

Tracking Changes

The Journal of the Society for Editing

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Editor, heal thyself

Recovering workaholic discovers her own best medicine



by Kathryn Flynn

Molly McCowan was every client's dream copy editor: focused, fast, and willing to put in whatever time was required to get the job done. But last summer those same qualities brought her career to a screeching halt.

The Fort Collins, Colorado, resident, owner of Inkbot Editing, had been putting in 70-hour workweeks to finish up a few big projects. "I started noticing that my forearms felt really heavy, almost like dead weight, and my hands also felt really heavy and just tired,"

she said. "I thought, 'They're just fatigued. I just need to push through this project. And then I'll take a break.'"

But a few days after the big deadlines had been met, she found she couldn't even touch a keyboard, the cumulative effect of too much work, substandard ergonomics, and bad typing form. "It was like my hands, my arms were on fire," she recalled. "I couldn't touch anything. Everything hurt. I couldn't even button my pants. I couldn't wash my hair. I couldn't drive. I couldn't open a door. I couldn't even hold my husband's hand for weeks. And that was really, really scary, because my hands are my livelihood, and working on the computer is how I make my money and do what I love."

Her immediate concern was for her clients with pending projects. She put out the word among her editing colleagues and they came to the rescue in droves, offering moral support, sending emails, taking on projects, and helping her subcontract her existing workload. At home, her husband Dane took over household duties and friends helped any way they could.

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Not so simple

Of course, she also needed a diagnosis. “My MD just said, ‘Well, you have severe tendinitis and it’s in your wrists and your hands, so you need to take these anti-inflammatory drugs, and if they don’t help then you might have to have surgery,’” McCowan said. But her intuition told her there was more to it than just her wrists and hands—she had had nagging neck pain for years—and there might be more ways to deal with the problem than drugs and a scalpel. Her well-honed research skills weren’t much use without the ability to type keywords into a computer, so friends searched on her behalf. She eventually assembled a holistic approach that has proven effective and provided some relief.

“I’ve been really lucky to find a therapy modality called Rossiter, which helps break the fascia that’s locked together. And then I also have a medical massage therapist who I found about a month ago,” McCowan said. “I also went vegan a few months ago. That’s been a huge change for me and has helped more than I can even tell you as far as inflammation and energy levels and mood.”

Though McCowan still has pain in her neck and shoulders, she has gradually regained the use of her hands. “It’s a relief to see the symptoms go back to the actual root problem. I feel like now we can really address that,” she said.

Battling burnout

McCowan also realized that not every symptom that needed to be addressed was physical. There was a good deal of burnout as well. “When I was stuck in that workaholic mindset—super focused, super driven—I was always covering things up with work,” she said. “If I ever had a problem or a worry, I would deal with it by taking on too much work and then drowning myself in that work. That’s definitely an emotional reaction, and now I see it as that.”

“ My advice would be, number one, pay attention to what your body’s telling you ... don’t push it down or think it’s not a big deal. ”

After a good amount of self-reflection, McCowan has even come to see the whole ordeal as a good thing. “I’m glad it happened, actually. I’m not super happy about going through all that pain, but on a bigger level I think it really needed to happen,” she said. “It woke me up to my bad work habits and why I was working that much and what I was trying to run away from.”

McCowan said other editors often ask her how they can keep from finding themselves in a similar situation. We all use a keyboard, mouse, and screen for much of the day, after all. “My advice would be, number one, pay attention to what your body’s telling you,” she said. “Don’t push it down or think it’s not a big deal. That is something that I failed to do for most of my life.” For those who want to cover every possible base, she also recommends disability insurance.

Finding a balance

To establish a healthy work-life balance, McCowan suggests those who set their own schedule honestly assess how much time they want to spend with their keyboard and monitor each day. Though editing is clearly computer based, there are still steps one can take to keep things in check. She suggests “just thinking of what projects do I really want, what projects don’t I want, and being able to see red flags and listen to that intuition saying this client is going to give me trouble, or this project is going to make it so I don’t have a weekend with my family.” It’s hard, she acknowledges, but worth the effort.

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Tracking Changes

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The Journal of the Society for Editing

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The Society for Editing, the nation’s leading organization of editing professionals, educators, and students, is dedicated to improving the quality of communication and the working lives of editors. We set standards of excellence and give a voice to editors in journalism, government, business, and beyond through top-notch training, networking, and career opportunities.

FALL 2017

FEEDBACK
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“It is scary, but most people can recover from this. In my situation, which is really extreme, it’s been about six months and I’m still not fully recovered,” she said. “For me it’s probably going to be a lifetime thing, but that’s not scary to me. It’s just about knowing my limits and not pushing past those limits, which is what I needed anyway.”



As for the future of Inkbot and McCowan’s copyediting career, she’s confident it will continue, though probably in a slightly different form. She’s found that dictation software is helpful but not infallible, and it still requires a fair amount of correction. “I don’t know, sadly, if I’ll be able to go back to copyediting. I’m thinking of other things I can do within the editing world,” she said. “I love coaching authors, and that’s obviously more in person or through video calls, and I also love developmental editing, which if I’m just doing manuscript evaluations isn’t that much actual computer time. I’m trying to be creative about what I can still do in the industry I love.” ●

Kathryn Flynn works for Dragonfly Editorial. In a past life, she spent nearly 25 years in journalism, serving as features editor and assistant city editor at the (Annapolis) Capital, and 6 years as a technical writer and editor at a telecommunications firm.

Ergonomics, holistic health, and work-life balance

Molly McCowan’s experience with repetitive strain injury (RSI) taught her a lot about ergonomics, holistic health, and work-life balance. Here are some of her tips for maintaining your physical and emotional well-being, even on deadline.

- McCowan refers to editors as “computer athletes.” To stay on top of your game, **make sure the tools of your trade are ergonomically correct.** Incorrect chair height, keyboard location, or monitor placement can increase your risk of developing RSI.
- **Pay attention to your posture when you work.** “A lot of us working on the computer have that posture of shoulders rounded forward, head tilted down, neck bent,” McCowan said. This position puts added strain on your neck, back, and shoulders. The alignment of your arms, elbows, and wrists is also important.
- **Don’t ignore physical symptoms** or assume you can push through them. Pain when you type, tingling, numbness, a heavy feeling in your forearms, or loss of grip strength is your body’s way of telling you there’s a problem. McCowan noted that switching hands (for example, using the mouse with your left hand when you’re right-handed to avoid discomfort) is a big red flag.
- All work and no play is a recipe for burnout. **Take breaks during the day**—McCowan’s sources recommend a five-minute break every 30 minutes—to stretch your legs and rest your eyes, neck, shoulders, arms, and hands. **Take time off throughout the year**—those precious things called vacations—to recharge, refresh, and rejuvenate.
- Know thyself and thy limits. **Saying “no” is not a sign of weakness.** Turning down a job or asking a colleague for help when you’re already spread too thin will save your sanity and your reputation.

