

## Next meeting

### Magazines and Motorbikes: Editing and Publishing in a Magazine Setting

*Presented by Rob Blackburn*

**Wednesday, 6 February, 6.30 pm for 7.00 pm**  
**The English Speaking Union**  
**146 Toorak Road West (between Walsh and**  
**Marne Streets)**  
**South Yarra (Melway 21 4E)**

Rob Blackburn is Chief sub-editor for *Trader Classifieds* magazines (part of the ACP magazines group), and journalist/deputy editor for *Motorcycle Trader*.

Rob will take us through the process of editing and publishing in a magazine setting, and compare and contrast the roles of magazine 'sub' and the book editor.

Rob is a member of the Society of Automotive Engineers (Australasia) and worked for a couple of decades in automotive engineering roles in Melbourne and overseas. Later he operated as a consultant. The mix of work initially involved a small proportion of freelance proofreading/editing/writing of technical and then general material. Gradually this work became his whole job, morphing into his staff contract with ACP three years ago. One of the joys of his current job, says Rob, is that he gets to ride lots of the latest 'vroom-vroom machines'.

#### PLEASE NOTE BOOKING DETAILS

The dinner meetings are organised by volunteer committee members – please assist them in this very time-consuming task by taking note of the following.

**Cost:** \$20 members, \$15 students, \$25 non-members

**Bookings are essential:**

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- Book with Renée Otmar – email preferred – at <renee@otmarmiller.com.au> or phone 5221 5848.
- Book STRICTLY before 5.00 pm on **Monday, 4 February**. Bookings received after this deadline will not be accepted.
- State your Soc Eds membership status, or if you are a student, or a member of VWC, ASTC, AusSI, or APA.
- Please state any specific catering requirements; note that the vegetarian options are always offered at dinner meetings.
- If you need to cancel, please email Renée as soon as possible.
- If you cancel after 7.00 pm on the day before the meeting, the Treasurer will contact you shortly after and ask you to pay as if you had attended.
- People who arrive on the night without a prior booking will be unable to attend.

## A note about our regular columns

As this January issue is an early one – the first Newsletter of the year is usually the February issue – some of our regular columns will not appear until the next issue. The missing columns include: IPEd Notes, Membership report, About Us, and Ed. and the City.

Apologies to all who look forward to these columns each month, but I hope you will find there is plenty to enjoy in this special 'best of' issue.

*Niki Horin*  
Newsletter Editor



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## Christmas gala 2007



Lured by the promise of good food, good company and good fun, around 40 members descended on the English Speaking Union on the balmy evening of 5 December to take part in the society's 2007 Christmas gala ... and we weren't disappointed.

The evening kicked off with socialising and drinks in the drawing room, followed by a huge oriental feast.

Fuelled with brain food and with appetites sated, the boisterous party of editors were soon raring to take part in the inaugural Spicks and SBooks quiz. Hosted by Eve Recht and Rosemary Noble, the quiz was made up of lots of fun wordy and bookish games and competitions. Well, look, I know my table did find some of the questions a bit tough, and I don't think we came close to winning, but we certainly had lots of giggles making up some of the answers!

With the competition won and the prizes distributed, it was then time for coffee and cake ... and so ended another successful Christmas function.

Thank you quiz-mistresses Eve and Rosemary for all your hard work, and for making it a fun night for all.

Also, my thanks to Kerry Biram, who was hard at work on the night with her camera at the ready – the photos pictured here are just a sample of her great selection.

*Niki Horin*

*Newsletter Editor*



## Best of 2007 from around Australia

Last year's issues of this newsletter kept you up-to-date with all the happenings in the Victorian society, but what were the other societies of editors around Australia getting up to? In this, the first issue of 2008, we thought it might be interesting to investigate the goings on of the other societies by way of compiling a 'best of' collection of some of their newsletter editors' favourite articles.

Thanks to Catherine Etteridge from The Society of Editors (NSW), Peter Judge and colleagues from the Canberra Society of Editors, and Rebecca Newman from The Society of Editors (WA) for their 'best of' selections.

### Best of 2007 from *Blue Pencil*

Catherine Etteridge, editor of the NSW society's *Blue Pencil* newsletter, chose two monthly meeting reports for publication in our 'best of' issue: 'Reading the silences between words' by Mark MacLeod and 'Plain English on the run' by Susan McKerihan.

Catherine explained that as many of their society's members live outside Sydney and can't attend regular meetings, it's very important to provide interesting monthly meeting reports in the society's newsletter that convey the experience of listening to the speaker. And these two articles certainly meet this aim.

Catherine offered some insight into her selections: 'Speakers like Mark MacLeod who have such fantastic enthusiasm and know their subject so well are an absolute delight to hear. Susan McKerihan prepared her talk extremely well. She is an effective and engaging speaker and struck a chord with many members who deal with business publishing and plain English.'

For more articles and information about the activities of The Society of Editors (NSW) in other issues of *Blue Pencil*, visit <[www.editorsnsw.com/blue.htm](http://www.editorsnsw.com/blue.htm)>.

