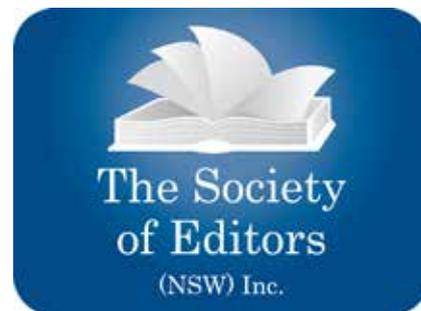


Blue Pencil



February 2016

Everything in its right place: Fiction continuity

We were fortunate at our September meeting to have Sarah Fletcher present her paper on tracking continuity in fiction, which was voted the best paper at the IPEd 2015 conference in Canberra last May.

I mostly work on fiction and I realised a couple of years ago that there must be a better way to track timelines and what people are wearing through a book. It is easy to miss something you are not looking for, particularly if you are focusing on something else in your fiction editing or proofreading. An ad produced by Transport for London to promote awareness of cyclists shows how our brains are very good at focusing on a particular thing but may miss a lot of background details. (View the ad at <https://vimeo.com/35582594>) One

of the ways you get better at tracking continuity is training yourself to be more aware of those background details.

What is continuity?

I and the *Oxford Dictionary of Current English* define it as: 'The maintenance of continuous action and self-consistent detail'. As editors we are already accustomed to the task of maintaining consistency but 'continuous action' and 'self-consistent detail' may require further explanation.

In the TV and film industry many people are responsible for continuity



Next meeting: Tuesday, 1 March 2016

Annual General Meeting

The March general meeting is the society's Annual General Meeting. It is free to all attendees.

As well as presentation of the 2015 Annual Report and the election of committee members, we will conduct a vote on the special resolution relative to becoming the NSW branch of Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd).

From 1 July 2016, the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. will transition into Editors NSW, a branch of IPEd covering editors in the NSW region. To facilitate this change, the society will wind down its obligations under the *Associations Incorporation Act 2009* (NSW).

Full details on the registration page, see link below.

Our meetings are always held on the first Tuesday of each month:

6.30 pm for a 7.00 pm start
Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts
280 Pitt St, Sydney (cnr Bathurst)
Supper, wine and soft drinks are included.

Registrations: <http://editorsnsw.wildapricot.org/event-2161187>

April meeting: Speaker to be confirmed, Tuesday 5 April 2016

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including the scriptwriter, script editor, script producer, script supervisor, camera operator, director, film editor, and the hair, make-up and special effects people.

In novels continuity is ultimately the author's responsibility but managing continuity is one of the ways that editorial professionals can add value to publishing. It is one of the things that nobody else really does.

Continuous action

The first type of continuity to track is continuous action which has three components: plot, timeline and blocking.

Does the plot actually make sense? Are there massive plot holes or other gaps? Things that are impossible? Is the timeline physically impossible? For example, is someone pregnant for fifteen months? This is a problem if they are a human but not if they are an elephant.

Have any dead characters accidentally come back to life? In some genres such as zombie novels that would be absolutely fine. Are there internal inconsistencies such as a person being a particular age when something happened but an elapsed period of time between two events that does not correspond?

One of the challenges in managing a timeline is that authors do not usually give you a spreadsheet that has every event in the novel and exactly when it happens and a timestamp. Most fiction will have absolute time, so 11.00 am or Saturday, 2 July 2016. You may need to check the calendar to verify that this date is actually a Saturday because often authors will not check that kind of thing.

We also have relative time: two weeks later, the next day, that night. You also need to keep an eye out for implied time, which includes things like the seasons, the weather, the position of the sun, the phases of the moon. It gets interesting when you are working on a fantasy novel with more than one moon,

For example, a rural romance may say a particular crop is being harvested in a season or month in a particular area that is not the time the crop would be harvested. This is one of the ways as editors that we can use our general knowledge to improve the work that authors give us.

The real problem with these time scales (absolute time, relative time, implied time) is that authors often use all three at the same time. We need to reconcile them to look at the timeline as a whole and to help do this I have developed a continuity tracking sheet.

Blocking is a stage term that refers to where the actors are positioned, in this case the characters. The author loses track of the characters sometimes. Common blocking pitfalls are when an author describes an action repeatedly, or when someone enters or leaves the room twice. You might have seen this in film and TV with props disappearing and reappearing or changing levels of liquid in glasses.

