

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW)
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August 1989

Next meeting 6 September 1989 Working together – editors and book designers

The speaker at the next Society of Editors meeting is one of Australia's most experienced and creative book designers, Susan Kinealy. Notable for her dynamic and understated covers, Susan also has a remarkable capacity to come up with fresh and innovative designs for inside a book. Some examples of her work include *The Bradman Albums* (Weldon), *The Artist's Garden* (Bay Books) and *Jenny Kee's Knitting Book* (Simon & Schuster).

Susan will be speaking about how editors and designers can work more closely together, and how different companies

have different requirements and expectations.

We look forward to hearing Susan speak and hope you can join us at the Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli on 6 September at 7.30 pm. Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at a cost of \$3 if you telephone and book by Tuesday 5 September and \$5 if you come along without booking.

RSVP by telephoning Anne Sahlin on (02) 660 2425. Please leave a message on her answering machine if she is not in.

Last meeting – Robyn Appleton

Robyn Appleton was guest speaker at our August meeting. Robyn has had many years experience training editors in various publishing houses and has recently been involved with formal courses conducted for editors. Her theme for her talk was "Academic qualifications do not an editor make".

An editor has to deal with many different tasks during the process of preparing a manuscript for publication. Editors often become microsurgeons on manuscripts when authors, although contracted, fail to write well enough to achieve their purpose.

Editors are responsible for the quality and accuracy of the text, for shaping an unwieldy manuscript into something publishable. This involves recognising the difference between editing and rewriting, and learning that the two are not synonymous.

A manuscript is a collection of information; it is not necessarily grammatically correct or well written. Good editors are sensitive to each individual manuscript, its particular audience and form, so that by constant liaison with the author they can solve the problems posed by the manuscript. If

material is confusing or ambiguous, it is the responsibility of the editor to point this out to the author. The editor corrects grammar and spelling, but should not assume the role of co-author or ghostwriter unless specifically requested to.

By being sensitive to the manuscript and its market, an editor can advise on the type of introduction needed and on whether a glossary, index or other matter should be included. As well, a bibliography or end notes may be required. Attention to these details makes the information more accessible and may widen the market for the published work.

Editors are also responsible for eliminating discriminatory or biased material. Authors are often so close to their own writing that they fail to see such bias; editors can provide an objective opinion on problem areas. However, editors should also realise the importance of the author's own style,

which should be retained even though changes are made to the manuscript.

A competent editor needs amazing powers of concentration, much patience, and the ability to work in isolation for long periods. Essentially a creative person, an editor needs superior word and grammar skills. A broad general knowledge is vital, as is an inquiring mind ever open to more knowledge. Reference works should be freely consulted to verify information – editors should never presume or assume. An editor also needs to be flexible, open to suggestions and able to communicate easily with people. A logical person makes a more successful editor than does a dogmatic one. Each manuscript being different, there cannot be “rules” for editing, only guidelines.

There are formal, privately run courses available for editors. A typical course covers approximately 16 hours of lectures

**Society of Editors (NSW), PO Box 254, Broadway 2007
Committee 1989**

Kim Anderson (President). Ph 969 6853 (Impresa)

Anne Sahlin (Treasurer). Ph 660 2425 (freelance)

Christine Mackinnon (Minutes). Ph 419 6867 (freelance)

Jeane Balcombe (Newsletter). Ph 212 4600 (Community Child Care) or 713 9696

Jill Wilson (Catering). Ph 439 3307 (freelance)

Michael Wyatt. Ph 699 9491 (Keyword Editorial Services)

Ken McGuire (Freelance Register). Ph 449 4255 or 44 6192

Anyone wishing to know more about the Society may write to PO Box 254, Broadway 2007 or telephone any committee member.

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and costs about \$400. It is impossible to cover adequately, in this short time, all the duties of an editor, especially if sufficient practical work is to be completed to demonstrate the theory being taught. Course notes tend to be simplified and dogmatic whereas an editor needs to “feel” each individual project. Editing is not just a grammatical exercise—the colour and soul of each manuscript is unique and should be treated as such.

