

# **BOOK WORM**

**NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.**

**September 2004**

## **From the Chair**

### Verbalising nouns

I embark upon a short piece on this topic with fear and trepidation, for indeed I am sure the purists among us would be less than amused at what might seem to be a light-brush approach to a complex grammatical problem, *verbalising nouns*.

Formerly, this practice was confined to academic discourse and analysis, but now it is increasing at a rapid rate, and is to be read and heard incessantly.

While in our modern language we could cope with nouns such as ‘computer’ becoming ‘computerised’, it seems more difficult to accept verbalising perfectly good nouns to produce grammatical errors, not to mention a growing trend towards business-speak and verbal inflation that is leading us to what is fast becoming known as *Junk English*.

*Junk English* is often a trick we play on ourselves—and others—to make the unremarkable seem important. It is the equivalent of junk food: ingest it constantly and the brain will become soft.

If George Orwell were writing *Politics and the English Language* today, he would surely expand on his principal concern—the potential for language to function as a tool of totalitarian ideology—and address today’s lexical and syntactic problems, the tendency to make verbs out of nouns and nouns out of verbs. In his book *Death Sentence* Don Watson, however, does dare to suggest that we need not go as far as Orwell. Watson notes: “...had Lincoln followed Orwell’s rules for plain language, the Gettysburg address would have been a plain thing and only a fraction as effective.” And so we struggle on to ‘progress’ the cause of plain English. As editors we may not be the greatest perpetrators of *Junk English*, but perhaps we do need to be reminded occasionally to say what we mean and mean what we say, and leave the art of verbalising nouns to the more pretentious in our midst.

*Betty Durston*

Ken Smith: *Junk English*

Reference: Amazon Editorial Reviews

## Editorial

Hello everyone: I hope you've been doing some interesting projects during the past month ... I have ventured into the new (for me!) area of managing the production of a book. I have been liaising with many people, including those who conceived the idea, those who will be featured in it and the journalist who will write the text and provide pictures for it. Because it's a book about 'best practice in community housing in WA' I have been researching who offers what housing to which sort of tenants and have been amazed at the scope of such housing in this state. The book is due to be released in December and before then I have to edit each chapter, liaise with designers and printers and generally keep to the ever-decreasing time-frame! Eeeek!

If you wonder why I exclaim so over the task, it's because from 7 September I will be working in Fremantle three days per week, with only two (business) days to get everything else done. I shall be the Coordinator of PACAT (the anti-live animal export lobby group) and I encourage you (in a shameless plug that is an editorial privilege!) to check out our website at <http://www.pacat.org> or phone me at the office on 9430 8839.

See you all at the joint WiPWA/SOEWA function—see below.

*Tanya Marwood*

## Forthcoming Meetings

### SEPTEMBER MEETING

SOEWA's next meeting will be our annual joint function with Women in Publishing WA.

The theme is:

### **Mentoring/coaching<sup>3/4</sup> is it the way forward?**

The meeting will answer all of your queries on this exciting topic:

- What exactly is mentoring?
- Why is it different from training?
- What can I get out of a mentoring scheme?
- How can it improve my professional career?

A panel of three experts will host the meeting and give you an insight into their experiences of the process. This will be followed by a group discussion focussing on key points to determine if our organisations should establish a mentoring scheme.

The experts:

1. Kim Lisson from Coach School will start us off with a 15-minute introduction to mentoring and coaching.
2. Ann Kennish from the Small Business Development Corporation will discuss mentoring and its benefits for small businesses or sole practices.
3. Anne Surma from Murdoch University and SOEWA will talk about her personal experiences of being mentored—both positive and negative.

Fine wine and gourmet food will be served and there will be plenty of time to catch up with friends old and new.

So come along and be part of the development of our societies.

**When:** Tuesday 7 September, 7 pm until 10 pm

**Where:** Small Business Development Corporation seminar room, 553 Hay Street, Perth

**Cost:** \$10 members, \$15 non-members.

RSVP to Ceridwen Clocherty

[ceri@cambridgemedias.com.au](mailto:ceri@cambridgemedias.com.au)

**October's meeting** will be on the topic of **marketing for freelance editors**. A marketing consultant will offer us some advice on how to get the best from our marketing efforts. Details will be explained in the next edition of Book Worm, but it will be at the Tresillian Centre, at the usual time and cost.

## **Report on the July meeting**

*Tom Jenkins*

The July meeting, held at Team Digital (formerly Desktop Applications) in Lord Street, explored a form of document most of us have seen but fewer understand—the Portable Document Format, or PDF as it's commonly known. About 20 members enjoyed nibbles and wine before the talk, which was presented by Team Digital's Allan Kirkpatrick—a man who knows a lot about software. Probably the most

memorable part of his presentation was the big screen demonstration of what really amounts to a new kind of book for this age. It tells us, as editors, that for some purposes the days of simple words on paper are over.

What Allan showed us was an interactive book, written in Word, then made into a PDF. Created for the State Government, the 900-page manual concerning access to Crown Land was mainly text. A CD of the book demonstrated that it had built into it many of the attributes of an interactive website: that is, links like this: <http://editorswa.iinet.net.au/> (on which the cursor changes to a pointing finger). These enable a reader to leap from one section to another, or to other documents or websites, quickly and easily. An 'index search' function gives readers the facility to find what they want without page-turning, which we have grown used to on the Internet.

The book was also printed on paper, and Allan explained the problem of creating a PDF that had both the resolution necessary for good printing (which tends to create bigger files), and the smaller file sizes needed on the Internet. This can be achieved by using Acrobat Distiller's powerful compression (up to 98 per cent, he claimed), and by separating the big book into a number of much smaller chapters, linked so they function together.

