

women can be reduced by as much as 50% if they are treated with regimens that combine chemotherapy with trastuzumab after surgery.

Steve Hasley reviewed the current state of knowledge about Pap smears and the diagnosis of cervical cancer. He stressed the importance for women to monitor both their human papillomavirus (HPV) status and the frequency of their Pap smears. Research has shown that HPV, a common, sexually transmitted virus, is the major cause of cervical cancer. Testing is available to determine whether a woman is infected, and all sexually active women should be tested frequently. Cervical cancer will not develop in all women who test positive for HPV, but monitoring is extremely important. Guidelines for HPV testing parallel those for Pap smears, and current recommendations for Pap smears include the following:

- Annual Pap smears for women who have or have had multiple sexual partners

- Reduction in frequency of Pap smears to once every 3 years for women who have negative findings on Pap smears for 3 consecutive years
- Discontinuing Pap smears for women who have had hysterectomy

Dr. Hasley said that popular sentiment causes most women and physicians to continue to adhere to an annual schedule of Pap smears even when it is not indicated. This practice adds unnecessarily to health care costs and should not continue, although he said it probably will be difficult to stop.

Dr. Johnston discussed the SWAN Project (Study of Women's Health Across the Nation: Examining Women's Health in their Middle Years), an important national data-collection effort to follow up on more than 16,000 women as they progress through menopause. The project, funded by the National Institute on Aging, the National Institute of Nursing Research, the NIH Office of Research on Women's

Health, and numerous others, is about to enter its fourth funding cycle and has been collecting data since 1994. The study promises to provide a description of the aging process among US women of several ethnic groups and to point out differences in such aspects as age of onset of menopause, severity and range of symptoms associated with menopause, decline in ovarian function, change in hormone expression, and general health status as women age. Dr. Johnston reviewed the project's most recent findings, reporting, for example, that bone mineral density changes and cardiovascular risk factors differ markedly among various ethnic groups. More information on the study can be found at [www.swanstudy.org](http://www.swanstudy.org).

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## PERSUASIVE PORTFOLIOS

### Speaker

**Kathi Whitman**

*InCredible English, Inc., Kansas City, MO*

### By Heather Haley, MS

Portfolio (n). def. a dynamic collection of your best work, designed to demonstrate your skills.

According to Kathi Whitman, a good portfolio accomplishes the following:

- Is a critical sales tool
- Reflects a clear marketing strategy
- Targets a specific audience
- Is well planned and stands alone when necessary
- Presents a context for every

element of content

- Is readable, usable, and persuasive
- Is available both on paper and online
- Demonstrates "hidden" as well as obvious skills

Whitman has been on both sides of the portfolio presentation—as a seller of her company's capabilities and as a potential buyer of services such as graphic design and writing. She said that it is important for your portfolio to support your marketing message, which should be a description of no more than 7 words. She uses "Making your message make sense," and all the pieces in her portfolio demonstrate ways she helped clients' messages make sense.

### Selecting Samples

When assembling your portfolio, said Whitman, you should return to the question of classical rhetoric: Who is your target audience, both primary and secondary? Audiences (clients) have varying needs; for example, the needs of a medical books publisher differ from those of a continuing medical education company. Effective portfolios focus on client needs/problems, not on your credibility, and she recommended selecting samples according to each client's needs.

Because portfolios are dynamic by definition, Whitman recommended creating a customized coding system kept in a spreadsheet or database. With an organized, indexed library of samples, the audience-appropriate portfolio

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## Reports from Open Sessions

lio can be assembled for a last-minute opportunity. In organizing and coding projects, categories like industry/client, specialty, project type, and context/key skills demonstrated will be useful.

To keep momentum around building your portfolio, Whitman recommended sending an e-mail or letter to a client asking permission to use the material after the project has been completed. With ongoing projects, record details and concepts that will be an asset later in your portfolio, even if the client never uses the ideas.

Whitman also offered suggestions for creating a portfolio in “trickier” situations, such as when you have great work but it’s 10 years old, when you want to show editing work, or when the final product was less than perfect. She said that older work can be an asset and should be emphasized in the appropriate contexts. Older work demonstrates you have been around for awhile and that the piece was innovative in 1995—demonstrating an ability to adapt as the field adapts. She demonstrated some of her substantive editing work by showing a marked up author’s draft in a PDF, in which she used text highlighting and color to demonstrate additions and deletions. She recommended writing your rationale for editing choices in the margins. If the final product of a piece of your writing does not look as professional or there were editing mistakes, use the original you submitted to your client. If the design of the final product was poor, it may be worth paying for a redesign and showing the prospective client both the published product and your redesigned sample. You can capitalize on this moment by talking about the choices you made to make the poorly published design piece better.

Creating a portfolio can also be a challenge if you work in regulatory writing and all your projects are pro-

prietary or if you’re just starting out and don’t have many samples.