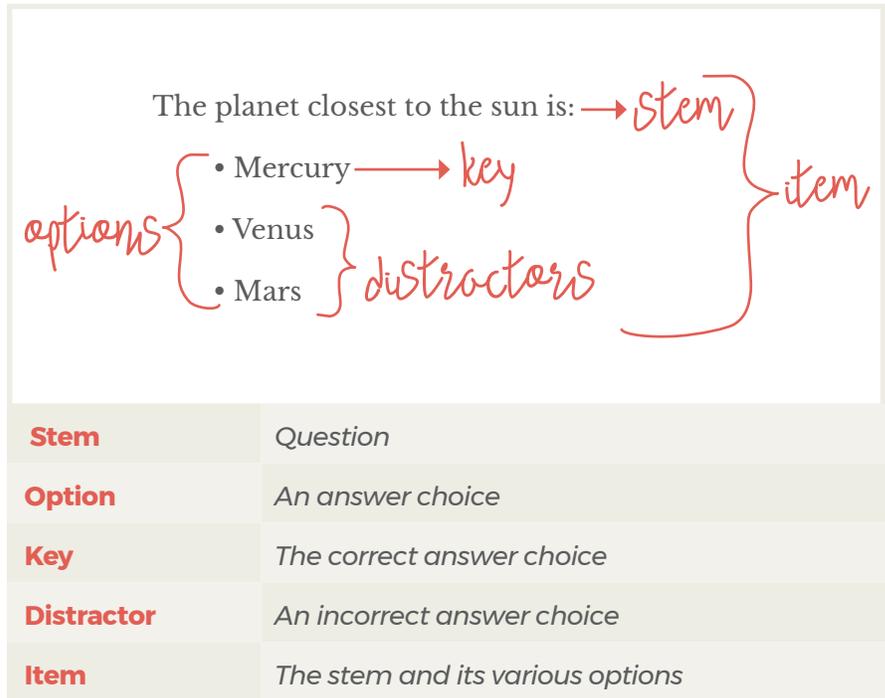
For more information about the symptoms of repetitive strain injury and how to prevent them, see McCowan’s October 17, 2017, blog post, “**Repetitive Strain Injury 101: What Editors Need to Know**,” on Copyediting.com.



Assessment editing 101

Assessment editors are specialists who edit all of the materials used in a testing environment. In other words, they're the ones who test multiple-choice tests—before you take them. At ACES2017, Evelyn Mellone and David Pisano from the Defense Language Institute explained how assessment editors analyze multiple-choice tests from all directions and help educators and evaluators create the most useful tests possible.

To learn more about their methodology, [download their ACES2017 presentation on Assessment Editing](#). And if you're afraid of multiple-choice tests, just take a tiny peek at this graphic, which will at least show you how to describe them accurately. ●



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“Is this racist?” How editors can identify hidden bias in language

Editor’s note: Catching racist and discriminatory language requires more than an awareness of slurs and pejorative terminology. Racism on paper can take many subtle forms, including the lack of fair and equal media representation, prejudicial narratives, racializing words through juxtaposition, and the unintentional othering of people of color. ACES2017 featured a panel of experts discussing how editors can best identify—and combat—this “hidden bias” in language. We asked panelists Steve Bien-Aimé and Karen Yin to tell us more about this topic.

What exactly is hidden bias in language?



Steve: Hidden bias is equivalent to unconscious bias—people often shape their views and perceptions on what they know and feel comfortable with. In language, as in life, that means people view and express things that comport with their own worldviews.



Karen: I’ll add that hidden biases are unconscious. That means they don’t necessarily align with our declared beliefs and that they can be activated outside of our control and without our consent. Just like any of our other unconscious beliefs, they can infiltrate everything we do without us even realizing it.

Can you share an example of this that you’ve seen in your editing or reading?

Steve: Two examples come to mind: on the radio this morning, a talk show host asked whether taking out the trash is a man’s job, or should his girlfriend also take out the trash. This seems benign until we understand that the host was omitting the experiences of same-sex couples. Within the print realm, what is meant by “nude/natural/flesh-colored” for female clothing? Folks are various shades; thus, are we using that labeling for all shades of people or for certain folks?

What is one way that editors can best watch for this/guard against it?

Steve: Mistakes will always be made, but the tool that I use is trying to see whether the language I’m using includes as many people as possible, or am I ignoring/omitting groups of people?

Karen: Pay attention to what surprises you. It’s an opportunity for your worldview to expand.

Avoiding bias
isn't **incidental**
to an editor's job
but **central.**

Anything else you’d like ACES readers to know?

Steve: Hidden bias is not a conscious thing; however, mindfulness and inclusiveness can keep hidden bias to a minimum.

Karen: Avoiding hidden biases in language doesn’t mean our goal is to make all language bias-free. We need biased language to draw attention to and talk about different groups of people, like Black Lives Matter. Use biased language consciously. ●

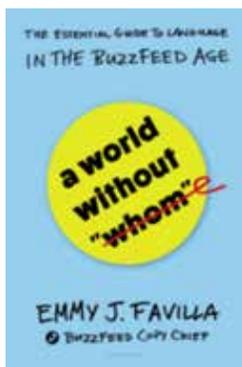
Steve Bien-Aimé is an assistant professor at Louisiana State University, where he teaches journalism at the Manship School of Mass Communication. Karen Yin is the creator of AP vs. Chicago and the Conscious Style Guide, a reference site for inclusive, compassionate, and empowering language.

To learn more, **download the presentation on Hidden Bias in Language** and view other resources from the Conscious Style Guide.



A world without whom

November's ACES Twitter Chat featured Emmy Jo Favilla (@em_dash3), an editor at BuzzFeed. She spoke to our Twitter crew about her new book, *A World Without Whom*, and discussed how language is changing in the digital age.



ACES: Please tell us a little about your book. What was the inspiration behind writing it?

Emmy Jo: A lot of it came from realizing editors and writers would often reach out with questions and concerns about trivialities and assuaging their worries about things that they didn't really need to be spending time deliberating. In summary, it's a book about the ideology of not resisting the

changes we see happening in language, from a more relaxed relationship with grammar and punctuation rules we once held as hard-and-fast to rampant use of emojis. The book is also slightly memoir-esque, because I wanted to tell the story of BuzzFeed style and the BuzzFeed style guide, and how creating that and working where I do, writing for the internet, really influenced my changing attitudes toward language.

The talk got right to the question of “whom.”

ACES: The title of your book is interesting. Can we consider you a member of the dropping “whom” gang?

