

Technical Communications and the Art of Doodles

It's 2pm, after a big lunch and you are in a long and dreadfully boring meeting. Some long-winded bore is droning on about blah..blah..blah which has absolutely no relevance or interest to you and it's all you can do is keep a straight face and try to stop yourself from yawning and closing your eyes.

The art of doodles has rescued many a technical communicator from this predicament.

WIKIPEDIA defines the doodle as “an informal scribble or sketch” - in short, scribbling without intent and little thought. Some famous people have been talented doodlers in their day, and left behind ample compilations. These include John Keats, Erasmus and Emerson.

Technical communicators are ideally suited to doodles, with their eye for detail and ability to creativity combine words and images.

Doodles can be useful in helping to think about a problem or issue. At the very least, it keeps your hands busy and stops you from fidgeting or chewing your pen during meetings.

The professional doodler knows how to doodle in style. Firstly, it's absolutely essential that you maintain as blank a state of mind as possible. Allow your mind to free-associate and your hand to take your drawing wherever it goes. Doodles are dynamic – they progress as the meeting progresses and have a life of their own.

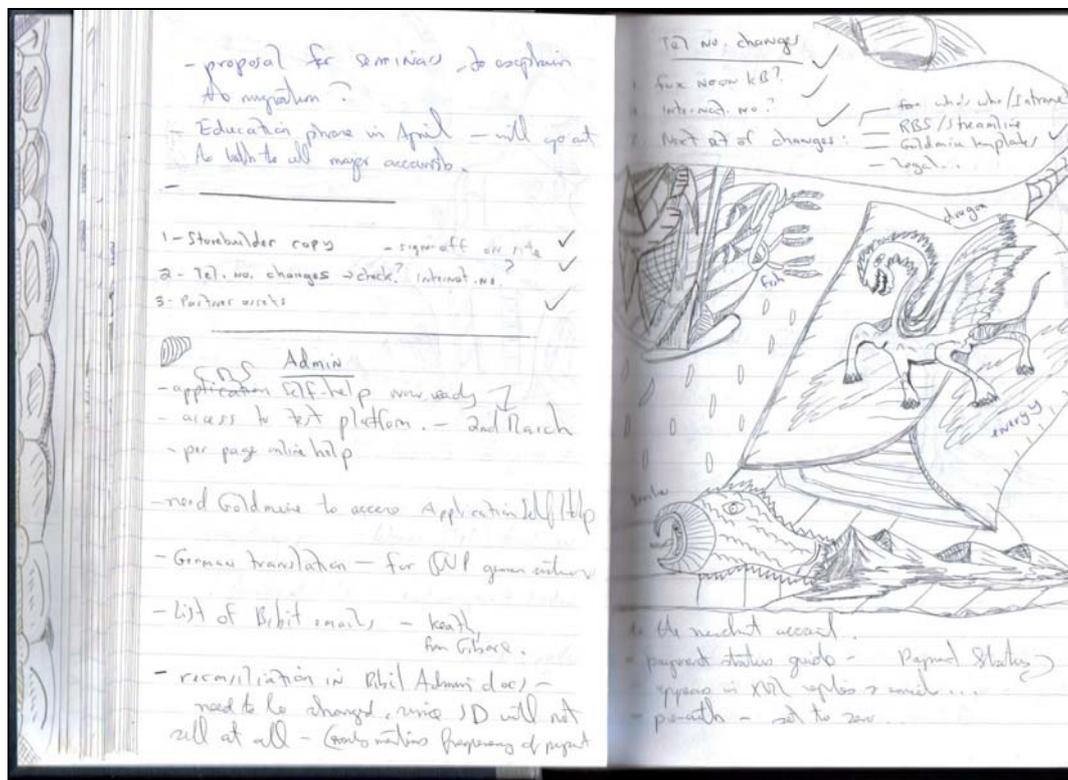


Figure 1: Doodles are Dynamic

It helps immensely when you keep your eyes focused on those in the room and pretend that you are taking copious notes. In fact, there is nothing that prevents you from actively engaging in the meeting and chiming in with comments while you are doodling. Remember to keep your doodles hidden from others. Colleagues will be impressed with your diligence in taking notes, and put you down as a serious and no-nonsense type. In fact, some technical communicators have progressed through to management and higher positions based on the impressions they have given off while doodling.

Don't underestimate the important benefits of doodles. They allow your conscious mind to be disassociated from what is occurring within the meeting room, so that you can subconsciously channel what you are feeling – and output this into a creative format.

Meetings can often be a source of hidden tension. Get any group of people together in a room, and there are all sorts of things going on – manoeuvring, posturing, flattering, snubbing – all of this being reflected through posture, body language, tone of voice, pace, turn-taking, in addition to what is actually being said. This is the subtext to the meeting. Understanding what is going on in your meeting environment can be key to success in your role.

The doodle helps you to release some of the tension that builds up during meetings and channel this onto paper.

