

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

October 2002

FROM THE CHAIR

The latest issue of *Australian Style* carries a lead article about the different ways we say and write days and months of the year. Pat Naughtin, the author of the piece and an international consultant on the International System of Units (imagine that as your job description!), argues that we should adopt the big-to-small approach: yyyy mm dd. He claims that this style is logical and conforms to the conventional pattern of using a descending unit-size sequence. He further claims that advocating such an approach, now adopted as an international standard, will help us make language universal and 'help us avoid language-specific writing, which excludes [certain] people from our audience'. I only cover some points from Naughtin's article here, because I'm particularly interested in their significance in the context of another — more heated — recent discussion on a related topic.

In response to the recent commemoration of the first anniversary of 11 September 2001 (or September 11 2001 or 11/9/01 or 9/11/01) the use of a particular convention for writing dates took a different twist. In *The Australian*, the issue of how we write dates (*The Australian* used the 9/11 $\frac{3}{4}$ US $\frac{3}{4}$ style in its headlines) raised questions about the loss of Australian identity, the Americanisation of Australian English and the extension of American imperialism. In other words, the variety of ways in which we write dates was treated as a metaphor describing social and political attitudes, interests and allegiances.

Oh dear, so nothing is ever simple or straightforward, is it. Naughtin's cool and logical argument in *Australian Style* becomes (for me at least) slightly shaky in the face of disputes about the use of 11/9 or 9/11. I suppose some would insist that there are contexts of language usage (where this term includes numerical as well as lexical items) that are clearly apolitical or uncontaminated by struggles for power or identity. But I think there are probably very few of those. Bruce Moore, Editor of the *Australian Oxford Dictionary*, commented in an interview last year that in making judgments about language 'we are making social judgments rather than linguistic judgments'. Language doesn't mean the same to all of us, and even adopting international standards and conventions for language use won't change the very different ways we *respond* to the same words $\frac{3}{4}$ or the same set

of numerical units for that matter.

What do members think? Please let us know. I hope you have a great October, all thirty-one days of it.

Anne Surma

FORTHCOMING SOEWA MEETINGS

OCTOBER MEETING: GUEST SPEAKER SUZIE HASLEHURST, MAGABALA BOOKS

Join our special guest speaker, Suzie Haslehurst, who will talk about editing practices at Broome's Aboriginal publishing house, Magabala Books.

When: 7.30 pm, Tuesday 1 October 2002

Where: Tresillian Community Centre, 21 Tyrell Street, Nedlands (street parking)

Cover charge: \$2

Bookings: RSVP to Amanda Curtin (curtin@highway1.com.au or phone/fax 9377 2091)

ADVANCE NOTICE OF NOVEMBER MEETING: EDUCATION NIGHT — GRAMMAR WORKSHOP PRESENTED BY JAMES HANSEN

Grammar is part of our tools of trade as editors, but sometimes it's the case that we know what's right — we just don't know how to explain it to the authors we work with!

Our resident expert James Hansen will present a refresher workshop on grammar, covering the basics and answering any 'curly' questions members bring along.

Please book early for this, and indicate whether you would like a set of James's comprehensive notes (approximately 60 pages), at a cost of \$5 to cover photocopying.

When: 7.30 pm, Tuesday 5 November 2002

Where: Tresillian Community Centre, 21 Tyrell Street, Nedlands (street parking)

Cover charge: \$2 (plus \$5 for notes if wanted)

Bookings: RSVP to Amanda Curtin (curtin@highway1.com.au or phone/fax 9377 2091)

JACQUIE EDITS TO KEEP THE WOLF FROM THE DOOR

Pamela Hewitt talks to Jacqueline Kent, former president and honorary life member of the Society of Editors (NSW), winner of the Beatrice Davis Editorial Fellowship, which led to study of publishing in New York for three months, and author of nine books. The most recent is A Certain Style: Beatrice Davis, A Literary Life (Viking, 2001), winner of this year's National Biography Award and the Nita B. Kibble Award for Women Writers, and shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Prize for non-fiction. The article was originally published in the July 2002 issue of Blue Pencil, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher and author.