**The following article was first published in the June issue of the NSW society's *Blue Pencil* newsletter.**

#### Reading the silences between words

*The dynamic Mark MacLeod addressed the subject of children's publishing in Australia at our February meeting. Drawing on his many years of experience as a publisher, Mark offered valuable advice for aspiring children's book editors. He also intrigued the audience with his insights into the role of silence in communication within a child's world and the importance of understanding it.*

It is good to be able to encourage potential children's book editors once again, because for a while there editing children's books didn't look like a wise career move. But it seems that the plateau is over and even picture books have publishers smiling.

However, the news isn't all positive. Young adult literary fiction is still a major challenge and some publishers who are not willing to gamble on a Children's Book Council short listing – or are not interested in doing so – talk about refocusing on more profitable areas of the list. But it's an exciting time to talk to people in children's publishing and to consider whether you have the right qualifications to edit books for young people.

One of the most important qualifications you could have is an interest in the spaces and silences between words. This is true of all editors working with imaginative literature, but especially so of those working with children. Although Australian children are more confident about speaking up than they were when I was young – as is painfully evident on any train or bus before and after school – Australian speech still values the taciturn. You need to be able to read Australian silence.

There is a specific cultural context, but communication through silence is not restricted to Australian children, of course. Wherever children are marginalised, in some adult company for example, or where their language skills are still developing, silence can be coded speech. And considered more broadly still, silence is now more significant than ever, since contemporary urban society seems driven to fill each moment of the day with noise and sound.

So if silence doesn't interest you, move on.

Many adults believe that their best qualification for working with children's books is their own experience as children. If you share this view, you'll find that your childhood memories often put you at a surprising disadvantage.

Childhood is not a constant. Attitudes change with the culture, so we need to be aware in the editing process that some authors might be writing about values from their own childhoods that are no longer current.

One good qualification for editing would be some knowledge of the changing ways we have perceived the child in history. But simple observation will complicate your perception of childhood too. Some adults are children at sixty, while some children are old souls and appear to be middle-aged from very early on.

The most successful people in the production of children's books have what we used to call an 'inner child' palpably present. I won't name and embarrass the people in children's publishing who are big kids, but look around at the next writers' festival or book week. You'll see who they are at once and in my opinion they are the best. They may not win the most awards from the adult arbiters of good children's literature, but young readers know them – by their books.

The greatest strength of these publishers, editors, writers, illustrators, booksellers and others is that they can still enter into the emotional experience of what it is like to be a child. The novelist Lilit Norman once told me wisely that this is the one ability a writer for children cannot do without.

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If you are writing or editing children's books and have forgotten what the street you lived in as an eight-year-old looked like, or what clothes children wore ten years ago, what music they listened to – then library and Internet sources will help you out. But if you have forgotten what it feels like to lose your bus money and have to walk home, or what it feels like to wet your pants in kindergarten and have to be given dry ones in front of the whole class, sourcing that emotional experience will be difficult.

And sometimes impossible.

As an editor you must be alive to the words children actually use in the times and places created by a story, but you must also be alive to the joys and distresses of those children.

Writers for teens and judges of books for teens are clearly aware of the distress in the lives of young fictional characters. But I often wonder if their own adult preoccupations prevent them from hearing the laughter as well.

We laugh when we stand back from our own experiences and see them from different perspectives. Even the painful experiences. One of my favourite bits of advice from the self-help decade was, 'If you are going to be able to laugh about it in three months or three years time, why not try laughing now?' We don't do it ourselves – and we don't encourage young readers to do it – often enough.

I blame the relentless use of the first person.

Those of you who went to school in the pre-postmodern era were probably taught that while the third person was the 'normal' storytelling mode, the first person could be used to make a story more immediate or more 'personal'. I wanted to hug Maryanne Fahey when she had her narrator buck the twentieth century convention and choose the third person for his autobiography in *I, Nigel Dorking*. I'm so tired of these past generations of first person narrators.

Self-centred teens who, like pre-schoolers, are at the centre of the universe – obsessive – take themselves so seriously, they think that every step of their journey from the bedroom to the bathroom must be described in riveting detail.

I think of Tom Keneally telling student writers early in his career that one of the hardest decisions in fiction was whether your character should go to the bathroom. And, if so, how did you actually get him or her there? I think also of Jennifer Paterson's response to those who criticised her for not washing her hands while she cooked on *Two Fat Ladies*. She said of course she washed her hands constantly in the kitchen, but did her critics stop to consider what fabulous television that would make?

If every act is described, each one loses some significance in fiction. And we long for silence.

The one interesting use of the first person is of course when the narrator is unreliable and becomes the story. But as a parent I have sometimes wondered about what this does to our attempts to teach children about the truth. Is the concept of truth irrelevant? When, from our politicians down, communication seems to be all a matter of 'spin', is there any point to talking about such absolutes? Are all storytellers – including our children – relating more or less beautiful lies?

These are not issues pursued only by those concerned with children's books – as the controversy surrounding writers like Norma Khouri and James Frey indicates. Ethical and moral questions are particularly important in children's publishing, however, because the buyers of the books are parents and educators. So if such questions seem quaintly old fashioned, again you might be in the wrong place.

We now live in a world in which the main reading done by children every day is on the Internet. Anyone with access to the technology can post on the net, and this is both its greatest strength and weakness. Clearly, understanding the text has become a more complex business than ever. And in pursuit of accuracy – particularly of information – young people need to read more than ever before.

