EDITING IN A VACUUM:
How to Thrive When You’re the Only Editor in Your Organization.

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Content Editor, Bader Rutter

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1. Introductions
2. Sharing our experiences working as solitary copy editors
3. Q & A — What have you wondered about? Let’s talk about your challenges.
ABOUT YOUR SPEAKERS

Jim Kogutkiewicz

• 2015 – Present Content Editor at Bader-Rutter, the nation's leading independent business marketing agency
• 2009 – 2015, Agency proofreader in the Milwaukee office of Cramer-Krasselt
• 2002 – 2009, The Freeman newspaper, Waukesha, Wisconsin; four years as the sole evening editor on the paper's night news desk, editing the entirety of the A section and proofreading the sports section five times a week

Shana McNally

• 2008 – Present Corporate Proofreader at Costco – the company's first – proofs marketing communications, packaging, the employee magazine, employee training, publisher promotions and social media; develops and maintains corporate style guides; and writes the My Costco Services guide
• 2000 to 2008 Costco Marketing Writer
• Previous experience: The Associated Press and SportsZone (the early version of espn.com)

Maria Hench

• 2007 – Present Copy Editor for the University Marketing Communications Department at DePaul University in Chicago. Edit copy for enrollment-related publications, advertising and core Web pages; maintain university style guide; contribute content to university social media platforms. Previously copy edited DePaul Magazine and university news releases.
• 2005 – 2007 Editor/writer at Saint Xavier University
• 2003 – 2004 Copy editor at custom publisher Imagination Publishing
• 1999 – 2003 Milwaukee Journal Sentinel universal copy desk
GAME PLAN – EDITING IN A VACUUM

How to survive – and thrive – on your own.
- Use triage editing.
- Follow a few simple tips.
- Employ continuing education.
- Participate in job shadows.
TRIAGE EDITING

From ACES October 2015 Portland Workshop

- Triage Editing
  - ACHES: Accuracy, Clarity, Headlines, Efficiency, Style
  - Is everything correct? Does everything make sense? Is everything spelled right?
  - Are there any career-altering errors? libel, fairness, balance, victim ID, profanity
  - Musts: accuracy, clarity, big type, first/last graphs, grammar, hyperlinks, trademarks
  - Things to consider: weight of project, lifespan, time to fix vs. impact, cost to others, damage to your credibility, harm to someone, confusing your readers

Shana
GENERAL TIPS

• Admit your weaknesses.
  – Keep a list of your pet peeves about the language, words you tend to spell incorrectly, grammar rules that flummox you or anything you consider a hindrance to smooth, consistent workflow.

• General tips
  – Know your limits.
  – Learn how to say no and how to ask for help.
  – Mistakes get made. Things get through. It happens. More important than a mistake being made is how it is fixed and addressed. How did it happen? How can it be prevented in the future?
  – Network at ACES. Reach out to others when needed.

• **When in doubt, ask someone else.** Does this make sense? Is it too long, short, etc.
THE IMPORTANCE OF KNOWING YOUR LIMITS

- Better working in Word than in a PDF?
- Do you feel like throwing in the towel after 4:30 p.m.?
- Mistakes will come from trying to charge through when you’re flagging or uncomfortable with how you’re working.
BE CONFIDENT IN YOURSELF AND YOUR SKILLS

• You’re going to be the resident expert, and possibly the final arbiter, your co-workers consult with grammar, punctuation and style questions.

• A healthy amount of paranoia is OK. It keeps you on your toes, but you still need to be able to sleep well at night.

• Know your organization’s style guide, especially the quirky entries specific to your organization. Also, if you are going to make a new ruling (or keep something the same after revisiting), be ready to explain it.

• No matter the publication, as copy editor, you are the reader’s advocate. If you edit for a variety of people/clients, know your audience, publication voice and how content is distributed.
OTHER TIPS

• **Designate a backup.** Make a checklist when you are out. Be sure it makes sense to the people who will be using it.

