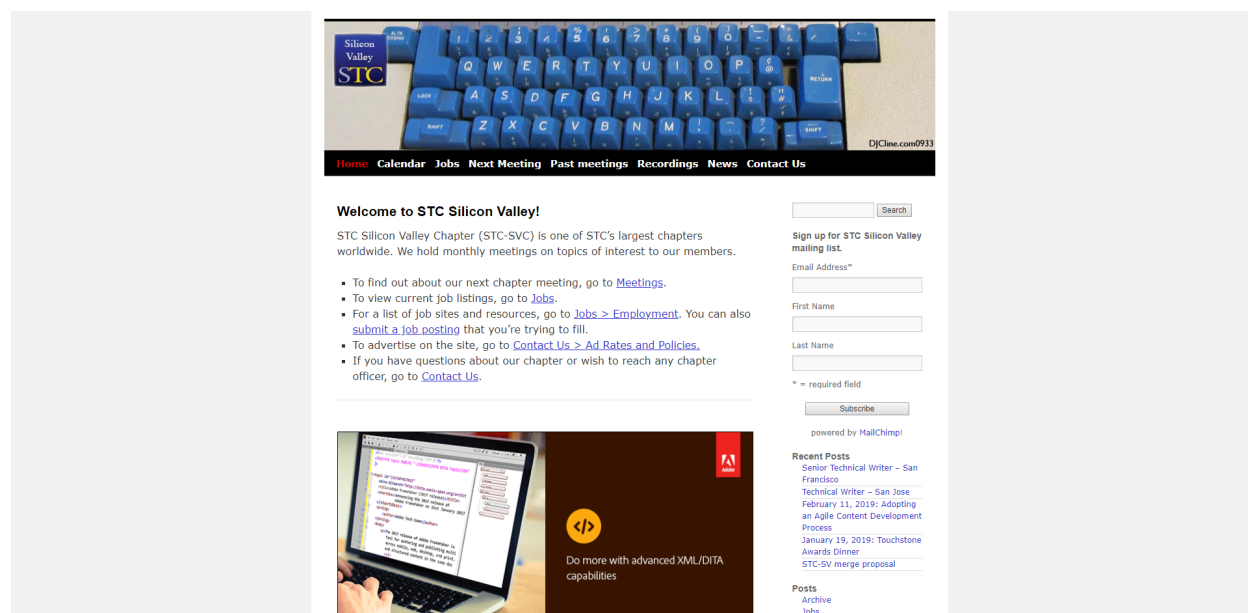


## Assignment #2: Phone App/Website Analysis

The focus of this project is to analyze STC (Society for Technical Communicators) Silicon Valley's website in terms of usability and visual design.

### Overview

The website serves as a resource portal for the STC chapter in Silicon Valley. Users can find various chapter-related information such as news, meetings, job postings, and calendar dates for future events. These resources are mainly geared towards both aspiring and established technical writers alike to not only pick up new skills, but also network and simply hang out.



This analysis will focus on assessing the website in terms of **design for scanability**, **navigation**, and **principles of design**.

### Design for Scanability

The idea behind scanability is that users skim over websites and pages in search of relevant information. In doing so, they tend to engage in satisficing – selecting the first reasonable link or button that might lead them towards the target information. As such, website design utilizes visual hierarchies that makes webpages easier to take in.

STC's website features a simplistic layout that aids in efficient scanability. These characteristics are as follows:

- The website is broken up into clearly defined areas. The navigation bar is located at the top of the page, the main content is at the middle, and supplementary links and information towards the right side.
- Most pages feature multiple items that follow the idea of visual hierarchy.
  - Titles of each item are bolded and are in bigger font to emphasize individual importance.
  - The links at the right side of the page are grouped together based on their logical relationship.
- Each button in the navigation bar is named in a way that is obvious for a given user (i.e. “Jobs” = job postings). However, the entire bar being black doesn’t make each button immediately obvious visually.
- Paragraphs are written concisely.

## Navigation

The main purpose of site navigation is to tell the user the website contents, how to efficiently navigate through them, and ultimately create trust (which in turn creates impression and retainment).

The site’s primary method of navigation is the black navigation bar at the top. It is split into eight separate sections – each of them leads to a different area of the site. While the black color doesn’t make the buttons immediately stand out, the site utilizes CSS to make them usable. Hovering the mouse pointer over any of the words turns the text red and applies a gray border around it.