Self-consistent detail

The second type of continuity, self-consistent detail, refers to consistency within the world that is presented to the reader. The main elements are place setting (geography), time setting (period detail) and characterisation (character details). This world might be a real place, for example, Surry Hills, and the author will need to know where the streets are. Or it can be a completely imagined world, such as in speculative fiction. We have place setting and geography, where exits are, if there is a hill somewhere. Time setting and period detail can really trip up authors and this is where an editor's vigilance can identify anachronisms.

Characterisation, which can be a bit harder to track, is important. I am sure we have all read novels where characters have changes in attitude or the way they react to something. People do this all the time but in fiction we have to sustain an illusion and the best way to do that is to try to keep things consistent in ways that readers expect.

Continuity toolkit

What do we actually do about this? Doing a pass for continuity would be a huge luxury, so I use my continuity toolkit and I try and incorporate continuity tracking with the rest of the job that I am doing. We can use the style sheet to track continuity, and also a specific continuity tracker. Major parts of your toolkit that are not so quantifiable are your professional judgment and constant vigilance. Sometimes there is not necessarily a

'right' or 'wrong' so you do need to make a call about whether it is going to bother the readers and whether it is worth even asking the author. Another judgment call is how much detail do you need to track

You need to balance comprehensiveness against the budget and the deadline. One of the ways that you can cut down the amount that you actually need to write down is to pay attention to red flags and ignore stuff that might not be so problematic.



Continuity red flags include:

- numbers, including dates, times and time zones
- ages of characters
- distances
- date and day of the year, if it is more than implied
- hair and eye colour
- height
- clothing and shoes
- crops and flowering plants
- pregnancy progress.

Also, check anything that 'smells funny' such as when you are reading and you think 'Really??' The smell test is looking a little more closely when something just does not seem right because sometimes you will find there is quite a substantial problem. And that is the kind of thing that will bother readers that may have specialist knowledge in this area. Some readers will care a lot less than others and in some genres it may be less of an issue. In crime you need to be careful of timeline because crime readers are used to analysing things like that. In some other genres it might not matter quite as much.

Style sheets: Inline or breakout method?

Everybody does style sheets for fiction, but I include character and place names because they do often change or morph throughout the course of the novel. I have also started adding more little details about the characters, listing in the style sheet their general appearance, (hair colour, eye colour,





height); major relationships (sometimes they can change in the redrafting); personality quirks and any significant injuries (is it their left or right hand?). With place names I like to note relative distances and directions, such as 'it takes half an hour to drive from here to there', because sometimes it can be a problem.

I have identified two types of style-sheet methods: the inline method and the breakout method. With the inline method the character and place details are noted within the style sheet alphabetically amongst other vocabulary words. This can make your style sheet quite lengthy but it is compact to keep things together.

The breakout method has a separate section for characters, a separate section for place names, weapons and other things you need to track.

The benefits to managing continuity by adding it to the style sheet include that you do not need to update and create yet another document, and a style sheet in Word is searchable, which saves a lot of time and is essential in a series.

However, the style sheet is not good for timeline tracking.

Continuity tracker

One solution is the continuity tracker, a separate document that records how much time has passed at specific points in the story and any other continuity red flags that you want to scribble down as you go. It is much better than the style sheet for keeping track of timelines and it can reconcile those three time scales we discussed before: your absolute, relative and implied timescales. You can actually look at them all together and see where they are not matching up.

I never send my continuity trackers to my clients. I do them in hard copy and I scribble notes. It can be sketchy and messy. I use abbreviations all the way

through it. You do not have to spend the time to make it pretty. You can download my template, which I have licensed under Creative Commons, from www.sarahjhletcher.com.

The tracker has four columns for information. In the first column, called 'date and day', I identify the start of the main action. I call it D1 and then, as I work through the book, I try and match up D2, D3, D4 and so on until the end of the main action. That gives me a unified picture of the timeline and means I can incorporate the actual date, plus two weeks later, plus all the seasonal stuff. Any absolute time references go there, if there is a date it goes in that column.

In the second column 'time passed' I record 'plus two days' or other relative and implied time markers. I may need to go back to check something so in column 3 'page' I record the page number and any other relevant information I might need later goes in column 4 'notes'.

Different genres may have different continuity standards. Crime, in particular, may be tougher on it than other genres. Some readers will have unusual amounts of knowledge and may be experts in the field. A reader with less knowledge might say 'nobody could shoot a gun that fast' whereas a reader with more knowledge might think 'you cannot shoot that many rounds from an xyz-gun without reloading'. I usually try to edit with the reasonable reader in mind.

Query, query, query

In terms of editorial practice, how do we deal with continuity issues? As with any editorial query that you cannot resolve by yourself, ask the author. Do not make continuity changes without the author's input because they can often have subtle, but important knock-on effects especially for things like timeline

and plot tweaks. It is up to the author to make these changes.