Emmy Jo: Absolutely! I think it's headed in the direction of “shan't,” and as I mention in the book, there's nothing worse than “whom” used incorrectly. It's a word that often sounds awkward and pretentious in conversation and I feel will be phased out sooner than we know.

Mark Allen: #teamshan't

Julia Willson: I've tried to phase it out with most of my clients.

Rhiannon Root: I like “whom,” but there are compelling arguments against it.

Emmy Jo: #BanWhom

Michael Helfield: I think we should keep as many options open as possible. It's what brings color to language. #keepwhom

Kate Karp: I shan't eschew “whom.” I'm comfy with it, but in some instances, an idiomatic “who” works well (e.g., Who you lookin' at?).

Next, Emmy Jo and the ACESChat gang talked about how the internet is changing language.

ACES: Based on your experience, @em_dash3, how do you think being connected to the world through the internet is changing English?

Emmy Jo: We're seeing less end punctuation, e.g., with one-liners punctuated with a period sometimes coming off as harsh or aggressive thanks to things like the line break and character limitations on tweets. All-lowercase, non-punctuated sentences are a fave among millennials online! It comes off as breezy, staccato, kinda cooler. And, as I mention in the book, a lot of this is rooted in what's often called “Tumblr English.”



Gerri Berendzen: This is a change I can't get into for anything except texting. Sentences need periods (or similar punctuation) at the end.

Emmy Jo: I agree, for anything more than one line! I'm not a total anarchist.

Christine Ma: But these guidelines don't apply to more formal writing, right? Like novels, magazine articles, cover letters, etc.?

Emmy Jo: No way! The period is essential outside of one-liners (though I would love to see a revival of the punctus, tbh).

ACES: Punctus: “In medieval manuscripts: a point used to indicate a short pause or minor break; also called punctum.” —Oxford dictionary

Daniel Toy: YES, PUNCTUS!!!

Heather Saunders: It's cute, too!

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Finally, we talked about how the internet has changed Emmy's view of copyediting.

ACES: You worked at more traditional publications before BuzzFeed. How has your view of copyediting, grammar, and language evolved?

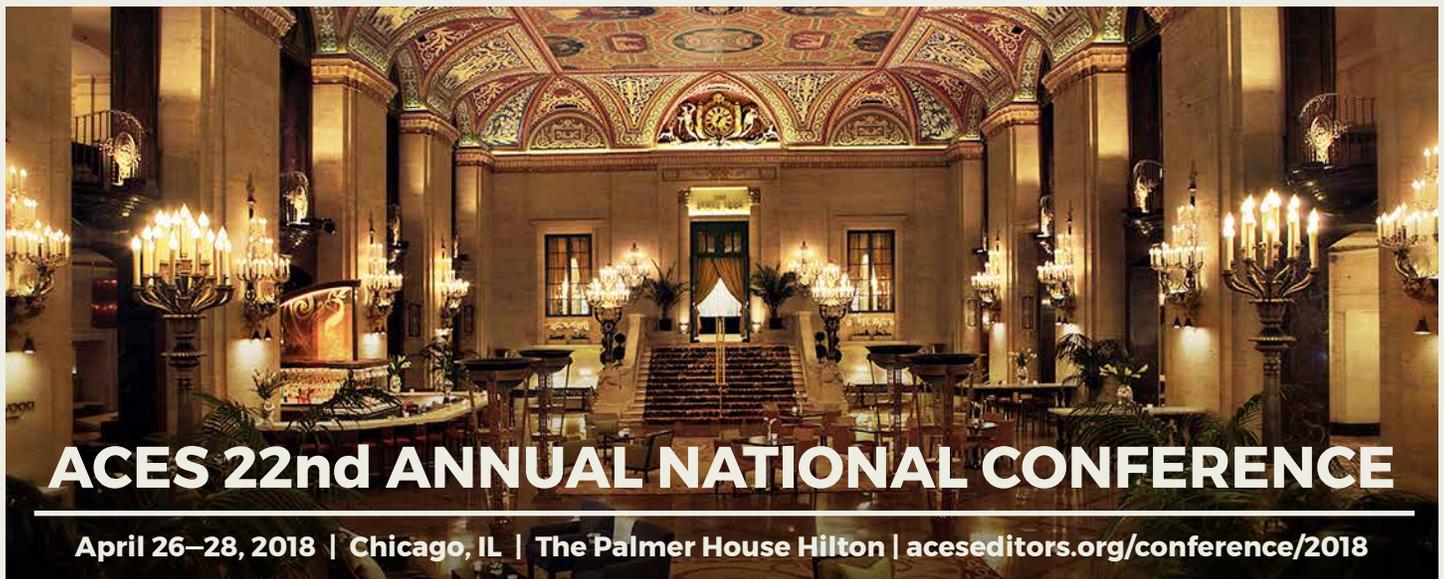
Emmy Jo: Copyediting at BuzzFeed was when I first started editing things that were more irreverent, sillier, meant to make people laugh. I learned that things need to be written in more conversational ways to resonate and be shared more widely. So that was when I started to question if it was really in our best interest to stick to the rules in AP and standard dictionaries. Of course when it comes to editing news stories, more traditional

sensibilities come into play, but it made me realize that you can't edit all types of content in the same way, adhering to the same rules.

Gerri Berendzen: This is a good lesson for all copy editors. The tone of the piece should influence how it is edited.

Emmy Jo: In terms of style, I've learned to rely more on common sense and observations of the prevailing ways that people communicate online. ●

ACES' Twitter Chats are held at 4 p.m. EST on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Join in the fun at #ACESChat.



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Note: Early-bird pricing runs through Jan. 31, 2018, at which time rates increase in all categories except single-day registration.



Writing about disabilities

The NCDJ style guide helps editors produce copy that is both accurate and sensitive

Editor's note: Jennifer LaFleur led a session at ACES2017 titled "Words Matter: Covering Disabilities." In describing her session, LaFleur wrote, "Disability is increasingly in the news, but journalists often are not comfortable covering disability, in part because of unfamiliarity with the language and issues." We asked Jennifer how a new style guide can help journalists and editors address this gap.

First off, what is the NCDJ style guide?



LaFleur: The NCDJ style guide is an online resource that's been put together by the National Center on Disability and Journalism (NCDJ) at Arizona State University. It's intended to help journalists who are writing or editing stories about people living with disabilities.

The guide has more than 80 entries. Each one includes background on the term or phrase, the NCDJ's recommendation, and what Associated Press style is on the terminology, if AP addresses it. Recommendations and notes are provided where there is disagreement between NCDJ and AP styles.

You write in your session description that "... language is constantly changing, national disability organizations often disagree on the appropriate terms to use, and the *AP Stylebook* is silent on so many questions." How can well-meaning editors make style decisions in this changing landscape without feeling that they are navigating landmines?