Generally at this point, what you get on the net is raw, unmediated data. There will be more frequent opportunities for editors on the net in the future – witness the way Wikipedia's co-founder has now moved on to found Citizendium, with stricter editorial controls. But because there are few editorial filters applied to what is posted, children need to read widely and critically in order to assess what they are reading.

Of course not all the filtering that adults may wish to apply to children's reading is to ensure the reliability of the text. Censorship of children's books is still prevalent enough to persuade the authors of *Brought to Book* (Dillon and Williams, 1993) that there is a need for a second edition. This first study of censorship in Australian school libraries identified 'censorship by stealth', which still occurs at many points in the production of children's books. Adults make choices in writing, illustrating, editing, designing, marketing, selling, buying, reviewing and recommending books that are intended for children. And while they make these choices in what they consider the best interests of children, children themselves are rarely consulted about the criteria used.

One of the consequences has been the power of nostalgia in contemporary children's publishing – an attempt by adults to impose an innocence on childhood, which they would say they were restoring, but which they may never have experienced themselves in the first place. There are far too many cute books about children that are pretending to be for children.

I feel assaulted by adults who impose cuteness on children and their world and diminish childhood in doing so.

I feel assaulted by other less important features of writing for children at the moment: the tide of cultural imperialism that rolled over us with American technology and the American popular culture it brought in its wake. Some days I feel like giving up my desire to help preserve the Australian version of English; but most days I want to resist the Australian authors who have their characters 'go watch television', or 'holler' to their friends. I can't tell you how many manuscripts I have read that include this American synonym for 'shout'. And yet I have still never heard an Australian child or adult actually use the word in speech.

Similarly, every second Australian school story I read refers to the head teacher as 'Principal Smith'. I realise that journalists have begun to use the American style 'Prime Minister Howard', 'Minister Downer' and so on. But I am yet to encounter an

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Australian school where this style is common. The head teacher is 'the principal' or 'the principal, Ms Smith' or just 'Ms Smith'. 'Principal Smith' is being modelled directly on 'Principal Skinner' from the ubiquitous *The Simpsons*.

I ask myself, too, as an editor whether our fondness for American language has dulled our ironic Australian sense of humour. Outside New York and the Jewish community, Americans are not noted for their irony. Why else would we have added 'not' to the end of a sentence in the late 80s and 90s? 'Great party – not.' Traditionally Australians would simply have used intonation to indicate their true feelings when they went home disappointed, saying, 'Great party!'

And when did we change from putting ourselves last in the list and start saying 'me and Principal Smith had a talk'? Must be when I started to get old, because I want to make a moral judgment about it!

Perhaps you're thinking it's an easy life if an editor can work up energy over such small points. But, silenced on the margins of adult power, children spend so much of their time noticing tiny details. That thread hanging from the teacher's

jumper, Mum's not-quite-matching socks. The little veil of silence drawn over some subject of conversation when the adults notice that the children are listening. The meaning of intonation when the child who is normally addressed as 'Jenny' is suddenly called 'Jennifer'. The significance of that vast empty space that John Brown sees in the double bed next to Rose, as she pines for the Midnight Cat. The unspoken exasperation of the mother who thought she was going to enjoy a holiday at Sandy Beach, using baby Gerald himself like a stick of driftwood to write the baby's name in the sand.

Despite the frustrations of relatively low pay, minimal marketing budgets, the disappearing backlist, the dominance of Harry Potter, adults who think they know what children should read and so on, I wouldn't miss such moments of insight that are enjoyed by children's publishers and editors in the spaces and silences between words for anything.

*Mark MacLeod is an editor, publisher, lecturer and radio and television presenter. A past president of the Children's Book Council of Australia, he now works as a freelance editor and speaker.*

***The following article was first published in the April issue of the NSW society's Blue Pencil newsletter.***

## **Plain English on the run ...**

*The November presenter was Susan McKerihan, a full-time Plain English adviser and editor with PricewaterhouseCoopers. Susan's is an unusual role which involves helping accountants, auditors, actuaries, tax consultants and other more general business advisers to prepare clear and succinct reports for their clients.*

Susan started work in 1992 as a copy editor with the management consulting division of what was then Coopers & Lybrand. She had no editing training, but had a strong understanding of grammar and Plain English, and the following qualifications:

- a Masters in Applied Linguistics at the University of Sydney with Michael Halliday
- several years' experience teaching English as a foreign language, in France and in Australia
- significant exposure, through previous jobs, to the world of business.

Through a combination of experience and necessity, her role gradually developed into advising how to make highly technical documents accessible to non-technical audiences. She also had, in her own words, the great good fortune to work extensively with Robert Eagleson, whom she regards as her guru.

Susan has had some challenging jobs involving unusual and complex subjects. As a result she has developed a philosophy about Plain English editing in a highly pressured environment. In this report we share some of her ideas.

*The challenge:* How to achieve a reader-focused approach to business documents that – among other characteristics – are written under extreme time pressure by people whose principal skill is not writing; must comply with statutory requirements; and will be publicly scrutinised.