The first thing I encountered when *Beatrice* came out was the clichés about women. Women interviewers, more than men, said 'Oh come on, tell us about her sex life'. You'd think that 30-year-old gossip would have a very short shelf life. The cliché of the editor as blue-pencil-wielding headmistress also irritated me.

It's been a bit weird, all the attention. I don't think anybody would write books for the sake of that. There are easier ways to get your fifteen minutes. It does give the book a bit more life and puts Beatrice back in prominence, which is good. The prizes give the book a bit of a shot in the arm. It's a good thing for the subject, and it's nice to have written what I think is an interesting book about a really interesting subject — publishing.

That's something I tried to do in the book: explain the process while trying to draw a line between making it pedantic and being intrusive. That was one of the toughest things to do. You don't want to give too much information to people who don't know about editing because they'll be bored to sobs. People who do, already know.

Editors have a characteristically humble attitude to their own writing. I think most editors are pretty good writers. You have to be. But this handmaiden attitude militates against them wanting to write for themselves. It's like the joke about editing as invisible mending. It's called that for three reasons: it's done mainly by women; it's very badly paid; and it's noticed only when done badly.

In fact, editing is a much more active engagement with the text. American editors

call themselves quarterbacks, which is much more active — and right, because they control the play. They do a lot more commissioning and shaping.

The main difference between editing here and in New York is that we don't have the economies of scale. This means all sorts of differences in status and pay, but I don't know that it influences the work. Sometimes it does, but someone who's paid \$20 an hour can be a fantastic editor, and you can get someone who's paid \$80 an hour and is sloppy. There are two things I did notice, one good and one bad. The bad one is the commodification of books. At its worst, there's the feeling we have to sell x books to make y profit. They all pay lip-service: 'Nobody does books just for marketing reasons.' Garbage. They do a lot of books for marketing reasons.

The really good thing I came back with is that editing as work is taken very seriously in New York. There's more energy and focus. They're also much more collaborative. There's more trust between author and editor. It's all dependent on time and money. People know that if it's going to work, it's going to work big.

I started as a journalist and became a radio broadcaster at the ABC. I happened to hit the ABC in one of its noxious phases, so I left, went overseas and bummed around. I got a job as an editorial assistant in London, and used the experience I gained in London to get a job here. I've been doing it for about twenty-five years.

I always, always wanted to be a writer. I never specially wanted to marry and have children, do all that. I knew I'd have to earn my own living and I couldn't do that as a writer — very few do — so I'd better earn my living doing something that fits with doing my own stuff: journalism, broadcasting and then editing. It's only now, after God knows how many years (and I don't regard them as wasted) that I think 'I'm a writer who does editing to keep the wolf from the door'. It's taken a very long time to get there.

The first resistance you have to get over is your own. You've got the editor on your shoulder, the person who scribbles out what you've written before you've written it. That takes a while to get over. Then, if you write one novel, followed by another and another, people regard you as a novelist; but if you refuse to be pigeon-holed you're a bit awkward, and it probably means you don't get as much attention. If you're like me and you just like writing — young adult fiction, oral history, biography and the odd short story — it does seem that you're not considered a real writer. But that's OK: it's the work I love.

As an author, I've only had one bad editing experience and that was because the publisher was lazy and didn't want to spend any money on editing. What it meant

was that somebody timidly crossed a couple of bits out in pencil, so I did the editing myself. The editor for *Beatrice*, Meredith Rose, at Penguin, is wonderful. She's a real blue heeler. She'd say 'I don't think this phrase works'; I'd say 'I think it does'. She'd come back two or three times, and it always worked out. She won some, I won some. It was a really good experience. It was a book about an editor, so we would be damned, both of us, if it was badly edited.

I came in during the dying days of hot metal. Now you can put an entire book together in three weeks. In the past, technology was much slower, more cumbersome and labour-intensive. Now it's much easier: all you need is a computer and some programs. But what hasn't changed is the amount of time you need to spend writing well and editing well. Those things were never given enough time, but it's worse now.