LaFleur: The NCDJ style guide is an attempt to pull together the best practices on disability style. When AP does make a call on style, we use that. When it doesn't, we include what is considered preferred. In cases where there is a divide, we discuss the various angles in the debate.



I think it's up to an organization to decide, but it should be consistent. There are terms that are generally offensive—such as wheelchair-bound, epileptic, etc. I write about disability issues all the time and still get complaints, but because we've made a decision in the guide about how to handle things, I can write back and say why we do it a certain way.

Jennifer LaFleur is senior editor for data journalism at the Center for Investigative Reporting, a nonprofit investigative newsroom based in the San Francisco Bay Area. She is coauthor of a book on computer-assisted reporting and has won awards for her coverage of disability, legal, and open-government issues.

For more information, you can find the NCDJ style guide at <http://ncdj.org/style-guide>

You mention the *AP Stylebook* being silent on many issues. Tell us more about that.

LaFleur: Here's one where AP does make a call:

Afflicted with/stricken with/suffers from/victim of

Background: These terms carry the assumption that a person with a disability is suffering or has a reduced quality of life. Not every person with a disability suffers, is a victim, or is stricken.

NCDJ recommendation: It is preferable to use neutral language when describing a person who has a disability, simply stating the facts about the nature of the disability. For example: "He has muscular dystrophy" or "He is living with muscular dystrophy."

AP style: Conforms to AP style, which suggests avoiding "descriptions that connote pity."

Here's a term AP doesn't address:

Cochlear implant

Background: A *cochlear implant* is an electronic device that can help a person who is deaf or hard of hearing. The device does not fully restore hearing, but it gives a representation of sounds to help a person understand speech. The device has been criticized by some in the Deaf community who are concerned the device could threaten Deaf culture. However, advocates support the device for suitable candidates.

NCDJ recommendation: When referring to a cochlear implant, avoid describing it as a corrective device or one that would restore a deaf person to mainstream society. Instead, define it as an electronic device that can assist a person who is deaf or hard of hearing in understanding speech.

AP style: Not addressed.

Many of these terms in the NCDJ guide are not in the *AP Stylebook*, which is why we thought we should create a separate one. ●



Some embarrassing problems in copy are hard to catch, and many of these involve numbers. These errors are easier to identify if you look to the story for clues and use your common sense.

by John Russial

Sometimes the problem with numbers is simple, as in simple arithmetic. Sometimes it isn't. Sometimes the problem is figuring out which numbers might be the problem. For that, editors need to be able to do more than add, subtract, multiply, or divide.

Take the following sentence: "With an enrollment of 2,679—almost 30 percent larger than Eastern Oregon University's 1,900 students—the Oregon Institute of Technology has played an increasingly prominent role in the Klamath Falls community." This one is easy—the numbers are provided, so just check the math. Calculate the percentage, and you can see that it's 41 percent, not "almost 30." The writer made a common miscalculation—dividing by the wrong number.

In other cases, you can't just do the math—you first need to think critically so that you can ask the right question. During the recession, a story appeared about people trying to save money by growing vegetables. It said: "People like Rita Gartin of Ames, Iowa, are part of that shift. Last year she kept a small garden. This year it has tripled in size into a five-by-seven-foot plot because, Gartin said, "The cost of everything is going up and I was looking to lose a few pounds, too; so it's a win-win situation all around."

There's a mistake here, but it's not apparent unless you ask yourself whether the sentence makes sense. Then a little math helps you ask the right question. A garden that

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The Right Jobs for Freelancers

The **Editorial Freelancers Association** is a community of colleagues dedicated to sharing opportunities, promoting dialogue, and maintaining high standards for our industry.

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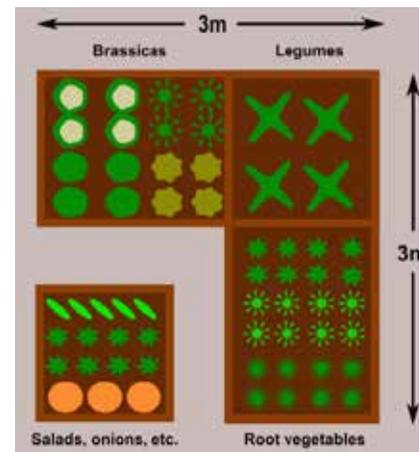
HAST THOU HEARDEST OF THE SINGULAR *THEY*?

The big news at last spring's ACES2017 was AP and Chicago's acceptance of *they* as a singular pronoun or gender-neutral pronoun. In the midst of the excitement, academic editor Sandra Schaefer reminded conference-goers that English writers have long used the singular *they* ... pretty much all the time. To learn more, [download Sandra's presentation on epicene pronouns and style](#).

- Chaucer: "And *whoso* fyndeth hym out of swich blame, *They* wol come up."
- Shakespeare: "God send *everyone* their heart's desire."
- King James Bible: "So likewise shall my heavenly Father doe also vnto you, if yee from your hearts forgiue not *every one* his brother their trespasses." (Matt. 18:35)

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tripled in size into a 5-by-7 plot? That doesn't sound right. Multiply five by seven, then divide that by three, and you see that the original plot would have been about 12 square feet—maybe the size of a card table top. The question almost asks itself: did it triple in size to a 5-by-7 plot or from that size?



The bottom line is that numeracy isn't always just about numbers. It's about reading for content and always asking, "Does this make sense?" ●

John Russial teaches editing at the University of Oregon and does research on editing and other newsroom issues. Before taking an academic job, he worked in daily newspapers for 17 years, most of that time as Sunday copy chief of the Philadelphia Inquirer.



Thanks to alumni and friends for catching up at #ACES2017

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The prodigal tongue

Linguist Lynne Murphy to be keynote speaker at ACES2018

by Mark Allen



Lynne Murphy is often called on to answer for what her native country has done to the English language. As an American linguist in England, Murphy embraces that role with a long-running and popular blog, media appearances, and now a book, *The Prodigal Tongue*, due out in the spring.

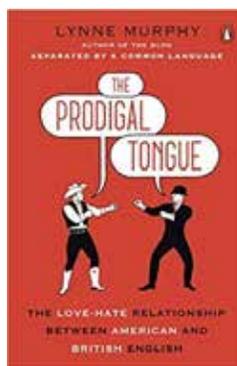
In April in Chicago, Murphy will talk to a mostly American-accented crowd as the keynote speaker at ACES' 22nd national conference.

"I'm used to talking to British audiences, based on the theme that American English isn't the monster you think it is," said Murphy, professor of linguistics at the University of Sussex in Brighton. Americans generally "don't know the extent of the things British people complain about" when it comes to the Americanization of the language.

Murphy assures her new countrymates of three things when it comes to the shared language: Just because America is newer, that doesn't mean it came up with all these language changes; some changes actually make English more English; and the English language would not be in the position it's in were it not for the American Century.