*My response:* always look for quick wins by helping with the big picture first (make sure the principal messages are clear and the document is 'skimmable'); don't ignore the importance of layout and design; and apply Plain English principles when editing the text.

### **1. Get the big picture right first**

I've found that when business reports are difficult to understand or irritating to read, in most cases the reason isn't poor grammar or style – it's illogical structure and buried messages.

So my first step in editing such documents is to focus on structure rather than language. Initially I take an 'adviser' approach rather than doing hands-on editing. I give the writer some suggestions about how to highlight the big picture and make the document 'skimmable'. This means I don't look at the style or grammar, but at the overall structure and whether the main points (such as, findings, conclusions, recommendations) can be quickly and easily found.

This concept of a reader focus is new to many business writers. Once they begin to think of the reader as a customer, they accept that there is no point in writing a learned report that will gather dust.

When the writer and I have sorted the principal messages from the supporting detail and presented those messages appropriately, I then offer to do a detailed copy-edit and proofread. But even if there isn't time to polish the writing, at

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least there is more likelihood the restructured document will convey the writer's message clearly.

## 2. Emphasise the importance of layout and presentation

The way a document looks can affect the way the reader approaches it and how quickly they absorb its content and message. It's possible to make a turgid message much easier to grasp just by tweaking its layout and design.

I consider this an important element of readability, and always advise on the overall 'look and feel' of any document I am involved with. Some things I concentrate on are:

- uncluttered page design, with plenty of white space
- legible text (type style and size) and colours that help rather than hinder reading
- a visible structure, in terms of informative headings (rather than generic ones)
- the contents list as roadmap
- the use of graphics to complement or clarify text.

## 3. Apply the basic principles of clear writing

The following principles are the ones I use in my workshops and training courses. I also apply them when editing business documents.

### *Break up long sentences*

- Edit long sentences ruthlessly.
- Use your gut feel as to how long is too long, but in most cases sentences of more than 25 words are difficult to follow (unless in the hands of a good writer).
- Encourage the use of semi-colons; unconfident writers shy away from them.

### *Prefer the active voice*

- Convert passive, impersonal sentences into direct active language.
- Make the writer take responsibility for their findings and opinions.
- Don't be afraid of 'we' and 'our'.

### *Avoid nominalisations*

- Nominalisations, or 'buried verbs', are a common feature of business writing (the verb is buried in its corresponding noun form). Overusing them can make a document plodding, static and remote. For example, I would change 'the implementation of the new system will result in an improvement in XYZ' to 'implementing the new system will improve XYZ'.

### *Less is more (unless it muddies your meaning)*

Shorter is generally clearer, particularly if the length is caused by repetition or padding. In most of the examples I deal with, wordiness occurs as a result of the following and is easy to recognise and fix:

- unnecessary adjectives or adverbs
- repetition of ideas
- phrases where one word would do

- padding with meaningless phrases such as 'The purpose of this letter is to inform you that'; 'It is important to note that'; and 'During the course of our review we found'. But who edits the editor? I have to remember to practise what I preach!

### *Use everyday words and avoid trendy terms and clichés*

This is the hardest part! Convincing people that they can appear knowledgeable and impressive while using plain, everyday words is a major breakthrough.

In addition, certain words and phrases seem to take hold in the business world, whether they make sense or not. Here are some of the expressions currently in vogue in business writing:

- 'impact' as a transitive verb: 'These results will impact the staff's bonuses.'
- 'around' as a catch-all preposition – replacing any other preposition: 'There are some issues around performance.' 'Management has identified risks around password control.' 'We should look at the reasons around how this occurred.'
- 'space' used to mean area of focus, field of expertise, segment of market or industry, and so on
- 'deep' anything (probably from in-depth): 'We have deep expertise around this space.'
- collective nouns (management, the group, company names) with plural verbs; probably acceptable these days but very irritating: 'Management have assessed the results.'
- no hyphens in compound adjectives, compound nouns or noun strings, often resulting in ambiguity or confusion: 'before tax income assessment review'.

There is also the problem of legitimate jargon (such as accounting terms) used in an inappropriate context. Once again, in these cases the key is to take a reader focus, which often involves challenging the writer to 'say it in Plain English'.

## 4. Training

I am often asked to present workshops or training courses, and prefer to do so only for small groups of people from the same area, with the content tailored specifically to their type of work.

It might be anything from an introduction to Plain English, a more in-depth report-writing course, an analysis of what constitutes an effective business document, or tips for editing other people's work – but it always includes the concept that the secret to good business writing lies in taking a reader focus.

## Conclusion

I consider myself a very lucky editor because (i) my job involves putting my hobby and my greatest interest into practice; and (ii) I work for a wonderful organisation that believes in what I do and supports me. What could be better than that?

