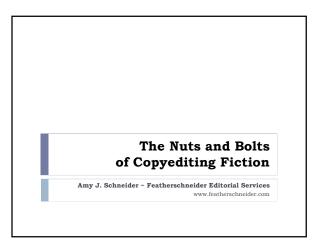
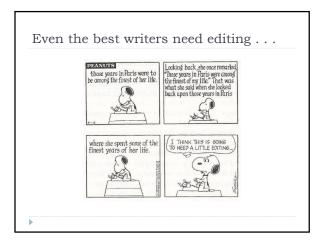
The Nuts and Bolts of Copyediting Fiction



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- Full-time freelance copyeditor/proofreader since 1995
- Started with textbooks/nonfiction; began some fiction editing in my first year; more fiction as time went on
- Frequently edit series novels (cozy mysteries, paranormal, romance)
- Mentor: Karen Judd, Copyediting: A Practical Guide

General considerations

- > Author experience, preferences, writing style
- Publisher house style (exceptions are sometimes made)
- Conventions of the genre
 - Fantasy: special terms, lots of backstory, blood & gore
- Military: lots of technical info, blood & gore
- Frotica: even sex needs an editor!
- Audience: often a consideration in series books, queries

The copyeditor's focus

- ▶ Spelling, grammar, punctuation: sure! But also. . .
- Suspension of disbelief
- Internal consistency
- Author's voice

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- Reader's enjoyment
- You are the continuity director
- Fiction is pleasure reading! Nonfiction conveys information; fiction tells a story, sets a mood, provides an escape.

Getting Started

You have the manuscript; now what?

- > Ms. likely to arrive line edited, styled, ready to go
- Review publisher house style
- Review ms.-specific notes/previous style sheet, if provided
- Review publisher's tracked edits, if any
- Apply template, if appropriate
- > You are ready for the first pass!

First pass: get the bonbons . . .

- Just read the story! Get to know the characters, the plot, the author's style.
- Two approaches:
- Untracked, typographical cleanup only: stray italics/spaces, reversed quote marks, obvious bad paragraph breaks, etc.
- Tracked: Macros for above, plus fixing absolute errors (wrong word choice, hyphens, etc.; nothing requiring a style decision)
- Flag things for later if needed; mostly mental notes
- Note the level of detail

Second pass: technical considerations

- Use Document Map, Styles Pane
- Tracking on and showing (my preference), but use toggle to review
- Use macros for flagging/deflagging, queries
- Set up style sheet(s)

Second pass: the Big Edit

- Main word-by-word copyedit pass
- Compile style sheet(s) as you go
- Considerations:
 - Spelling/grammar/punctuation/etc.
- Plot problems (query only; make suggestions if you can)
- Dialogue: diction, accents, grammar (allow leeway, but query awkwardness)
- Consistency: creative license vs. suspension of disbelief (call possible issues to author's attention, let him/her decide)
- Queries: diplomacy is king! ("Perhaps ...," "Does this contradict ...," "May confuse readers ...," etc.)

Third pass: tidying up

- Multiple mini-passes: clear flags to yourself, resolve other issues
- Remove copyeditor's working template and styles, apply publisher's template
- Final spelling/consistency check
- Save final file
- Clean up and format style sheet(s)

File Management or, staying organized

Managing the manuscript

- Keep the original separate; save versions as you go
- Use folders: Original File(s), Working Files, Final File (optional)
- Save after each chapter with new name: ch 01 Title reading.doc, ch 02 Title reading, etc.
- If no chapter numbers, add some! [[Ch 01]], [[Ch 02]], etc.

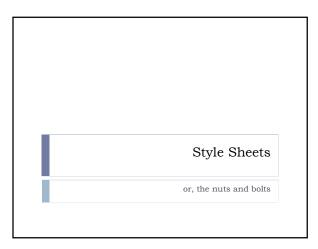
Managing the style sheet(s)

Four categories; I keep separate docs (YMMV)

- I general style sheet.doc
- 2 characters.doc
- 3 places.doc
- 4 timeline.doc
- Author may include character bios, backstory, description of worlds; lucky you! By all means add them to the style sheet.