She has appeared on British radio programs, including as a guest in a half-hour Susie Dent documentary, "Americanize!" and a debate with journalist Matthew Engels, who wrote a book about the American takeover of the English language.

She has spoken to copy editors before, appearing as a dinner speaker and workshop presenter at national conferences of the Society for Editors and Proofreaders.



Murphy's book is due out March 28 in the UK and April 10 in the U.S. *The Prodigal Tongue: The Love-Hate Relationship Between American and British English* is available for preorder from Amazon, and copies will be available for purchase at the ACES conference April 26–28, 2018.

The germ of the book started with a 15-minute talk Murphy did for a local Skeptics in the Pub organization. The first five chapters of the book, she said, are based on that talk. She has a chapter on what English means to Americans and what it means to Britons, and she looks at how dictionaries are used and perceived in each country. Dictionary culture is a frequent research topic for Murphy.

The book project was supported by a grant from the US National Endowment for the Humanities.

In 2006, Murphy started her blog **Separated by a Common Language**, in which she explores the differences in the two Englishes. She also keeps a blog of antonyms, **Who Shall Remain Antonymous**, billed as "a diary of antonyms, opposites, and contrasts." And on Twitter, she offers a Difference of the Day and other linguistic gems as [@lynneguist](#).

Murphy said she is planning another book "based on going through a conversation from 'hello' to 'goodbye' and the little polite things you do and how do you do them." ●

Mark Allen is a freelance editor in Columbus, Ohio. He is on the ACES board.



Style haiku

alleles, heavy chains
nonhuman genetic terms
orphan drugs, heart sounds

— from the *AMA Manual of Style, 10th Edition*



To be or not to be (a freelancer)

Freelancing is a perfect fit for some—but not for others

by Kathryn Flynn, with tips from Ruth Thaler-Carter

One of ACES' fastest-growing membership groups is freelancers. We hear a lot about the many reasons to go into freelancing and how to do it best.

But for as many reasons as there are to consider freelancing (e.g., working in fuzzy socks while listening to Pandora), there are just as many reasons to avoid it (e.g., managing expenses and having to find your own work).

At ACES2017, freelance editors Julie Munden and Jennifer Maybin talked to attendees about how to get started in freelancing. They also shared information from award-winning freelance editor Ruth Thaler-Carter, who was unable to attend the event. Thaler-Carter maintains that freelancing is not for everyone, and she offered a few points to consider before ditching the 9-to-5 and hanging out your own shingle.

Ruth's reasons *not* to freelance

- You need self-discipline and the ability to meet deadlines and do quality work *without* direct supervision.

- You must be able to work alone and survive without an office “family.”
- You'll work *more*, and more hours, at least at first; clients will expect you to be more accessible than bosses might expect.
- You'll have to deal with several “bosses” instead of one.
- You won't make more money right away—you might have to start with low rates and work up to higher ones, and it may take time to find paying markets and steady customers.
- All supplies, equipment, promotions, benefits, memberships, and other expenses come out of your pocket. Tax deductions do not cover all outlays and only occur after investing in whatever is needed.
- Entrepreneurship is not easy—it takes constant effort.
- You have to sell your skills and find new projects. You can't be shy. *You* will have to create and find most of your work.
- Competition is fierce—lots of other people are, or want to be, freelancers. And they'll undercut your prices.
- You still must cope with office politics to get and keep projects—your contacts may be fired, transferred, overruled, etc.
- You have to keep your own records and do your own filing.
- You might not be as good as you think you are.
- You *will* get screwed, maybe not often, but at least once.

If any of this makes you balk, Thaler-Carter recommends you rethink the freelance life. ●

For more points to consider from Thaler-Carter, **download her ACES2017 presentation**. While you're at it, learn more about **Munden and Maybin's advice to new freelancers**.

Kathryn Flynn works for Dragonfly Editorial. In a past life, she spent nearly 25 years in journalism, serving as assistant city editor and features editor at the (Annapolis) Capital, and 6 years as a technical writer and editor at a telecommunications firm.





Recognizing fake news

Good editors know how to spot bad information

Fake news and alternative facts are making headlines these days, but spotting bad information has always been an important part of an editor's job. It's the nagging feeling you get when you look at a name or number and know something's just not right. It's why you look up the original source of a quote or statistic, knowing it's at best out of context or at worst flat-out wrong.

Gerri Berendzen's presentation at ACES2017, "Don't Get Fooled: How to Spot Bad Information and Fake News," addressed how to vet information, recognize the red flags in copy that require a closer look, and determine whether a source is credible, particularly when time is at a premium. Berendzen is a member of the ACES Executive Committee and has worked as a copy editor for 35 years.

Berendzen also discussed how to train yourself to be skeptical about information. Tips for this skill included always asking questions, watching for qualifying statements, and knowing your own biases and blind spots.

Gerri's top 3



- If something seems too good to be true (or too big or unusual), it probably is. Question it.
- If a question immediately pops into your mind when you read something, don't ignore it.
- If it seems like a coincidence, check it out.

Her advice, combined with a healthy dose of skepticism and your inner editing voice, will go a long way to delivering accurate copy and information. ●

To learn more, download [Berendzen's presentation on bad information and fake news](#) from the ACES website.

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To truly clean up a manuscript, you need a three-step plan of attack

Editor's note: Amy J. Schneider has editing fiction down to a science. Her well-evolved process consists of three passes of the manuscript, which she described in a presentation at the ACES2017 conference last spring. Here are the steps she outlined in her session "Copyediting Fiction for Traditional Publishers."

First pass: get the bonbons

- Read the story! Get to know the plot, the characters, and the author's style.
- Make only minimal essential edits. These are items that are absolutely wrong—fixing outright spelling/word choice/punctuation errors, fixing stray italic/bold type—but nothing requiring a style decision or research.
- Flag things for later. This includes names spelled differently, “pet phrases” that I might want to suggest toning down, and things I want to be sure to look up during the main edit. These are just reminders to myself of things I don't want to miss during the main pass.
- Note the level of detail. Is there a lot of detailed description that will need to be noted on the style sheet (e.g., brand names, place names, detailed personal history), or is it more bare bones? This gives me an idea of how long the main edit will take as well as how complex the style sheet will need to be. For example, if there is a lot of description of the interior of a certain house that appears throughout the book, I'll want to be sure to note it all to ensure consistency (e.g., that the west-facing front door in Chapter 2 isn't suddenly facing north in Chapter 37).

Second pass: the Big Edit

- Do a slow, careful, word-by-word copyediting pass.
- Compile your style sheet(s) as you go.
- Keep a careful eye on plot, dialogue, and consistency. During this pass, I make notes on these things rather than just reading for “feel,” as I did in the first pass.
- Make diplomatic queries as needed.