## My favourite reference books

*Concise Oxford Dictionary* and *Macquarie Dictionary*: both have thorough and useful sections on language, style and grammar

*Style Manual*, 6th edition (John Wiley & Sons, 2002)

Robert Eagleson, *Writing in Plain English*)

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Martin Cutts, *The Plain English Guide*

Tony Kleu, *Writing Good English*

Elizabeth Murphy & Shelagh Snell, *Effective Writing – Plain English at work*

*A Plain English Handbook – How to create clear SEC disclosure documents* Securities & Exchange Commission ([www.sec.gov/pdf/handbook.pdf](http://www.sec.gov/pdf/handbook.pdf))

*The BBC News Styleguide* (BBC training website)

*The Economist Style Guide*

John Seely, *Oxford A–Z of Grammar and Punctuation*

Godfrey Howard, *The Good English Guide – English Usage in the 1990s*

William Zinsser, *On Writing Well*

William Zinsser, *Writing to Learn*

*Susan McKerihan is a member of the NSW society and works as an in-house Plain English adviser and editor with PricewaterhouseCoopers.*

## Best of 2007 from *The Canberra Editor*

Peter Judge, editor of *The Canberra Editor* newsletter, called on his society colleagues for their selections of favourite newsletter articles of 2007. The final choices were 'Fiddly bits – the proposal and the quote', by Elizabeth M. Murphy and 'Thinking about words – musing on boozing', by Peter Judge.

Both of the selected articles are written by long-time contributors to the newsletter. 'Fiddly bits – the proposal and the quote' is one of a regular series of articles on a variety of topics important to editors that Elizabeth has been writing since October 2002, and 'Thinking about words – musing on boozing' is one of a regular series of articles on words that Peter has been writing since September 2004.

Other articles by both of these writers, as well as more information about the activities of the Canberra Society of Editors, can be found in other issues of *The Canberra Editor* at [www.editorscanberra.org/news.htm](http://www.editorscanberra.org/news.htm).

**The following article was first published in the April–May issue of *The Canberra Editor* newsletter.**

### Fiddly bits – the proposal and quote



Elizabeth M. Murphy

Groan!!! Yes, I agree, 'the proposal and quote' is probably the most fiddly area that an editor has to deal with. I wrote broadly about quoting in 'By the Way ...', in *The Canberra Editor* for January 2002 [www.editorscanberra.org/Jan02.htm#by](http://www.editorscanberra.org/Jan02.htm#by), so this time I'm writing a sort of 'running order' based on a number of my own quotes.

Where to begin? First, **read the ad for an editor carefully**, or listen carefully if it's a phone call. Watch for indications of what level of skill is required, what they think the document requires to make it readable/publishable. If there are actual **selection criteria** in the ad, make sure you can address every one of them confidently and succinctly. You may have to send for the selection criteria. **What if there are no selection criteria?** This is often the case with non-government organisations. In that case, get clues from the ad, and contact the organisation for further details.

Is it a government job? Government departments often, but not always, ask you to sign a standard **government contract**. These are 'one size fits all' so a lot of what's in them does not apply to editors. Most government departments will listen to reason – put up a case for varying the clauses in the contract to suit you and the editing job, and they are likely to go along with you. These contracts also often include a demand that you take out **massive insurance**. Again, if this seems unreasonable to you, put up a case for reducing the amount or cutting out the requirement altogether. I have done this on many occasions, and have found government departments and agencies very reasonable. If there is no contract, it is in your own interests to make sure that you **get agreement in writing** to your proposal for tackling the assignment. Then, if things go wrong, or if the job changes along the way, you have your proposal and their agreement to refer to when you need to write a supplementary quote. This is particularly important when working for friends – keep business on a businesslike footing.

Now it's time to put in an **expression of interest**. This can be a quite general document – often just a letter saying little more than that you are interested and why (perhaps because the material is in your own field), and offering to quote for the job after you have been sent a suitable sample of the document. Never quote for a job before you have seen it. Some organisations want an hourly rate before anything happens at all. Resist giving this too early, but if you have to, give a range of rates and list some of the variables – level of edit that might be required, degree of complexity of the document, pressure cooker deadline, and so on.

When you receive a reasonable sample of the text, you can get started on the task of getting the job. First you need to **assess the job** for yourself – define it in terms of what you see needs to be done and why, no matter what the client might have said. Refer to last month's article 'Fiddly Bits – Project Definition' at [www.editorscanberra.org/Mar07.pdf](http://www.editorscanberra.org/Mar07.pdf). This stage includes timing yourself to see how long it takes you to edit some sample pages. From this you can work out your **hourly rate** for the level of edit you deem necessary. Add on time and charges for administrative work, consultations, possible research and so on; and consider the level of difficulty of the job – charge more for a really difficult job than for a simple, straightforward job.

I believe the client is entitled to know **how you propose to go about the work** – I like to set out a step-by-step **timeline for aspects of work** – charting the project. A numbered list of steps might include:

1. rough hardcopy check, listing grammatical and stylistic problems and inconsistencies
2. detailed analysis for discussion

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3. planning consultation (it's customary not to charge for an initial consultation)
4. on-screen edit using Track Changes
5. allowance of 'x' hours for additional consultations
6. amendments as necessary and send to client.

Then I tell the client **what IS included** and **what IS NOT included** – I might include making extra copies of each section of the document for discussion with the client, and I might exclude checking a bibliography for anything other than spelling, typos and inconsistency of formatting (depending on the job, of course). You will end up with the number of hours you estimate for completion of the edit, a short list of inclusions and exclusions, and an estimate of how long overall you expect to take working on this job. Editing is an intensive activity that nobody can do for long at a stretch, so a task you estimate will take 40 hours will, of course, take more like two weeks, as you need to spread those hours over a longer time than two days.