Series style sheet(s)

- For series, update/add to style sheet(s) from previous book(s), if you have them
- Choose a way to indicate info from previous books (font color, highlight, text tags); macros help
- Compare/update as you go to ensure continuity; Amazon "Look Inside" can help
- Remember, "facts" from previously published books in the series cannot be altered now
- Note "(series style)"/"(au pref)" as needed



General style sheet

- Essentially same as for nonfiction; note publisher/author preferences where appropriate
- Number style: time, height, room numbers, phone numbers, fractions; treatment in dialogue
- Punctuation: serial comma, ellipses, hyphenation of color terms, commas around too/either/anyway, possessives of names ending in -s
- > Abbreviations: both real and fictional

General style sheet (cont.)

• Typography in fiction:

- internal thought, remembered dialogue, telepathic communication (generally italic for "not real" exchanges)
- words as words, words as sounds, letters as letters, letters as shapes
- foreign terms
- signs, handwriting, text messages, e-mails, inscriptions, clothing
- + terms of address: Detective, Officer; pumpkin, sweetheart

General style sheet (cont.)

- Usage: that/which, further/farther, etc.
- Miscellaneous: publication names, organization names, other proper nouns that don't fit elsewhere
- General word list: generic terms, unusual plurals/ spellings/capitalizations, variant word forms (-ward words, dreamed/dreamt), invented words, foreign terms, frequently corrected/changed words

Character style sheet

- Avoid alphabetical lists!
- Group by affiliation instead: family, coworkers, neighbors, members of an organization, etc.
- > Animals are characters too!
- And even sometimes inanimate objects: sentient weapons and objects, fictional deities, etc.

Character style sheet (cont.)

- Note ANYTHING that could be contradicted later (with chapter number):
 - > Physical descriptions, ages/birthdays, relationships, employment
 - > Abilities, education, personal history, regular activities
 - Right/left (scars, injuries, tattoos, etc.)
 - > Phone numbers, e-mail and postal addresses, etc.
 - Negative attributes: things a person can't or won't do, or has never done
- Copy exact wording from the ms., for ease of searching later; abbreviate to save space, but be aware of keywords

Character style sheet (cont.)

- What if you find a contradiction?
 - If only a few instances (say, a misspelled name) and/or not critical to the plot, change and query
 - If the variation is closer to an even split, or if the attribute is critical to the plot, query author to resolve.
- Help the author out by making suggested fixes, if possible.
- List unnamed characters too; they may come up later

Places style sheet

- (aka geography and buildings)
- As with characters, avoid alphabetizing; group by relation to each other
- Exception: I will alphabetize (after the edit) lists of minor items with little or no description that were mentioned in passing
- Check against reality when possible, but allow for deliberate fictionalization (query if unsure)
- Let the first read be your guide to how much detail to record
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Places style sheet (cont.)

- Cardinal directions
- Regional/city/street/building names; any proper nouns
- Descriptions of interiors
 - b décor, colors, furniture type and placement, windows/doors
 - right/left: rooms off hallways, doors, wings of mansions
 - where the sun rises and sets
- number of floors/locations of rooms (watch out for British usage)
- > Descriptions of exteriors: landscaping, architecture
- Business hours, regular events

Timeline style sheet

- I use a Word table that simulates a monthly calendar
- Again, check against reality, but allow for fictionalization of historical events, actual dates (query if unsure)
- Some dates/days may be vague (a Tuesday on the chart is not necessarily positively a Tuesday in the story; indicate whether this is the case)
- Indicate breaks in time flow
- > Parallel timelines/flashbacks: can be tricky!

Timeline style sheet (cont.)

- Note any mention of time, fixed or relative
 midmorning; three weeks later; sunset; Wednesday
- Weather, moon phases, seasons
- School days, workdays
- Critical plot events
- Character ages/birthdays, whether relative or absolute (can be flexible here, but query large discrepancies)
- Watch for "missing" holidays and big events, if their absence is remarkable

The finer points or, balancing consistency and creativity

Food for thought . . .

"Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't."

~ Mark Twain, Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar

The fine line

- > Creative license vs. suspension of disbelief:
 - "Don't mess with Art! Author reigns supreme!"
 OR
 - Call issues to the author's attention, explain why readers might stumble, let the author decide

Elements of fiction

- Often informal structure: sentence fragments, incorrect grammar, creative punctuation/capitalization
- > Dialogue: accents, poor grammar, sounds, dialogue tags
- Adult themes: naughty words, sex scenes, offensive/illegal behavior
- Deliberate fictionalization or obfuscation; fictional worlds
- American vs. British style: various levels

Formal vs. informal structure

- Watch for uneducated, "simple" characters using "fivedollar" words, especially in first-person POV
 - "I thought she sounded noncommittal"
 - "George's mercurial behavior unsettled him"
- But at the same time, watch for errors in narrative or dialogue that are not the characters' but the author's
 Authors make mistakes that characters would not!
- May be asked to violate rules/conventions
- Bottom line: Keep dialogue/narrative true to character/voice