- Hovering over the “Jobs” and “Contact Us” tabs yields a mini dropdown menu for each, showing additional options. (Hovering over them also turns their text color red.)



*Figure 2.1. STC Silicon Valley’s website navigation bar. Active tabs are indicated by red text, while hovering over another tab highlights the button gray and turns the text red.*

The site does tell the user where they are by changing the text color of the current tab red – the use of red here does stand out well enough. Additionally, the name of each page is displayed at the top left corner; it matches the clicked button in the navigation bar. This is relevant as it helps “build trust” with the user.

Additionally, a search bar is located at the right side of the website under the navigation bar. Scrolling down the website reveals a static mini-menu on the right side featuring multiple links to various items and posts (some of these are essentially repeats from the navigation bar).

STC's site does not utilize a breadcrumb navigation system; it does not indicate where the user is since clicking away from the home page. On the other hand, the site is relatively simple and small enough that a breadcrumb option may not be too necessary; all the relevant information can be found without having to navigate through multiple pages at once.

There are a few instances where clicking on a button (usually "Past Meetings" or "Recordings") and then clicking on the "Continue Reading-→" link on any article would result in both or more of these buttons highlighted red (Figure 2.2). This can be confusing for some users because having multiple "active" buttons would make it difficult to determine what page they're on.



Figure 2.2. Clicking on "Continue Reading-→" under certain pages will yield multiple "active" buttons.

## Principles of Design

Principles of design serve as a rule of thumb to help people understand visual and logical relationships when creating design objects. These in turn help users see how multiple design objects visually work together.

STC's website (Figure 3.1) follows the following principles of design:

- **Similarity:** Design objects have similar function(s). In this case, every page within STC's website follows the same characteristics:
  - Same font use
  - Same page layout. Title followed by page content
  - Hovering over all navigation tab buttons, page item titles, and hyperlinks turns the text red
- **Proximity:** Design objects are grouped and spaced accordingly. Items on most pages are consistently grouped so that users can visually tell them apart.
- **Contrast:** Different design objects are emphasized to show differences. Item titles are bolded and given bigger font to show their status as titles. Hyperlinks can be distinguished by not only the underlined text, but also by hovering over them (the text turns red).
- **Alignment:** Design objects are aligned to highlight relationships. The navigation bar is aligned horizontally. The "Home" tab is aligned in a way that it sets a "line" that serves as a margin. All the items as a result start on said margin.
- **Order:** Design objects are placed to show sequence and importance. This is shown in some pages where the most recent/future meeting is shown as the first

item; past meetings are then shown in reverse chronological order (descending importance).

- **Enclosure:** Design objects are closed and separated accordingly. The entire site is enclosed by a gray background. A long, black rectangular box encloses the navigation bar.

