

## SPECIAL ISSUE— THINKING ABOUT STANDARDS

*Earlier this year, the Society of Editors (NSW) emailed the Editors' Association of Canada requesting information about their approach to standards and accreditation. They responded by sending us the article that begins on page 2. It provides some salutary insights into the difficulties of evaluating the competence of editors—as well as some ideas about a possible way forward, and makes excellent background reading as we attempt to wrestle with these issues ourselves.*

Next meeting: Tuesday 1 September 1998

### **Towards the articulation of standards for editorial services—a discussion and workshop**

'Editing is both an art and a craft. It may call variously for inspiration, patience, an infinite capacity for detail—or a measure of each. Serving the requirements of the publisher, writer, and the document itself demands self-confidence and tact—and humility. It also requires a variety of skills. Given this variety, no one can specify what makes a great performance in every activity that is called editing. One can, however, specify the skills generally accepted as needed by editors working in particular media.' (From *Professional Editorial Standards*, Editors' Association of Canada, 1991)

As part of national moves towards a possible accreditation scheme for editors, all the societies of editors in Australia have resolved to work together to develop a set of standards for editorial services. Whether or not accreditation is finally achieved, we felt that articulating nationally agreed standards would be a valuable exercise.

The meeting will be dedicated to:

- briefing members about the proposed national strategy;
- discussing the things we think a competent editor should be able to do in providing various kinds of editorial

services (e.g. structural editing, copy editing, proofreading) and what a competent editor should know about the publishing process—so we can provide input to the recently formed national working party on standards.

6.30 pm for 7 pm in the Rooftop Function Centre, 4th floor, Australian Museum (enter from William Street). Drinks and light refreshments provided. Please **RSVP by Friday 28 August** to (02) 9294 4999 (voicemail). Members \$12; non-members and those who don't RSVP, \$15.

#### **If you can't make the meeting**

Your perspective is important. If you can't make the meeting, please let us know what you think—refer to the enclosed copy of EAC's *Professional Editorial Standards* as a model; you could even make notes on these and send them in.

Send to: Joe Beaumont, convenor, Accreditation Working Group, PO Box 254, Broadway 2007; fax (02) 9555 2106; email [joseph@geko.net.au](mailto:joseph@geko.net.au) (by 15 September if possible).

# The Canadian experience— a short history of EAC's Committee on Professional Standards

by Lenore d'Anjou and Elizabeth Reid (committee members with long memories)

When the group that became the Freelance Editors' Association of Canada (FEAC)—and later the Editors' Association of Canada (EAC)—was still talking about organising, a frequent theme was the need for the evaluation of editors. Everyone agreed that one of the association's goals should be (in the formal words eventually adopted in the constitution) 'to promote and maintain high professional standards of editing'. But how does one sort 'good' editors from less good? And what are the implications of this sorting?

For expediency, the organising group decided to base membership on demonstrated attachment to the occupation. If prospects had performed 500 hours of editorial work freelance (or an equivalent amount in-house) during the last year, we would accept them as voting members.

This criterion continues to be used today—complemented by various

warnings that EAC voting membership proves only that others have been prepared to pay the individual for his or her work—and it is worth noting that all formal discussions of certification have specified that it would not be tied to membership.

EAC is, of course, much interested in improving skills. One of its first initiatives, which continues to be highly successful, was to offer seminars on various aspects of editing to members and the publishing community at large. Many of these seminars are regarded as highly valuable, and participants bring to their work whatever they learn, but we have no way of measuring the results.

Also, we have never felt that testing what a person has learned in four evenings of, say, 'advanced copy editing' will reveal anything meaningful; the fact that one can recognise a disagreement between subject and verb and knows how to fix it in a test situation

does not mean that one will notice and repair the same problem in the middle of a 600-page manuscript several months later.

In 1987, a membership meeting asked the executive to strike a committee to examine the possibility of establishing criteria by which to judge the competence of editors.

## Work began with publishers' tests

The Committee on Professional Standards began to meet in September 1987. The group interpreted its mandate as to come up with some sort of certification that editors could apply for when they felt ready. We began by examining tests that various publishers gave to applicants for editorial positions and/or freelance work.

These existing tests proved of little use. Many seemed so short and easy as to be designed to weed out only gross incompetence; almost all were firm- or genre-specific (i.e., educational publishers did not test for fiction-editing skills) and limited to a narrow area (usually mechanical copy editing or reading of first proofs).