When can you start? You need to tell them about your **availability**, and take into consideration any other jobs you are working on at present. Can you work on two or three jobs at once? Or do you need to wait until the present job is finished first?

A very important paragraph is your **disclaimer**. You are an editor and you are suggesting or recommending certain alterations that, in your view, will make the document more readable for the target audience. You need to tell the client that your alterations are recommendations only and that they are free to accept or reject any or all of them. But the client also needs to know that you will not be responsible for any repercussions should your advice not be taken, or should other alterations be made after you and the client have agreed that the job has been completed satisfactorily. Also use this paragraph to tell the client that, if the assignment alters significantly while in progress, you have the right to submit a **revised quote** to cover the additional costs you would incur.

Now you are ready to give the client your **estimate of time required** (broad or detailed) and **your rate(s)** for doing the work. Don't be backward about hours – you are entitled to work at a steady rate, not breakneck speed, and you need time for all the extras (the fiddly bits), and the client has to be prepared to pay for them. As to hourly rates, you may need to quote more than one rate for an assignment – one rate perhaps for copy-editing and another for project management, research and so on. Check with others doing similar work if you don't know what rate to charge – this is a very difficult area for new editors. Don't undersell yourself, but perhaps charge a little less than the industry average if this is your first job.

Set the actual **quote** out clearly, showing your basic rate, plus GST if applicable, and finally the total. Give a **time limit**, perhaps 14 days, for consideration of your quote.

Say how you propose to **invoice** (for example, on completion or monthly). Also say how you prefer to be paid – cheque or direct credit. Be careful about giving bank details in an email to anyone you are not sure of.

End with a polite, interested paragraph, mentioning the addressee's name, and offering to give further detail if required.

Mail it or email it and get on with your current work – watching the letterbox won't make the job come to you any faster!

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Peter Judge

## Thinking about words – musing on boozing

*Words are an editor's stock-in-trade, the raw material they work on and their greatest asset. Words are surely worth thinking about. Peter has been writing a regular series of articles on words since September 2004.*

Alcohol is a bit of a paradox. No, not the stuff you drink (although that might be, too), but the word. The prefix *al-* is a dead giveaway, showing that the word must have come from the Arabic. But the Arabs don't drink, at least not officially – according to the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, the prohibition of wine and spirits is one of the distinctive marks of the Moslem world. It was not always so – the Koran speaks of wine having both beneficial as well as detrimental effects, but concludes that the detrimental effects (through abuse) outweigh the beneficial. Whatever, how did that word alcohol appear and develop its present meaning?

The origins are even more astonishing, because *al-kohl* was the name given to the fine black powder, antimony trisulphide, used by ladies in the ancient world as eye make-up. Seventeenth-century travellers referred to it as 'a mineral called alcohole'. It seems a long way from an early version of mascara to a bottle of Scotch, but that in itself is quite a story. It seems that the very fineness of the powder that constituted *kohl* became the primary meaning of the word, so that from the 16th to the 19th centuries chemists spoke of 'alcohol of sulphur' (for 'flowers of sulphur' produced by sublimation) or 'alcohol of iron' (*alcohol martis*, very finely powdered iron produced by reduction).

By extension from this meaning, the term was then applied to any substance produced by distillation or similar processes, and so in the 17th century to 'alcohol of wine'. In the early 18th century we find alcohol defined as 'the pure Substance of anything separated from the more Gross. It is the more especially taken for a most subtle and highly refined powder, and sometimes for a very pure spirit. Thus the highest rectified Spirit of Wine is called Alcohol Vini.' Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) says 'An Arabick term for a high rectified dephlegmated spirit of wine, or for anything reduced into an impalpable powder'.

In case you are puzzled by that word *dephlegmated*, which sounds as though it might describe your chest after a coughing fit, it simply meant 'to deprive of superabundant water, as by evaporation or distillation; to clear of aqueous matter; to rectify; used of spirits and acids.' And yes, the term is related to *phlegmatic*, which also has nothing to do with having a nasty cold, but with staying cool in adversity. Your *phlegm* that launched a thousand Kleenex comes from a Greek word meaning 'inflammation', via Latin and French intermediaries.

It is only in the mid-18th century that people began to refer to drinkers of *alcohol* without any further qualification, so you can see that alcohol in its present sense has a comparatively recent pedigree. Not so *booze*, which has a robust Old English (OE) air to it, and turns up in the early 14th century, 'Drink to him dearly of full good bouse', where the next line makes it clear that the *bouse* rhymes with *mouse*. Johnson has '*bousy* [adj] from bouse] Drunken.'

*Spirit* began life in its various religious contexts, translating the Greek word *pneuma* and particularly contrasted with man's earthly body. So if his spirit was man's essence, it became, in the late 17th century, a term describing other kinds of essence, including those obtained by distillation. Bunyan's Pilgrim says, 'He gave me also a piece of honeycomb and a little bottle of spirits'. So to the early 19th century, when we read that 'the substances from which spirit is obtained are usually barley, wheat, oats, rye, sugar or molasses.' A pretty good list for starters.