As an editor, I'm happiest with the authors who work as active collaborators. For that reason, I prefer working on creative non-fiction.

The best experiences I've had are where I've developed a manuscript or an idea with the author and we've worked on it together. That I find immensely satisfying. I get irritated by the preciousness that occasionally creeps into fiction editing. There is a lot more worship at the shrine, being afraid to touch the work.

I did a seminar at the residential program at Varuna on the author and the writer's voice. Last time this was done, they chose canonical Australian writers, and people were invited to marvel at the writer's voice. But I used mid-career writers writing now — Tim Winton, Roger McDonald, Marion Halligan, Kate Grenville, Nick Earls — and said 'Here's the text. Is there anything we can improve?' I noticed an enormous reluctance to say anything critical. I'm not talking about going in boots and all, but quite a few editors are reluctant to own their instincts.

I love reading good writing where the balance is right and the writing's not drawing attention to itself in any particularly fussy sort of way, where the words work. One thing I do like about fiction editing is getting into the small stuff, weighing things, balancing phrases, seeing where that comma goes, the sort of thing you do when you're writing.

I've worked freelance a lot longer than in-house. One of the things about freelancing is that you can choose the degree and intensity of contact. I'm working part time in-house at the moment; you get more of an overview of what you're doing. If you're working on something you see it from go to whoa, which you don't as a freelance. It means that your knowledge of the production process

has to be up to speed. That's interesting and stimulating. There's the human company, too. Most offices have at least one person you can select as your giggling companion. At the same time, I'm wanting to go back and work on my stuff now. I'll probably do that for quite a long time.

MORE ON THE UPDATED BIBLE

Alex George provides this 'further comment on the new edition of the Style Manual (sorry, manual)'

I was seeking guidance on the number of words that fit on an average typeset A4 page (including variations according to font size etc.). How to find it? The Contents page didn't help so I turned to the Index. However laterally I thought, I couldn't find what I wanted, but I did note a few interesting entries (my bolding):

design, 15–17, 24, **288–405**, 420
writing, 14–15, 22, **36–186**

I found that those large page ranges refer to chapters, but what use are they in an index when you want information quickly?

Can anyone help with my query?

ageorge@central.murdoch.edu.au

KEEPING AN EYE ON THE NEWSPAPERS

Alex George (setting a good example to all) reports on his reading . . .

On May 4 the Netherlands will remember those lost in World War II for the 55th time. Australians do this two weeks earlier, on Anzac Day. (Losing them once is bad enough.)

Melville Council, the Southern Metropolitan Regional Council and the contractor believe they have prevented similar delays in the future. (Very clever of them.)

Economic losses provide spur for cleaner air (Heading)

AUSTRALIANSTYLEWATCH: HERE WE GO AGAIN

The Editor is, naturally, persisting with his probably unappreciated campaign to subject Australian Style to scrutiny. At the same time he has been pleased to receive support at the last moment in the form of a critical note from another member:

ALEX GEORGE

In 'From the Editor' of *Australian Style* 10 (1) I was brought up by the last sentence: 'Because this tends to polarise and politicise discussions, it needs to be watched' ('this' refers to many observations contrasting Australian and American English). Such use of the intransitive verb 'to need' is now common and therefore it is unlikely that anything can be done about it, but it annoys me greatly. The subjects usually have no need of anything: it is humans who have the need. So why not say 'We need to watch this tendency' or 'This tendency should be watched'?

ALLAN WATSON

I have commented previously on an unusual feature of AS editorial policy: that 'the styles chosen are those of the authors indicated'. I now want to go further and claim that this is bizarre and indeed absurd.

