

Linguist, IBM Watson. Researched news articles on assigned topics, then wrote questions based on the articles. The questions were used for training for IBM’s artificial intelligence engine, called Watson. May–June 2015.

Other Conferences Attended

These are conferences which I attended, but did not speak at.

- Society for Technical Communication Region 8 Conference, Santa Barbara, California. 1997.
- Society for Technical Communication Region 7/8 Pan-Pacific Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii. 2000.
- Society for Technical Communication Annual Conference, Chicago. 2001.
- Society for Technical Communication Region 8 Conference, Las Vegas, Nevada. 2003. (I helped to organize the conference.)
- Society for Technical Communication Annual Conference, Dallas, Texas. 2003.
- Society for Technical Communication Annual Conference, Baltimore, Maryland. 2004.
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, San Francisco. 2009.
- American Dialect Society Annual Meeting, San Francisco. 2009.
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, Portland, Oregon. 2012.
- American Dialect Society Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon. 2012.
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, Minneapolis, Minnesota. 2014.
- American Dialect Society Annual Meeting, Minneapolis, Minnesota. 2014..
- Society for Technical Communication Summit, Phoenix, Arizona. 2014. (Annual Conference renamed as Summit.)

- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, Portland, Oregon. 2015.
- American Dialect Society Annual Meeting, Portland, Oregon. 2015.
- West Coast Roundtable for Language and Law, Seattle, Washington. 2015.
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, Washington, D.C. 2016
- West Coast Round Table for Language and Law, Provo, Utah. 2016.
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, New York, NY. 2019
- Linguistic Society of America Annual Conference, online. 2021.
- American Name Society Annual Meeting, online. 2021.

Education

Master of Arts in Linguistics with a Concentration in Language and Communication. Georgetown University, Washington, D.C., 2008. Papers and presentations included the following:

- Clarity in Death Penalty Jury Instructions: Ensuring Justice by Explaining the Law to Non-Lawyers (paper and presentation for Language and Law class)
- Jury Instructions: Imperfect Intercultural Communication (paper and presentation for Intercultural Communication class)
- Language in a Police Context, a discussion of Fourth Amendment rights. (presentation to Introduction to Sociolinguistics class)

Certificate in Forensic Linguistics. Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. 2008. “Forensic Linguistics: Applications.” Linguistic analysis of ransom notes, stalker letters, a veiled extortion threat, and other criminally oriented communications.

Certificate in Forensic Linguistics. Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY. 2014. “Discourse Analysis in Law Case Evidence.” Discourse analysis of warning labels, recorded conversations in criminal cases, trademark disputes, and other civil and criminal contexts.

Bachelor of Arts in Humanities, Minor in Communication Arts. *Magna cum laude*. Holy Names University, Oakland, CA. 1993. The core of the major was English, Philosophy, and History; minor included Graphic Arts, Public Speaking, and other Communications courses. An overarching theme at Holy Names is an emphasis on writing skills.

2009 Linguistic Institute: Language Structure and Language Ecologies. Sponsored by the Linguistic Society of America and the Department of Linguistics, University of California, Berkeley. Classes: Computational methods in linguistic reconstruction, Language contact and language change, Gesture and language, Narrative and viewpoint.

“API Technical Writing Workshop” presented by Sarah Maddox. One-day workshop co-sponsored by Google, Inc., and the Silicon Valley chapter of the Society for Technical Communication. January 2015.

“Presenting Data and Information.” A one-day course taught by Edward Tufte, Professor Emeritus at Yale University and author of *The Visual Display of Quantitative Information* and other books on information design. 2003.

Classes in copyediting and developmental editing, University of California, Berkeley Extension.

“Documenting APIs,” a class about writing reference documents for application program interfaces for software engineers, University of California, Berkeley Extension.

Introductory class in Java programming, University of California, Berkeley Extension.

“Creative Nonfiction,” a writing class, University of California, Berkeley Extension.

Certificate in Business Data Processing, Institute of Computer Management, Cleveland, Ohio. Learned computer programming, file organization, and other aspects of computer science. 1975.

Service to the Profession

Panelist, “Careers in Technical Documentation.” Linguistics Career Launch, sponsored by the Linguistics Beyond Academia special interest group, part of the Linguistic Society of America. Online event. July 2021.

Presentation: “Two Fields: Technical Writing and Forensic Linguistics.” Described my two professions as possible career paths for students of linguistics. The event was “Enterprising Linguists,” sponsored by the UC Berkeley Linguistics department and by the Linguistics Outside Academia special interest group within the Linguistic Society of America. University of California, Berkeley, October 2016.

Presentation: “Careers in Technical Communication.” An overview of the field of technical communication, with an emphasis on career opportunities for people with degrees in Linguistics. The target audience was graduate students in Linguistics, presented in coordination with the Graduate Linguistics Student Association at Georgetown University, 2008. (Presented twice.)

Vice President for Programs, Berkeley chapter, Society for Technical Communication. 2018–2019.

President, Berkeley chapter, Society for Technical Communication. Three one-year terms, 2003–2006; two one-year terms, 2013–2014.

Judge, International Technical Art Competition. Society for Technical Communication. 2005–2008. Judged approximately 12 entries annually, evaluating them for effectiveness, originality, and technical competency. Assigned awards as part of a team of judges. Wrote individual evaluations for entrants on the entries’ strengths and weaknesses, and suggested improvements. Part of a small group who chose the “Best of Show” entry at the end of the judging.

Judge, International Summit Awards, Society for Technical Communication, 2013 and 2014. A technical communication competition whose entries have already won awards at local competitions around the world.

Publications Manager for a professional conference. Managed a team of volunteers to produce programs, signage, post-conference proceedings, and other materials. Also helped to organize the conference. Region 8 Conference, Society for Technical Communication, 2003.

Judge for Touchstone, the Northern California Technical Communications Competition. Served as team judge for two competitions and lead judge for a third. Society for Technical Communication, Northern California chapters, 1999–2003.

Honors and Awards

Alumni Recognition Award for Professional Achievement. Holy Names University, 2014. This award is given to one or two Holy Names alumni each year.

<https://www.hnu.edu/about/news/41st-annual-hnu-alumni-awards-ceremony>

Fellow, Society for Technical Communication, inducted 2014. An honorary rank given to a tiny fraction of STC members who have contributed to both the Society and the profession over many years.

<http://www.stc.org/fellows/item/joseph-j-devney-2>

Associate Fellow, Society for Technical Communication, inducted 2011. The number of Associate Fellows at any one time cannot exceed 3 percent of the total Society membership.

<https://www.hnu.edu/about/news/society-technical-communication-honors-joseph-j-devney-93>

Distinguished Chapter Service Award, Society for Technical Communication, Berkeley Chapter, 2008, for providing exemplary service to the Society at the chapter level. The number of recipients is limited to approximately one percent of chapter membership per year.

Oak Society, Holy Names University, 1991 through graduation. Recognition of academic achievement and leadership qualities.

Kappa Gamma Pi, a nationwide graduate honor and service society for graduates of Catholic colleges, 1993 and continuing. New members limited to 10 percent of a school's graduating class.

Council of Leaders, President's Level award, Pacific Bell Directory, 1990. Given to employees who made significant contributions to the company, no more than 1 percent of staff annually.

Organizations

Member, Linguistic Society of America.

Member, American Dialect Society.

Member, International Association of Forensic Linguists.

Member, American Name Society.

Fellow, Society for Technical Communication, 2014; member since 1996.

Member, Northern California Science Writers' Association.

Member, Kappa Gamma Pi, an honor and service society for graduates of Catholic colleges.