But our chasing after the words underestimates the great antiquity of these noble drinks. We have all benefited from the happy coincidence that the two ingredients required for alcoholic fermentation turn up just about everywhere and always appear together. Most civilisations developed some form of alcoholic drink very early on – the Chinese, who seem to be first off the mark in all sorts of ways, were distilling a beverage from rice beer by 800 BCE, and by the start of the Christian Era distillation methods were known to the Arabs, the Greeks, the Romans,

the ancient Britons and most countries of Europe. These early distilled spirits were mostly based on sugary substances like grapes and honey, making brandy and distilled mead. A little later, starchy substances joined the fray: the grains mentioned above and even the humble potato. By medieval times distillation was flourishing, as shown by the happy fellow in the illustration, bubbling away outdoors from his wood-fired still.



*Beer*, brewed from malted barley and made bitter with added hops, is an OE word with Germanic roots – modern German *Bier* – and is now a generic term that includes *ale* (also OE, made without hops) and *porter* (strong dark beer to sustain porters and other workers in tough trades), a beer like *stout* made dark by charring the malt.

*Wine* is known to have been produced since at least 4000 BCE. Our word comes from the Latin *vinus* and so do most other European words for wine – to name a few, *le vin*, *il vino*, *el vino*, *o vinho*, *der Wein*, *de wijn*, *vinet*, and it's *vino* in all the Slav languages, too. Australian wines are primarily named for their grape varieties, whereas in France the locality where the wine is made is seen as more important, the *terroir* – the complex of soil, climate, water, altitude, exposure and the social culture of the local community. In many European countries the name of a wine region may effectively carry copyright, which is why Australian sparkling wines can no longer be called *champagne*, even if fermented in bottle by the *méthode champenoise*.

Incidentally, the word *grape* reached us from the French *grappe* meaning a bunch of grapes – if you want just one grape in France you ask for a *raisin*. It is related to Italian *grappa*, a vine-hook by which to *grappare*, to *grab* the bunch of grapes. (And yes, *grappa* is also Italian brandy.) *Grape*'s changed meaning in English appears to have come from its original adoption in the plural, then evolving a new sense in the singular. We owe *sour grapes* to Aesop's fable in which a fox couldn't reach grapes hanging high up on a vine, and went around saying to anyone who'd listen, 'The grapes are sour anyway!' (Moral: 'It's easy to despise what you can't get'.)

So to more modern drinks, many of which focus on 'water' in their names. Scotch *whisky* and Irish *whiskey* both owe their names to the Gaelic *uisgebeath* or *usquebaugh*, meaning 'water of life'; the French term for brandy *eau-de-vie* and Scandinavian *akvavit* translate likewise. *Vodka* is the affectionate diminutive of the Russian word *voda* meaning water, and while I can attest to many Russians' affection for vodka, there is generally nothing diminutive about the quantities in which they demonstrate their affection. Our word *brandy* (formerly brandywine) comes from the German *Branntwein* (literally 'burnt wine'), and if nothing special we might call it *schnapps*. But in Germany the word *Schnaps* (with one 'p') may just imply a portion of any strong liquor small enough to be gulped down in a single swallow (*snappen* is to grab or snap). As for *Cognac*, it's the name of the town in western France that has specialised in the production of high quality brandy for the last 300 years.

*Gin* is from the Dutch *genever*, but that has nothing to do with the Swiss town – the French *genièvre* is the juniper plant, whose berries give gin its flavour. Gin began life in Holland in the 18th century as an inexpensive medicine with the diuretic properties of juniper-berry oil, but rapidly became popular and was introduced to England by soldiers returning from the Low Countries. It then became not only 'mother's ruin' (Cockney rhyming slang) but the destroyer of many of the urban poor – who can forget Hogarth's 'Gin Lane'?

Then there's *rum* (short for *rumbullion*) and the various aniseed drinks (absinthe, Pernod, anis, pastis, ouzo, raki ...), the liqueurs and so much more. This is a congenial topic that is hard to cut short, but it's making me thirsty. I'll leave you in good company. Cheers!

Peter Judge

Sources: *Oxford English Dictionary* on CD v. 3.0 and *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2006 on DVD. *Le Trésor de la langue française* at <atilf.atilf.fr/tlf.htm>. Comments on alcohol and Islam are based on <answering-islam.org/Books/MW/ wine.htm>, an article reprinted from the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leyden), co-ed. Prof. A.J. Wensinck. The image is from *Liber de Arte Distillandi* at <www.pbm.com/~lindahl/food-art/>.

## Best of 2007 from *Bookworm*

Rebecca Newman, editor of the WA society's *Bookworm* newsletter, chose a meeting report from an intriguing dinner meeting event held in May 2007 as the pick of articles this year. The dinner meeting was presented by Tatum Hands and Danielle Davies, and the article, 'Forensic Editing: the pen (or keyboard) really is mightier than the sword', was written by Emma Pearmain.

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For more articles and information about the activities of The Society of Editors (NSW) in other issues of *Bookworm*, visit <[www.editorswa.com/html/publications\\_bookworm.htm](http://www.editorswa.com/html/publications_bookworm.htm)>.

**The following article was first published in the June issue of WA society's Bookworm newsletter.**

## Forensic editing: the pen (or keyboard) really is mightier than the sword

A few meetings ago, two of our members mentioned in passing that they were 'forensic editors', and while the conversation moved on, the title lingered for some of our committee. Just what *is* a forensic editor, we wondered.