We had more in mind. After asking a sample of Canadian publishers if they would find some form of certification useful (they were overwhelmingly in favour), we decided that what we needed was tests in four areas: structural and stylistic editing, copy editing, proofing, and general knowledge of the publishing process.

About 18 months later, we reported to the executive that we had first drafts of a series of tests well under way, but that we were unsure how they should be administered, how closely they should be tied to the seminars (or some other educational program), or what taking the tests should mean. Several months of lively debate by the members ensued. What were we trying to do: establish the Canadian Conservatory of Editing? Create a two-tiered association in which

### *Society of Editors (NSW) Inc.*

PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007; Voicemail: (02) 9294 4999

### **Membership**

Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor in the print media, and anyone who supports the society's aims.

Membership runs for a calendar year. 1998 fees are \$45 for new members (\$25 if joining after 30 June) and \$40 for renewals.

For a membership application form, phone (02) 9294 4999, or write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007.

### **Blue Pencil**

The society's newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, is published monthly, except for a combined January/February issue. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Mail them to Merry Pearson at 55 Collins St, North Narrabeen NSW 2101, or fax or email them to her as per the contact details on the back page.

Deadline for the October issue is Monday 14 September.

### **Committee meetings**

All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings. The next meeting will be held on Monday 7 September at 6 pm at the Graphic Arts Club, 12–26 Regent Street, Sydney. You are also welcome to join those committee members who stay on to enjoy a fine Chinese meal.

self-appointed experts judged the rest of the profession? What sort of stigma would fall on those who decided not to sit the exam or who tried it and failed?

Just as the idea seemed to be sinking under a sea of acrimony, an experienced member pointed out that there was not much point in testing unless we announced what we were testing for. Drawing on this suggestion and others, the executive changed the committee's mandate to:

1. Produce and publish a set of editorial standards on which association members agreed.

2. Produce a battery of tests with which editors could see for themselves whether they met the standards.

3. Meanwhile, periodically raise the question of certification with the members.

The idea of written standards seemed so obvious that many committee members wondered why we hadn't thought of it ourselves. Much of the work had already been done in our heads (we had to know what we were testing for as we devised exams). We now organised it and set it down on paper. A draft was circulated among all members with a request for comments. The response was good, and many suggestions were incorporated in the final version, which was accepted in 1991 by a overwhelmingly positive referendum vote.

## **Professional Editorial Standards**

Later that year the document was published as *Professional Editorial Standards*. Desktopping was provided by FEAC, and a commercial printer donated its services. Distribution was wide within Canadian publishing, largely through the cooperation of other industry associations. Even wider dissemination has been encouraged by waiving copyright for reproduction in total. (The booklet is designed for easy photocopying, and the FEAC logo appears in every running head to ensure credit.)

We are not sure how far the document has travelled, but we occasionally receive compliments from abroad, and it was recently reprinted in *A Handbook for Good Practice in Journals Publishing* (Oxford: Hans Zeller Publishers, commissioned by the International African Institute).

With the standards published, we went back to the tests. We could now look at

the assembled material in the light of the standards. This proved helpful: we could see what we had missed, and we revised tests or developed new ones to cover every point. Since we were writing self-tests, we also decided to prepare graphic answer keys plus comments justifying every editorial decision made and describing other valid choices that a test-taker might make.

By October 1992, we had a draft ready to be examined by others, but we did not wish to show it to members who might wish to take the finished tests. We invited a dozen other experienced editors to work through the tests and then join us for a weekend to discuss them. (We knew we were asking a lot; we estimated that writing the tests constituted three or four days' work.) Our main question was whether we were hitting the right level. Were our tests too easy? Too long? Had we strewn them with too many abstruse problems that only specialists would ever come across?

## **Self-tests reviewed and published**

For the most part, the reviewers' comments were favourable. They found the tests realistic and not too long—in fact, they suggested several additions—and they praised the package, with its answer keys and commentaries, as a tool for self-teaching. They liked our stress on the absence of a single Canadian style and on the interconnections of various stages of editing. They found the answers and commentaries non-prescriptive, emphasising consistency rather than a definitive style. (This approach follows the tradition of *Editing Canadian English*, a previous FEAC publication.)