Use your best professional judgment. Think of readers, keep an open mind. And do not let continuity overwhelm your other editorial considerations if you are trying to do a lot of other things with the text at once.

In terms of author relationships, do not get smug. And do not punish authors for continuity mistakes because everybody makes them. It is better for the book and your relationship with the author to deal with it on a factual level and move on.

You might suggest solutions where appropriate, but maintain your editorial boundaries. It is not your name on the book and, ultimately, the author is responsible for the continuity as with all other aspects of the book, aside from maybe design and production. They may want their book to go out with massive plot holes you can drive a truck through. At the end of the day, that is up to them. It can be satisfying to find those little traps and pitfalls, particularly as your skills develop in this area, but do keep those boundaries in mind.

New members

Professional

Joanne Smith

Associate

Peter King

Julie Koh

Laurie Ormond

Michelle Morgan

Janie Wormworth

Student

Jenny Ryan

Continuous action

- plot
- timeline
- blocking

Self consistent detail

- place/geography
- time/period detail
- characterisation
- character details

Copy deadline for the next (March) issue of

Blue Pencil
Friday, 11 March

On-screen accreditation exam in 2016

The next IPEd accreditation exam will be held on 25 June 2016 and will be an on-screen exam for the first time. Candidates will complete the exam on screen using Microsoft Word. The structure of the exam will be the same as previous exams. However, candidates will be required to enter text on-screen, edit text using 'track changes' and select answers from multiple-choice options or drop-down lists.

The exam is designed for editors with at least three years full-time editing experience or equivalent, so it is expected that candidates will be

comfortable using Word. The exam will be held in an invigilated computer lab in each capital city and candidates will have access to technical support if required. The computer labs use PCs with Windows, but we hope to be able to make Macs available if needed.

Registration will open at the beginning of March and close at the end of May. The society is holding a workshop on 3 May to assist candidates in their preparation. IPEd is also planning to develop a webinar to give candidates an idea of what is involved in the on-screen exam.

The sample exams in the on-screen format will be available on the IPEd website well before the exam preparation workshops, so potential candidates will have the opportunity to practise using the on-screen format. It is important for potential candidates to complete at least one sample exam under exam conditions to check their timing and take note of skills they may need to brush up on.

http://iped-editors.org/Accreditation/Next_accreditation_exam/Sample_exams.aspx

Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship applications close 18 March

The Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship is run by the Australian Publishers Association and sponsored by IPEd and the Australia Council, among others. This prestigious award has been offered since 1992 and provides a unique opportunity for a book editor to expand his or her knowledge and expertise.

It provides an experienced editor with the opportunity to research editorial and publishing practices in the USA, through undertaking a research project of eight to ten weeks in the editorial department of an American publishing house.

The Fellowship is designed to be of benefit to both the recipient and the Australian publishing industry. The Fellow will be required to share their project and experience through workshops, talks, mentoring and writing.

Applications for the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship close on 18 March 2016. More information, including application details, is available from the Australian Publishers Association website <https://www.publishers.asn.au/news/could-you-be-the-next-beatrice-davis-fellow>

Festivals and conferences 2016

Overseas

Bologna Children's Book Fair

4 to 7 April, Bologna, Italy

Oxford Literary Festival

2 to 10 April, Oxford, UK

London Book Fair

12 to 14 April, London, UK

Hay Festival

21 to 31 May, Hay-on-Wye, Wales

National Editors Conference

10 to 12 June, Vancouver, Canada

Edinburgh International Book Festival

13 to 29 August, Edinburgh, Scotland

SfEP Conference

10 to 12 September, Birmingham, UK

Frankfurt Book Fair

19 to 23 October, Frankfurt, Germany

Interstate

NT Writers' Festival

5 to 8 May, Darwin

Melbourne Writers Festival

26 Aug to 4 September

Brisbane Writers Festival

7 to 11 September

New South Wales

Newcastle Writers Festival

1 to 3 April

Sydney Writers' Festival

16 to 22 May

Bellingen Readers & Writers Festival

11 to 13 June

Byron Bay Writers Festival

5 to 7 August



Professional development 2016

Editing young adult fiction

Date: Friday, 11 March 2016

Time: 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

Presenter: Zoe Walton

Register on <http://editorsnsw.wildapricot.org/event-2133931>

Members: \$220

Distant members: \$132

Non-members: \$350

What is involved in editing fiction for a young adult audience? Is it all YOLO and FOMO and emoji these days, or is there more to it? In a one-day workshop, publisher and editor Zoe Walton will explore some of the key elements to consider when structural editing and copyediting YA fiction, and share examples from her own experience. Topics will include:

- what is YA and who is reading it?
- what are our responsibilities and ethical considerations in editing books for teens?
- editing for different ages and markets
- achieving an authentic voice – language; idiom and slang; dialogue
- structure, pacing and character
- editing YA genres – from contemporary to speculative fiction and more
- message vs story – balancing themes, author's intentions, educational value and readers' expectations
- considerations in copyediting YA.