Despite what CSI would have you believe, 'forensic' doesn't mean doing everything by torchlight. Forensic editing simply means applying investigative editing and legal analytical skills to documents relating to, or used in, courts or forming part of public legal record.

Tatum Hands and Danielle Davies specialise in forensic and legal editing, and as they explained to our May meeting's audience, technological advances have made their role a necessary step in our legal and governmental systems.

The rise of desktop publishing has led to an accelerated publishing schedule for all types of documents. Traditionally, documents would have to go through several stages, from writing to typing to printing to delivery, passing through the hands, and under the watchful eyes, of several specialists along the way. In comparison, today anything can go from conception to global distribution in a matter of hours.

In addition, there is an implicit assumption that highly qualified fields such as the law are practised by people who can write well; we assume that because someone holds an influential role, they must be able to articulate their knowledge in a logical, well thought-out manner. However, contemporary legal studies do not prepare lawyers and judges for extensive writing tasks in an area where even the smallest punctuation or grammatical error can sometimes change the meaning of a whole piece and undermine the legal authority of the document.

This means that forensic editing is arguably one of the most responsibility-laden fields of editing. There is a need to hold a substantial amount of English and editorial skills alongside legal knowledge, as well as a clear prerogative to maintain the intentions and integrity of all documents. Sound exhausting?

When you take into account the rates charged by professional consultants, it's surprising to learn that forensic editors have got to keep a sharp eye out for plagiarism too. Every reference and footnote needs to be checked and checked again, as there have been messy instances where up to 60% of a document has been 'borrowed' from somewhere else ... and alarmingly, some writers didn't even know that this was an issue!

But then there is a silver lining. A collective sigh of wistful envy rose from the audience as Tatum explained about a contractual clause that explicitly expresses her right to be 'intrusive'. Yes, she has the contractual right to be as ruthless with her red pen as she wants to be.

*Emma Pearmain*

## Useful Websites for Editors

**This monthly column invites all those intrepid Internet explorers among the Society's membership to share their online discoveries. Including you! It is intended to be a forum for sharing Internet sources useful to editors.**

Thank you to Nick Renton for his contributions to this month's column.

For definitions of those ever-prolific and increasingly perturbing acronyms, visit the very useful <[www.acronymfinder.com](http://www.acronymfinder.com)>.

For an international English thesaurus and dictionary online, visit <<http://wordweb.info/>>.

Hmm ... is Nick's name ringing familiar? If so, that might be because Nick, among other things, is the author of lots of books, including a number of writing books like the excellent reference *Renton's Metaphors*. For more information about Nick, visit his website: <[users.bigpond.net.au/renton/930.htm](http://users.bigpond.net.au/renton/930.htm)>.

## Submissions ... please!

Do you know of a useful technical information website? Do you have a favourite editing blog you would like to share? Do you want to alert your fellow editors to an interesting journal article or a humorous editing website? If so, please email the website address details along with a short explanation of why you like the site to the Newsletter editor: <[niki.soe@fivemile.com.au](mailto:niki.soe@fivemile.com.au)>.

*Niki Horin*  
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Membership of the Society is open to anyone engaged professionally in any aspect of editing for publication, or who has had such experience in the past. Associate membership is open to anyone interested in the Society's activities. Associate members may not vote or hold office in the Society.

Application/renewal forms are available from the Membership Secretary or the Society's website:

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I want to apply for **FULL MEMBERSHIP** of the society.

*Applicants **must** tick one or other of the following two boxes, but may tick both boxes.*

I have two years' full-time (or the equivalent in part-time) editing experience in paid employment **OR**

I have a post-secondary qualification in editing and publishing and one year's full-time (or the equivalent in part-time) editing experience in paid employment.

I have attached a short statement that substantiates the option I have ticked above. It includes a summary of the type and duration of my editing experience and details any relevant qualifications I have. **Note: Applicants for full membership must provide this information.**

I have attached statements from two people in editing-related employment which state that I have the necessary qualifications and experience required for full membership. (These references state each person's current occupation, employer and position.) **Note: Applicants for full membership must provide this information.**

I want to apply for **ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP** of the society. I have an interest in editing and associated disciplines and in the society's aims generally.

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## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL COMPLETE THIS SECTION IF RENEWING YOUR EXISTING MEMBERSHIP

I wish to **RENEW MY MEMBERSHIP** of the society for 2007–08.

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Category	Payment required	Applicants 1/1/08-30/06/08
Full	\$75	\$37.50
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I have **TRANSFERRED PAYMENT** online to the society's bank account The Society of Editors (Vic) Inc / Commonwealth Bank / BSB 063-114 Account number 0090 1695. *Note: In the DESCRIPTION line, please type 'MEM' followed by your surname (or as many characters that will fit).* **I enclose a printout of my online receipt as proof of transaction.**

I would be interested in talking to a committee member about joining the committee at some stage in the future.

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**PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND POST IT TO SOCIETY OF EDITORS (VIC), P.O. BOX 176, CARLTON SOUTH, VICTORIA 3053 AUSTRALIA.**

Dates for your diary  
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