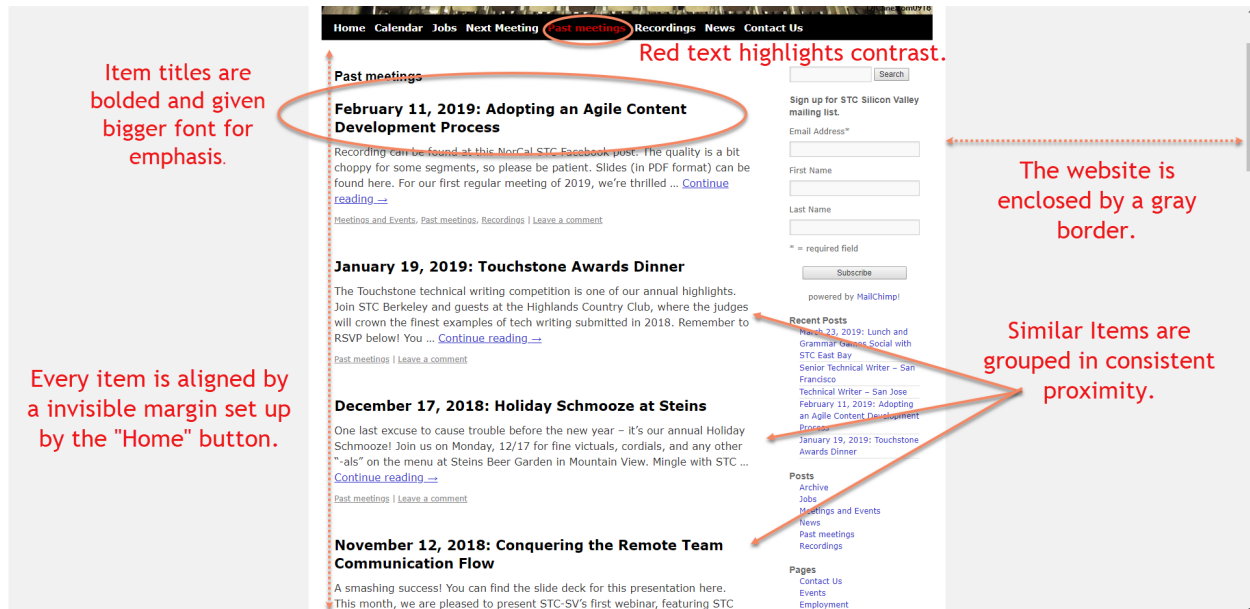


Figure 3.1. Analyzing principles of design on STC's website.

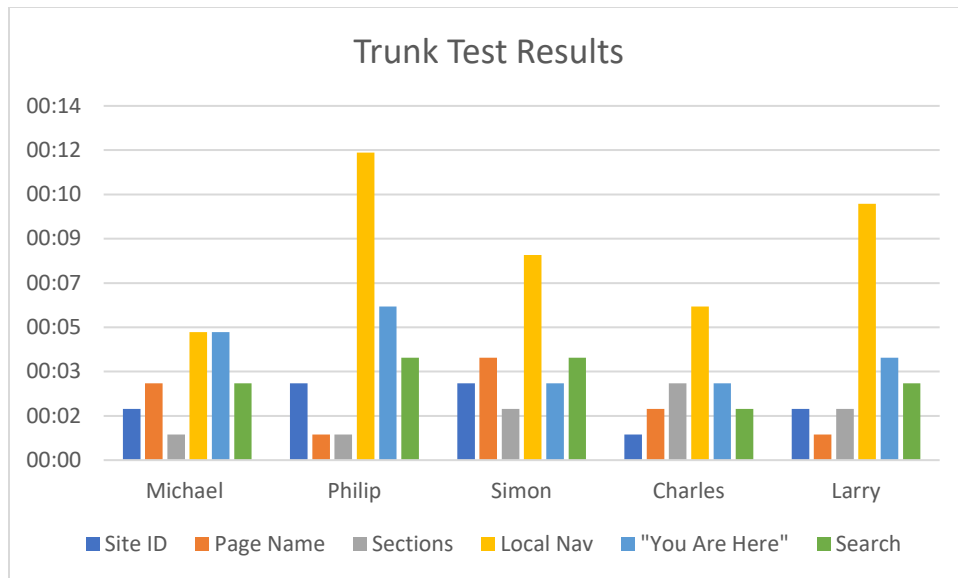
## The Trunk Test

The trunk test is an assessment designed to assess a website's usability visually and navigability. Participants are first led to the website itself, then asked to find the following elements:

- Site ID
- Page Name
- Sections
- Local Navigation
- "You are Here" indicators
- Search Bar

By adjusting characteristics to accommodate trunk test results, websites can be more comfortable and easier to navigate as a result.

For this project, 5 acquaintances were selected to take a trunk test. After introducing them to the STC website, they are tasked with finding the above elements. Their timed results are as follows (Figure 4.1):



**Figure 4.1.** Results of the trunk test.

Participants were able to quickly find most site elements. Aside from local navigation taking the longest to find, all the other elements were found within less than five seconds. Based on the graphical results, STC’s website is usable and easy to navigate.

## Suggestions for Improvement

STC’s website utilizes good visual design that makes it user-friendly. Its simple layout lends itself for easy scanability in terms of visual hierarchy, clearly defined sections, and text conciseness. The navigation bar not only effectively helps users navigate through the website, but also tells them where they currently are. And lastly, each page follows various principles of design such as alignment, proximity, and order.

On the other hand, there are a few things that the website can improve on. The navigation bar at the top does a good job in showing the website’s various areas, but the buttons are not immediately visually obvious; the user must hover the mouse pointer over them to know that they’re buttons. This can be improved by applying visual aid on each button (i.e. different color, adding a button visual) to make them stand out more.

Another suggestion for improvement is the use of the right-side menu. While it provides an additional method of navigation should the user scroll downwards (since the navigation bar won’t be visible), its repetitive nature may raise some confusion for certain users. One way to solve this would be to get rid of the side menu (or at least the “Posts/Pages” sections) and make the navigation bar a “sticky bar” – it scrolls down as the user scrolls down the page. This way, the primary mode of navigation would always be present.