The reviewers' strongest warning was to strengthen the emphasis on the application of editorial skills to genres other than books. (By chance, the eight or so people who constructed the tests work primarily in trade nonfiction and textbooks.)

Incorporation of the reviewers' suggestions and our own new ideas plus careful final editing took many, many months. So did preparation of camera-ready pages (with one committee member desktopping for an honorarium well under market rates and others providing hand-writing for the answer keys).

Finally, in April 1996, *Meeting Editorial Standards*—a two-volume set

with *Self Tests* in Volume 1 and *Solutions and Discussion* in Volume 2—was released by EAC and Captus Press. The package is being sold commercially, with profit for both partners.

## **Resolution for certification**

During the last years of the tests' preparation, other EAC members began to ask for certification. The exhausted committee members begged to be left alone until the books were published. Almost as soon as they were out, the executive established a committee to consider the possibility; a year later it reported favourably. Debate among the members was brisk but far less passionate than in 1989 and in December 1997, a sizeable majority voted yes by referendum to the following resolution:

That EAC institute a certification program in English editing covering the four core areas in *Professional Editorial Standards*, and that membership and certification not be tied to each other.

Jonathan Paterson (a member of the Standards Committee with some energy left) was named chair of the Certification Committee and has begun work on an approach to a battery of tests.

Visit the Editors' Association of Canada at:

<http://www.web.net/eac-acr>

*Meeting Editorial Standards* is available by mail order through Captus Press (<http://www.captus.com>). It's a two-volume set which costs US\$55 plus US\$9 freight (or US\$33 airmail)—expensive given current exchange rates, but it's a substantial and very relevant piece of work. We have bought a copy and will make it available for members to peruse at the September meeting.

# COMMITTEE ACTIVITIES

The 1998 committee met for the sixth time on Monday 10 August.

## Accreditation issues

*(Working group: Joe Beaumont, Cathy Gray, Jo Healy-North, Bruce Howarth, Rhana Pike)*

Our thoughts on possible ways of moving towards accreditation, as well as information from the Editors' Association of Canada, was sent to the various state societies as briefing material for the meeting held in Melbourne on 2 August (see report below). The NSW working group will continue to meet, providing input into the national working parties on standards and accreditation models.

## Web site development

*(Working group: Jean Weber, Bruce White, Kylie Lawson, Merry Pearson, Cathy Gray, Julian McAllan, Tim Power)*

The committee endorsed the working group's proposal to register a Society of Editors (NSW) domain name

(available at no cost to us, as an association, from Connect West) and choice of TIG (The Internet Group) as service provider. Total cost: \$480 for the first year; \$451 each year thereafter. A draft site has been constructed and is due to be tested soon.

## Promoting the register

*(Working group: Cathy Gray, Catherine Hockings, Merry Pearson, Terry Johnston)*

Direct mail promotion due to be sent by the end of August.

## Ethics

*(Subcommittee: Robin Appleton, John Fleming, Catherine Hockings, Terry Johnston, Tim Badgery-Parker)*

A draft 'code of desirable professional behaviours' is now ready for editing, after which it will be submitted to the general membership.

## Other issues:

• A **Meetings Working Group** has been established, with John Fleming, Terry

Johnston and Cathy Gray as members, and others to be solicited from the general membership. In the long term, the subcommittee will organise speakers for general meetings. It will also seek and investigate a new venue for 1999.

• The **Society of Editors Prize** has been established for Macquarie University's Graduate Diploma in Editing and Publishing. The recipient will also receive a free one-year society membership.

• Planning is underway for the **copy-editing workshop** in September (convenor Tim Badgery-Parker) and **Successful Freelancing** in October (convenor John Fleming).

• Membership cards are being printed and will be mailed to members with the October *Blue Pencil*.

If you'd like to contribute in any of these areas, contact one of the committee members involved (see list page 6).

## Standards are a national issue

### *Australian societies of editors develop a national approach*

The presidents of six societies of editors met in Melbourne on 2 August 1998: Renée Otmar (Victoria), Alex George (Western Australia), Peter Judge (ACT), Kathie Stove (South Australia), Mary-Jane Bosch (Queensland) and myself. Also present were Karen Disney, a past president of the SA society, and Joe Beaumont, the convenor of the NSW society's Accreditation Subcommittee.