Zoe Walton is Publisher – Children's and YA Fiction at Penguin Random House Australia, and has more than fifteen years of experience editing and publishing fiction for young readers. Authors she has recently published include award-winners Tristan Bancks, Nicole Hayes and John Larkin, and *New York Times* bestseller John Flanagan.

Preparing for accreditation: Tips, strategies and exercises

Date: Tuesday, 3 May 2016

Time: 9.30 am to 4.30 pm

Presenter: Meryl Potter

Register on <http://editorsnsw.wildapricot.org/event-2137770>

Members: \$220

Distant members: \$132

Non-members: \$350

If you are planning to sit for the Institute of Professional Editors (IPEd) accreditation exam this year, or simply thinking about sitting in the future, this is a good workshop to attend. It also serves as an editorial master class – an intensive day, with lots of exercises to challenge style decisions, how to tackle lists and tables, appropriate language styles, and the all-important style sheet.

The 2016 exam will be offered on screen for the first time. This workshop, however, covers strategies and content, with only some reference to working on screen.

The workshop focuses on:

- preparation for the exam – tips and strategies for organising revision, reducing stress, managing your time and hitting the 80 per cent pass mark
- editing a short extract, comparable to the extract for part 2 of the exam – dealing with the tricky things that might be included, following the brief, making style decisions, preparing a sound style sheet, and writing sound author queries
- part 3 of the exam – some short answer exercises for practice (for example lists, tables, language), and making sound choices of questions that will help you pass
- Q&A forum – time to ask any other questions you might have.

Meryl Potter is an IPEd Distinguished Editor with more than 30 years experience as an editor and writer, over a vast range of subjects, across book publishing (trade, education, custom), magazine publishing, marketing, and corporate and government communication and publications. She was a lecturer for Macleay College's Book Editing and Publishing diploma for more than twelve years, and has developed and presented workshops for the New South Wales, South Australian and Tasmanian societies of editors, and the Australian Institute of Interpreters & Translators in New South Wales and South Australia. She was lead writer for three of the five IPEd accreditation exams, including the first one in 2008.

Workshop information

Registration

To register for a workshop you can book and pay online on:

www.editorsnsw.wildapricot.org

before the course date. A tax invoice will be automatically generated and emailed to you. Workshops fill quickly and we often have people on a waitlist for courses, so please secure your place early.

Please note that we require a minimum of ten registrations for workshops to proceed. The society reserves the right to cancel workshops if there are insufficient enrolments.

If you have any inquiries please contact the office manager at:

events@editorsnsw.com

Regional members

Regional members living more than 200 kilometres from Sydney can register at a 40 per cent discount on the cost of the society's regular workshops (excludes some computer-based workshops).

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Blue Pencil

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Copy deadline March issue is 11 March 2016

The views expressed in the articles and letters, or the material contained in any advertisement or attachment, are those of individual authors, not of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.

Advertising rates

Full page \$375; half page \$200; one-third page \$125; quarter page \$100; one-sixth page \$75 (half of one column). Circulation: approximately 400. Please note that the committee reserves the right to decide whether advertisements are appropriate for this newsletter.

Membership

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents) and anyone who supports the society's aims. Membership is available in different categories.

Membership runs for a calendar year. The 2016 fees are \$105 for professional members (new or renewal), \$85 for associate members (new or renewal) and \$45 for student members. Interested organisations can become corporate associates for \$400 per year.

To obtain a membership application form visit the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. website www.editorsnsw.com, phone 9294 4999 (voicemail) or email membership@editorsnsw.com.

NB: The society transits to become NSW branch of IPEd, 1 July 2016.

Listing in the *Editorial Services Directory*

The *Editorial Services Directory* is available online at www.editorsnsw.com/esd. New listings and updates can be added throughout the year. The cost is \$40 per year in addition to the fee for professional membership of the society. New listings should be submitted using a template available from the office manager at membership@editorsnsw.com.

Committee meetings

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings, generally held on the second Tuesday of each month. Please contact the office manager for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.