Third pass: tidying up

- Clear flagged items and resolve issues. These would be things I flagged to look over when finished. It might be checking the frequency of two different spellings of a character's name and deciding how to change/query. Or I might do some research on a historical point that I'm not sure the author has handled correctly. These could be matters that I didn't want to stop and take care of during the edit, or perhaps items I wanted to wait to deal with until my edit was complete so I could be sure I saw all the content that pertained to them.
- Run a final spell check.
- Save the final file.
- Clean up and format style sheet(s).

Amy J. Schneider has been a full-time freelance copy editor and proofreader since 1995. Her editorial experience includes textbooks, trade nonfiction, and best-selling fiction in a variety of genres. Her fiction clients include Penguin Random House, Hachette Book Group, and St. Martin's Press. To learn more about her approach to editing fiction, [download her ACES2017 presentation](#).



ACES member profiles

For this issue of *Tracking Changes*, we asked members, “What is the best piece of editing advice you ever received?” Here’s what they had to say.



Write, then edit

I was a senior in college and thought my writing was supreme until my Writing Theory professor introduced me to Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*. An innate perfectionist, I’d formed an opinion early on that editing was what made good writing, and not the other way around.

From my professor and from Elbow, I learned the importance of allowing the writing process to just be the writing process and the editing process to just be the editing process. “Your editorial instinct,” says Elbow, “is often much better developed than your producing instinct, so that as each phrase starts to roll off your pencil, you hear seventeen reasons why it is unsatisfactory.”

I learned to stop editing while I wrote. I learned to keep my pen moving and to keep my sentences forming, connecting, and streaming. Instead of using the editing process as a crutch to fabricate my writing, I learned to write without stopping to mop up my words; I learned to write until I was saying something guided, intentional, and clear.

Learning to write separately from editing doesn’t mean you don’t need to edit your work. It means you need the patience to produce something substantial before you begin to take it apart.

Rachel Kang
Writer and Editor
Charlotte, North Carolina

Engage deeply with each sentence

The best editing advice I ever got was to make sure each sentence has a strong verb.

People don’t decide to make a change. They change.

The fewer words you use to say something, the harder the remaining words hit, and the less space they take up.

And in decluttering verb phrases, you as the editor are forced to engage with each sentence more deeply and understand what’s really happening, even—or especially—when the writer doesn’t.



I worked at newspapers for five-and-a-half years, and probably one-quarter of my questions for reporters stemmed from cleaning up needlessly long verb phrases.

Patrick Hopkins
Copy Editor, *SmartBrief*
Herndon, Virginia

Work independently—or not

Two pieces of advice that I got early in my career:

A good editor needs knowledge, judgment, and confidence.

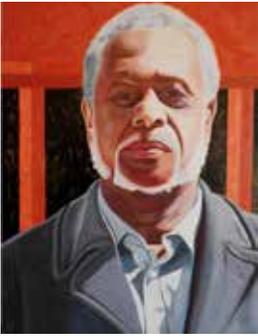


If you feel like you need to do everything yourself, then go into business for yourself and keep your business small so you can retain control. If you want to work on larger projects and learn from other people, then you need to learn to relinquish some control.

Kirsti MacPherson
Freelance Editor and Writer
Evanston, Illinois

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Painting by Jordan Davies

Listen to your punctuation

My first teacher, Mr. Period, taught me that there are always good reasons for rules. Going through a red light can cause death. Stop means full stop!

Ms. Comma taught me the importance of patience. I found that my hurried thoughts could be helped enormously by

pausing, breathing, and slowing down.

Mr. Colon always said, “Remember the power of two: it takes two to tango, two people to fall in love, and two dots to form me.”

Ms. Semicolon, like Ms. Comma, would always say, “Patience, dear boy. Pause; think about your timing.”

Ah, Mr. Exclamation. He would simply say, “More feeling! More fervor!” He taught me to pursue all of life’s ultimate experiences.

I am a very lucky guy to have had such wonderful teachers in my life. They still guide me every day on my life’s journey.

Paul Chevannes
Supervisor, Copyediting/Proofreading, Tiffany & Company
New York, New York



Make only the changes you need to make

During my first week as a newspaper copy editor (four months out of college), I was paired with a more experienced editor, a mild-mannered guy who was probably at most 10 years older

than I was. He was supposed to take a look at my work before passing it on to the slot.

At one point, I was handed a story by one of our regional correspondents.

In those days we marked up the copy with a pen before it was handed over to a typist. I really went to town on this opus. Then I proudly showed it to my mentor.

He looked it over. Then he calmly said, “You didn’t need to make all those changes.”

Something about his tone of voice, pleasant though it was, cut right through me. I almost wished he’d yelled at me.

Years later I myself was in the slot, and I saw quite a number of newbies doing exactly what I’d done. So I, in turn, passed on the advice that I’d learned so early in my career.

And it sure as hell kept me humble.

Mark Murphy
Freelance Copy Editor and Proofreader
Syracuse, New York

First, do no harm



The best piece of advice I’ve ever received was stolen from the advice doctors get. “First, do no harm.” Missing things is human; inserting errors into copy yourself is more sinful. Be sure that the changes you make heal copy, not harm it.

David Yontz
Senior Editor, Creators
Athens, Georgia

Pick your battles

In 1996, shortly after joining the copy desk of the *Washington Times*, I had an issue with an article from the national news desk. I don’t remember what it was now, more than 20 years later. But either I didn’t explain the problem very well, or my explanation didn’t persuade the desk editor that it was a problem.

I was adamant that the issue needed fixing, but the desk editor didn’t agree. Our conversation got heated, and the copy desk chief had to intervene. I don’t recall how the issue was resolved, but I do remember that the copy desk chief counseled me that not every problem with an article was worth getting contentious over. He advised me going forward to “pick my battles.”

It was sage advice from the late, great Bill Walsh.

Pete Parisi
Freelance Editor/Writer
Annandale, Virginia

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Make it great



The best advice I ever received was from a managing editor at my first job. She reviewed my newsletter and said, “This is good. How can

we make it great?” Her words taught me to look beyond copyediting to substantive editing, and they’ve changed how I edit ever since.

*Jennifer McGovern, CPSM
Mid-Atlantic Regional Marketing Manager, VHB
Fairfax, Virginia*

Correct the content, not the people



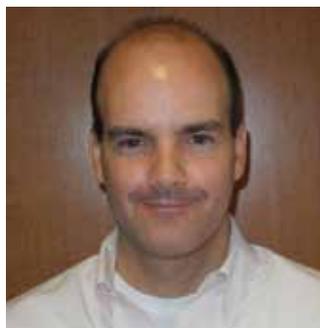
When I first started out as an editor, my predecessor passed on this tip: “Correct the content, not the people.”