If, however, it is a bold exercise in trailblazing, the very least we could expect is some philosophical underpinning in the form of a mini essay, in *each* issue of the mag, justifying such a leap away from established practice. Tell me, dear reader, when did you last pick up a copy of the *Guardian*, the *Bulletin*, *Country Life* or *Acta Crystallographica* and find *colour*, *-isation* and single quotes in one article and *color*, *-ization* and double quotes in the next? The rules/conventions may not be written on tablets of stone, but the solid tradition behind them merits more than a flick of the editor's wrist.

Could the reason for this approach be that the editors (Pam Peters and 'executive editor' Adam Smith) doubt their ability to impose a consistent style on contributed material? Okay, I'm being provocative here, but, judging from the condition of the *non*-contributed material in Volume 10 No 1 [*sic*], it could well be wondered if this were the case. Surely we could expect that the matter for which the editor has direct responsibility could (a) be stylistically consistent and (b) follow the guidelines set out in the *Style manual* — especially since she had a

large hand in compiling it. To quote myself, AS ought to be an exemplar to us grassroots editors.

Inconsistency

Is 07 04 2002 the 4th of July? (page 1). Intro, 'Pat Naughtin is a speaker, writer, editor, and publisher . . .'

Compare *Feedback Report* (page 10). Col. 2, para 3, 'These include *lowdown*, *slick* and *stooge* . . .' In fact an instance of the extra comma appears also in the previous paragraph, i.e. in the same article, presumably written by the editor, Pam Peters.

Australian Word Map (page 2). Para 1, 'Word Map is a joint project that allows audiences to . . .'

Compare *Feedback Report* (page 10). Col. 1, para 1, 'The 24 test words therefore included 8 which were recorded in the 1930s and 40s . . .'

Yes, the *Style manual* (page 75) allows that the use of *that* to introduce a defining clause is mandatory only when *which* would result in ambiguity, but the first example would be unambiguous if *which* were used. To me, this is culpable inconsistency.

Australian Word Map (page 2). Para 2, 'Readers of *Australian Style* . . .'

Compare *Book Notes* (page 8). Sidebar, 'She reviews . . . *Style manual* . . .'

Letters to the Editor (page 6). Cols 2–3, top, ' . . . verse contributions by Ray Kelley (Qld) . . .'

Compare *From the Editor* (page 4). Col. 3, para 2, 'Phil Finnimore (QLD) . . .'

From the Editor (page 4). Col. 1, para 3, 'Alice Springs News'; para 4, 'Cairns Post'. Come on, guys.

One of AS's signature inconsistencies rears its head again in this edition: end-of-line word breaks eschewed in some sections, embraced in others. On page 2, compare col. 2, line 10 with col. 1, line 9. The latter desperately needs a slice of *Australian*, on the next line, to put it out of its grotesque misery.

Another familiar failure manifests in the sidebars on pages 8 and 9. These are not part of the book reviews to which they are attached, so their style is plainly a matter for the editor. Compare these two entries:

Style manual for authors, editors and printers, *published by John Wiley & Sons 2002*

Quirky Querty: the story of the keyboard @ your fingertips, by Torbjörn Lundmark; UNSW Press, 2002

In the first we see lower-case style for title, the words 'published by' inserted before the publisher's name and no comma after it; in the second, one version of an upper-case style has been adopted for the title, the publisher's name has no introductory phrase and there is a comma after it. Note also the semicolon in the second: I suggest things would be consistent only if this mark appeared after the title in the first.

One might ask also why the place of publication is not given, whereas it is provided for the book reference on page 3.

The perils of non-interventionist editing (and if you think that's an oxymoron don't blame me)

Moving from the matter of inconsistency — and from one presentation style to another (hey, we can all play this game) — there's another big question. Do you, when you've decided not to impose your style on contributed articles, simply desist from casting your eye over them? Or do you at least owe the reader the duty of making sure they contain nothing too outlandish? Apparently you desist. How else could we account for the following?