Apologies and expressions of interest were received from the Tasmanian and Northern Territory groups.

At a very constructive and exciting meeting, we resolved to:

- establish a Council of Australian Societies of Editors (CASE), consisting of the presidents of the eight societies or their delegates;
- develop a set of national standards for editorial services;
- investigate models for accreditation for discussion by members of the state and territory societies;
- develop objectives and a business plan for the national magazine;
- set up a national web site;
- plan a national conference for 2001.

Working groups were established on standards (convened by South Australia), accreditation models (convened by NSW) and the National Conference (convened by Queensland). The ACT society will chair the group

investigating the future shape of the national magazine, and the Victorian society will coordinate compilation of a list of training courses for editors in Australia.

Discussion on these and other issues will mainly be by email, but a CASE meeting will be held each year, attended by the president or delegate of each society. The next meeting will probably be held in conjunction with the Style Council in Melbourne, February 1999. It was also decided to hold a workshop in Adelaide in November 1999 to review progress on draft standards.

Until the national web site is up and running you can find out the latest on CASE at John Bangsund's 'Australian societies of editors' page (<http://www.pipeline.com.au/users/bangsund/>) or click on the 'CASE notes' button at the Canberra society's site (<http://www.editors.dynamite.com.au>).

*Cathy Gray  
(on the CASE!)*

## New members

A warm welcome to all those who have joined the society since early July:

Stephanie Abbott  
Margaret Burke  
Patrick Cullen  
Michel Dignand  
James Faulk  
Simon Gilchrist  
Marnie McLean

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# H e l p   W a n t e d

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Opportunities abound for making contributions to your society. We need:

## **Stall minders**

The society is looking for volunteers to staff its stall at the NSW Writers' Centre's Spring Writing Festival on 12–13 September. If you have a couple of hours to spare, or if you have ideas about how to make our presence as effective as possible, please contact Isabel Partridge (details on page 6). For general information about the festival and workshops, call the centre on (02) 9555 9757, or visit their web site at <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~nswwc>

## **Ideas**

We're still looking for a new venue for next year's meetings. Some good ideas have been proposed, but we'd like to hear of more. Please let us know if you can suggest somewhere that is:

- central, close to public transport and not too impossible for parking;
- flexible, and able to accommodate meetings from 20–40 people, both milling about and sitting down;
- able to be booked in advance for a whole year's meetings;
- able to accommodate eating and drinking (preferably organising our own catering);
- pleasant; and not too expensive.

Better yet, talk to a committee member about joining the new Meetings

Subcommittee as described in Committee Activities on page 4.

## **Suggestions**

It's hard to believe, but it's time already to think about booking the society's Christmas party, to be held this year on Tuesday, 1 December. We need a place that's easy to get to where 30 to 40 of us can socialise for the evening and enjoy a good, but not too pricey, meal. Please contact any committee member (details on page 6) with your suggestions.

## **Fast fingers**

Transcribing the tapes of monthly meetings may not be the most stimulating job, but it's a vital one for keeping our remote members and others who cannot get to meetings up-to-date. We looking for volunteers (or maybe one staunch soul) to transcribe tapes from the September, October and November meetings. It can take up to eight hours per meeting, but you'll have about four weeks in which to do it. And you'll have the use of the society's professional-quality transcription equipment. If you're interested, please contact Merry Pearson (details on page 6).

## **Your thoughts**

One page on our proposed web site will be devoted to defining our skills as editors. This will be primarily for the benefit of those who want to either become an editor or hire one. Our

preliminary compilation, based in part on what other societies have done, has led to questions about which skills we want to define and how, and even what to call them. We'd like your input about what you mean by substantive and/or structural editing; production and/or project editing; light, medium, and heavy copyediting; stylistic editing; proofreading and/or editorial proofreading and many other terms. If you'd like to offer your comments, contact Merry Pearson for a copy of the current list.

## **Ozwords**

In the July issue of *The Canberra Editor* we learnt of *Ozwords*, a newsletter about Australian words that is published twice a year by Oxford University Press in partnership with the Australian National Dictionary Centre. The centre has a home page at <http://www.anu.edu.au/ANDC>

*Ozwords* is available free of charge by contacting:

Brendan Lee, Subscription Manager  
Ozwords  
GPO Box 2784Y  
Melbourne 3001  
Fax (03) 9934 9100  
email [leeb@oup.com.au](mailto:leeb@oup.com.au)

## **Buzzword bingo**

From the SA society's newsletter, *the word*, we learnt of Buzzword bingo, a game to be played in those boring, buzzword-laden meetings. Cards with five words are available at <http://www.buzzwordbingo.com>. As explained in *the word*, to claim victory, you can jump up and shout, 'Bingo!', or nod casually at your co-players with a knowing smile.

