

Blue Pencil

Newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW)

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Next meeting 1 August 1990

What publishers want from freelance editors

The needs and expectations of publishers in relation to freelance editors vary enormously. Sometimes editing only is required, while at other times a freelance editor may have complete control of a project, including design and illustrations. At the August meeting a panel of publishers will discuss their expectations of freelance editors. For further information, please see the enclosed notice (and pin it on your noticeboard).

Please note: Attendance at meetings has fallen off lately, possibly because people prefer to stay home on these cold winter evenings. However, members will appreciate that it is very embarrassing for the Society if we invite two or three speakers to a meeting and only a *dozen* people turn up to hear them. The committee has decided, therefore, that unless at least 20 people attend the August meeting, the September and October meetings will be cancelled.

Future meetings

Meetings of the Society are held on the first Wednesday of each month.

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|-----------------|--|
| 5 September | Desktop publishing |
| 3 October | Editing magazines and journals – panel |
| November | Christmas function |
| 6 February 1991 | AGM |

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Freelancers and publishers

What is the role of the freelancer (or it freelance)? These alternative terms have been discussed in previous Society of Editors newsletters [See *Blue Pencil July 1988. Editor*]. At the risk of being etymologically incorrect, I must confess a strong preference for freelancer. Whatever your preference, there is no doubt that freelancers are playing an increasingly important role in publishing.

Publishers in Britain started using freelancers in the 1960s as a way of cutting costs, according to an article in the *Bookseller* (19 January 1990). Evidently there was an increase in the cost of raw materials at this time. In

Australia there has also been a general move towards freelance labour. Using freelancers is cost-efficient in that they are used only when needed and in-house staff numbers can then be kept small. In-house staff after all have to be paid regularly and require such things as space, equipment, coffee and superannuation; they also go on holiday and occasionally are sick—all the common drawbacks of employing human beings rather than machines.

The reasons for people choosing to freelance rather than work in-house full-time are many and varied. Motherhood immediately springs to mind, but the *Bookseller* article states

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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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this is less important than redundancy. If Australia is in a recession at present (technical or otherwise), publishers may move even further towards freelance labour. Whatever the reason, freelancing seems to be a preferred way of life among many editors in Sydney. When trying to fill an in-house position recently, I failed miserably when trying to persuade various freelancers of the advantages of in-house employment.

The needs and expectations of publishers in relation to freelance editors vary enormously. Sometimes editing only is required, while at other times a freelance editor may have complete control of a project to camera-ready copy, including design and illustrations. In some publishing houses the freelance editor has almost complete control of the editing and subsequent stages of production, while

in others the in-house supervising editor looms large. If you “go freelance” after working in-house for a particular publisher, you are indeed in a fortunate position for freelancing for that publisher—you know the house style, and the level and type of editing expected. However, if a freelancer and publisher are just starting an association, time and patience on both sides are required to arrive at a good, cost-efficient relationship.

Publishers want freelance editors to be responsible for their work and accountable for it—as indeed do all professional freelancers. This relationship is to be the subject of our August meeting, when a panel of publishers will discuss their expectations of freelance editors.

Valerie Marlborough

July meeting

Technical editing

Jean Weber, a freelance technical editor and editor of the Society of Technical Communicator's quarterly newsletter *Keyword*, spoke to us at the July meeting on the role and skills of technical editors.

The word “technical” is used in a wide variety of senses and encompasses science, technology and maths. The publications on which technical editors work are also diverse – from marketing manuals and software-support manuals to manufacturers' instruction manuals. The technical editor's role involves everything from planning a whole set of manuals or books to co-ordinating the writing of them, reading the material from the user's perspective to see if it makes sense and copy editing. The stages at which the editor is involved

and the amount of involvement depends on the number of staff. The technical editor may also be called upon to teach courses on writing and/or editing and to help with the preparation of slides for presentation.

A degree in science, any science, is an asset, but the main skill required is to be able to assess and edit from the reader's point of view and the reader's knowledge level; for example, that of the office worker who will use the product. Computer companies are only now realising that they need to hire people who can read and write! The big problem has always been that the employer tends to think that technical knowledge of the subject matter and an ability to talk to technical people are the only skills required. Technical editors

therefore have to market their communication skills to technical people whose technical knowledge often exceeds their ability to communicate that knowledge to a non-technical reader. In practical terms it is important to be able to use a computer since it is best to play with the program yourself when editing a manual. Desktop publishing experience is also an advantage. With this hands-on computer experience and a background in editing science books your chances of getting a technical editing job are good. Salaries and freelance rates are high, with an average salary of \$35 000, increasing to \$40 000 or even \$45 000 if you are good.

The Society of Technical Communicators, which currently has 180 members, was formed in 1989 to:

- provide opportunities for members to get together and exchange information
- promote industry awareness of technical editors
- reach potential employers who do not know what skills are required.