1. Page 1, col. 2. The dimension of 1840 mm becomes 1.890 m when converted.
2. Page 1, col. 2 again. Two room dimensions are given in the form 'x yds y ft. z in.' In the old imperial days the dimensions of a room (and anything else?) were never given in yards, feet and inches. For rooms it was always feet and inches. (Note also the full point after *ft*. If the author is allowed that little bit of idiosyncrasy, wouldn't even a non-interventionist editor feel obliged to add a point to *yds*?)
3. Page 3, col. 2. Of a number of dictionaries I consulted, only an el-cheapo tome of doubtful provenance allowed a hyphen in *feedback*. To underline the point, the Macquarie, which comes from the same stable as *AS*, does not give *feed-back* even as an alternative spelling. By allowing it into print here, they are sanctioning a spelling they positively discourage.
4. Page 6, col. 1 (in this case a letter). Reference to a '400 year-old institution'. My copy of the *Style manual* tells me, on page 92, that 'compound adjectives that consist of short adverbial phrases are always hyphenated', and one of the

examples it gives is '40-year-old male'. Couldn't be clearer, really. (Okay, it's a letter, and there is this hands-off editorial policy, but reproducing a gaffe perpetuates it.)

5. Page 8, cols 1–2. We are told that the *Style manual* no longer bears the Commonwealth coat of arms. One doesn't have to look far (i.e. not beyond the adjacent pic. of the manual's front cover) to discover that this is simply untrue. Non-intervention strikes again.

6. Page 9, col. 2. '. . . it is very well-researched . . .' According to established practice, this is wrong on two counts. A compound adjective consisting of an adverb not ending in *-ly* and a participle is not hyphenated when used predicatively; and even if used attributively it takes no hyphen where the expression is modified, e.g. by *very*. Okay, authors may choose their style, but was the intention that they are free to make up their *own* style? It seems so. But hang on, the writer is 'executive editor' of *Australian Style* and a 'Style Council researcher'. Doesn't that suggest an obligation not to present young editors with bad examples? Speaking of which, if the *Style manual's* strong preference for the lower-case style for book titles has any force at all, couldn't we expect that someone as close as this writer is to Australia's editorial heartland might take some notice? (Having said all that, I note that the new edition of the *Style manual* simply does not address the issue of how predicate compound adjectives should be handled — at least not in any place discoverable via the index. As it leaves the question unanswered, I can only assume that what we're dealing with here is an oversight. The publication is quite firm, however, about what happens when you add a word like *very*.)

Other matters of concern

Page 4, col. 3. I have already drawn attention to Phil Finnimore's state of residence being given as *QLD*; it is to be noted also that Valerie Yule's is given as *VIC* (page 6, bottom). Looking beyond consistency, what does the new edition of the *Style manual* say about abbreviations for state names?

The recommended shortened forms for use in publications are as follows:

NSW Vic. Qld . . .

And who was responsible for this section of the manual? The author of this article and editor of *AS*, Pam Peters.

Page 4, *passim*. There are two double spaces between words, others on other

pages. Okay, I'm fussy, but aren't editors supposed to be?

Page 4, col. 3 again. The word *recognised* is broken after the first e. This break is not recommended even by the *Little Macquarie Dictionary*, one of the least good guides to word division.

Page 5, col. 2. The name of the correspondent is given as 'H.Lang'. Not only are the admonitions of the *Style manual* in regard to punctuating initials (page 158) being ignored, the lack of a space is verging on the unprecedented. But then I suppose H.Lang rendered his/her name in exactly that way.

Page 6, cols 2–3, top. '. . . bards out there .' Doesn't either of the editors have the eye to pick up glitches such as the space before the full stop? They keep occurring.

Page 10. Two failures to follow the *Style manual*, each of them repeated. We have two instances of a hyphen, rather than an en rule, separating the extremes of a range of numbers (at col. 1, para 2 and col. 3, last para) and two compound adjectives involving numbers rendered without hyphens (at col. 3, paras 1 and 3). The manual is prescriptive on both these points, and the second of them falls within chapter 6, one of those for which the writer of the article was responsible. Yes, Pam Peters.