Two other sites of interest are mentioned in *the word*. One is the slot, at <http://theslot.com>, where linguistic pet peeves of a long-time newspaper editor have been put online. This URL comes with an editor's warning not to look up the site when on a deadline.

And finally we learnt that the third edition of the Macquarie Dictionary is online at <http://www.macnet.mq.edu.au>

## **Save Australian Style**

The June issue of *Australian Style* contains the disturbing announcement that, due to severe funding cuts, Language Australia (the National Languages and Literacy Institute of Australia) will soon be unable to support centres such as Style Council and activities such as the publication of *Australian Style*.

Style Council is one of 31 language centres in all states whose work has been supported by Language Australia, with the aim of fostering language research for educational, social, cultural and economic purposes. The range of language work performed by the group makes it unique in the world.

The national bulletin has been published and distributed free of charge

for six years by the Style Council Centre at Macquarie University, but the December issue may be the last one without your intervention.

You can help by:

- writing to your federal member of parliament to press for ongoing support for Language Australia;
- writing to your state minister for education, urging him to support Language Australia and *Australian Style*; and
- writing to your professional organisations requesting their help to continue *Australian Style*.

(The society already is sending such letters.)

## **1998 COMMITTEE**

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## **NOTICE BOARD**

### **Copyediting workshop update**

The society's 19 September workshop, 'Brush up your copyediting', will be presented by Loretta Barnard, who worked for many years in legal and educational publishing. Since becoming full-time freelance in 1986, she has worked in a wide range of editorial roles in many subject areas. Shelley Kenigsberg, who was to have presented the workshop, is on an extended contract in Jakarta.

The cost is \$75 for members and \$90 for others. This includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea. Please use the enclosed form to register by Friday, 11 September. For more information, contact Tim Badgery-Parker on (02) 9954 8645 or (02) 9518 7225, or email timbp@rpi.net.au

### **Successful freelancing workshop**

The society's Successful Freelancing Workshop will be held on Saturday 17 October in the Australian Museum's lecture theatre. The morning sessions will focus on freelancing as a business with a session on marketing presented by Catherine Hockings and a session on financial and legal concerns presented by Elizabeth Sadler. In the afternoon, practising freelancers will present case histories: Maggie Aldhamland on trade book publishing, Matthew Stevens on corporate and public sector publishing, and Isabel Partridge on periodic publications. The final session will be a panel discussion with Maggie, Matthew and Isabel.

The cost is \$75 for members and \$90 for non-members. This includes lunch and morning and afternoon tea. Please use the enclosed form to register. For more information, contact John Fleming on (02) 9529 8638 or by fax on (02) 9529 9764.

### **Financial & legal editors group**

Financial and legal editors and writers are invited to participate in informal lunch-time discussions in the CBD about various aspects of their work. Upcoming topics are web page design, usability testing and sharing project experiences. Meetings are from 12.30 to 1.30 pm on the last Wednesday in the month at the Australian Securities and Investments Commission National Office, Level 10, 135 King Street. Lunch is BYO (there are food halls opposite and below this address).

For information, contact Danielle Sinani or Irene Wong (email communication is preferred), on (02) 9911 2612 or 9911 2601; fax (02) 9911 2615; or email dsinani@asic.gov.au or irene.wong@asic.gov.au

### **NSW Writers' Centre workshops**

Some dates for your diary: Clues on Grammar workshop with Robert Eagleson, 5 September; and Publishing Process and Principles of Editing course, with Robin Appleton, an eight-day weekend course beginning on 10 October. Call the centre on (02) 9555 9757 for more information, or visit their web site at <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~nswwc>

### **Did you know?**

*Dreamt* is the only English word that ends in the letters *mt*.

*Facetious* and *abstemious* contain all the vowels in the correct order, as does *arsenious*, which means 'containing arsenic'.

No words in the English language rhyme with *month*, *orange*, *silver* or *purple*.