Our department creates online learning for faculty

and corporate clients. Because of this, I work with a variety of authors from a variety of disciplines. They’re the subject matter experts and have the knowledge we need to include in our training materials—but none of them are writers. My job is to work with them to polish their content and create engaging learning.

Because of this, I try to make sure that all of my corrections are focused on the text. I also work to build good relationships with our authors so that no one feels bad about their writing. I’ve also gotten away from using track changes for that same reason—seeing all those marks can make someone feel pretty awful about all of the necessary changes.

*Kris Wilson
Digital Learning Content Editor, Fox Valley Technical College
Appleton, Wisconsin*



*Joseph Priest
Corporate Writer, Syniverse
Tampa, Florida*

Heed the internet

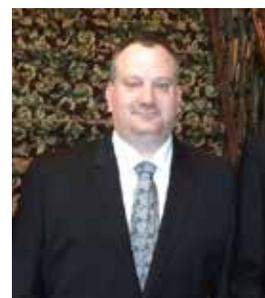
Here’s a simple and favorite quote of mine that answers your question: “The Internet is a mirror, for better or worse. And a never-ending advertisement for the value of editing.”

— Bill Walsh, 2014



*Olivia Bottum
Research Associate, Retired, University of Michigan
Ann Arbor, Michigan*

15 years of copyediting a dictionary of medieval English taught me that hyphenation of Middle English words is a creative act not covered by the *Chicago Manual of Style!*



Suspect the short and sweet

As a financial copy editor, one of the best pieces of advice I have ever gotten was to be suspicious of brevity. Short, sweet financial statements or text blocks often have errors hiding in plain sight.

Of course, one ought to approach every document or piece of text with suspicion, but sometimes you just want to take your foot off the gas and glance over the short snippets: “Surely, this one will be easy!” We now know from the scientific literature that the brain will sometimes see what it expects to see. That’s bad news for us copy editors.

So, this little chestnut my senior colleague gave to me was not just based on experience, but also on sound science. Which, when you think about it, may not be so surprising!

*Michael Helfield
Financial Copy Editor and Proofreader, PwC Canada
Montreal, Quebec*

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Do what you can reasonably do



The best piece of advice I ever got was from a seasoned editor, who, when I was struggling to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, told me: "You can only take it up one notch."

I don't remember what I was working on at the time. But it was soothing

to realize that I wasn't expected to perform miracles—only to do what I could reasonably do.

The shift in perspective this advice gave me meant I felt much better about the work I was doing. I've thought of it many times since.

Joanie Eppinga

*Owner/Executive Editor, Eagle Eye Editing & Writing
Spokane, Washington*



Concentrate on moving forward

When I was a teenager, I was in a writing group mentored by a woman who would tell us, "I know you can write better than this." And so what else could we do?

Nurtured by the certainty that we were good writers, we

learned how to discuss each other's work constructively. Once, when I told someone in the group that I had liked an earlier version of his piece better, our mentor said, "You can't look backward, in writing; the author has made a choice, and you have to take what's there and move forward."

I still check regularly to make sure that I am an editor who concentrates on moving forward and allows other people to make their own choices.

Marisa D. Keller

*Editor and Proofreader, MDK Wordsmith
Brattleboro, Vermont*

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Read backwards

When you have looked at copy forever (edited it and proofread it, read it and reread it), reread it yet again—but this time backwards, page by page. This works best with copy that has illustrations and lots of areas with callouts, bulleted lists, and asides.

Lenda P. Hill
Associate Editor, *Journal of Negro Education*
Howard University School of Education
Washington, DC

Dare to ask questions



Some of the most valuable copyediting advice I carry with me in my daily work is from my editing professor, Dr. Brad Owens at Baylor University. His classes are best described as “intense” by all who know him.

One saying of his took a weight off my shoulders. He said that the best editors are not those who already know everything—but those who dare to ask the right questions. Hearing this was such a relief, because I have been a relentless question-asker since I could speak.

We all have those moments in our daily work as editors where we are tempted to trust the writer and the editors who have seen a piece before us, to make assumptions, to go along with the way a piece is written without putting in the effort to ask how it should be written. When that happens, I hear Dr. Owens’ words and remember the example set by our school’s student publications advisor, Julie Reed (also a student of his), as she modeled what his advice looked like as we learned our trade.

Whether it was confirming the spelling of every name that appeared in the school paper against the student directory or taking copyediting tests over and over until we spotted all of the errors and had checked every fact, my training at Baylor kept me on my toes. These memories help me push myself to ask every question a good editor should ask, even now, nearly seven years after graduation.

Dr. Owens also advised us to develop a “certain kind of arrogance.” This is the boldness that enables a 20-something girl to question the top editors at a 60+-year-old publication, to suggest changes to world-renowned experts writing about their fields, and to fact-check the assertions of those in power. To not make assumptions or forget to verify.

Often we think of reporters as being relentless question-askers in the pursuit of truth. But it’s just as important for their editors to have the boldness to think critically, push back, and hold their writing to the highest standards.

Jenna DeWitt
Assistant Editor, *Christianity Today*
Wheaton, Illinois

Know what you don’t know



By far the best piece of advice I’ve gotten related to editing is, “know what you don’t know,” courtesy of Dr. Edward Traves at Temple University. That advice has saved me from so many embarrassing mistakes.

For example, instinct is important when you’re on tight deadlines, but there’s a big difference between trying to remember whether AP style says it should be written “onsite” or “on-site” or if Morocco is located east or west of Egypt. Don’t listen to your gut; look it up.

Relatedly, I’ve learned to never assume a private client has proofread their own work. I’ve read ads where the company or client name was spelled wrong, or where they put their business address in the wrong city. Google isn’t infallible, but a simple copy and paste into a search engine does wonders for my final products and my peace of mind.

Sydnee Thompson
Copy Editor, *Hour Media LLC*
Troy, Michigan

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Read right to left

Best advice: read right to left to find spelling errors.

Best searches for common, hard-to-spot typos: pubic, mange, heath, HIPPA.

Phil Jamieson
 Founder, ProofreadNOW.com, Inc.
 Mount Vernon, New Hampshire

Know what you're good at



Two years into my career, a photographer who would later become my managing editor told me with bold honesty, "I'm not so sure you're cut out for this reporting business, but I think you'd make a heck of an editor."

Soon after, I was editing copy, eventually became a copy desk chief at a different daily paper, and now, 28 years later, work as an editor for a nationwide engineering firm. Needless to say, that photographer stays on my Christmas card list after all these years.

Tom Paquin
 Marketing Editor, Ayres Associates
 Green Bay, Wisconsin

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Always use a contract

The best editing advice I ever received was from my peers in Facebook's Editors Association of Earth group, to use a solid contract for all projects.