I mentioned style of quotation marks at the outset, suggesting it was one of the things one wouldn't expect to find varying from article to article within the one publication. The really strange thing here is that, while 'the styles chosen are those of the authors indicated', an exception is made for quotation marks. It's not the first time I've mentioned it, but it is still something to wonder about.

[The Editor is grateful to James Hansen for running his eagle eye over the above and making helpful suggestions. Australian Style is published by the Style Council Centre, Macquarie University. It is supplied gratis to all who request it at](#)

WEB SITE ADMINISTRATOR CHANGE

Brian Ward, who designed and established the SOEWA web site, and has expertly maintained it since 2001, has recently handed over the responsibility of web administrator to another of our members, Colin Muller.

We'd like to thank Brian very much for his commitment to developing an attractive and user-friendly site — one that has served to heighten the profile of

the Society of Editors (WA) significantly.

We're also extremely lucky to have Colin take over the role from Brian. Colin is a professional web site administrator, who's taken over the site with impressive ease. We're in capable hands!

You can contact Colin to update your Register details or for other site-related matters at colin@twobluedots.com.au

WHAT WORD IS THAT

The following article was originally published in the July 2002 issue of Blue Pencil, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc., and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher and the author, Michael Lewis. In a singularly pugnacious — even prescriptive — mood, I've decided to take on something that has been annoying me for years: the abuse *between A to B*. I am usually tolerant of changes in meanings, but tampering with the meaning of a preposition is going too far.

There's really no excuse for this, though some dictionary definitions do require careful reading. For example, the *Macquarie Dictionary* (2nd edition) says that *between* means 'in the space separating (two or more points, objects, etc.)', and an unwary reader might well think that 'A to B' identifies a 'space separating'. But, for my money, 'two or more' can only be satisfied by things in an *and* relationship. So *between A and B* is the only admissible usage.

Error is most prevalent when A and B are numeric: 'The salary for this position is between forty to fifty thousand dollars' or 'This office is open between 9am to 5pm'. But those are not very different from 'Albury is between Sydney to Melbourne', which I think (and hope) is unlikely to be heard.

A similar error creeps into matters of choice: 'Choose between A or B'. Interestingly, most grammarians regard *or* as another form of additive (sometimes called cumulative) relationship, like *and*. As far as grammatical consequences are concerned, that's fair enough; I can't think of any sentence where changing *and* to *or* would require any other change — to punctuation, word order or any other aspect of the sentence's grammar. But there's a world of difference at the semantic level — 'A or B' is not two things. (In any given situation, it might be: 'Are you hungry or thirsty? Both.' But that's not inherent in the meaning of *or*.) So the choice must be *between A and B*: 'You can choose

tea or coffee' but 'You can choose between tea and coffee'.

Other difficulties arise with *between*. A common question is whether it can be used for more than two things. In general, US usage is more restrictive than Australian or British usage; Americans tend to prefer *among* when more than two things are involved. Still, they don't object to 'between you, me and the gatepost'.

Perhaps the grandest chestnut of all, though, is 'between you and I'. I don't get steamed up about this one because at least its origins lie in an attempt to get things right. Like so many things drummed into children by well-meaning but ill-informed teachers, it reflects only half of a truth. For most of us on most occasions, the phrase 'A and B' (where A refers to someone else, and B refers to the speaker) will be used as the subject of a clause: 'My husband and I are pleased to be here', 'Sally and I went to the pictures'. In object position, we will usually say 'us', rather than identifying the separate members of us. So we had it drummed into us: 'Don't say 'me and John'; say 'John and I'. The qualifying 'in subject position' was never expressed, perhaps because it was never recognised.

DELICIOUS NEW WORDS

Some will have seen these fresh examples of alter-one-letter/give-a-new-definition inventiveness. They come from Murray Waldren's 'That's Language' column in *The Weekend Australian* for 21–22 September.

customers — clients you don't really trust
glumerous — when beautiful people feel sad
pramenade — a walk in a public place while wheeling a perambulator
precrastinate — to do yesterday what could wait until tomorrow

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: Tuesday 22 October 2002

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