

# EDITING IN A VACUUM:

How to Thrive When You're the  
Only Editor in Your Organization.



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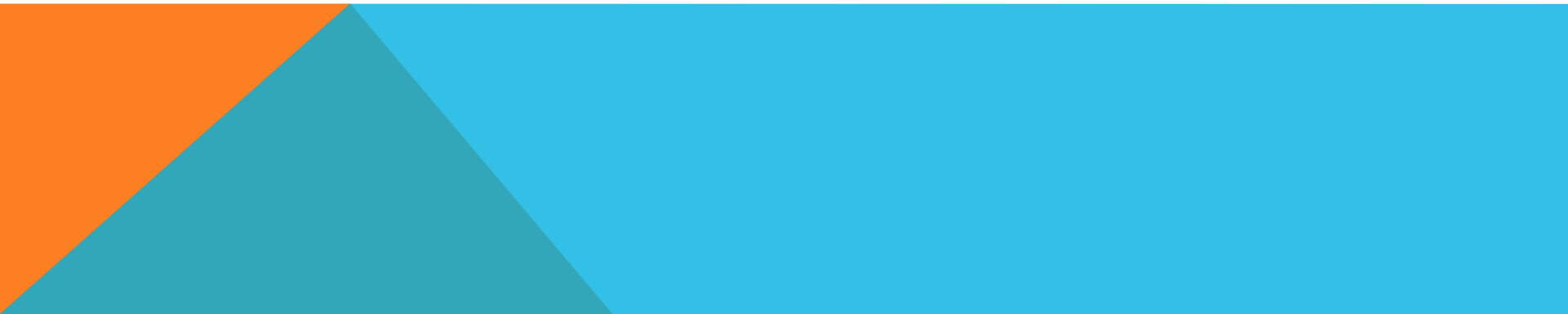
Corporate Proofreader, Costco Wholesale

**Maria Hench**

Copy Editor, DePaul University

# WELCOME

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
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# 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

# 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.

Jim

# 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 quizzes. I recently completed AP quizzes and ACES quizzes. Next up? I plan on taking quizzes on OWL, Grammar Revolution and Guide to Grammar.
- Read. Currently on my docket: “Copy Editing: A Practical Guide,” “The Best Punctuation Book Period,” “English Composition and Grammar,” “The Blue Book of Grammar and Punctuation” and “Math Tools for Journalists.”
- 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.

# 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

Maria

# QUESTIONS/CONTACTS

Questions?

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