Whitman said that for regulatory writers, it is acceptable to draft a project description alone if showing a sample is impossible. She suggested that you first try to get written permission to use a sample and sanitize any company identifiers as appropriate. When seeking permission to use a pharmaceutical regulatory sample, allow yourself a significant amount of time, as multiple departments (legal, accounting, etc) will have to grant permission. For writers in the beginning of their career, Whitman suggested creating “fictional” pieces such as a clinical study report on an imaginary product, a how-to manual for a hobby, or a children’s book explaining a concept. She said that the point is to demonstrate your skills, and you should feel free to move outside the bounds of projects you’ve been paid to do.

### Organizing the Portfolio

All portfolios should begin with a title page and a table of contents. Whitman

A well planned portfolio includes the following.

- **Target samples** that address the client’s needs. Samples illustrating before and after situations are important because they can demonstrate outcomes. Limit yourself to 10 samples so the presentation is complete in 30 minutes.
- **Project descriptions** that provide the context in which you worked on a piece. Context is often overlooked. Whitman noted that portfolio viewers have no clue what a piece really means without context. Project descriptions are often most important and most neglected.
- **Extras**, such as resumes, letters of recommendation, awards, certificates, and licenses.

recommended that experience base, the audience, and the project descriptions should drive how you organize the portfolio. An effective organization will make it easy for you and your reviewers to find the right sample at the right moment. Consider using tabbed dividers to organize the samples by writing and editing or project types such as abstract, slide kit, etc. To maximize persuasion of your portfolio, make the connections obvious between your work, your skills, and the solutions for addressing clients’ needs. If you want to demonstrate the depth of your work, include a project description that is applicable to all your samples, followed by the samples. To show breadth, include individual project descriptions, each followed by the appropriate sample. Whitman added that you should be prepared to answer the question, “How much would a piece like this cost?” for every sample in your portfolio.

### Other Considerations

Readability and usability are other considerations when creating a portfolio. Whitman reminded attendees that reviewers of a portfolio will scan it rather than examine it in-depth. Therefore, you should use writing and formatting techniques to enhance readability. Avoid long paragraphs and use page titles, bullet points, and ample white space to enhance scanning. Consider adding titles like “Before” and “After” to samples when appropriate.

In this electronic age, both paper and electronic versions are necessary to capitalize on opportunities as they come up on short notice. Electronic portfolios are the best place to demonstrate online work. For electronic portfolios specifically, online writing is linked and well organized. Whitman recommended updating often and featuring your most recent work in an

overview of the site. When asked why bother with a print portfolio, given the high demand for electronic samples, Whitman noted that print portfolios are needed to show to peers and in group interview situations.

How you prepare your portfolio can help you demonstrate “hidden skills” such as the following.

- **Organizational skills.** Arriving at an interview with a well thought-out, polished portfolio will speak for itself and your organizational skills.
- **Writing skills.** Your project descriptions will provide further evidence of your writing ability.

- **Neatness.** The presentation of the portfolio (eg, crisp samples, no loose elements) and lack of errors can reinforce this quality.
- **Critical thinking and problem-solving.** Use samples and accompanying background to demonstrate problem-solving for previous clients.
- **Teamwork.** Capture examples of teamwork when giving background on a sample.
- **Leadership.** Choose a sample where you can demonstrate leadership in the project description.
- **Research.** Include samples for which you conducted the research.

- **Technology.** Creating an electronic portfolio can demonstrate that you stay up-to-date with technology.

Whitman noted 2 Web sites that offer more information on portfolios. Downloadable articles on guidelines for using samples and testimonials and presenting your portfolio are available at [www.creativebusiness.com](http://www.creativebusiness.com). Examples of portfolios are included in a cooperative library for technical communicators at [www.tc.eserver.org](http://www.tc.eserver.org).

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*The southwestern theme of the closing reception on Saturday helped introduce the 2006 Annual Conference in Albuquerque. The lively event provided opportunities for networking, socializing, and just plain fun.*

## SEEKING THE TRUTH ABOUT THE ENVIRONMENT AND YOUR HEALTH: SEPARATING TRUTH FROM FICTION

### Chair and Moderator

**Donna L. Miceli**

*DLM Writing Services, Ft. Myers, FL*

### Speakers

**Devra L. Davis, PhD, MPH**

*Director, Center for Environmental Oncology, University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, Pittsburgh, PA*

**Bruce W. Dixon, MD**

*Director, Allegheny County Health Department, Pittsburgh, PA*

**By Donna L. Miceli**

Why do scientists believe environment is a cause of cancer? According to Devra Davis, there are numerous reasons.

- Fewer than 1 in 10 cases of breast cancer occur in women born with genetic defects.
- The cancer risk for adopted children reflects their adoptive parents, not their biologic parents.
- Fewer than half of identical twins get the same cancer.
- Rates of cancer are higher for people employed outside the home
- The cancer risk for immigrants changes to that of their new country.
- The majority of cancer cases have no known risk factors.

- Disease is more aggressive in women with higher residues of toxins in their blood.
- Patterns of cancer remain unexplained.

Dr. Davis presented several lists of environmental and workplace chemicals that are either proven or suspected human carcinogens but pointed out that smoking is still considered the biggest workplace hazard.

Discussing breast cancer specifically, Dr. Davis noted that the risk of this disease is increased for people employed as solvent workers, chemists, health care professionals (nurses, dentists, and physicians), and hairdressers.