Society meetings are held every two months and there is an annual weekend seminar in September. Surveys of members—where they are, pay rates, whether contracted or staff employees and so on—are conducted. Visits to printers and other relevant organisations are also arranged.

Most of the members of the Society are technical writers, but the Society would

like to attract a wider range of people. To this end the Society hopes to develop courses for technical writers and editors through its very active education committee.

IBM (Australia), with whom Jean is currently contracted, was the first company she had encountered that regarded editors as co-ordinators of writers. Most people in computing look upon editors as people who “muck around with your commas”, probably because “editing” on computers means just that. Software developers tend to think that the writing department is a nuisance—it takes too long, is too expensive and so on. However, when the manual has been produced the marketing department think it is great because they can read and understand it. Battles between software people who think manuals should be written the way the programmer thinks and writers who want the information organised for the way it is used are ongoing. Eventually, through marketing results, the programmers realise that writers are right!

IBM (Australia) has a programming section that produces its own manuals. Products from Australia are aimed at the South American and Asian markets; many of the programmers, therefore, are from Asia, where English is a second language—it can be quite fun translating this “English” into intelligible English.

Lesley Dow

Editors' Societies around Australia

Victoria

The Society of Editors (Vic) held its AGM on 28 June. Their June newsletter carried a report on a talk by self-publisher Wendy Lowenstein, an article by Jill Kitson on global

publishing, a review of the book *The Law of Journalism in Australia*, and some observations about WordPerfect 5.1 from John Bangsund, the newsletter editor

Elsewhere in New South Wales

The Galley Club

At the July meeting of The Galley Club there was a panel discussion on the relationship between publishers and printers. The speakers were Rhonda

Black, Production Manager at Allen and Unwin, and Robert Stapelfeldt, New South Wales Sales Manager for Globe Press.

Society of Business Communicators

In the June/July issue of *SBC News* there is an article on the new Federal Government Training Guarantee scheme. Under this scheme, employers paying more than \$200 000 a year in salaries will be encouraged to spend 1 per cent of that payroll in training their

employees. If they spend less than this, the Government will charge them the difference in tax.

At the July meeting of the Society, Mike Minchan spoke on gaining access to prime time television.

Australian Society of Indexers

New South Wales members of AusSI are holding a meeting on 8 August at the State Library. There will be a panel discussion on "What publishers require from indexers". This will be followed by

discussion on whether to form a NSW Branch of AusSI.

For further information phone Michael Wyatt on 699 9491.

Introduction to book indexing

The School of Librarianship, University of NSW is offering an "Introduction to Book Indexing" course which is sponsored by the Australian Society of Indexers. This is an 18 hour course and is being held at

the School of Librarianship on consecutive Thursdays 6.00 to 9.00pm, from 23 August until 27 September. The cost is \$250. For further information, contact Maureen

Are you communicating if nobody's listening

A seminar on "communication audits" is being organised by the Society of Business Communicators in association with the Public Relations Institute of Australia (NSW), to be held on Monday 30 July.

Cal Downes, Professor of Organisational Communication at the University of Kansas, will be the Keynote speaker. He will be joined by

Peter W. Harvey, Teaching Fellow in Communication and Liberal Studies, Charles Sturt University, and Rodney H. Gray, Manager, Change Strategies, Westpac Consulting.

The seminar is at 5.30 pm on Monday 30 July 1990 at the Wynyard Travelodge. Cost is \$32.50 for members and \$35 for non-members.

Principles of writing and editing

The Society of Business Communicators is running this five-day course. Designed for people who would like guidance on how to write and edit corporate publications, the course is also a useful refresher for more experienced people.

When: 17-23 October 1990

Where: Artarmon Inn, Sydney

Cost: Members \$725, non-members \$775

For further information contact Bill Smith on 450 1342.

Advanced business writing

Yet another course organised by the Society of Business Communicators. This one will be presented by Professor Robert Eagleson of the University of

Sydney and held on 8, 9 and 12 November and 7 December. Telephone Bill Smith on 450 1342 to enrol.



Society of Editors (NSW)

August 1990 meeting

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At our August meeting a panel of publishers will discuss their expectations of freelance editors. The panel will consist of Margaret Olds, Editorial Director at Child & Associates, Jeremy Fisher, Managing Editor at Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, and Jan Bradley, Product Manager at ABC Books.

- When:** Wednesday 1 August at 7.30 pm
- Where:** Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre, 16 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
- Cost:** Wine, soft drinks and eats will be served at no cost to members. Non-members will be charged \$5.
- RSVP:** By fax to Michael Wyatt on 698 4970, or by telephoning him on 699 9491 during business hours, or on 332 1414 after hours.