The contract I use clearly defines expectations on both sides, sets parameters such as standard work hours and

communication preferences, and most importantly, details tasks that are in and out of scope for the quoted rate. Over the years, I have added verbiage about professionalism (after a nasty experience where a client refused to pay after I had done \$500 worth of work) and quality of work (excellent but rarely perfect).

I expect my contract will continue to evolve, but for now it serves me quite well. Haven't been sued yet!

Julia Willson
 Editor, Edits by Julia
 Middletown, Delaware



Don't be intimidated by anything

The best advice I've ever received is from Bryan Garner. I read this years ago, in the Dec. 2003–Jan. 2004 issue of the *Copy Editor* newsletter. Here's what he wrote:

"First, do everything you can to educate yourself about the language. ... Second, keep making distinctions. Don't think that you're the only one who cares about linguistic distinctions, because there are many of us out there. Third, understand that copy editing involves people skills as well as technical skills."

For myself, here's my advice to other editors. Don't be afraid to ask questions. Don't be intimidated by anything. If you don't know the answer to something, your reader might not either.

Christine Steele
 Editor, USA Financial
 Grand Rapids, Michigan

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Listen to your gut



A professor told me to trust my gut when it came to finding luck and opportunity in writing. He said that sometimes the two meet when you stick around in the right situation longer than everyone else.

I kept his advice tucked in the back of my mind

during an internship. A year in, my peers wondered why I didn't move on to find a "real job." I'll admit, sometimes I did, too. But I felt like I was at a place where I could grow—even though there were no signs of that happening.

I listened to my gut instinct and stuck around. Shortly afterward, a writer left the company, and I offered to fill the position. Luck met opportunity, and this chance landed me my dream job with the company.

Aria Gmitter
Editor, *YourTango*
Trenton, New Jersey



"Don't forget to read the headlines!"

Pam Dickinson
Freelance Copy Editor
San Diego, California



Focus on the reader

The best editing advice I ever got: It's easier to come to a compromise when a writer is clinging to an unclear headline, clunky phrase, etc., if you take personalities out of the editing process

and make it all about the reader. Of course, that's how it should be in the first place, but ... life!

Jennifer Bulat
Director of Editorial Production, *Winsight Media*
Chicago, Illinois



Make sure the writer's decisions are intentional

I once heard the editor's job framed this way: making sure that all the writer's decisions are intentional. This advice has been especially helpful in navigating my relationships with writers, who might get defensive by default when they see my many queries. When I'm able to frame the conversation as clarifying their meaning—to avoid any misinterpretation by other readers, not just me!—they seem more open. We become united in the goal to put on paper only what is truly intended.

Laura Lattimer
Editorial and Marketing Manager, *SIR*
Richmond, Virginia



Switch from enforcing rules to giving guidance

My wake-up call came when I read Carol Fisher Saller's *The Subversive Copy Editor*. It shifted my mindset from rules to guidance and suggestions. It also

elevated my priority: clarity now trumps consistency. I'd recommend the book (and have) to any editor looking to deepen their understanding of the craft.

Deborah Stein, Editor in the Life Sciences
Editor II, *Jhpiego*
Baltimore, Maryland

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Cut a word from every sentence

The best piece of advice I ever received was from professional freelancer Jim Dunn about writing, though I often apply it when editing and rewriting articles. Here's his advice:

when you think you've finished a piece, go back and take one word out of every sentence. Doing so will force you to make keen decisions, causing clauses to contract or disappear, sentences to combine, and paragraphs to shrink. If you want to be really tight—do it again.

Buck Banks
Vice President, NewmanPR
Miami, Florida

Listen to your mom



Call me a dork, but I was homeschooled in elementary school (both of my parents are educators), and my mom taught me proofreaders' marks in second grade! I guess this isn't exactly career advice, but she definitely sparked in me a love for editing.

In terms of an editing mistake I didn't know I was making until a friend pointed it out: I was years into my career before a more senior editor pointed out that limiting modifiers require careful placement!

Emily McCrary-Ruiz-Esparza
Editorial Manager, Housemethod.com
Raleigh, North Carolina



Want your awesomeness featured in the next issue of *Tracking Changes*? Tell us what's unique and wonderful about you:

write to Sam Enslin at sam@aceseditors.org



ACES quarterly quiz

Is the fall weather freezing or refining your editing skills? Find out with our quarterly quiz. The questions are from actual (bad) examples from print and online news and feature stories, with the source cited where available.

by Peter Parisi

QUESTIONS:

1. Former “Nightline” host Ted Koppel thinks Fox News host Sean Hannity is bad for America. (March 27, TheStream.org)

2. The late Stephen R. Covey described a scenario in his classic book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, that has stayed with me ever since I first read it.

3. Owens likely won’t be hurt by losing to Goldberg, though Owens doesn’t have the cache to survive getting squashed as easily as Brock Lesnar did. (Feb. 27, *Wrestling Observer* e-newsletter)

4. [Sen. Tom] Cotton was barely allowed to get a word in edgewise as bussed-in liberal protesters screamed at him, chanted at him, and berated him for the Trump administration’s agenda. (Feb. 24, Brietbart.com)

5. Internally, [Richard] Pryor had been seen as an early frontrunner in part because of [Jeff Sessions] ... for whom Pryor once served as deputy attorney general in Alabama years ago. (Feb. 1, the *Washington Post*)

6. We know that no office-seeker will tow the ideological line we’d like them to, that results-driven governing requires an almost ruthless brand of pragmatism. (Jan. 22, The Hill)

7. [Betsy] DeVos is working toward a scenario in which “all parents, regardless of their Zip code, have had the opportunity to choose the best educational setting for their children,” she told *Philanthropy* magazine in 2013. (Nov. 11, the *Washington Post*)

ANSWERS:

1. The former “Nightline” host’s surname is Koppel (-el, not -le).

2. If “the late” Stephen Covey really did write *The 7 Habits*, or anything else, it was literally ghostwriting. AP style advises against using “the late” to describe something someone now deceased did when they were still alive.

3. Pro wrestler Kevin Owens may lack “cachet” among wrestling fans, but he does have a cache of wrestling holds.

4. Setting aside a debate over the serial comma here, “buss” is a synonym for “kiss.” As far as we know, the protesters didn’t engage in a “kiss-in” after being bused in.

5. As far as we know, the late comedian was never considered for attorney general in the Trump administration. It was supposed to be William Pryor. Also, AP style calls for front-runner to be hyphenated.

6. Ideological lines are “toed,” not “towed,” unless perhaps they become ideological baggage.

7. The ZIP in ZIP code is an acronym for “zone improvement program,” and is uppercased per AP style.

Peter Parisi is a former longtime copy editor for the Washington Times and a 17-year member of ACES. Send bad examples you find to him at josephparisi1054@aol.com, including the source of the item.