Allan emphasised the importance of building what he called 'quality' into the original document (in Word or other software), including fonts. It is a bad idea to use 'bolding' and 'italicising' rather than separate, specialised bold and italic fonts. Resolution must be built into graphics, with vector graphics having the quality of maintaining sharpness regardless of size. He spoke harshly of the tendency of JPEGs and some other graphics files to lose quality when edited and recommended the use of TIFF or Adobe PhotoShop formats.

This sort of document is at least a part of the future and it seems that not all of us are ready for it.

## **Style Council Conference 2004**

*Tina Mills*

The words of Don Watson were on the tips of everyone's tongues at the 2004 Style Council Conference, 'Public and Professional Discourse'. As a first-time attendee, and as publications officer for a federal government agency, I was optimistic. For the past three years I have spent the majority of my working days deciphering government gobbledygook and trying to lure my colleagues away from an excessive use of the passive voice and nominalisations.

Neil James from the Plain English Foundation set the tone with his keynote address, 'Back to life: resuscitating public language'. He talked about some of the common elements of officialese, the causes of this 'empty language' and how to inject life into

public language. Workplace training, evaluation systems and editing were some of the ways James suggests to engender a 'plain English' approach. However, these could not happen without cultural change in our institutions, and that change had to come from the top. Although I was encouraged by Dr James' presentation, clear communication is not achieved by using plain English alone. NSW MP Andrew Tink touched on part of the problem. He proposed that '... attack and defence are at the heart of public and political language'. Those on the attack will exaggerate and those on the defensive will 'dumb down'. The use of officialese is a tactical move to adopt a language of power, safety and procedure.

Several presenters took up Neil James' lead: from suggestions for encouraging writers to *want* to use plain English, to the proposition of an 'eradicate corporate-speak and bureaucratese' A-Z style sheet, to an examination of whether electronic publishing had suffered a similar decay in its 'public language'.

On the higher education front, presenters from the University of South Australia gave an overview of a program they are developing for writing and editing PhD and Masters theses. The program is about changing the role of editor from being an end-of-thesis copyeditor to one where the editor works with the student and their supervisor from the beginning of the writing stage. An additional focus was on helping researchers adapt their theses to other formats and audiences. Taking another approach with PhD students, Mandy Scott from ANU spoke about how she manages her editorial role with PhD students—she sees part of her role as encouraging students to become better writers, not just marking up their work. Her students are generally from non-English speaking backgrounds, but her approach was about sharing her editorial role with that of educator.

Author Matthew Reilly has ventured into relatively unknown publishing waters with his latest novel, *Hovercar Racer*, which is the first complete novel to be published on-line and available for free! Reilly released the book in eight parts over several months as PDFs from the website. Previous efforts to publish on-line (most notably by Stephen King and Bryce Courtney) had failed, perhaps because internet users aren't quite ready to pay to read on-line. So how did Reilly overcome this? How else but advertising! Canon and United International Pictures agreed to 'sponsor' the publication on-line. But the interesting thing is that Reilly does not see the PDF on-line version, which can also be e-mailed, as replacing or 'destroying' the book. A print version of the book will be released later this year and the on-line version will be taken off the Internet. So what's he up to? Think of it as the biggest free sampler of an author's work ever produced. Reilly reckons people don't browse the Internet for books like they do bookstores, and it's reassuring that he sees this high-tech publishing idea as a way to get people (and with this novel, young boys) back into bookstores.

After three days in Sydney, thrust into a world of linguists, wordsmiths and editors, I left feeling invigorated and inspired and ready to infect my working environment with the 'plain English bug'—whatever its limitations. Some of the presentations were perhaps preaching to the converted, but they all made for an interesting and broad range of topics.

You can find the Style Council Conference program at <http://www.shlrc.mq.edu.au/style/program.html>

the Plain English Foundation at <http://www.plainenglishfoundation.com/index.htm>

and *Hovercar Racer* at <http://www.hovercarracer.com/>

### **Deadline for October 2004 *Book Worm* issue:**

Tuesday 21 Sept 2004.

All submissions gratefully accepted.

### **Further 2004 *Book Worm* deadlines**

#### **Issue**

#### **Deadline**

November 2004

Tue 19 October

December 2004–January 2005

Tue 23 November

### **Contacting SOEWA**

*President:* Betty Durston, [bdurston@cygnus.uwa.edu.au](mailto:bdurston@cygnus.uwa.edu.au)

*Vice President:* Ceri Clocherty, [ceri@cambridgemedias.com.au](mailto:ceri@cambridgemedias.com.au)

*Secretary:* Ffion Murphy, 9450 1546, [f.murphy@ecu.edu.au](mailto:f.murphy@ecu.edu.au)

*Treasurer:* Linda Browning, 9266 2253, [L.Browning@curtin.edu.au](mailto:L.Browning@curtin.edu.au)

#### *General committee members*

Anne Surma, 9287 1494, [asurma@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:asurma@murdoch.edu.au)

Michele Crawford, 9246 4116, [michele.crawford@westnet.com.au](mailto:michele.crawford@westnet.com.au)

Chris Walker, 9228 0793, [cdwalker@ca.com.au](mailto:cdwalker@ca.com.au)

Tanya Marwood, 9291 3723, [tanya.m@globaldial.com](mailto:tanya.m@globaldial.com)

*Newsletter*

*Editor:* Tanya Marwood, 9291 3723, [tanya.m@globaldial.com](mailto:tanya.m@globaldial.com)

*Proofreader:* Michèle Drouart, 9382 2930, [drouart@netfactory.com.au](mailto:drouart@netfactory.com.au)

*SOEWA Web Site:* <http://www.editorswa.iinet.net.au>

*Web editor:* Ceri Clocherty, [ceri@cambridgemediacom.au](mailto:ceri@cambridgemediacom.au)