• **It’s about education.** Especially the first time, review changes with the client. This saves time later.

• **Know yourself.** Should you clear your desk of little stuff in the morning and devote the afternoon to big projects? The reverse? Mix it up?

• **How to measure success:** Keep a kudos file and a numbers list.

• **No review?** List your goals and accomplishments for the year. Send a copy to your boss.
OTHER TIPS

• **Read out loud or use text-to-speech tools.**

• **Network.** Find other members of your tribe.
  • Professional associations like ACES: chapters, conferences, online forums
  • Other copy editors in your area. Go to lunch if your schedule permits. You need time away from your desk.
  • Social media: find other copy editors
    • Facebook groups
    • LinkedIn groups
    • Twitter: #ACESchat, @EditorMark makes a list of conference attendees
CONTINUING EDUCATION

• Editors practice just like doctors and lawyers. Learn every day.
  – Take classes. I recently took Poynter’s “The Inner Life of Grammar” and Poynter’s “Effective Editor.” Next up? Grammar Girl’s “Master AP Style with Ease” (and I used to work for the AP!).
CONTINUING EDUCATION

• **Indulge your editing/writing/journalism and non-editing interests.** Take advantage of programs open to the public at your library, local college/university, cultural center, etc.
  - Author lectures, book readings/signings
  - Writing workshops
  - Speakers and panel discussions on special interest topics
  - Learn something new: subject matter, hobby, etc.
    - You never know when that expertise/piece of trivia will come in handy.
    - Another creative outlet or way to de-stress. I still take music lessons.

Maria
JOB SHADOWS

- Discuss professional backgrounds, workplace setup, daily routines, professional training, hierarchies
- Share best practices, style guides, references used, workflow
- Possible topics of discussion: typical day, duties, tracking, resources, priorities, training, background, volume, style guides
- Takeaways:
  - Similarity of workflows
  - Varied backgrounds of writers and proofreaders
  - Proofreading requires continual training
  - Learn new things
PEOPLE WANT ORDER IN THEIR WORKDAY

“I just need a rule.”

– Style and structure gives them a foundation in their day.
– People care about getting it right, but will rarely care as much as you do.
– Keep yourself sane, and your coworkers comfortable, and accept sometimes all you can do is give guidance and let them use it as they need.

Jim
PEOPLE WANT ORDER IN THEIR WORKDAY

“Give me a rule I can use to justify this.”

– Does anyone here work in an office full of people who understand how to punctuate bullet points?
– I was a “periods on bullet points” street tough. I found a rule.
– Not all editors will have this freedom, but consider retrofitting a rule to fit what your coworkers want.
  • Just remember: Find a rule, then apply it consistently.

Jim
GIVE THEM GRAMMAR — FOR FUN

• Being the only language expert in an office can be a trap.
  – Isolated work is repetitive and leads people to only think of you for one reason.
  – Without some type of release in the workplace, you risk stagnating.

• Talk to people about your field of expertise outside of a specific job or duty.
  – Removes urgency and deadlines
  – Relaxed approach makes it easier to absorb grammar issues
GIVE THEM GRAMMAR — FOR FUN

• Click ‘Send’ and feel the power of the officewide Grammar Tip.
  – It will generate feedback and get you talking to coworkers about the little troubles that trip everyone up.
  – It will keep you sharp. You’re not going to risk sending an incorrect rule to the whole office.
  – Valuable creative outlet.
  • It gets you writing and expressing yourself to people outside of formal grammar enforcement person.
  – Coworkers will generate more material for future tips.
GIVE THEM GRAMMAR — FOR FUN

• Offer a workshop for the writers you work with
  – Opportunity to share your expertise
  – Opportunity to bring back what you’ve learned at ACES
  – I ran a Jeopardy-style game using common errors and DePaul-specific style
    • Inspired by an ACES session by Pam Nelson
    • Fun, interactive way to get your points across to your co-workers
QUESTIONS/CONTACTS

Questions?

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