Capitalization

- Author may have a stated preference for the unusual
- > Terms of address: Doctor, Detective, Lieutenant
- Unusual terms, especially in fantasy
 - the Stone, Seeing/the Sight, NoonTide, She
 - Warlord capped only for a specific person
- Religious terms
 - pronouns for God: He or he?
 - the Devil or the devil?
- Sun/sun, Moon/moon, Earth/earth, Universe/universe
- Ĕ

Dialogue

- Accents/elisions: yuh, ag'in, ; 'cause, 'em, 'er
- Sounds: uh-huh (yes), uh-uh (no), mmm-hmm
- Slang: geez, dammit, outta here, whoop-de-do, helluva, young'uns
- Interruptions (dashes) vs. pauses (ellipses)
- Some publishers say "Don't edit dialogue; query only"

Dialogue (cont.)

- Dialogue tags: verbs of saying
 - she screamed, he muttered, I wheezed:YES
 - I grimaced, she shuddered, he encouraged: NO
 - watch for overuse/underuse in long exchanges
- Watch punctuation of tags
 - "I never said that," she said.
 - "I never said that." She frowned.
 - "I just don't understand," she said, and looked away.
- Speech interrupted with action/expressions
 - "Hey"—he looked into her eyes—"I never wanted to hurt you."

Adult themes

- Cuss words can have many variant spellings/hyphenations; ditto sexual terms. Put 'em on the style sheet, especially those that aren't in MWII (which will be most!)
- ▶ Beware the *−ass* words: smartass, badass, big-ass, lazy-ass
- > Don't let Romeo take his pants off twice!
- It's OK to turn down genres that disturb you

When fact and fiction collide

- "I canna break the laws of physics, Cap'n!"
 - Iooking out the window at night in a brightly lit kitchen
 - "When a halftone has spots caused by surprinting dots, that's a moiré!"
- Historical facts vs. deliberate fictionalization; anachronisms of both fact and language
- Deliberate obfuscation
 - streets may not intersect/locations may be obscured
 query e-mails/phone numbers/etc.
- Bottom line: Picture the action. Could it happen? Use your Spidey-sense and look it up!

American vs. British style

- Punctuation: usually Americanized
- Spelling: usually Americanized, but sometimes retained to preserve a certain flavour
- British terms unfamiliar to Americans: is it clear in context?

Floor designations

- American: first, second, third
- British: ground, first, second
- > And a word about flights of stairs, as long as we're here ...

Frequent fliers: language bloopers

- Pet phrases (query)
 he shoved his hands in his pockets; he tailed off
- Alliteration/rhyme/echo (query)
 Squelching through a slough of snow and sludge
- Consecutive sentences that end with the same phrase
 Nodded his head, shrugged his shoulders, blinked/squinted his
- eyes (can usually delete)
- Danglers/mixed metaphors
- Common general issues: subjunctive, misplaced either/only, there is/are (often deadwood), smothered verbs (made a decision).
 Watch for these, but be mindful of rhythm and mood.

Frequent fliers: action bloopers

- "If a gun appears in Act One, it should go off by Act Three."
- Similarly, "drop-in" characters
- Remembered inscriptions/speech: Do versions match? If not, which one is preferred? Memory is fallible, but differences could distract from the story. Query.
- Missing scene breaks (space breaks for POV change)
 Show, don't tell: Characters telling each other things they
- already know about each other. Query, but it's probably too late.

Frequent fliers: trademarks

- Publishers generally want to avoid legal issues
- But let's not get carried away! Keep it natural.
- Commonly encountered:
- Styrofoam, Listserv, Realtor
- Laundromat, Dumpster
- Band-Aid, Kleenex, Coke

Queries: putting on the kid gloves

- Tact is your friend!
- Suggest fixes when possible, to make the author's job a little easier.
- "Perhaps change this word to ____?"
- "Did you perhaps mean _____? (Either is correct; just checking.)" (walking world/waking world)
- "But in Ch. 2, _____. Is this a contradiction? Please clarify."
- "Is [unusual word choice] intentional?"
- "Readers may be confused by this, because _____

Final thoughts . . .

- Be flexible
- Use your Spidey-sense
- Respect the author
- Serve the readers
- Have fun!
- Questions? amy@featherschneider.com
- Social media links: www.featherschneider.com