Robyn pointed out that anyone can attend one of these courses if they pay, but that this does not mean participants have the necessary personal attributes to make a good editor. Nor does attendance at a course prove that the person has “learned” to be a good editor. By paying money and attending the required lectures, many students expect to receive a certificate even though they might not necessarily have what it takes to be an editor. For a certificate to have any meaning, practical work to a required standard must be completed.

Such courses are certainly beneficial provided they are treated as a source of guidelines and not as a substitute for, or shortcut to, “on the job” training. The only way to become a competent editor is by getting adequate hands-on experience.

Robyn feels that the best way to begin is by learning to proofread. This develops familiarity with proofreaders’ marks. Inconsistencies in the text are much more obvious once the manuscript is typeset and as costs are more important at this stage, a trainee editor will learn to change as little as possible. This will cure the ghost writer instinct and teach a trainee editor how best to deal with a manuscript. Robyn summed up her talk by emphasising that editorial courses cannot attempt to teach the personal qualities outlined above. Courses can only build on these

prerequisites. Anyone considering enrolling in any course or seminar should ascertain exactly what will be covered and ensure that the course content will meet their particular needs.

Ultimately it is the publisher’s responsibility to train editors as it is only through experience with individual projects that competence can be achieved. The notion that editing is a glamour job for Ladies and Gentlemen is a fallacy!

Christine Mackinnon

A hilarious idea

In English the article “an” is used before words beginning with a vowel (except u when it has the initial sound y) and words beginning with an *unpronounced* h, eg, an apple, an illiterate usage, an hour. It is not used before words beginning with an aspirated h – we do not say “an house” or “an history lesson”. Yes, yes, you will be saying, we know all this. Exactly. Why then do some people write (and the usage seems to be increasing) “an historic event” or “an hotel”? They do not say “an ‘istoric event” or “an otel”. Indeed, the only person I have ever heard pronounce these words without the initial h was Winston Churchill. He also pronounced “home” as “ome”. He was born in 1874 and, as an upper-class Englishman, his speech habits were extremely conservative.

On one occasion I heard an ABC announcer say “an historic moment” (pronouncing the h): presumably he was just reading what was put in front of him. And in fairness I must say that a member of the Society of Editors has assured me that she always not only writes “an historic moment” but actually says it as well. She justifies this by a “rule” that you use “an” before a word beginning with h where the

accent is not on the first syllable. If this holds then we should write (and say) "an" before all such words, as in the following example.

I was wandering in an hexagonal garden, admiring an hibiscus, when I thought I saw an hyena lurking behind an hydrangea. I nearly had an hysterical fit, but I decided it was just an hallucination. Later I met a man who was smoking an Havana cigar and playing an harmonica. He was an Hungarian who suffered from an hereditary disease and he subjected me to an harangue about an horrific experience he had just had. An hyena had leapt at him from an herbaceous border with an hostility unparalleled in his experience. He tried to immobilise it with an hypnotic stare, but this failed, so he transfixed it with an harpoon borrowed from an hussar.

If we do not use "an" before these words in ordinary speech, why should we write it? It is either a silly affectation or a vulgar error.

Maureen Colman

Copy editing workshop

The Australian Book Publishers Association is running a one-day workshop in Sydney on 21 September 1989. The workshop is for experienced editors and will cover substantive editing and matters of style. Topics include:

- Substantive editing: structure and logic (Juliet Richters)
- Points of style in Australian English (Susan Butler)

- Questions and answers on the AGPS Style Manual (Graham Grayston)
- Fiction editing: some perspectives by an author/editor (Marele Day)

The workshop will cost \$170 for ABPA members (or \$140 if paid before 31 August) and \$220 for non-ABPA members (\$190 if paid before 31 August).

Telephone (02) 29 5422 to reserve your place.

Weldon Russell Book Editor, Sydney

Weldon Russell, publisher of illustrated non-fiction books for both the international and the domestic market, requires a bright, energetic and meticulous book editor to join its small and enthusiastic publishing team. A minimum of 2 years in-house experience is required. Salary commensurate with experience.

Telephone Dawn Titmus on (02) 406 9222 for more information.

Future meetings

Please note that the October meeting of the Society of Editors will be held on Wednesday 4 October. This will be the last monthly meeting in 1989. Monthly meetings resume in March 1990.

Copy deadline

The deadline for contributions to the September *Blue Pencil* is Friday 8 September.