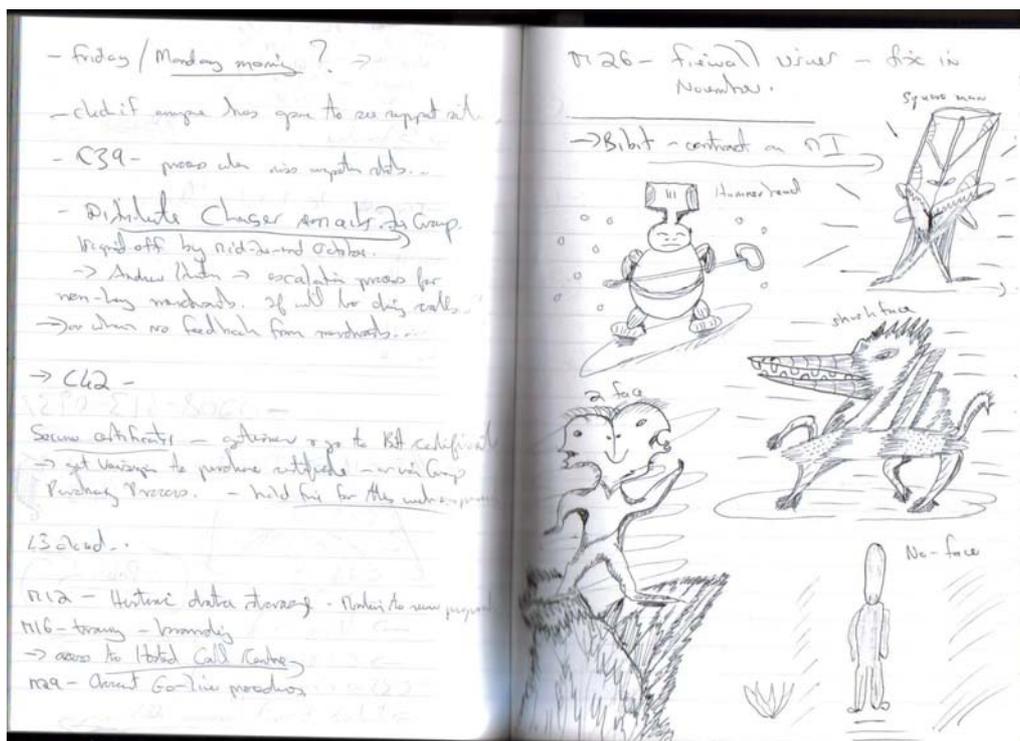


Figure 2 : Doodles help release tension during meetings

After the meeting, a useful technique is to go through your doodles and try put some words next to the scribbles. This works rather like a Rorschach inkblot test, and enables you to reflect what you think you see in your doodle. This do-it-yourself psychoanalysis technique can save thousands in therapy bills.

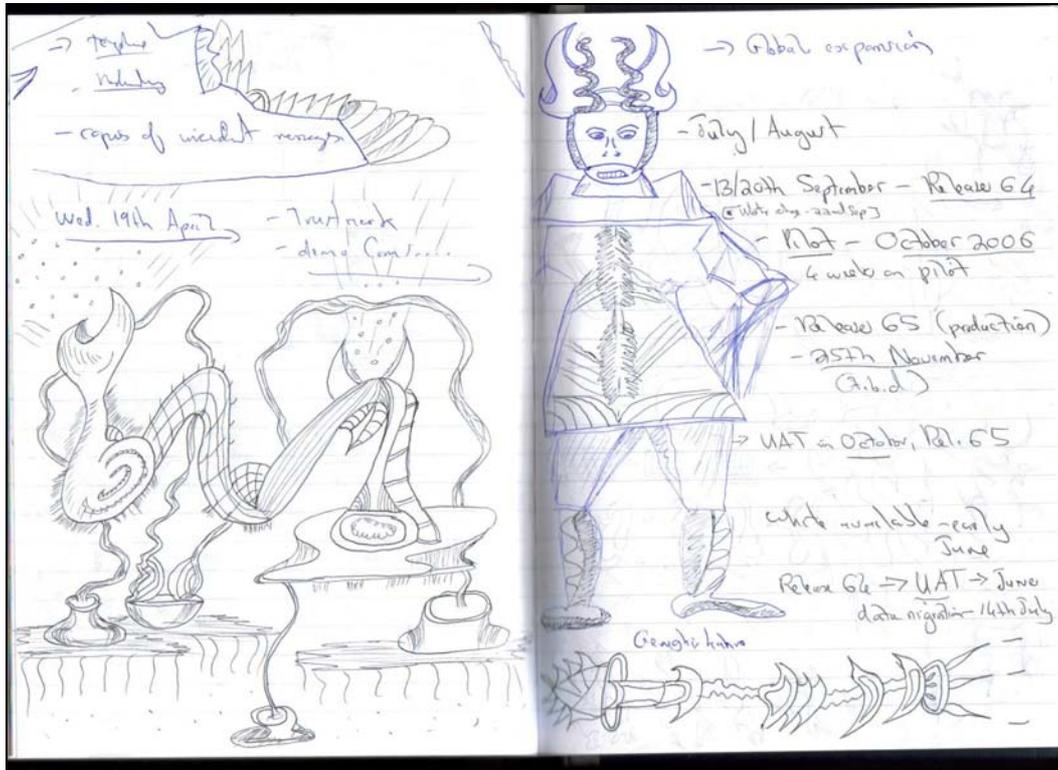


Figure 3: Example from a Professional Doodler

Join the Doodlers association

So what are you waiting for? Now is your chance to become one of a growing number of doodlers. There's no joining or membership fees, and all you need is a pen and a notebook, to keep you company during your next..yawn...meeting.

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